

**CULTIVATING MINISTRY**  
**EPHESIANS 4:11-16**

We live in an entertainment culture.

We go to the gym to exercise, step onto a treadmill and have a TV screen facing us to watch. But most don't watch – they have their own private entertainment in their own headphones. Or perhaps you prefer an aerobics class — so you exercise there to the loud beat of the instructor's favorite “get up and go” music.

The average person watches four hours of television per day (28 hours per week). In addition to that, the average person spends 17 hours per week surfing the Internet. Together that's a full-time job — a full-time job being entertained.

I have an iPhone — when I checked on Friday it had 2039 songs on it, 1916 photos, 108 apps, and 11 audio books. And I have access to my entire Kindle library on that phone, though currently I only have 41 books downloaded onto my phone. I think I might have an electronics addiction. I have an iPhone, an iPod, two kindles, two computers — and a laptop — seven email addresses (I think), three blog sites (only one active), Instagram, Facebook, Twitter (and I'm responsible for a Facebook and Twitter account for the church also), two TVs, Netflix, and Amazon Prime. Won't someone please help me? Oh, you can't because you have the same stuff, don't you?!

Five years ago, the average teenager used to send and receive about 3000 texts per month, and that appears to be down to about 1,000 per month (30 per day). However, the typical teen is also tweeting, facebooking, and snap chatting. And they own additional messaging apps like Kik, GroupMe, and WhatsApp. So don't worry that our teens are communicating less than they used to — they are still plugged into their electronics.

We believe in discretionary time, recreational vehicles and increasingly larger flat screen televisions. In 2004, Americans spent more than \$700 billion on recreational products and services — more than the entire Gross National Product of Canada! In *Century of the Leisured Masses*, author David Surdam demonstrates that in the 100 years from 1909 to 2008, spending on the basics of life (food and housing) decreased from ~58% to ~25%. But expenditures on recreation more than tripled (from 3% to over 9%).

And this mindset has infiltrated the church as well. Now people often select a church not on Biblical criteria but on entertainment value — so sermons are replaced by drama, dance, musical productions, and video clips. People are tempted to go to church to be entertained rather than be the church and serve one another. At GBC, we want to be different.

One of the core values of GBC is: “we believe in every member ministry.” Every member of the church body is a minister, gifted by God and equipped by the church to serve in the church for the glory of God. And that truth is found in the passage before us this morning, Ephesians 4:11-16. If I can give you the theme of this passage in a few words, it is this —

**GOD’S PLAN IS TO BUILD HIS CHURCH THROUGH ALL HIS GIFTED PEOPLE.**

The church is not a place for “professionals,” “professionalism,” or “entertainment.” It is a place where all God’s people gather to exercise their gifts towards each other for the benefit of each other.

In this passage, we will discover *five characteristics* of God’s plan for the church that should shape and direct all our activities in the church.

1. **We are Built on the Foundation of the GOSPEL and SCRIPTURE (v. 11a)**
2. **We are being Built by the GOSPEL and SCRIPTURE (v. 11b)**
3. **We are All either EQUIPPING or Being EQUIPPED (v. 12a)**
4. **We are All SERVING in the Work of Christ (v. 12b)**
5. **We are All being Built Together into ONE Body (v. 12c)**

In this passage, we will discover *five characteristics* of God's plan for the church that should shape and direct all our activities in the church.

### 1. We are Built on the Foundation of the GOSPEL and SCRIPTURE (v. 11a)

- Paul identifies four gifts that God has given to the church for the purpose of protecting unity (v. 3)
  - ✓ ***apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers*** refer to both the gifts and the people.
  - ✓ God has not only gives gifts of grace to the people of the church, but He gives gifted people to the church — He not only gives functions, but He gives relationships. These gifts function in relationships within the context of the body.
  - ✓ Paul is also emphatic — “*He, he gave...*” — i.e., the ascended (sovereign and authoritative) Christ of v. 10 gave these gifts.
- The first two gifts mentioned are ***apostles*** and ***prophets*** — we call these foundational gifts — gifts that were used in the founding of the church (2:19-20).
  - ✓ ***apostles*** were a select group of men who had been chosen by Christ and had seen the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:21-22) and they had the accompanying power of miracles that testified to their position (this included only the 12 and Paul).
  - ✓ In a more general sense, an apostle is lit., “a sent one” — i.e., sent w. gospel by God's authority
  - ✓ The fundamental task of the apostle was to proclaim gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 15:9-11; Gal. 2:7)
  - ✓ The ***prophets*** mentioned here functioned like OT prophets — through special revelation of God, they removed the veil of the future and made known the facts of the present — brought to light that which had been hidden or unknown so that the church would be edified and built up (1 Cor. 14:3)
  - ✓ The office of apostle was broad and evangelistic, the office of prophet was for the local church and for equipping and discipling.
- These gifts are no longer functional in the church (cf. 2:20, ***having been built***; Scripture authenticates the message), yet the church is still built on the ministry of those who were gifted with these gifts.
  - ✓ The ministry of these men was *for* the gospel and *through* the Scriptures — the instruments they used to build the church were the simple gospel of Christ and the Word of God (**1 Tim. 2:7**)
  - ✓ The fact that God gave and used these gifts in history should stimulate gratitude in us — be thankful to God for the firm foundation of the church, which was laid on the work of Christ and the labor of the apostles and prophets in the early church. We stand because they stood first. We stand on the backs and shoulders of their labor (1 Cor. 3:10-11; Eph. 3:5ff).
  - ✓ We no longer have the apostles and prophets, but we still do have the benefits of their ministry.
  - ✓ The way we do ministry is no different than the way they did ministry — the gospel and Word.

- The first characteristic of the church is that it is built on the foundation of the gospel and Scripture. And the second characteristic is similar —

## 2. We are being Built by the **GOSPEL** and **SCRIPTURE** (v. 11b)

- Not only did God gift the church with apostles and prophets, but He also gave **evangelists** —
  - ✓ The word evangelist appears only a few times (Acts 21:8 — Philip; 2 Tim. 4:5 — Timothy).
  - ✓ But the concept of evangelism is very common — and it simply means “to declare the good news” and it was used of those who announced the news of the gospel.
  - ✓ Even Jesus practiced evangelism — Lk. 20:1 — “preaching the gospel.”
  - ✓ The gospel is quite simple — Acts 13:38-39 — forgiveness of sins and restoration to God
  - ✓ NT evangelists were simply people who took gospel to places where it had not been previously known. In early church, they were missionaries & church planters, much like apostles (w/o sign gifts)
  - ✓ But notice also that the evangelist doesn’t have to go to Cambodia — 2 Tim. 4:5 — in Ephesus.
    - Pastor C. T. Studd said, “Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.”
    - Ten-year-old A. A. Hodge and his sister Mary: “Dear Heathen: The Lord Jesus Christ hath promised that the time shall come when all the ends of the earth will be His kingdom. And God is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent. And if this was a promise made by a Being who cannot lie, why do you not help it to come sooner by reading the Bible, and attending to the words of your teachers, and loving God, and, renouncing your idols, take Christianity into your temples? And soon there will be not a Nation, no, not a space of ground as large as a footstep, that will want a missionary. My sister and myself have, by small self-denials, procured two dollars which are enclosed in this letter to buy tracts and Bibles to teach you. Archibald Alexander Hodge and Mary Eliz. Hodge, Friends of the Heathen.”
  - ✓ I live in the same house with someone with this gift — regularly, “I had a chance to share gospel...”
  - ✓ [Aside: evangelism isn’t only for those with the gift — it’s for all followers of Christ — Mt. 28]
  - ✓ The evangelists were important then and are important now because without this gift the church would grow deeper, but not broader. It’s also a privilege. We, who do not deserve salvation and reconciliation to God, have been saved and reconciled, and then also been granted the gift and privilege of preaching the message of reconciliation to others (2 Cor. 5:18ff).
- Not only did God give evangelists, but He also gave **pastor-teachers** —
  - ✓ The question is whether this refers to two gifts (pastors and teachers) or one (pastor-teachers)
  - ✓ Godly men have held both but it seems most likely that because of the grammar, this is one gift — all the other gifts have the article in front of them, except **teachers** — so teachers is probably to be considered as a unified gift with **pastors** — teaching shepherds.

- ✓ Scripture uses three words to refer to one kind of leader in the church — **Acts 20:17, 28**
  - **elder** refers to a man's age and implies his spiritual maturity, so it suggests godly character
  - **pastor** means "shepherd," and refers to his tender care of feeding and protecting the flock
  - **overseer** means "guardian," and refers to the activity and function of the elder —
  - MacArthur — Elder emphasizes who the man is; overseer speaks of what he does; pastor indicates how he does it.
  - The emphasis here is that those who lead the flock do it with tenderness and with the Word of God — **teachers** = 1 Tim. 3:2; also **Titus 1:9**; an example is in 2 Tim. 2:24-26.
  - The foundational role of someone with this gift is to open the Word of God and explain it. Foundation of all ministry is teaching: 4:15-16; 5:18ff; 6:4; Col. 1:28; 3:16; Hb. 3:12f; 10:24f
- As you think about evangelists and pastor-teachers, remember this —
  - ✓ All elders (should) have the teaching gift — though *not all who have this gift are elders*. There are many who have gifts related to teaching who do not fill the office of elder. This is also a valuable gift for Sunday School teachers and AWANA leaders and disciplers and counselors...
  - ✓ God is using people — He is gifting frail men with spiritual gifts to accomplish His purposes. These *people* are gifts to us in the church (aren't you thankful for the evangelist in your life, and those who open and explain the Word of God to you?)
  - ✓ The tools that these gifted people used are simple — the Gospel and the Word of God.
  - ✓ Ministry is not overly complicated. (It's hard, but not complicated.) Ministry is the combination of exposing and explaining the gospel to unbelievers and then training believers with the Word of God. We want to do it creatively and with energy and passion, but we never will depart from these basic tools — gospel and Word.
  - ✓ Cf. Acts 6:4 — prayer and Word = dependence on Spirit of God and message of God
  - ✓ We summarize this by saying "*GBC exists to shepherd God's people — reach the lost with the gospel of Christ and disciple the believing with the Word of Christ.*"
  - ✓ I like doing home fix-it projects, and I've acquired a few tools — saws and sanders and drills and screwdrivers of all sizes and grinders and nail punches and wrenches... But give me a hammer, pliers, a screwdriver, and maybe a saw and I have what I need most of the time. Most things are not too complicated. Ministry is founded on the work of the gospel and the Word of God.
- So the ministry of the church has been built on the foundation of the gospel and Scripture, and it is still being built through the gospel and Scripture. There is a third characteristic of the church —

### 3. We are All either **EQUIPPING** or Being **EQUIPPED** (v. 12a)

- What is important in this chapter is not only what gifts are given, but *why they are given*.
- Some suggest that the reasons given in v. 12 all relate to those with these gifts — so that the evangelists and pastor-teachers can equip and serve and build.
- Because of a shift in prepositions (**for the work of service** = lit., “to the work of service”), it is probably best to see this as discipling — the pastor-teachers equip, the equipped serve, and the body is built.
- It is the function of those with the gift of pastor-teacher to **equip**.
  - ✓ The word **equip** was used in a variety of ways —
    - it was used of a medical doctor setting a bone and fishermen mending nets
    - it was also used of military and naval preparations for battle
    - it was used of correction and healing relationships in the church body (Gal. 6:1)
    - it was used of a teacher training a student (Lk. 6:40)
    - it was used of a home having everything it needs to function well — it’s complete
  - ✓ The sense is not just that they are taught, but that they’re prepared for any need that might arise
- No pastor can do everything in ministry. No group of elders can do all the work. No group of pastor-teachers can do every part of ministry.
- The task of elders and pastors is not to do all the ministry, but to equip and prepare others so that they can do the ministry.
  - ✓ That’s why we have SS classes and AWANA, and BCDC, and home groups, and counseling, and preaching, and ladies’ and men’s Bible studies — we’re preparing people for the ministry of serving others.
  - ✓ It has been said that the perfect pastor, “preaches exactly fifteen minutes. He condemns sin, but never embarrasses anyone. He works from 8 a.m. until midnight and is also the church janitor. He makes \$60 a week, wears good clothes, drives a new car, and gives \$50 a week to the poor. He is 28-years-old and has been preaching for 25 years, and is wonderfully gentle and handsome. He loves to work with teenagers and spends countless hours with senior citizens. He makes fifteen calls daily on church families, shut-ins and hospital patients, and he is always in the office when needed. That’s the perfect pastor.” There is no perfect pastor and no pastor can do all that needs to be done. Acts 4:29-31 = the entire body of Christ speaking.
  - ✓ A pastor and group of elders is not given to the church to do the work; they are given to invest in the lives of others so that those others are prepared for the work that is involved in ministry.
  - ✓ These gifts and these men have been given to the church to prepare the church to serve —
    - A parent is given children not for the task of doing everything for them, but for the purpose of doing increasingly less and less so that one day the child can care for himself.
    - This is the function of pastor-teachers — not to do the work of ministry but to equip.
    - At GBC, we spend much time teaching — not to fill heads with info, but to equip to serve.
    - We’re putting tools in your hands so that you can be more effective in serving one another...

- Our culture has developed a “do it for me” attitude; sitting on the couch, we want others to care for our needs... That can develop too readily in the church, and it’s devastating. A healthy church is not the church with the frenetically busy pastors, but with pastors who are investing in the lives of others so they can be equipped to serve.

*“The goal of the Christian ministry is quite simple...are we making and nurturing genuine disciples of Christ? The church always tends towards institutionalism and secularization. The focus shifts to preserving traditional programs and structures, and the goal of discipleship is lost. The mandate of disciple-making provides the touchstone for whether our church is engaging in Christ’s mission. Are we making genuine disciples of Jesus Christ?” [The Trellis and the Vine, p. 14.]*

- While the foundation and process of growing the church is the gospel and Scripture; everyone is involved in the process of church ministry either in equipping or being equipped. And the fourth characteristic of the church is similar —

#### 4. We are All **SERVING** in the Work of Christ (v. 12b)

- **for the work of service** = “the deeds of deaconing...” the tasks one does in helping others. The goal is not for the elders to do all the work, the goal is to equip every member to do ministry.
- Implications —
  - ✓ Every member is a minister. The NT knows nothing of people who watch but don’t engage, who attend but don’t participate. There are no sidelines in the church. Everyone is on the field.

*“All Christians are in ministry.” [Ray Stedman]*  
*“Spiritual service is the work of every Christian, every saint of God. Attendance is a poor substitute for participation in ministry.” [MacArthur]*

- ✓ Some are more prominent and some are less prominent, but everyone is serving (1 Cor. 12:20ff)
- ✓ *The work is work, but it’s also a joy.* Like a child after labor; joy in labor (Heb. 12:3; Phil. 2:19ff)
- ✓ *The work of service is in building people, not buildings.* Service is speaking Word of God into the lives of people. It is so easy to be task oriented. God has created the church for us to be people-oriented. It’s about relationships.
  - The goal of all this activity is v. 13 — unity...maturity...fullness. The result is v. 16...
  - The only way this can happen is in relationship with one another; e.g., **1 Thess. 5:14-15**.
  - We are placed in the church body to cultivate relationship. God has graced you with a gift so that you personally can be involved in another person’s life (probably many) so that you can speak a word and offer encouragement and provide help so that relationship is deepened and that you are both made to be more like Jesus Christ.

- That is the privilege of every believer in the church body. If you are a 10-year-old believer or an 87-year-old believer, God has you in the body to serve someone else with your gift...
- This isn't a program, but a mindset and attitude — "I have the HS and Scripture...I can serve"

*"In spite of our inadequacies, in spite of our lack of full maturity, the Lord desires to use us in the lives of others. The help we provide others will not be perfect, in the same way that the help we receive from them will not be perfect. Regardless, we [are created as a body] for each other." [Wilkins]*

- Sometimes we do this really well.
- Sometimes we don't do this as well. Let's try a test — how are we doing in the application and use of our spiritual gifts with each other? Cf. Rom. 12:14ff.
- You and I were created to do all these things with one another. What one thing can you do this week to cultivate one step towards a more biblically-centered relationship so you serve another?
- So the way the church is being built is through the gospel and Scripture; and everyone is involved in that process. And the goal of that work is the final characteristic of the church...

## 5. We are All being Built Together into ONE Body (v. 12c)

- When all this is done — spiritual gifts are employed, elders shepherd and equip and those who are equipped serve — look at what happens. Fifth phase of God's plan to grow the church — it's built!
- The result of people using gifts is that the church of Christ is **built up**.
- When we say, "built up," we're talking about spiritual progress and maturity. When every member (part) functions as a part of the body the way God intended, the whole body benefits. And when a member doesn't function, then the whole body suffers.
  - ✓ As we saw last week, we *are* one unified body (vv. 1-3); are we living that way?
  - ✓ One test of how effective we are in working towards the unity of the body is how well we serve one another. As Marshall and Payne wrote in *The Trellis and the Vine*:

*"...if this is really what God is doing in our world then it is time to say goodbye to our small and self-oriented ambitions, and to abandon ourselves in the cause of Christ and his gospel...It is more important than our jobs, our families, our pastimes —yes, even more important than the comfort and security of familiar church life. We need to recapture the radicalism of what Jesus said to the young man who wanted to return and bury his father: 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God' (Lk. 9:60)." [38]*



## CONCLUSION:

At the beginning of this message, I said that Paul's theme in these verses is that —

*GOD'S PLAN IS TO BUILD HIS CHURCH THROUGH ALL HIS GIFTED PEOPLE.*

The church is not a place for “professionals,” “professionalism,” or “entertainment.” It is a place where all God's people gather to exercise their gifts towards each other for the benefit of each other.

It's tempting to say, “I'm not needed in the church; I have nothing to contribute.” But the opposite is true. You not only have something to contribute to the care of others in the body; it is necessary for you to function in the body. If not all the members are functioning, then the body's effectiveness is limited.

Listen to Romans 12:4-6a.

Let us exercise our gifts according to the way God has given them. And in so doing, let us cultivate and attitude of ministry that overflows into a sense of unity and community.