



DEVELOPING AN ENVIRONMENT OF SERVING

Thinking

Dream a bit. Try and come up with a few sentences that describe how a "perfect church" would function.

When you imagine that perfect community of faith, why do you think so many churches never get there?

Reflecting

We want to anchor our thoughts about church life in Ephesians 4:11-16. Read over the passage.

Who are those mentioned in 4:11?

Who is in view in 4:12?

What kind of relationship does Paul envision existing between those mentioned in 4:11 and those in 4:12?

How does Paul go on to describe the way the church is to function, as presented here in Ephesians 4?

If the leadership of the church does not carry out its part, what will that mean for a local church? If the members of the church do not carry out their part, what will that mean for a local church?

Taking it to heart

What, if anything, is hindering you from connecting deeply with others and finding your proper place of "fit" within our local body so that we can all grow up as Paul describes here in Ephesians?



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LEADERS' GUIDE FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

MAY 25, 2008

EPHESIANS
4:11-16

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The big picture

Unfortunately, feeling the pressure of our consumer-driven world, many people get involved in a church with an idea of "what's in it for me." And, candidly, if we approach church life in terms of "what they are here to do for me," then we probably won't experience real church life! In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul roots the experience of the life of the church to the active participation of every member. Apart from finding your place of serving in the life of the church, you won't be able to fully experience all that God has in store for you.

Thinking

Everybody who attends a local church seems to have thoughts about what would make the church better. So, dream out loud a bit. Talk about what might enrich the experience of life together. And explore why churches (ones we know and we've been part of) don't seem to get there. Look for common threads. Typically, a major factor is that there are things that people feel should be happening that just don't happen. And, that leads us to Paul's thoughts in Ephesians 4. Specifically, *if every member is not actively involved in serving, the life of the church suffers.*

Reflecting

As you begin reading through the passage, you might have some who want to discuss (or debate!) the roles of apostles and prophets and whether such exist in the church today. Feel free *not* to resolve this issue in your group! What you can do is point out that no matter how one understands those roles, Paul apparently has *the leadership* of the church in mind in 4:11. That's what we want to note; we don't have to resolve the question of whether there are apostles in the church today.



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Seeing the leadership roles in 4:11 provides the context for what follows. The leaders are to "equip" (the word speaks of providing resources and training) the "saints" (Paul's favorite word for referring to *all believers*; saints are not a special class of believers) so that the saints can be engaged in the "work of [the] ministry" (which is Paul's way of talking about the ongoing loving and Spirit-led serving that characterizes the life of a local church).

In other words, the "ministry" of any local church is *not* to be carried out by the "paid staff." The ministry of any local church is what the members of that church do, as they are enabled by the Spirit and trained and coached by the leaders that Jesus has given to that local church. It's vital that we see that ministry is carried out by all members and not simply by those in leadership.

What Paul goes on to picture is a wonderful, organic kind of life where each member of the church finds his or her place of "connecting" and appropriate way of serving so that the body itself grows up into Christ-likeness and experiences the kind of life of love for which the church was designed. In other words, the health of any local church is radically dependent on the participation of all the members of that local church. A "perfect church" (or, at least, one seeking to be what Jesus intends for it) is one in which the members of the church realize that they are designed by Jesus for meaningful, Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered service. And, we all need each other in order to grow into maturity; both individually and corporately.

Although Paul doesn't specifically delineate the downsides of not experiencing church life as he presents it here, the implications are clear. If leaders don't equip, then saints will find it hard to discover where and how to serve. And if saints are not willingly engaged in serving in the life of the church, then the church itself will struggle in coming to maturity, will be prone to deception, and will not "function" properly. A healthy and growing body is only healthy and growing as each member finds his or her place of connection and service.

Taking it to heart

As you talk about the implications, be clear that Southside Fellowship is not looking for workers! That is, we are not exploring the topic of serving because we "need help." What we want is health. And as we see here, health in the body comes as each saint finds what she or he was made to do. And as we see here, health for the individual saint also is tied to his or her involvement in the life of the church. Why are we talking about serving? The bottom line is because we long to honor Christ by growing into maturity, and a significant way that will happen is when each one discovers how and where he or she is to serve.