

Remember: Gifts

By Pastor Daniel Dennison

June 16, 2019

Ephesians 4:1-16

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.”^[a]

⁹ (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?^[b] ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds^[c] and teachers,^[d] ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,^[e] to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ 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.

One of my favorite movies is Saving Private Ryan. And one of the most powerful scenes comes at the end of the movie. Several men who were responsible for Private Ryan's rescue end up dying in the mission and at the end of the movie, the man who led the mission, Captain John Miller (played by Tom Hanks), is fatally

wounded. (SLIDE!) And in a poignant moment Private Ryan (played by Matt Damon) leans in to hear Captain Miller's final words as he breaths his last breath. And the words he tells him were "Earn This." The sacrifice that all of these men have made to save you... EARN THIS!

And I remember thinking, "dang, what an incredible burden to put on an individual!" I mean how do you do that? What is he supposed to do to earn the fact that all of these men have given their lives so that he might live? And while it's maybe an unfair request the sentiment makes complete sense. It would be a travesty for Private Ryan to just go and waste his life away. You would hope that he would go and live the kind of life that is in some way commensurate with the sacrifice that was made to save him.

Now I share this with you because that's kind of where we find ourselves in the book of Ephesians. If you read the first 3 chapters of Ephesians, they are all about what God has done. There are zero commands for us in the first 3 chapters of Ephesians except for one and that is to REMEMBER. Paul commands us to remember what God has done for us. But then Paul turns the corner in chapter 4. And he says THEREFORE in verse 1. That means because of what he has just taught in the first 3 chapters he (SLIDE) says I therefore urge you to walk in a manner that is worthy. That word worthy literally means to balance the scale. Meaning that your life should be the proper weight of the gospel. That you wouldn't have these deep words of God and at the same time live a shallow life. Instead the way we live our life when balanced with the Gospel should make sense. That our lives would be commensurate with the sacrifice that has been made for us by Jesus.

Live our lives worthy of the sacrifice of Jesus, I mean how do we even do that? I think most of us agree we should live that way. I mean one of the greatest criticisms of Christianity is of people who claim to follow Jesus, but their lives don't match that. We generally don't like those kinds of people, we call them hypocrites. Most of us WANT to live a life that is consistent with what God has done on our behalf.

We all want to live the kind of lives that when someone at work or in the organization that we're a part of finds out we're a Christian they say "Yea, that makes sense! She is an amazing boss. He exhibits so much grace and patience.

She is so generous, of course he is a Christian.” I mean you don’t want someone to hear that you are a deeply committed Christian and they respond: “Really?? You?? I just always assumed you had no soul.” You don’t want to be that person, nobody does.

This passage really makes a lot of sense. If God has done all of this for us as described in the first 3 chapters. If he has paid the penalty for our sin and given us the opportunity to walk in freedom and grace, how are we meant to respond? How are we meant to live our lives? Well Paul tells us in the first 3 verses: (SLIDE) walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

After 3 chapters of telling us about all that God has done for us he says: Bear with one another! Tolerate one another. Just try and get along! And we hear that and we think “Is that it!?” I mean we would expect something more magnificent than that like “give all of your money to the poor or go spread the Gospel in a 3rd world country.” But he doesn’t say that instead he says: People, can you just get along!?

That doesn’t seem very difficult until we begin to look around in the world today. I mean I don’t know if you know this or not, but our world is kind of a negative place. And I know that’s really hard for you all to imagine when you think about politics, and the media, and the comment sections on internet articles, and social media. I mean I hate to burst your bubble, but we aren’t very good at getting along!! I remember last year watching the winter Olympics and this was fascinating. There was an official Olympics twitter account. And then there was another parody twitter account that had been created simply to talk about all the things that were wrong and bad about the 2018 Olympics. And that twitter handle had twice as many followers as the official winter Olympics twitter page. We are so negative as a culture that we are more likely to follow the guy that is complaining than the people who are just telling you what’s going on.

And it’s true with us. I mean how often do our conversations turn negative? Most of you would have a much easier time telling me about 3 bad things that happened last week than 3 good things that happened. And so that’s why Paul uses all of these words in the first few verses: humility, gentleness, patience.

I mean shoot forget the world, let's take a look closer at home and examine ourselves. I decided to do some screen shots of some of your social media feeds from this past week and I wanted to just show you a sampling of what I found this week. Ok, I wouldn't do that to you, but you were scared for a moment weren't you!?

In all seriousness though if I could speak candidly for a moment... I was here less than a month before I had people hurling insults and complaining about things that happened in our church years ago. I love you... but let it go! Leading a church this size is hard and mistakes will be made and feelings might get hurt. The biggest danger in a church is not some outside force attacking us. The biggest danger to a church is being ripped apart from within. And so what is Paul's advice? He says: bear with one another in love, maintain unity!

The most natural way we can love God is to love his kids. And that's true for us too. If you want to love me, you love my kids. If you want to love me, the most natural thing for you to do is love the people that I love. It would be WEIRD if you said: "Daniel, man, I love you, I think you are awesome, but UGH, your kids! BLAH, THEY JUST DRIVE ME CRAZY, I CAN'T STAND EM. But you man, you're cool, I want to hang out with you, just not your kids." What am I going to say??? Yea, you're right they are pretty annoying. NO!! Those are my kids! Even if they are being difficult they are forever linked to me. And so God says: If you want to love me, you love my kids. Bear with them even when they're being difficult. Even when they make a bad decision. Because true spirituality is manifested in unity.

The spirit of God is all about unity. So if you have a kind of spirituality that is pushing you away from US and into your own little clique, that's some kind of spirit, but it's not the Holy Spirit. Because he loves US. And he's building an US. And he knows that's hard! And I love the next few verses: there is one body and one spirit. It's through that spirit we become a body. One Lord, One Jesus we believe in. One faith. Not separate tribes, we all come to the same man. One baptism, there's not a deluxe package for some people and the standard for others. It's that we all come in humility because we need Jesus to save us because we're all equally a mess. And that we have one God who is father of all who is over all through all and in all. And I love that Paul knows in the Hebrew mind, numbers matter. 3 and 7 are numbers of completeness. So he gives you the trinity: the Spirit, the Lord, the Father. And then 7 times we are one, one, one,

one, one, one, one, one. God is building an US! And if you want to love God, you have to love US.

That's how I feel with my kids. For the Love of your parents, can you just get along!? I want to wake up on a Saturday morning where there is no screaming. It's hard to wake up that way. You know what I'm talking about where you walk out and you say "what is going on?" And immediately it's "She took my...." NO!! Just give it back, say please, say thank you. And just get along. The most loving thing my kids could do for me is to love each other. The most loving thing they could do is what Paul is talking about here: be unified. Have unity with one another.

But here's the thing, unity does not mean a loss of individuality. We see it in verse 7. After all of that one, one, one, one talk he says: (SLIDE) But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Unity doesn't mean uniformity. What God is building is a unity of diversity. So when Jesus rescued us, he took different gifts and scattered them among us. And he gave different people different gifts, different creativities, different abilities, different temperaments. He made us differently so that TOGETHER we build one another up. Why? Because we're BETTER TOGETHER.

It doesn't matter that some of you might have gifts of teaching and others of you might have the gift of encouragement. It doesn't matter that some of you might vote democrat and some of you might vote republican. It doesn't matter that some of you are Sooner fans and some of you are Cowboy fans. It doesn't matter that some of you might be considered middle class and some of you might be considered upper class. It doesn't matter that for some of you English isn't your first language. It doesn't matter if some of you like modern worship and some of you like traditional worship. What matters is that we maintain and establish unity in the midst of our diversity.

We watch this story over and over again in the movies. And we love it! A diverse group of people brought together with different giftings. You got a bow and arrow, you got an ax, you shoot laser beams, you throw a shield. Let's all get together. When they just made Iron Man and Thor and Captain America they each made \$100s of millions of dollars and that's impressive. But when they decided to corral all of these diverse figures together and they made Avengers. It made

BILLIONS of dollars. With a B. Billions of dollars! WHY? Because we're better together... And we all want that. We all want to be a part of a bigger story like that. That's why people pay money to watch those movies over and over.

We don't naturally do it though. We typically flow to the relationships that are most easy, but God is calling us to a unity of diversity. If you will allow God to place you in a community of people that are different then you that are maybe hard to understand, that maybe have a different kind of life story than you, I promise you that you will be better off for it, this church will be better off for it, our world will be better off for it. Because God is calling us to a unity of diversity.

I remember when DHS called us and told us they had a baby for us to pick up at the hospital in 2012. We had a loving home to provide, but we didn't have a lot of money or a lot of time due to busy jobs. But I remember those first few weeks some of my wealthier friends and family members sent us gift cards and cash and diapers and car seats and a crib. Some of my college students came and raked leaves and mowed my lawn, little old church ladies offered to babysit so we could have a break, my elderly neighbor brought us a home cooked meal. As I think back on that time in my life there were all kinds of very different people, old, young, black, white, rich, poor who played a significant role in allowing us to provide a home for a child who didn't have a home. (SLIDE) And because we came together, something beautiful got done. There's another name for that... it's called being the church!

God has given each of us different gifts, why? So that we can build up the body. That's what we see in verses 11-13, (SLIDE) "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds^[c] and teachers,^[d] ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,^[e] to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Each of us have been given different gifts so that we can build up the body of Christ which according to v.13 leads to unity of the faith and maturity. Some of you have the gift of encouragement and writing notes. That's not one of my gifts and writing notes certainly isn't, because I have the handwriting of a kindergartener. But some of you do have that gift and you bless many of us on staff with that gift. I have received all of these from you all just in my first year

here. And they mean the world to me. They lift my spirit and encourage me to keep laboring for the Gospel. Ministry is hard work, so if you have the gift of encouragement, put it to practice helping build up our community. The world is a negative place, so we need your encouragement.

Some of you are great at praying. We obviously all need to pray, but God has given that gift in abundance to some more than others. Our prayer ministry here at Asbury is almost solely run by lay people, not by staff. There are people in one of our prayer rooms right now praying for me as I preach this sermon! I mean how sweet is that? We need your prayers. We need you to exercise that gift for the sake of our church.

God has taken his gifts and scattered them amongst all of us, why? So that we will come together and use them to build up the body. Some of you have been blessed with financial resources that others of us could never even begin to imagine. The body of Christ is counting on you to share those resources for the sake of building up the Kingdom of God. And let me just also say for those of you who don't think God has blessed you with financial resources: He's calling you to give generously too. That's why every member who joins our church, regardless of their income level, vows to support it with their gifts. Because without your gifts, we cannot be the church.

WE need you. You are here to build up the body. Our gifts are given individually, but they aren't just to pump up your individuality. Don't say "I've been gifted with this, so let me use it to build up my own platform." NO, use it for the good of the body. Our choir and our orchestra could use their gifts to go build themselves up, maybe to go and make money on the side, but they don't do that. They share what God has gifted them with to help lead us in worship and draw each of us closer to Christ. We are called to use our gifts for the sake of the body. We need each and every one of you to use your gifts of money, your gifts of time, and your gifts of talents and spiritual gifts to help build up our church and the body of Christ.

Why? V.13 "so we can attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,^[e] to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We are meant to use our gifts to help each other understand the faith more. To believe it more. To see the grace of God manifest through your kindness

to others. To help us understand the scripture as someone else explains it. And v.14 (SLIDE) ¹⁴ 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.

It's cute when a 3-year-old talks like a 3-year-old. It's not as cute when you get older and you keep talking and acting that way. That's why we are meant to use our gifts to build each other up and lead one another to maturity. My kids are really easy to trick. And so it takes someone loving to teach and train them so that they can make good decisions. And all of us, we have areas where we are easy to trick. You might be incredibly intellectual, but you might have some deep-seated emotional insecurities and those things are dominating you. And God has given you a solution. You know what it's called? US. The body of Christ. God has given us an us. A unity of diversity. For the sake of maturity, that we all grow into the people we are meant to be.

Last 2 verses: (SLIDE) speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ 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.

I don't know what your gifts are and I'm not sure what God is calling you to do, but I know that God is calling each of you to be a part of something so much bigger than just building up your little kingdom for your glory. God is inviting you to something bigger and better. And he's calling us to do it together, because we're better together. So don't say no. Because when every body part and joint is working together, the whole body grows in love. That's why we don't just want you to come and attend Asbury, but we want you to unite with us in membership. Because when you join as a member one of the things you vow is to uphold US, the church, with your gifts. That's why our strategic initiative this year is to help others follow Jesus by strengthening worship attendance, because we are better when you are here and present with us using your gifts to build us up.

And here's the thing, we can operate as a church without you. But only in the same way that I can operate with the loss of an arm. I can still function without an arm, but it makes everything harder. Every other part of my body has to work

more. The loss of an arm would be hard, but not impossible. But an arm by itself is worthless, it can't do anything.

(Tim & Band come back up and start playing)

So here's the deal, we want you here and we would love for you to join us in membership. God has made you an arm, a foot, an eye, an ear. And you are meant to use your gifts to build up us, so we can grow in love and unity. And we will hurt if you're not a part of us, but you will be devastated if you're not a part of us. It's worse for you to be alone. One of God's greatest gifts he has given us is US. Many of us when we look at the most significant moments in our life, it's because of the people that were around us. Thank you, God for the US that helped us, when we were down. Thank you, God, for the people that have stood on stages like this and taught us the Word of God. Thank you, God for the US that use the gift of music, to penetrate our souls with powerful words and lyrics and melodies. Thank you God for the US that smiled when they opened the door and greeted us this morning. Thank you God for the us who exercise the gifts of hospitality. Thank you, God, that one of the greatest gifts you have given us is US.

If there's anyone in this place who has never put their faith in Jesus. That's really our message today. Our message isn't try harder, our message isn't earn this. Our message is HE DID IT! He descended to live the perfect life you could not. He ascended to make a path to God for any who would reach out with empty hands and say "forgive me, heal me." So if you're here this morning and you've never put your faith in Jesus... there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. We are all about HIM. Jesus is our only hope. You put your only hope in him.

And God for all of us who are a part of the family. May we lean in. Where we've been hurt, we speak the truth in love. Where we have hurt others we apologize quickly. When it's difficult, may we be humble and gentle and patient. And where we are gifted, let us pour out those gifts to the building of the body. I pray this place would be so beautiful and so strong that all over the city of Tulsa people would want to come and be a part because they would see this is what my soul always wanted. A family, a community, with a great cause. Lord, let us be ONE, so that the world might see you. Thank you, Jesus, for the gift of US.

