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Ephesians 4:7-16

We Need Grace:
Leadership Gifts

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Two weeks ago we learned what it means to **live worthy** of all the gifts God has given us in Ephesians 4:1-6. We talked about specific steps we can each take: **humility**, **gentleness**, **patience**, and **love**. Together these steps **maintain** church **unity** through the Holy Spirit. But they don't actually **create** unity. We are unified by **what we believe** in, "one Spirit... one Lord... one faith... one God and Father." So a church is unified by the **character** of its people and by **believing the same thing**.

Our text today, Ephesians 4:7-16, adds one more way we are **unified**, through the **diversity** of our **gifts**—by all the **different ways** God gives us **talents** and **abilities** to serve him by serving the church. We each have different gifts but they **fit together as one**, like a **puzzle**.

Have any of you put together a **puzzle** recently? Growing up my family would put together **1,000 piece puzzles** right around **Christmas time**. **How big** was your puzzle? **100, 500, 1000, 2000** pieces? On Amazon you can buy puzzles as large as 40,000 pieces, which covers a whole wall.

- According to the **Guinness Book of World Records** an economics school in **Vietnam** put together a puzzle in 2011 that contained 551,232 pieces.
- This summer in **Dubai** a business group constructed a **12,000 piece puzzle** that covered **65,905 square feet**, which is the largest puzzle in the world.

So today I've brought an **equally impressive 13-piece puzzle**. A puzzle is a great illustration of the **church body** and what our text is talking about today. A puzzle is made up of differently shaped pieces, and when the pieces come together **they can create a beautiful picture** (aka. "**Sprocket**"). Getting to **witness** and **see** that picture (**to see the church come together**) is a **gift** given to us by God.

Christ gives gifts to the church. (Eph 4:7-10)

7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says:

“When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people.”

9 (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? 10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) (NIV®)

This is a challenging passage to read and understand but it becomes a little easier if we examine the **Old Testament** passage Paul is quoting, **Psalm 68**. Psalm 68 tells us of God **driving away** his **enemies** before him as he enters **victoriously** into his holy **sanctuary**, the **temple** in Jerusalem, **with his people**. When a king conquers his enemies what happens? Those **defeated** kings and nations **pay tribute**. In fact, Psalm 68:18a says God **receives** gifts from men.

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

Psalm 68:18a

When you ascended on high,
you took many captives;
you received gifts from people, (NIV®)

But when Paul **quotes** this passage what does he do? He **reverses** it. Instead of “receiving” gifts Christ Jesus **gives** gifts (aka. “...gave gifts to his people”). Through his death, resurrection, and ascension to the throne, Christ Jesus has won the right not just to **require tribute** but to **bestow blessing**.

Have you ever **intended** to give a **friend** or **family** member something and instead you received a gift? Like inviting a **coworker** out for lunch and **they insist on paying**? Maybe you’ve done a **gift-swap** with a friend and you felt like they got you a **much better gift** than you gave them? How about when you **hire** someone to work on **your** house or **fix your car** and they don’t charge you what they could? We **owe everything** to Christ and he still **gives us more**. *Christ gives gifts to the church. What are they?*

Christ gives the gift of leadership to his church. (Eph 4:11)

Now there are **more gifts** than the one listed in today’s passage. You can find those in **Romans 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28**. But even those lists **aren’t comprehensive**. God can gift us in a **multitude of ways** to serve the local church. But our passage today focuses on specific **leadership gifts** (so if you don’t have one of these gifts in today’s passage don’t worry, there are other gifts).

Ephesians 4:11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, (NIV®)

One of the ways we find unity is through **Biblical leadership**. When you put together a puzzle what are the first pieces you look for and put together? The **edges**, and if you’re lucky, the **corners**. Jesus himself gave us these corners and edges (our leaders) for our church puzzle. Let’s look at each one:

apostles

There are two different types of apostles in the Bible. There are what we call “**big-A**” Apostles who were either **with Jesus during his ministry or saw him after he rose** from the grave.¹ The **twelve disciples** and **Paul** are all “big-A” Apostles (Luke 6:13; Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor 9:1). They were **specially commissioned** by Christ to have **unique authority** to write **Scripture** and to **establish the church** throughout the ancient world. I believe these types of Apostles **passed away** with the early church, but in Ephesians 4:11 Paul doesn’t seem to say that the **gift of apostleship** is gone, so what is he talking about?

Elsewhere we find “**little-a**” apostles who churches send out to do ministry or have a unique gifting to start **new churches** and **ministries**, especially to people who have **never heard** of Jesus before (Acts 14:4; 1 Cor 9:5; Rom 16:7).² The word “apostle” just means “**one who is sent**” or “**a messenger**” (John 20:21; 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25). An apostle is someone who is **gifted** in a special way and sent by God. **Missionary and church-planting director Daniel Sinclair** describes those **gifted as apostles** this way:

“God uses [apostles] in a variety of ministries. They are the kind who tend to make things happen. Oftentimes they are good at making something out of nothing, ministry-wise, successfully starting new works from scratch. Generally there is a history of evangelistic and discipleship fruitfulness.”³
(A Vision of the Possible: Pioneer Church Planting in Teams by Daniel Sinclair, pg 6)

I think someone who is gifted as an apostle is Thierry Mirone who has preached here and visited us from **France**. He is **directing** the **church-planting network** in France and God is using him and his team in amazing ways. People are coming to Christ and the church is growing. The church needs people like Thierry to spread the **church** and the **gospel** throughout the world. *God gifts the local church with apostles.*

Prophets

When we think of prophecy we usually think of someone who **foretells the future**. This is a part of what prophecy is, as seen in New Testament people like **Agabus** who predicted a **severe famine** and warned Paul that if he went to Jerusalem he would be **imprisoned** (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11). But prophecy is not limited to **future-telling**. Prophets are also gifted by God to **strengthen, encourage, and comfort** the local church.

1 Corinthians 14:3 But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. (NIV®)

Paul actually tells the church not to ignore prophecy.

1 Thessalonians 5:20-22 Do not treat prophecies with contempt 21 but test them all; hold on to what is good, 22 reject every kind of evil. (NIV®)

This means **we should not reject** the gift of prophecy but should let those gifted with prophecy encourage the local church (1 Cor 14:22). But we should **test** every prophetic message against Scripture. There is an **element** of “prophecy” in **preaching** as we preach to strengthen, encourage, and comfort. Sometimes a really **odd thing** happens. The week or season I’m preaching on a topic **we experience it as a church**. For example, I’ve preached on **conflict** and **peacemaking** and opportunities for conflict and peacemaking sprang up. I’m not a prophet but preaching can be **prophetic**. *God gifts the local church with prophets.*

Evangelists

Evangelists are specially gifted by God **share the gospel**. The word for “gospel” is “**euangelion**” which means “**good news**.” Now “**evangelist**” is “**euangelistēs**” in the Greek.⁴ So an euangelistēs is someone who preaches the euangelion. That means an evangelist is someone who preaches the **good news**, the gospel. What is the **gospel**? It’s the good news that Jesus can **save** you from your **sins** and give you **eternal life**. If you will **repent** of your sins and **believe** in Jesus he will rescue you. He will **take** your **unholiness** and **grant** you his **perfect righteousness**. Those people who share the gospel and see others **come to Jesus** are gifted evangelists, but **we’re all called** to do evangelism even if some are better at it than others (2 Tim 4:5).

I used to work for an evangelist. The owner of the **fish-tank cleaning company** told me he shared the gospel with his **neighbor** and his neighbor came to Christ. I think **Bernie** is a **gifted evangelist** as well. God gives the church special people to help the rest of us evangelize, and to **train us** how to do it. *God gifts the local church with evangelists.*

Pastors (Shepherds/Elders)

Jesus also gives the local church “pastors.” The ESV translates this “shepherds.” What does a shepherd do? A shepherd takes care of a flock. A shepherd **feeds** the sheep (John 21:15-17). This is why as pastors we **preach and teach God’s word**. A shepherd goes **looking** for the sheep that **wander away** (Luke 15:4; Heb 10:24-25). A shepherd **intervenes** when the sheep begin to **bite** and **hurt each other**, risking getting **bit himself** (Matt 5:9; Phil 4:2). Shepherds help **bind up hurting** sheep and try to pull out sheep **caught** in the **thorns of sin**, even if they have to **cause pain** to the sheep in the process. Shepherds **fight off savage wolves**

who want to lead the **flock astray** with **false teachings** (Acts 20:28; Eph 4:14; Titus 1:9). And the best shepherds, the best pastors, **lay down their lives** for the sheep just like **Jesus our shepherd laid down his life for us** (John 10:11). Peter calls **elders shepherds**, which means elders are **pastors**.

1 Peter 5:1-2a To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: **2** Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing... (NIV®)

At Cornerstone we have a **Board of Elders** and at our member's meeting on **December 1st** the Elders are going to ask the **members** to vote on another **candidate** for Elder. You're not just electing a board member, you're saying, "This person is one of our pastors." I know I'm the only one you call pastor, but it would be true if you called Terry and John pastors too. *God gifts the local church with pastors (shepherds and elders).*

Teachers

Pastors and Elders have to be "**able to teach**" (1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; 2 Tim 2:24).⁵ Anyone who is an Elder at Cornerstone has to be able to teach in **some capacity**. That may not mean preaching, but it means teaching somewhere. **One book** I read said **all Pastors are teachers but not all teachers are pastors**. God gives the local church people who are gifted in teaching but may not be gifted in **caring for the flock**, and that's okay. This could be **small group leaders** or **Discipleship class teachers** for the **adults, youth, or children**. We need them too. *God gifts the local church with teachers.*

Do you see how the **edges** of the **puzzle** are lining up? God gives us apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers to bring the rest of us together into a **complete** puzzle. Christ doesn't give these gifts so that leaders can **keep it to ourselves** but so that we can **benefit the local church**.

Christ gives the gift of leadership to equip, disciple, and protect his church. (Eph 4:12-16)

Christ Jesus gave us these leadership gifts for **three purposes**:

1) Equip

Ephesians 4:12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (NIV®)

Jesus gives us **gifted leaders** so that they can **help us** use and **develop** our gifts too. It's tempting when we see someone who is **really gifted** at **music** or **leadership** or **teaching** or **preaching** to say, "You should do it **all the time** because you're **amazing!**" But that's like looking at a corner piece on a puzzle and saying, "Wow! You're so beautiful and amazing let's stop with you." We all have gifts and talents and our leaders help us draw them out. This is one of the **reasons** I ask the **elders** and other **gifted teachers** to help me preach every couple weeks. Not only does the break **refresh** me but it gives them the opportunity to **develop** their preaching and teaching. As ministry leaders we need to figure out ways to be **constantly giving our ministries away**. We **don't** want to create ministries that are **dependent** on one or two people.

Likewise, each of us **needs to ask** if we're a part of the puzzle. Am I being equipped? Am I serving? Am I a **part of the ministry** or am I gone most weeks? The other week I was taking a **puzzle** to **Savers** and on the way out to my car I somehow **dropped a piece**. I picked it up and put it in my pocket, and later that day after I came home from Savers I found the piece in my pocket. Now there is a puzzle at Savers that is **missing one**

piece. If we're not using **our gifts** to **serve** the church or if we only come **half the time** to **weekly worship**, any week we don't show up **the puzzle is missing a piece**. We want a complete puzzle, but that's dependent on each piece **being here** and being a **part** of the church body. *Christ gives us leaders to equip us.*

2) Disciple

Ephesians 4:13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (NIV®)

God gives us gifted leaders to help us grow and mature as followers of Jesus. Yes God gifts some leaders in the church with the ability to disciple and help others grow. If you want to grow, find someone who can **mentor** you and **study the Bible** and **pray** with them. *Christ gives us leaders to equip and disciple us.*

3) Protect

Ephesians 4:14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming (NIV®)

The Bible warns us that we have **itching ears** that want to hear thing that **aren't Biblical**.

2 Timothy 4:3 For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. (NIV®)

Ephesians 4:14 should give us hope that our leaders can help **protect** us from false teaching while 2 Timothy 4:3 should strike a **healthy fear** in our hearts to listen to our shepherds that **know the Lord** and **love his word**. But shepherds, we must always do this in **love**.

Ephesians 4:15-16 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

The **result of a unified church under Biblical leadership** is that it actually grows the church **spiritually** and **Lord willing numerically**. The last line of verse 16 says the church “grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. When we have unity through Biblical leadership the **puzzle comes together**.”

Christ gives the gift of leadership to equip, disciple, and protect his church.

Our Cornerstone puzzle is a **72-piece puzzle**. We have 72 **members** and **attenders** who come to worship **consistently to every once in a while**. **Where** do you **fit in**? Where can you use your gifts and talents? Maybe you're a **shepherd** or a **teacher** or maybe your gifting is in one of those **other lists** we didn't talk about tonight. Either way, I want to encourage you to **find your place in the puzzle**. Find where you fit. And if you're **not sure**, ask a **corner piece**, ask a church leader so we can help guide you. If you've been **absent** a lot can I ask you to try and be a part of the puzzle. When you're **here** and you're **using your gifts** we're **whole**. *Christ gives the gift of leadership to equip, disciple, and protect his church.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes further endnotes and references. Click to listen to sermons or to read our story.

¹ There is no capitalization difference in the original Greek. Big A little a is my way of explaining the difference.

² Exegetical Commentary: Ephesians. Ephesians 4:11a-c special article. “These would be closer to what many Christian groups might call church planters or church-planting missionaries.” Kindle Location 6856.

³ Sinclair, Daniel. *A Vision of the Possible: Pioneer Church Planting in Teams*. March 30, 2012. IVP Press. Downers, Grove. IL. <http://a.co/d/9I25fx9> Page 6.

⁴ MED, s.v. “EVANGELIST,” 221. https://accordance.bible/link/read/Mounce_Expository#3846

⁵ Bible verses list taken from Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians. Kindle Location 6895.