

Ephesians 4:7-16 — When Everybody Does Their Part

March 9, 2014

Good morning CrossWinds. We are in an exciting time in the CrossWinds family. In two weeks, the entire Spirit Lake campus is playing hooky and heading to Spencer for a preview service of the Spencer campus. That campus officially launches on Easter. The equipment for that campus will be delivered this week. There are still needs on that campus and you will have an opportunity to sign up to help at the end of the service.

As usual, the Holy Spirit has us at just the right place in the Bible for what we need as a church. We are studying our way through the book of Ephesians. The series is called, “Who Am I?” The book of Ephesians is split into two parts. The first part talks about what God has done for us through Jesus. We learned we are the most blessed beings in the universe through Jesus. That is incredibly good news for those us who live in Iowa and are dealing with this long winter.

In the second half of the book, it talks about how we should live because of who we are. The entire Christian life is not a list of commands we do to stay on God’s good side but it is directives on how we live a life of thankfulness because God has promised to never leave our sides.

Last week, Paul talked about our relationships with one another in the church. To live a life of thankfulness to Jesus and reflect Christ to others we are to live a life of humility, gentleness, and patience while we bear with one another in love. We are to be eager to keep the unity that God gives us through Jesus in the church. Even though we are different, we are to be united. That unity comes

from the Trinity. Just as God is composed of three persons — Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that are distinct but not divided — we are to reflect the Trinity. We are to be a church that is full of distinct individuals that are not divided but unified.

This morning, Paul takes things a different way. Even though we are one, God created us to be different. He wants us to be different. The church is like a puzzle. Every one of us is shaped differently, but God designed us to connect together and make one picture of Christ to the world around us. The problem is that most churches are only partially-assembled puzzles. A few pieces come together and try to paint the picture while the rest stay in the box. Maybe it is because they feel unimportant. Sometimes they just don't want to get involved. Sometimes people don't think they will make a difference. For whatever the reason, the puzzle doesn't come together to be what God intended it to be.

This morning, we are going to learn why it is important for you, if you are a Christian, to be serving one another in the church. Why is it important to get out of the box and get into the picture? We are going to look at eight reasons why you should insist on getting involved in the church.

Why should I insist on serving at church?

1. Christ gave me gifts that he knows my church needs.

**But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.
Ephesians 4:7 (ESV)**

What this means is Jesus is the head of the church. As the head of the church, he gave his church gifts. Each one of us who knows Christ, has a gift given us by Christ. This means that as Christians, we have the Holy Spirit living within us and that Holy Spirit will empower us to serve in meaningful ministry.

Some of you can lead; others can teach; others have administrative gifts. Some of you have natural talents given you by God but we also have supernatural gifts given us by God's spirit.

Here is the exciting part. God knew you would live in Iowa. God knew you would be part of CrossWinds Church. He knew what gifts would be needed at CrossWinds Church to make it function smoothly for his glory. God gave you the gifts you have because those are the gifts CrossWinds needs. God, in his wisdom, always gives the natural and supernatural gifts the church needs to bring glory to him. The question is always involvement. The question is always participation.

Some of you may think we don't have the gifts we need to accomplish what God is calling us to do but God loves to raise up people with gifts. He brings new people to church that have the gifts that are needed.

2. Some people are gifts from God to equip others in the church.

Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers... Ephesians 4:8-11 (ESV)

This section is deep. I will see if I can unpack it for you. Paul began by quoting from Psalm 68:18. In that Psalm, God is pictured as marching in triumph before all Israel after the exodus. When he came to Mt. Sinai, the earth shook under his feet. Next, God set his sight on Mt. Zion, in Jerusalem, and he moved with thousands of thousands of chariots up the slopes of Jerusalem to victory, leading captives in his train and receiving gifts from men.

Paul took this Psalm, that originally applied to God conquering Egypt through his main man Moses, and he applied it to God conquering Satan, sin and death through his main man Jesus. Jesus went from sitting at the right hand of God the Father to descending to the earth. Jesus didn't just descend to the earth but he descended to the grave and burst forth conquering it. He ascended far above all things to the highest heavens. When he did, he gave gifts to men.

This is where the theologians go crazy. Psalm 68:18 says God *received* gifts from men, here it says he *gave* gifts to men. Which one is right? The word, received and gave in the Hebrew are similar. They are so similar that in the Syriac translation and Aramaic Targums on Psalm 68:18, it says gave, not received. All this to say, don't sweat the words. They are close in meaning.

The point is that in the ancient world, when a king conquered an enemy, he would return home in triumphal procession. There would be a big party and the king gave gifts of the spoils to the people as part of the celebration. It is the same thing with the church. Jesus conquered sin and death. When he conquered his adversaries, he returned to heaven, threw a party and gave gifts to the church. They are spiritual gifts and natural abilities to serve one another in the church.

Paul drilled down into five specific gifts Jesus gives, and they are five different gifts of leadership in the church for the building up of the people in Christ.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers... Ephesians 4:11 (ESV)

Some of these people are very controversial. Do all of these gifts exist today or are some of them over with?

Apostle

This is one that is controversial. Are there still those with the gift of being an apostle that are active today? You see this in some of the freakier nut-jobs running around where they introduce themselves as apostle so-and-so. Is that legit to call yourself an apostle? To begin with, I think we need to differentiate between the office and ministry of an apostle. When we are talking about the office of the apostles, we are talking about 12 guys who were with Jesus. That is it. They were eyewitnesses to his life. They were close to Jesus. When Judas died, Matthias was chosen so they would still have 12. One of the criteria was that the new apostle selected to be part of the inner 12 needed to be someone who was with Jesus from the beginning, just as the other apostles were.

Obviously, today we do not have any of the 12 apostles. They spent three years with Jesus. They witnessed the resurrected Jesus. There is nobody in the apostolic office today. If there was a new apostle, he would be writing new books of the Bible.

I do believe that some people have an apostolic type of gift or ministry. What I mean is they are gifted by God for missionary pioneering church planting. They start churches where there are no churches. They are like Star Trek. They boldly go where the gospel hasn't gone before. That pioneering gift is really a different gift than a normal pastor. A normal pastor preaches and teaches to edify the church. It is much harder to do this when there is no church and you

are launching from nothing. I think God gives certain people that gift, and thank goodness he does. Each year about 3,000 churches close in our country. If you didn't have people out there with a heart to start new churches, we would rapidly become a post-Christian nation. America is the fourth largest unreached people group for Jesus in the world. We need more people with this apostolic type gift-mix.

Prophets

Again, you need to distinguish between the office and the ministry of a prophet. There are no prophets today like the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets were always saying, "Thus saith the Lord..." because they spoke God's words directly. They gave us books of the Bible. Peter told us that no prophet spoke out of his own mind but these people were carried along by the Holy Spirit so they said exactly what God wanted them to say. We believe the Bible is closed and God has not given additional Bible books for the last 2,000 years, so the office of the prophet in the Old and New Testament is closed.

That being said, I think there are still people that God gifts to the church who have a prophetic-type gift mix. In the Old Testament, the priests would teach people the Bible. Over time, the people became full of Bible knowledge but their hearts became calloused. God, in his grace, would send a prophet who would call the people to repentance. The prophets were powerfully used by God not primarily to give information but to call people to repentance and life change. Today there are people that God gives as gifts to the church who have a prophetic type of gift. They are powerful communicators of the gospel that call

people to repentance and a God-ward orientation in their lives. Thank goodness God gives these people to the church. If he didn't, we would become a hard, calloused people.

Evangelists

Evangelists are leaders who love people that aren't Christians. If you sit them around Christians too long, they go nuts. They often have trouble fitting into the institutional church because the institutional church has too many Christians. These people sometimes feel more comfortable working with non-Christians outside the church than they do working with Christians inside the church. These are people who are very comfortable talking about Jesus and they have results. They tell others about Jesus and people respond and trust him.

While these people don't usually fit in the church, they are very important for the church because without them there wouldn't be a lot of people in the seats. They bring a steady stream of new Christians which keeps the church from becoming stagnant like the Dead Sea.

Pastors

Pastors are those gifted with loving and nurturing people. They love counseling. They love nurturing. They are patient. They love having coffee and a cinnamon roll with you. They want to get to know you. They want to be involved in your life. They love you, care for you and pray for you. Pastors encourage people and share their burdens. Pastors are usually very nice

people, even when they disagree with you. They are not combative. Pastors are good at giving you that warm, fuzzy feeling.

Teachers

There are certain people who are gifted by God as gifts to the church to teach. They love to study the Bible. They love to read. They love to think. They love to write. They love to explain. People love to listen to them because they help people understand their Bible. They help you put pieces together. They make things clear. When they teach, people take notes because their minds are engaged.

Here is the key. Every church needs people who have all five of these gift mixes. Churches need people who have an apostolic type gift mix or they will never move into new regions. Churches need people who have a prophetic type gift mix or they become information numb. People need evangelists who are bringing new people to the church or the place becomes stagnant. Churches need shepherds so people are being cared for and teachers so the Bible is understood. A healthy church needs people with all five of those gifts in leadership of the church. If you only have people with one or two of these gifts in church leadership, the church will die.

3. Serving in the church is everyone's responsibility.

...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...
Ephesians 4:12 (ESV)

Everyone is in full-time Christian ministry. Every day, every hour, whatever you are doing, you are in ministry. Last week, I was flying to North Carolina and I wanted to get some rest. I was hoping for an empty seat next to me. When I talk

with people and they find out my profession, the rest of the flight is filled with questions. My wishes were not granted. I sat next to a guy who worked for True Value Hardware and answered his questions for the entire flight. That is OK. I am never off duty. None of us are off duty in our faith.

Here is where churches go wrong. They think the job of the pastor is to be on duty and do the ministry. In reality, everyone is gifted by God for ministry. Everyone is on duty. All the pastor is supposed to do is equip the people to do the work of ministry, not to do it for them. Folks, this is your church. Every one of us is a minister and this is your ministry. This is your budget. All I, and the other pastors, do is to help you do the ministry well.

Remember that God gifted each of us for ministry in the church. There is no such thing as a Christian that is uninvolved in the church. There is no such thing as a Christian who just attends on Sunday. Church attendance is an oxymoron. Christians don't attend church. They serve in church. Nobody is off duty. Every Christian is gifted by God to serve.

We are a church that is pastorally poor. That doesn't mean we don't have high-quality people. I have amazing staff. Every one of them is a jewel. There are too many things for us to do them all. Some of you are amazing. You have stepped outside your comfort zone and you are helping things work. Some of you have volunteered for hospitality. Others of you have volunteered for the Gathering Grounds coffee bar. Others of you volunteered to help in Spencer. Others of you are ushers. Many of you bring cookies. Some of you are helping with the web site. For some of you, I can't even find the time to get you involved.

I love it when we have a church meal and so many of you step up to make it happen. These are little things where you are using your gift of hospitality, leadership and mercy to serve Jesus.

What I love is that I can't afford to hire you. I can't. Our budget is stretched. We are opening a new campus on faith that God will bring the people to help pay for it. I want to applaud those of you who have volunteered to set up and run tech in Spencer.

Everyone is in full-time ministry in the church. All pastors do is try to get you into ministry. It is your church. The pastors just help you run it better. It is not my church.

4. Serving in the church bring unity to the church.

until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God... Ephesians 4:13 (ESV)

The reason why so many churches split and fall apart is because the people aren't serving. They sit around arguing over how the minister is not serving them the way they want to be served. The minister isn't visiting them enough. He is making changes to things they don't feel comfortable with. When you have a church filled with people who aren't busy serving, they become proud, not humble. They focus on themselves rather than meeting the needs of others. When you are serving together, you realize ministry is a lot of hard work. What you find yourself saying is, "We need each other" and there is no way we can survive unless we work together, stick together.

It is like a mission trip. We had a group recently go to New Orleans. When they came back from painting together and drywalling together, there was

unity between them. They weren't fighting over stuff. Serving together brought unity to the team.

5. Serving in the church brings spiritual maturity.

...to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...
Ephesians 4:13 (ESV)

Spiritual maturity comes from those who are doing. I love information. I love Bible study. I love asking God to open my mind to better comprehend his great love for me. The problem is that too many Christians think following Jesus is just a philosophy. They think it is something you just believe in your head, when in reality it comes out in how you behave in your life. What the Bible says must work itself out in how we live.

The problem is people who know a lot but don't do a lot are self-deceived about their spiritual maturity. They think they are mature when they aren't. The spiritually mature people are involved serving others in the church. They are doing things Christ was doing. They are loving people, telling the truth, teaching the Bible, encouraging those in need. The people who are serving others in the church are the people who are becoming more like Christ in the church. It is only those involved in serving that grow spiritually.

6. Serving in the church protects us from the spiritual nut-cases.

...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Ephesians 4:14 (ESV)

When we serve one another in the church using our natural and spiritual gifts, not only do we mature spiritually but we are protected spiritually from the latest fads, nut jobs and spiritual freaks that are trying to steal the show. Think

about this. Who were the ones enamored by the Prayer of Jabez, which we have no evidence that even Jabez prayed more than once? Who are the people who read the book Heaven is for Real and let it redefine their understanding of heaven so they think we will now have wings. The Bible never says that.

Those who are not involved in serving will find themselves following the latest fads and gusts of our culture. Here is our game plan. Read your Bible. Love Jesus. Serve together. When the freaks and nut jobs show up, you won't be led astray into heresy and strange doctrine from the latest conference.

If you love God, you love reading your Bible and you love using your gifts in ministry, you will stay in community with one another and you won't get caught up in the latest heresy and regret it.

7. Serving in the church allows us to speak into the lives of one another.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ... Ephesians 4:15 (ESV)

One thing we have learned is that spiritual maturity is not possible outside of the church. I told you last week how much it pains me to have people do home church. That is a guarantee of spiritual immaturity. There is nobody to serve you, challenge you and help you grow in Christ. You are isolated, and each of us needs one another in the church. If you are a Christian by yourself, you will drift. You will crash into the rocks. Your spiritual life will be a shipwreck. We need each other.

When you serve together in the church, you build the right to speak to one another in the church. When you serve together, you open your lives up to one another. Ladies can do coffee and chocolate to go deep. Guys cannot do that.

Guys need to work together to share together. As we serve together we earn the right to share into the lives of others. That doesn't mean that we drop a ton of bricks on people. That isn't the way things happen in the church. We speak the truth to each other but we speak the truth in love. We live in glass houses where we are transparent but gracious. We are honest with our struggles, and we help one another in their struggles. We know that when somebody we serve together with speaks to us, they do it out of love. It promotes growth. It promotes humility. It promotes maturity. We accept it and are changed by it.

8. When everyone in the church is serving, the body is healthy and becomes like Jesus.

...from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4:16 (ESV)

When we aren't using our gifts to serve others in the church we won't be unified. We won't become mature. We won't be authentic and speak into the lives of one another. Insist on serving in the church with your gifts. Be patient and persistent in trying to find your place to serve. It is the way we grow in Christ and become more like him. Our service affects others. When the arm isn't serving, the entire body is handicapped. When the foot is on vacation, the entire body can't walk. When the foot and arm vacate at the same time, we have a serious problem. Get involved in serving. For CrossWinds to be healthy, we need all hands on deck.

I couldn't be more excited than I am about our Spencer campus launch this spring. It was three years of dreaming, planning, researching, praying, sacrificial giving and planning that brings us to this day. Do you realize we are

the first church in our region that will open another campus? This is unheard of. This is exciting. I am so proud of this church. It is such a privilege to pastor CrossWinds.

While another campus is exciting, it is also a challenge. We are sending some of our best leaders to Spencer. We still have holes for serving in Spencer. We have holes for serving in Spirit Lake because we sent some people south. I want to apologize to many of you who have volunteered. I have been out of town four days a week for the last three weeks and I haven't even been able to connect with people who want to serve. Thank you and thank you for volunteering to serve. This church is not a huge operation. Pastor Jordan is in Spencer. Pastor Leland works with children and students. Pastor Dave is only part time until he retires from his other job. We are at record attendance this year averaging 411. Every month for the last 11 months was higher than the same month a year before. The staff isn't getting bigger. Adding another campus is not reducing the work load. We need you. It is your church. These are your ministries. These are your campuses. We need all the pieces to come out of the box to do what God has called us to do.

Insist. Insist on serving in the church. Not only is it a great blessing to others but it is one of the best things you can do for yourself to grow in Jesus.



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