

Living God's Abundance – Inspired Leadership

Devotions Based on Ephesians 4:11-13

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Day 1 – Each of Us is Given Grace

7 But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Ephesians 4:7

So often when we think about grace we think about God's gift of forgiving us for what is wrong, sinful or broken in our lives. That is a vital aspect of grace, but there is much more than that involved in God's gift.

Grace is much more than a means of getting rid of what is wrong. It is also an impartation of what is right. Grace frees us from what prevents us from being all God created us to be, but it also imparts all of the resources of God which are necessary for us to become who we were created to be and accomplish what God has created us to accomplish.

In Ephesians 2:8-10, we see that the gift of grace does bring us salvation, but we also see that it is meant to do more than save us. It is meant to help us live the life and do the works for which God designed us - *For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life* Ephesians 2:10. Our salvation and our lives are gifts of God's grace. And that grace is not just for me. It is for my neighbor.

Why do I want to receive God's gift of grace? Not just for me. Not just so I can stop feeling guilty or hopeless. Not just so I can go to heaven some day. I want to receive every bit of grace God has for me so I can live the life God created me to live **for the sake of my neighbor.**

For Personal Reflection – How does it change the way I live when I see God's ongoing activity in me not just as something to free and forgive me, but to make me into the blessing he seeks me to be for those around me?

Prayer - Jesus, thank you that your grace is not just for other people, but for me as well. Help me to always be grateful that your grace set me free to be forgiven and have eternal life with you...Jesus, thank you that your grace in my life is not just for me, but for other people. Help me to receive all you have for me so I can be all you have created me to be for the sake of my neighbor. AMEN

Day 2 – The Gift of God is not a “What?” but a “Who?”

¹¹The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. Ephesians 4:11

The gifts were not given TO these leaders. Rather, the leaders themselves WERE the gifts Jesus was giving to the church. When I think of the gifts I have (or wish I had) it is easy to get fixated on myself. Either I become proud that I have so many gifts or I become discouraged that I seem to have so few gifts. The problem with this way of thinking is that the giving of gifts was never about making me proud or depressed. It was always about how my life could be a gift to those around me.

Do you see your Pastor or church leaders as **having** gifts or as **being** gifts? It is so easy to criticize or evaluate people based on their gifts and talents or lack thereof. When we see our leaders **as** the gifts, our attention turns away from evaluation and toward gratitude.

Do you see yourself as a having (or not having) gifts, or do you see yourself **as** a gift God has given to those around you? When you focus on your gifts, your attention remains on you. When you see yourself as a gift, your focus will move where it belongs – focused on the ones God has given you to love, bless and serve.

Don't get stuck in the trap of evaluating your gifts or comparing yourself to others. That just keeps your eyes focused on yourself. Rather, see yourself as a gift of God's love to the people God has put in your life. God gives only good gifts, so if he is giving you to bless another, what does that say about how God sees you?

For Personal Reflection - How would it change the way you connect with the people and world around you to see yourself as God's gift to your neighbor rather than as someone who has received various gifts from God?

Prayer – Lord, thank you that you have given our Pastor and church leaders as your gifts to our congregation. Help me to receive them with thanksgiving rather than criticism or judgment. Lord, thank you that you have given me as a gift to the world you love. May I be less focused on evaluating my gifts or lack of gifts and more focused on being your gift wherever you lead me each day. AMEN

Day 3 – Gifts God Gives to Lead Us Beyond Ourselves

*¹¹The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists...
Ephesians 4:11*

A member of my congregation mentioned recently that the Lutheran Church needs more “APEs.” Not more monkeys or chimpanzees or gorillas, bur more **A**postles, **P**rophets and **E**vangelists. Based on my experience as a life-long Lutheran, I would tend to agree with him.

These first three “gifts” God gives to the church are the ones that lead us beyond ourselves. They are the ones that make us dissatisfied with staying where we are and the way we have always been. They lead us to go where God is leading, hear what God is saying and invite who God is calling.

Apostles are those who are *sent out* to claim new territory for the Kingdom of God. They are the ones who motivate us to impact the world around us. Do you have a Pastor or leader in your congregation who leads you to go outside your comfort zone or engage new geographical areas or groups of people? Are you an Apostle God has given to your church to lead your church to new territory?

Prophets are those who make sure God is involved in the conversations and decisions which are going on in the church. So often we turn church into just another business where all decisions are based on human wisdom or business strategies. Has God given your Pastor or other church leaders to you to make sure that God’s input is being included in your church decisions? Are you a Prophet God has given to your church to make sure God is the center of all your church does?

Evangelists are those who can’t help but tell others about the goodness of God. Evangelists, at their best, are not salesmen who are trying to get people to buy a product. Rather, they are those who are so excited about what they have seen or experienced that they can’t help but invite others to experience the same thing. Has God given your church a Pastor or other church leader who can’t help but tell others? Are you an Evangelist God has given to your church so others can hear about the goodness of God and what is going on in your congregation?

If you have “APEs” or if you are one, your church is truly blessed. If you are lacking “APEs” in your church, pray for God to bring some to stir you up and bring life and fruitfulness to your congregation.

For Personal Reflection - Who are the “APEs” God has given your congregation? Do you encourage them and pray for them? Has God given you to be an “APE” in your congregation? Are you being the gift God has created you to be to lead your congregation beyond itself?

Prayer – Thank you God for giving our church the gift of Apostles, Prophets and Evangelists (take time to pray for and thank God for people who fit into these categories). Lord, help me to see where I am called to be an “APE” in my congregation. (If your church is lacking in APEs, take some time to pray that God will lead some to be part of your congregation.) AMEN.

Day 4 – Gifts God Gives to Minister to Each Other

The gifts he gave were that some would be ... pastors and teachers. Ephesians 4:11

I think these inward gifts are the gifts we as Lutherans have always been pretty good at. The gifts of Pastor and Teacher are not designed so much to expand our church to new places and to engage new people, but are rather designed to bless those who are already part of the church.

Pastors are the shepherds who love, care for and lay down their lives (their energy, their schedules, their homes, their families) for their sheep. Maybe your Pastor is that kind of shepherd. Maybe you have a team of care ministers. Maybe you have individuals who have the gift of caring for people. Maybe you are one of those people. In any case, thank God for the pastors (ordained and non-ordained) he has given your congregation to provide a ministry of care.

Teachers are those who have been given the gift of helping others more fully understand and enter into the Christian life and the life of the congregation. Teachers help us understand God, ourselves, the Bible, the ministry of the church, and what it looks like to live the Christian life. If God has given you a Pastor, adult teachers, or youth teachers to help your congregation to learn and grow, thank God. Are you a teacher? Is God calling you to share that gift?

A healthy church is one where people are loved, secure, and growing in their faith and Christian life. God's gifts of Pastors and Teachers are some of the main reasons a church can be healthy.

For Personal Reflection - What teachers and pastors has God given you to bless you in your Christian walk? Take time to thank God for them. Is God calling you to be one who is involved in a ministry of teaching or caring in your congregation?

Prayer – *Thank you God for giving to your church Pastors and Teachers. Thank you for the way you have blessed me through Pastors and Teachers in my life. Bless those involved in pastoral or teaching ministry in my church! AMEN*

Day 5 – Leadership in the Church Means to Equip, Not Do

¹¹The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-12

I remember going to a Pastors' conference in California where the Pastor shared his vision of church leadership looked like. He began by reading and talking about Ephesians 4:11-13. He quickly moved to the word in Ephesians 4:12 translated "building up." It is the Greek word *katartizo*. It is the same word used when Jesus calls his disciples who are in their boats cleaning their nets. Same word – "building up" and "cleaning their nets." What is the significance of this connection?

After a day of fishing, the nets that started the day whole and efficient and ready to catch fish are not the same as they were at the beginning of the day. What needs to happen before the next day's fishing? The tears need to be mended and the dirt needs to be cleaned out. The job of a

church leader in “equipping” the saints to do ministry is not to burn them out by having them serve your agenda. Rather, it is to provide an atmosphere where their torn areas of their lives can be mended and the areas muddled by gunk and garbage can be cleaned out so they can be freed to use THEIR gifts according to God’s call on their lives.

With this as the definition of leadership, the success of my leadership is not measured by my resume and what I have accomplished. Rather, it is measured by how fully those who I am leading (serving) are healed from their tears and cleansed from their junk so they can fully live out God’s call for them. My legacy as a leader is not me, it is the people God has given me to influence.

For Personal Reflection – Is your church one which defines success based on how well people serve the leaders’ agenda or on how well your leaders equip the lay members to live their lives and calling (both inside and outside the church)? Who has been a leader who has helped you get your tears mended and your junk removed so that you could more fully hear God’s voice and follow God’s call in your life?

Prayer – God, thank you for the leaders who have given of themselves to free me to more fully live your purposes for my life (take time to pray for them individually). Help my congregation to become a place where leaders are not the only ones doing ministry, but that they will more and more be the ones equipping the congregation to do the ministry. AMEN.

Day 6 – The Priesthood of All Believers

¹¹The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-12

One of the treasures of our Lutheran heritage is our emphasis on the Priesthood of All Believers. Martin Luther asserted that the lowliest housemaid’s service to God was just as important as that of the Pope. The church, the body of Christ, only functions fully when all are serving God in whatever vocations we find ourselves. When leadership is functioning correctly, “priests” will be multiplied in your church and out into every area of the community.

When bankers and teachers and farmers and wives and husbands and pastors and parents and children and construction workers all understand that they are serving God by using their gifts and lives to serve others, then the light of the church will be shining its brightest. It takes more than good church services and programs for God’s Kingdom to come fully. The light of Jesus needs to get outside the building to shine into the lives of those who will never come into a church building.

The whole idea of getting people to come into our buildings to have the “professional” Christian (otherwise known as Pastor) do all of the ministry is an idea which is no longer working (if it ever really worked in the first place).

You will find yourself in places and spending time with people your Pastor would never have access to. You have a credibility as you share your faith which your Pastor (who is paid to do this stuff, after all) may never have with certain people. You are the salt, you are the light. Go and glorify God in your neighborhood, your school, your workplace, your nursing home, your community park TODAY. Don’t wait for the Pastor to go to those places. Don’t wait for the church to plan a ministry strategy to impact certain places or people groups. Be the light where you are. You may be the only “minister” who has access to a person who needs what you have to offer today.

For Personal Reflection – What is the culture of your church like? Is it a “bring people into the church to see the ‘professional’ Christian” culture? Or is it a “Priesthood of All Believers” culture where people are equipped, blessed and sent to live out their ministry both within the church and in the community? If your church is not a “Priesthood of All Believers” culture, take time to pray that God would transform your church culture.

Prayer – Thank you God for those who have helped me hear God’s call in my life, and who blessed me and encouraged me to follow that call. God, I pray that you would continue to transform my congregation from being a congregation where only a few are seen as ministers to a place where all know they are part of spreading God’s kingdom, both inside and outside the church building. AMEN.

Day 7 – Unity with Each other and Experience of Jesus

¹³until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. Ephesians 4:13

I have been reading a lot recently about the Moravians. Many of their early connections were with the Lutheran Church back in the early 1700’s. But the thing that impressed me was that they never sought to make a name for themselves. They were willing to work with and bless any group who shared this simple set of priorities – Honor Christ, Love all People & Spread the Gospel. If they worked with Calvinists they didn’t try to make a Moravian church, they helped the Calvinists start a Calvinist church. The same was the case with any denomination. To this day, there are not a lot of “Moravians” in the world, but their impact has been enormous.

They saw they were part of something bigger than themselves, and in the process there are many groups and ministries which trace their beginnings to this small group in Germany. The First Great Awakening in Europe and America, the Methodist Church, world missions, 24/7 Prayer, and Small Group ministry all trace their roots back to the Moravians.

Out of a sense of unity with each other and with other Christians, and out of a powerful experience of Jesus, they built the body of Christ and not just their denomination. Their legacy was unity and an enhanced experience of Jesus for those they ministered to and with.

When we practice the leadership Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4, two of the results are unity with each other (both in our church and denomination, and with other Christians) and the opportunity for people (all people) to experience Jesus in powerful ways.

There is much more to “church” than to bring people in to be ministered to by the professionals and made dependent on the church to tell them what God is saying and what they are supposed to do. Real “church” is the body of Christ where leaders are given to the church to heal, cleanse, equip, bless and send everyone to live out their faith in the world. Where there is unity. Where people are equipped to hear God’s voice, see God’s activity and follow God’s call.

In short, Christian leadership should result in three things:

1. Everyone feeling closer to God
2. Everyone feeling closer to each other and to other Christians
3. Everyone transforming the world around them by living their faith out in their relationships, occupations, families and vocations every day, wherever they are.

For Personal Reflection - How much does your church look like the three things Christian leadership should help create? Do all people feel closer to God? Is there unity within your church and with other Christians in your community and around the world? Are people transforming the world around them in their everyday lives?

Prayer—God, thank you for the leaders who have helped me more fully experience Jesus in my life. Thank you for the leaders who have helped bring me closer in unity with other Christians. Thank you for the leaders who have helped me hear God’s call and have the courage to live it out. Help my Pastor and my church leaders to be the gifts God desires them to be – to equip, build up and send the rest of us to live out our faith in ways that build the body of Christ in unity and to a greater experience of God’s love and power. AMEN