

3 | We Support One Another



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In 1624, the English poet John Donne wrote, “No man is an island, entire of itself.” An interconnectedness exists between us all. No one survives and thrives without assistance from others, not even in the church. However, when we examine the behaviors and attitudes of most Americans, it looks more like a sea of islands.

Western culture in the twenty-first century surely stands out as the most radically individualistic culture in human history. It seems like every person makes every decision with one thing and one thing alone in mind: *What’s best for me?* Too often we give little consideration to how our lives and choices impact other people.

When we come to Christ, we don’t come to Him alone; we’re joined with other believers in His church. Our individual lives and relationship with Christ aren’t just about *me*; they are about *we*. We must leave individualism at the door when joining Christ’s church. Why? Because God saves us not only for our own benefit but also to bless and support others—especially fellow Christians.

GROUP TIME

THE POINT: God gives the church spiritual _____ to accomplish His _____.

Many Americans think about church almost exclusively in terms of *their* spiritual needs and what services the church might provide to *them*. These expectations lead them to search for a church with the most palatable preaching, most enjoyable music, and most relevant programs. In contrast to our culture's individualism, the Bible teaches that believers share a great responsibility for one another. So rather than approaching church for my spiritual needs alone, the gospel expands my value system to include how I might support the growth of others too.

Ephesians 4:1-7 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, 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.

My calling is to use my God-given spiritual gifts for the _____ of the church.

Paul began in verse 1 by urging us “to live worthy of the calling you have received.” Then in verses 2-6 he explained what that life looks like. Paul's explanation addresses our responsibility toward others. We can't separate living a life worthy of the gospel from our connection with other believers. But our sinful human nature is drawn to selfishness, so how can we break from an individualist mind-set and consider others? The answer is found in God's grace. “Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift” (v. 7). At salvation, Jesus saved us by His grace to unite us with God, and He continues to give us grace to unite us with His people. As we depend on God, His Holy Spirit works through us to support other believers. And the Holy Spirit works through other believers to help and support us. God equips us to accomplish His work!

Ephesians 4:11-13 ¹¹ And he himself gave some to be apostles, some 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.

Some people are gifted to _____ the church for ministry.

God has given various gifts to church members, but He has especially gifted some people to lead and equip the church for ministry. The leaders God has given the church are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The apostles included Paul and the Twelve who walked closely with Jesus—all of whom Jesus personally called and sent out. These men led the early church and authored much of the New Testament. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers also build up the body of Christ through their varying gifts. They proclaim the Word of God to us and explain what it means to live for Christ. They teach us how to obey God's commands. They model boldness in sharing the gospel. These gifted leaders help us to grow spiritually.

Ephesians 4:14-16 ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be 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.

All spiritual gifts are used to help believers _____ in Christ, in unity, and in love.

God gives every believer His grace in the form of spiritual gifts. Both Paul and Peter recorded lists of various spiritual gifts that are manifested in God's people (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 27-31; and 1 Peter 4:11). Some believers are gifted to serve in leadership roles, for example. Others are gifted to demonstrate greater acts of mercy, service, and generosity, while others have a greater inner sense of faith, wisdom, and discernment. Regardless of the specific gifts we possess, God has given all spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Who do you see in your church fulfilling each of the following descriptions?

Equipping others for ministry: _____

Building up the body: _____

Unifying the body around the truth of Jesus: _____

Growing the body to look like Jesus: _____

DAY 1: As Christians, we're to maintain unity in the church.

Read Ephesians 4:1-7.

As we depend upon the Spirit of God and exercise the gifts God gives to us, our goal is to maintain unity in the church. We're to make "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (v. 3). Paul didn't tell us to create unity; we're to "keep the unity" (v. 3). Through the gospel, Jesus has already brought unity by reconciling two opposing sides (holy God and sinful man) and two alienated peoples (Jews and Gentiles). Our calling is to maintain the unity that Jesus has already bought. We see at least two different ways to do this:

- ▶ **God empowers us to pursue relational unity.** Verse 2 describes the mind-set that fosters unity among people. In humility, we should consider others in addition to ourselves. With gentleness, we should give others the benefit of the doubt. Through patience, we should show others the mercy we've been shown from Jesus. And in love, we should forgive the faults of others, knowing we have plenty of our own failings that need to be forgiven.
- ▶ **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. There is one Savior of our faith. There is one spiritual body of Christ—the church. Christians may disagree on minor doctrines and issues, but Paul's words remind us that as believers, we have far more to unite us doctrinally than to divide us. The very core of our faith unites us.

Memorize Ephesians 4:4-6 as a reminder of the unifying truths we're to cling to as Christians.

"There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."

EPHESIANS 4:4-6

DAY 2: God uses spiritual leaders to equip us to serve.

Read Ephesians 4:11-13.

Based on Paul's words in Ephesians 4:11-13, God gives leaders to His church for at least four specific purposes:

- ▶ To equip the saints for the work of the ministry.
- ▶ To build up the body of Christ.
- ▶ To lead the body to unity around the truth of Jesus.
- ▶ To lead the body to look like Jesus.

No one comes out of the womb a ready-made worker in God's kingdom. No one is fully equipped to serve at the moment when he or she trusts in Jesus. But when we come to faith in Christ, God gifts us in a specific way, and He uses the spiritual leaders He's placed in our lives to equip us to use those gifts. We need to be equipped, and that happens as our leaders invest their time and use their gifts to teach and train us to do ministry.

You're being served by numerous people at church. Thank one or two of them this week, or write a note of encouragement to express your appreciation.



DAY 3: Every Christian has a responsibility to serve the church's ministry.

Read 1 Peter 4:10-11.

The heart of the church's ministry is done by each one of us—not just those with official leadership titles. We all have a responsibility to serve in the church's ministry. Our gifts may be different, our time commitments may vary, and limitations may arise, but our responsibility to serve is the same. In Christ's church, every saint has a part in supporting the body.

These truths should transform our expectations of our churches and our leaders. We should expect church leadership to work hard, but they shouldn't have to work alone. They have a biblical responsibility to walk faithfully with Jesus and diligently use their gifts to train the body. The body, then, should follow their example and join them in the work of the ministry. When we all join together in the work of ministry, the body grows in maturity and looks more like Jesus.

Evaluate your willingness to use your spiritual gifts in the church. Have you been spiritually contributing to others? If not, what's holding you back?

DAY 4: Every believer's spiritual gifts are important.

Read Ephesians 4:14-16.

In a human body, some parts are more visible while others aren't seen, but every part is necessary and comes together to form a complete, healthy body. I don't always think about it, but I'm very thankful for my liver. And though most people don't give regular thought to their big toes, they would have trouble staying balanced without one of them! Here's the point: every believer's spiritual gifts in every local church are important to the growth, unity, and maturity of the body of Christ—including yours. Embrace the role God gives you, and use it for the good of the body, because the body grows and is "building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part" (v. 16).

Allowing the Holy Spirit to use your spiritual gifts isn't only the primary way you serve the body, but it's also a tangible way you love the body. That's the point of verse 16: When we each contribute our gifts, the body is built up *in love*.

Consider where you might serve your church using your spiritual gift. Ask a pastor or friends for suggestions, if needed. Take a step of faith and pay attention to how God uses you for His kingdom.

DAY 5: Place your focus on the Word of God.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12,18-20.

As we serve the body with our gifts, we're to speak "the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). God's Word is the source of truth, so speaking the truth to one another in love means that all our gifts, all our serving, and all our ministry activity is to be united around Scripture. We're not to serve on our own—with our own ideas about who Jesus is and what He wants us to do. What we say and do are to be grounded in and based on God's Word.

All ministry service must be united around the Word of God. When it is, the Word gives us both clarity and unity. When Scripture isn't central, the church wavers like chaff in the wind. On our own, we're like little children, but when we remain focused on God's Word, we grow as mature adults. On our own, we might believe anything; with the Word, we're grounded in the truth. On our own, divisions fester; with the Word, unity grows. Left to ourselves, the church looks like the world; but with the Word, the church looks like Jesus. Under the direction of His Word and the power of His Holy Spirit, we in the body of Christ work together to accomplish His work.

What obstacles might hinder you from remaining focused on God's Word? Record two or three things below, then ask God in prayer to remove these barriers.

"The Bible's power rests upon the fact that it is the reliable, errorless, and infallible Word of God."

CHUCK COLSON