

## SESSION 3

# We Support One Another



### **QUESTION 1:**

*When has being part of a group helped you accomplish something big?*

## **THE POINT**

God gives the church spiritual gifts to accomplish His work.

## **THE PASSAGES**

Ephesians 4:1-7,11-16

## **THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE**

The English poet John Donne wrote, “No man is an island, entire of itself.”<sup>1</sup> 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 like a sea of islands.

Western culture in the 21st 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 (or for my family)?” 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 are joined with other believers in His church. Our individual lives and relationship with Christ are not 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.

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## 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.

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. They basically approach church like shopping for a car: surf the web, visit the dealerships, go on a test drive, and sign on the dotted line.

God certainly saves us in a very personal way, but though He saves us personally to Himself, He also joins us collectively to His church. 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.

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 cannot 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 think of 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." 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!

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 are to make "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Paul didn't tell us to *create* unity; we are to "*keep* the unity" (emphasis added). 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 brought. We see at least two different ways to do this:

1. **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.
2. **God empowers us to profess doctrinal unity.** The city of Ephesus in the first century was home to Jews, Gentiles, and even polytheists. Much like today, people were all over the spiritual map. But 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. Jesus Christ is

Lord is our confession of faith when we are baptized. There is one spiritual body of Christ—the church. Christians may disagree on minor doctrines and issues, but Paul’s words remind us that believers have far more to unite us doctrinally than divide us. The very core of our faith unites us.

**QUESTION 2:**

*Why is it essential to strive for unity within the church?*

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**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.

**KEY WORDS:** **Apostles (v. 11)**—This word originally meant one sent on an assignment. Jesus chose twelve of His disciples to be apostles (Luke 6:13).

**Prophets (v. 11)**—Old Testament prophets proclaimed God’s message about the Israelites and other nations. New Testament prophets preached and/or announced the future (Acts 21:10-12).

**Evangelists (v. 11)**—Based on the Greek word for *good news*, the term means Christians with a special gift for witnessing to non-believers (Acts 21:8).

At conversion, God gives each believer a spiritual gift or gifts to be used for the benefit of His church. 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. Some of these leaders hold more authority than others—especially the apostles and prophets. 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. Through their writings, they are still building us up two thousand years later!

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 give spiritual care for our souls. And they model boldness in sharing the gospel. Without these gifted leaders to Christ's church, none of us would be able to grow and become spiritually mature. Based on this passage, God gives these 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.

The primary role in a church leader's ministry is to equip the rest of us for ministry and to help us grow in Christ-like maturity. In many churches, people wrongly assume that pastors exist to do all the work of the ministry. They view Sunday mornings as a product to consume. Ministers produce; the people consume. *Ministry is what they're paid to do, right?!?* Not according to this passage.

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 he 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 trained, and that happens as our leaders invest their time and use their gifts to teach and train us to do ministry.

Each one of us is at the heart of the church's ministry—not just those with official leadership titles. Each one of us has 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 leaders to work hard, but they should not do ministry alone. They have a biblical responsibility to walk faithfully with Jesus and diligently use their gifts to train the body. The body should then follow their example and join them in the work of the ministry. When we all join together in the work of ministry, the entire body grows in maturity and looks more like Jesus.

**QUESTION 3:**

*How have you seen church leaders equip the saints in a way that brought unity in the church?*

**ENGAGE**

*Ephesians 4:12-13 describes the work of leaders in the church. Write the name of someone in your church who fits each description below.*

Equipping others for ministry: \_\_\_\_\_

Building up the body: \_\_\_\_\_

Unifying the body around the truth of Christ: \_\_\_\_\_

Growing the body to look like Christ: \_\_\_\_\_

*Pray for each of these individuals to be encouraged in their work.*

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## **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.**

The church is a body with Jesus as the head. Paul explained this picture when he wrote to the church in Corinth:

**“For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ .... God has arranged each one of the parts in the body just as he wanted. And if they were all the same part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body” (1 Cor. 12:12,18-20).**

God gives every believer spiritual gifts. These gifts include abilities and qualities empowered by the Holy Spirit. Paul and Peter recorded lists of various gifts that are manifested in God’s people (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11,27-31; 1 Pet. 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 gift(s) we possess, God has given all spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ.

In a human body, some parts are more visible while others are not seen. But every part is necessary and comes together to form a complete, healthy body. Most people don’t give regular thought to their big toes, but they would have trouble staying balanced without one of them! Here’s the point: every believer’s spiritual gift in every local church is important to the growth, unity, and maturity of the



body of Christ. 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.”

Allowing the Holy Spirit to use your spiritual gifts is the primary way you serve the body, but it is 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. As we serve the body with our gifts, we are to speak “the truth in love.” 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 is to be grounded in and based on God’s Word.

**QUESTION 4:**

***What does speaking the truth in love look like?***

All ministry service must be united around the Word of God. When it is, the Word gives us both clarity and unity. When Scripture is not 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.

**QUESTION 5:**

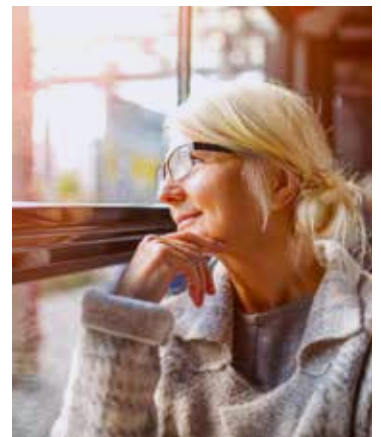
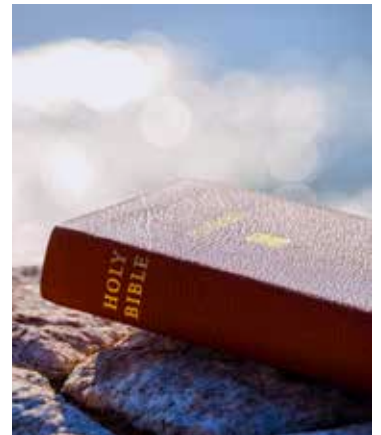
***What steps can we take as a group to promote the growth of the body and build it up in love?***

## LIVE IT OUT

How will you live out the truth that God has given you spiritual gifts for His service?

- ▶ **Reflect.** Consider the contrast between some of the cultural expectations of church with the biblical expectations studied in this session. Confess and turn from any misconceptions about life in the church. Ask God to unite your heart with His regarding His church.
- ▶ **Discover.** 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 see our strengths before we do. Discuss with a church leader your desire to serve.
- ▶ **Serve.** If you've identified your spiritual gifts, look for opportunities to exercise them in your life and in your church. Invest your time, passions, and strengths in building up others in the church.

Many people approach church for how it benefits them alone, but the biblical approach is to consider how we might benefit one another. Let's use our spiritual gifts to grow, unify, and love Christ's church.



### END NOTES

1. John Donne, "No Man Is an Island," *Scottish Poetry Library*, <https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/no-man-is-an-island/>