

We Support One Another

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: EPHESIANS 4:1-16

LESSON PASSAGES: EPHESIANS 4:1-7,11-16

THE QUESTION: WHY DOES GOD GIVE BELIEVERS SPIRITUAL GIFTS?
THE POINT: GOD GIVES THE CHURCH SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK.

LESSON PASSAGES

EPHESIANS 4:1-7,11-16

¹ Therefore I, the * prisoner in the Lord, urge you to live worthy of the calling you have received, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, a bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. ⁷ Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

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¹¹ And he himself gave some to be b apostles, some c prophets, some * evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² equipping the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be d little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

KEY WORDS

- a **Bearing:** Forbearance, tolerance, endurance. The Greek root wording indicates believers' responsibility not only to bear with each other, but also to offer support.
- b **Apostles:** This word originally meant one sent on an assignment. Jesus chose twelve of His disciples to be apostles (Luke 6:13).
- c **Prophets:** Old Testament prophets proclaimed God's message about the Israelites and other nations. New Testament prophets preached and sometimes announced the future (Acts 21:10-12).
- d **Little children:** Christians are called to become more mature in Christ. As Christians support one another, the church is strengthened and believers grow and become more stable in their faith.

For more information about key words (*), visit the glossary on pages 160–161.

MEMORY VERSE

Ephesians 4:16

From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

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Ephesians 4:1-7,11-16

Why does God give believers spiritual gifts?



UNIT 3 LESSON 3

Western culture stands out as the most individualistic society in human history. It seems like every person has just one thing in mind: “What’s best for me?” Too often we give little or no consideration to the impact our lives and choices have on others. When we come to Christ, though, we don’t come alone. We’re joined with other believers in His church. We must leave individualism at the door. Why? Because God saves us not only for our own benefit, but also to bless and support others in His body.

Focal Passage Outline

GIFTS CREATE UNITY IN THE CHURCH
(Eph. 4:1-7)

GIFTS EQUIP THE CHURCH FOR MINISTRY
(Eph. 4:11-13)

GIFTS HELP BELIEVERS GROW
(Eph. 4:14-16)

GIFTS CREATE UNITY IN THE CHURCH EPHESIANS 4:1-7

Sometimes when we think about giving, we only think about money. But tithes and offerings are not the only way believers can demonstrate generosity. They can also freely give grace and love as a way to encourage unity in the body.

What comes to your mind when you think of God’s gifts? Why?

Read Ephesians 4:1-7. As we’ve learned in earlier lessons, when God saves us, He also connects us to His church. In contrast to our culture’s emphasis on individualism, the Bible teaches that believers share a great responsibility for one another. So rather than focusing on our spiritual needs alone, we support the growth of others too.

Paul, a * **prisoner** for the cause of Christ, began this passage by urging believers “to live worthy” of their calling from God. Then, he explained what that kind of life looks like—and Paul’s explanation emphasized our responsibility toward others. We cannot separate worthy living from our connection with other believers.

As we continue to grow in our faith, God continues to give us grace so we can unite with His people. Along the way, the Holy Spirit works through us to support other believers, and the Spirit works through other believers to support us.

As we depend upon the Spirit and exercise the gifts God gives to us, our goal is to make “every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit” (v. 3). Paul didn’t tell us to create unity. He said to “keep the unity.” There are two ways to do this:

First, God empowers us to pursue relational unity. In humility, we should consider the needs of others along with our own. With gentleness, we should be **a bearing** with others (v. 2). Through patience, we should be showing mercy to others. And in love, we should be forgiving others (v. 3).

Next, God empowers us to profess doctrinal unity. In verses 4-6, Paul summed up some of the most unifying major doctrines of the Christian faith. There is one God in three Persons, one Savior of our faith, one spiritual baptism by which we’re saved, and one spiritual body of Christ—the church. Christians may disagree on minor doctrines, but we have far more uniting us than dividing us.

What are some ways that division can be harmful to a church? What is the responsibility of individual church members related to unity?

GIFTS EQUIP THE CHURCH FOR MINISTRY EPHESIANS 4:11-13

You’ve seen videos of soldiers returning home. The moment when surprised family members realize what’s going on is priceless! It’s like they’ve been given a precious gift in human form.

Sometimes, a person can be a huge gift. Paul told the Ephesians that God had given the church some special gifts wrapped in flesh and blood. Of course, these human leaders aren’t perfect, but they urge the church to reach the world with the gospel.

How have the leaders of your church been a blessing to you? How have they challenged you to be a more effective minister of the gospel?



Diggin’ Deeper



Spiritual Maturity

Developing individual spiritual maturity is important, but that growth must occur within the context of the church. Paul was not encouraging a kind of “Lone Ranger” spirituality. Christians grow and mature best in the context of a community of faith. Love (Eph. 4:2,15) is a key ingredient in Christian maturity. Younger, less mature Christians can benefit from association with older, more mature Christians. Also, mature Christians can grow by serving as role models for younger Christians. **Meditate on the following verses and record what each has to say about the church’s role in promoting spiritual maturity.**

- 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- Hebrews 10:24-25
- James 5:13-16

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Ephesians 4:1-7,11-16



Did you know?

Paul's "therefore" in verse 1 signals a transition in his discussion about the nature and ministry of the church. The first three chapters of the letter are more doctrinal or theological, highlighting issues such as salvation by grace and the unity of the church. In chapter 4 Paul began stressing the practical application of these truths to the everyday life of believers. A key emphasis in this section is God's provision of spiritual gifts. Christians are called to use their gifts to accomplish the work and unity of the church. **As you think about Paul's teaching, answer these questions:**

- Why did God give different gifts to people?
- How is the truth of spiritual gifts misunderstood in our world?

Read Ephesians 4:11-13. God gives each believer a measure of grace for the benefit of His church. This grace comes in the form of spiritual gifts. While God has provided various gifts to individual church members, He has especially gifted some people to lead and equip the church for ministry.

The leaders that God has given the church include **b apostles**, **c prophets**, *** evangelists**, pastors, and teachers. The apostles were people like Paul and the Twelve who walked closely with Jesus and were personally called by Him. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers build up the body by proclaiming the Word of God and explaining how to live for Christ.

God gives these leaders for at least four specific purposes. They equip the saints for the work of the ministry, and they build up the body of Christ. They also lead the body to unity and show what it means to look like Jesus. Their primary role is to equip the rest of us for ministry and to help us grow in Christ-like maturity.

We should expect church leadership to work hard, but they should not have to work alone. When we all join together in the work of the church, the entire body grows in maturity and looks more like Jesus.

How have you seen church leaders practicing Ephesians 4:11-13? How are you building up the church?

GIFTS HELP BELIEVERS GROW EPHESIANS 4:14-16

We've seen that the church is a body with Jesus as the head. Paul told the church in Corinth that this body is made of many different members (1 Cor. 12:12,18-20). God gives every believer a spiritual gift empowered by the Holy Spirit.

For example, some believers are gifted to serve in leadership roles, while others work behind the scenes. Regardless of the specific gift(s) we possess, God has given all spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ.

What do you think your spiritual gift might be? How are you using that to encourage the body?

Read Ephesians 4:14-16. When we're born, we're helpless and rely on others. As we grow, we become more independent

Live It!

The English poet John Donne wrote, “No man is an island entire of itself.” An interconnection exists between us all. No one survives and thrives without assistance from others, not even in the church.

This week, consider the contrast between some of our culture’s beliefs about church and the biblical expectations Paul outlined in this session. Reject any misconceptions about life in the church, and ask God to unite your heart with His regarding His church. Determine ways you can use your spiritual gifts to grow, unify, and love Christ’s church.

until we can finally take care of ourselves. The same is true with believers. We aren’t supposed to live like **d little children** in the faith. We’re supposed to stand strong, giving and receiving support as we use unique gifts.

Allowing the Holy Spirit to use your spiritual gifts is not only the primary way you serve Christ’s body, but it is also a tangible way to demonstrate love for His body. That was Paul’s point of verse 16: When we each generously share our gifts with others, the body is built up in love.

As we serve with our gifts, we speak “the truth in love.” That’s honesty and firmness mixed with compassion and love. We’re also not to serve “on our own,” promoting our own ideas about Jesus. If what we say and do isn’t grounded in God’s Word, then we’re really not grounded in anything.

On our own, divisions fester; but with God’s Word, unity grows. Under His direction, the members of His body work together to accomplish His work.

In what ways do you see your church knit together the way Paul described here? What are some obstacles that we need to overcome?

SO WHAT? How does this apply to me?

If you’re not sure what your spiritual gift is or how you can be of service in the church, ask other believers to help you. Many times, people recognize our strengths before we do. Discuss with a church leader your desire to serve. If you’ve identified your spiritual gifts, invest your time, passions, and strengths into using that gift to build up others in the church.

• How have you seen others using their spiritual gifts within the church? What can you learn from them?

• How have you been able to exercise your spiritual gifts?



• What holds people back from using their spiritual gifts to build up others in the church?

• Why are gifts key to building unity within the church? What can you do this week to promote unity among individual believers?

1. IT'S NOT ABOUT ME

Ephesians 4:1-3

Many Americans think about church almost exclusively in terms of their spiritual needs and the services the church might provide for them. They basically approach church like they're shopping for a car: surf the web, visit the dealerships, go on a test drive, and sign on the dotted line. But being a part of a church is not about what the church can do for you. It's more about what you can do for the body of Christ. It's never a matter of what you can get, but what you can give. If you catch yourself falling into the trap of thinking church is all about you, ask God to remind you that it's actually all about Him.

Savior, help me remember that You planted me in my church to serve, not to be served.

2. EQUIP THE SAINTS

Ephesians 4:11-13

If individualism skews our expectations of churches, then it definitely skews expectations of pastors and church leadership. In many churches, people wrongly assume that pastors exist to do all the work of the ministry. They view Sunday mornings as a product that they should sit back and consume. It's what those leaders are paid to do, right? Not exactly. It's true that leaders earn their paychecks by serving the church, but God never intended the whole burden to sit on their shoulders. You are part of the body, so you need to be part of the ministry. God didn't save you so you could sit. He saved you to serve!

Father, show me where You want me to plug into my church family. Teach me to serve!

DAILY READINGS

3. I'M HERE FOR YOU

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Encouragement is the act of giving others support or hope. In all honesty, that's what the church should be known for. When people look at us, they should recognize that we are a family that stands together no matter what. Paul challenged believers to encourage and build up one another in Christ. Think about people who have encouraged you. What did they say or do? What impact did their words and actions have on you? As believers in Christ and members of His body, the church, we are all called to encourage one another. If you pay attention, God will give you opportunities to support someone else—and to find similar support when you need it.

God of grace, give me the courage and compassion to support others in my church.

4. THE WORDS OF THE WISE

Proverbs 17:27-28

Jesus said that the words that come from our mouths actually come from the overflow of our hearts (Matt. 12:34). So, it's fair to take a few minutes to evaluate what your words have been saying about your heart lately. Centuries before Jesus came to earth, King Solomon drew a distinction between the wise person and the fool based on their words. The principle still applies today. You can still tell a lot about a person by examining what comes out of their mouth. Thankfully, you have the power to encourage others with your words. Pray that God will lead you to people with whom you can share words of encouragement this week.

Loving Lord, help me to use my tongue as a blessing to others, not as a weapon.