

What We Value: Uniquely Called

October 17, 2021



Vision '22

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Ephesians 4:7-16

Session Outline

1. The Distribution of Our Gifts (Ephesians 4:7-12)
2. The Purpose of Our Gifts (Ephesians 4:13-16)
3. The Diversity of Our Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

Theological Theme

Christ has graced us not only with salvation but also with a missional role in the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and the teachers.



Leader Guide

What We Value: Uniquely Called

Introduction

- ❓ Think of your favorite sports team or musical act. Who is your favorite individual member on the team or in the group? What aspects of their talent stand out to you? How do their individual gifts contribute to the group as a whole?
- ❓ Do you believe every person has a unique talent, gift, or trait to offer? How does this apply to the church?

The best groups or teams are made up of individuals who each contribute to the whole of the effort of the group. The church is no different. God has given individual gifts to the body of Christ to be used for His glory. Our gifts are exercised most properly and God is most glorified when we use them to contribute to the influence of the body of Christ as a whole. Though many gifts have been given, all gifts are required to work together to fulfill the mission of God. This use of gifts in relation to one another is the proper functioning of the body of Christ.

This week's study draws our attention to the biblical teaching that all believers are to live out their calling within the context of a local church. There's no such thing as a "Lone Ranger" Christian. In truth, when church members cooperate with one another and their leaders—and when both leaders and people use the gifts God has provided—then the church will be strengthened to become what God wants.

Session Summary

As a church, we value the idea that all believers are uniquely called to engage the whole person with the whole gospel of Jesus Christ anywhere, anytime, with anybody. In His wisdom and grace, God designed every person with unique gifts, abilities, passions, and talents so that we can each bring His good news to people in our lives who need to hear it. He designed the church to be made up of unique and diverse individuals who work together to make disciples who make disciples of Jesus.

1. The Distribution of Our Gifts (Ephesians 4:7-12)

Paul made it clear in 1 Corinthians 12:4-21 and Romans 12:3-8 what he implied here: all spiritual gifts are important and needed by the church. He pointed to this truth by first mentioning, in general, the gifts of all believers (4:7). Then he went on to discuss Christian leaders who had been given special gifts (4:11).

- ❓ What is the relationship between Jesus's ascension to heaven and our spiritual gifts (vv. 7-9)? How does this help you understand the purpose of spiritual gifts in general? How might exercising our spiritual gifts provide us opportunities to shine forth the glory of God?

Verse 9 explains that, before He ascended to heaven, Christ first descended from heaven to earth. In verse 8 (quoting from Psalm 68:18), Paul compared Christ to a victorious warrior who returns home from battle with enemy captives, distributing gifts from the spoils of war. When the Lord Jesus Christ returned to heaven victorious over sin and death, He gave spiritual gifts to His church in order to help it grow and impact the world.

- ❓ Other biblical passages on spiritual gifts indicate that the list in this passage is not comprehensive. What specific gifts did Paul list in these verses? What do these gifts have in common?

To what end has God given churches gifted leaders? The goal is that they will train the saints in the work of the ministry. It's not that the leaders do all the ministry; rather, the ministry is to be done by all believers working together. Paul believed in "every-member ministry." The leaders in a local church are like player-coaches. What happens when all the believers work together? They build up the body of Christ—the ultimate purpose of using spiritual gifts.

- ❓ Application: How are the ministries of Brentwood Baptist designed to help Christians realize the full potential of God's purposes?

2. The Purpose of Our Gifts (Ephesians 4:13-16)

- ❓ We get in step with living up to our call by adopting attitudes that promote unity. We stay in step by appreciating and exercising spiritual gifts. According to these verses, where does that kind of cooperation lead?

The Conquering King

This verse is an allusion to Psalm 68:18. The essence of the psalm is that a military victor has the right to receive gifts from the people he has conquered and who now are his subjects. Paul suggested that Christ has conquered His enemies and has given gifts to them, with Paul himself being the perfect example. As Victor over sin and death, Christ gives gifts to His new devoted followers, His captives.

In verse 4:3, Paul urged believers to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.” The term “unity” indicates one goal toward which believers (with diverse gifts) work together. This unity is both doctrinal (in the faith) and relational (in the knowledge of God’s Son). Doctrinal unity does not mean uniformity in every matter of biblical interpretation, but it does mean true Christianity is recognized as a shared set of core beliefs, as Paul expressed in 4:5-6. Relational unity means true Christianity is a living relationship with Jesus. It’s more than knowing about Him; it’s knowing Him.

- ❓ How might we contrast mature and immature believers? How does maturity enhance unity at our church? What did Paul say is the cure for immaturity and instability in our faith? In your own words, what does it mean to speak the truth in love?

Paul referred to spiritual maturity as a benefit and goal of unity in the church. In a healthy, unified body, individual believers grow from infancy to adulthood or from immaturity to maturity. The cure for immaturity is speaking the truth. Yet this truth is to be expressed in love—with compassion and understanding. Truth without love can be cold and harsh; love without truth can be mushy and weak. When members of a church intentionally embrace both truth and love, they will grow in Christ together.

- ❓ What do we learn from Paul’s analogy of the church as a “body...building itself up in love”? What might it mean to be a “supporting ligament” in this body? How does a mature church body function? How have you observed Christians working together to build up the church (that is, one another)?

Paul described the church as a single body with Christ as the head, or the director of operations. At the same time, the body (the local congregation) has many parts that need to work together. An individual church member is a supporting ligament, or an individual part (see also 1 Corinthians 12:14-21). Each part has been fitted and knitted together by the Lord with all the other parts. With the proper working of each part, the body will do what it’s supposed to do. When believers in a congregation function properly, this promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love.

- ❓ Application: How can using your spiritual gifts help sustain your connection to Christ? How might using your gifts help you mature spiritually? How can using your spiritual gifts help build others up? Where do you see the potential for growth, or more effective service?

Every member of the body of Christ contributes to the growth and maturity of the church. As we get to know Christ and His truth and live out that truth in loving ways, we become unified in faith and purpose and mature together as we build one another up.

3. The Diversity of Our Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

Paul's words here were likely prompted by a question regarding which spiritual gift was most important. There's a reason God preserved these words for us. Spiritual arrogance can easily creep into the hearts of those who exercise spiritual gifts that naturally get more attention. Just consider the amount of attention a teacher gets compared with someone with the gift of service who sets up chairs week in and week out. Spiritual pride crept into the Corinthian church, and it can creep in to ours.

Paul consistently went back to the gospel to set things in order. (That's a good lesson for us.) In verse 3, Paul reminded the believers that those who submitted to Jesus as Lord, are in Christ. This may seem elementary, but Paul was setting up an airtight argument. It may be that one group was accusing the other of not even being true Christians. We can't know for sure, but what we do know for sure is that Paul put forth a litmus test for true believers before he got into a detailed discussion of the gifts. Those who truly believed the gospel ("Jesus is Lord") were in the fold. No ifs, ands, or buts.

Paul wanted his readers to know one important truth before they started thinking about the details of the spiritual gifts; spiritual gifts aren't about Christians, they're about God. They both proceed from God and are for His glory. We steward them but should never be arrogant because of them. Paul expressed to the Corinthians in no uncertain terms that the gifts and work of ministry were not a result of their own merit, but gifted and empowered by the triune God. Paul knew this truth was critical for the Corinthians to understand if they wanted to mature in their ideas and use of the spiritual gifts.



How does the fact that God gives us gifts and empowers our work help us keep proper perspective on the work of the ministry in which we are involved?

Paul said "to each" in both verses 7 and 11 indicating that every Christian is given a gift. Of course every person is different and not everyone has the same gift or the same use of each gift, but every single person who has been born again has been given a gift.

 Why do you think Paul wanted the Corinthians to know every believer receives a spiritual gift? What should be our response to the truth that each of us has been given a spiritual gift by God?

Besides the fact that it is simply true that all believers receive a gift, Paul had an agenda. Remember that the Corinthians had asked Paul a specific question about gifts, and it appears that they had placed great value on some gifts and not others. When Paul makes the statement “is given to each” he starts the process of putting all believers on the same level in terms of value. Paul was fighting against haughty attitudes and a worldly pursuit of popularity and fame within the church. We still need this counsel and warning today.

First, Paul told the Corinthians that the gifts weren’t about them (vv. 4-6). The gifts, he emphasized, are about the Triune God. Then in verse 7, he made another revelation about the gifts. The gifts are also for the common good of the body. First, they are for glorifying God and, second, they are for building up your brother and sister. The actual steward comes in a distant third at best.

Let’s sum up the important truths that we’ve learned from Paul in this passage: we ought to put the “one anothers” into practice especially in times of disagreement within the body of Christ; the gifts are both given by God and empowered by God; the gifts, first and foremost, ought to bring glory to the Triune God; the gifts, secondly, are for the building up of the body of Christ.

These truths will serve us well as we think about the function of the gifts within our own local church. Arrogance and spiritual pride should be rejected, while humility, service, and love should be central in the use of gifts. And, above all, it ought to be our aim to glorify God through our stewardship of spiritual gifts as well as how we treat one another in Christ.

 Application: How does this passage and Ephesians 4 help you see the value, not of competing with other believers in areas of giftedness, but encouraging and building one another up in these areas? How might our church look different if we were all committed to this?

Conclusion

We are to live up to our calling as Christians. This calling is all about growing together in unity and maturity in Christ. Ministry is the responsibility of each believer, not just of the paid church staff. We each have one or more spiritual gifts that are to be used for God's glory and for the good of our church. We will move toward maturity, grow spiritually, and help build up our church as we exercise our spiritual gifts in cooperation with other Christians.

- ❓ What is your spiritual gift? Have you been a good steward of it? Have you become arrogant because of it or have you not valued it enough? What are some ways you can build up the body with your gift?
- ❓ Is your attitude one of dependence upon God to empower you to use your gift? Or are you depending on your own strength and wisdom?
- ❓ How can you spur others in our church on in their devotion to and effectiveness for Christ? How does this move us further toward our mission of making disciples?

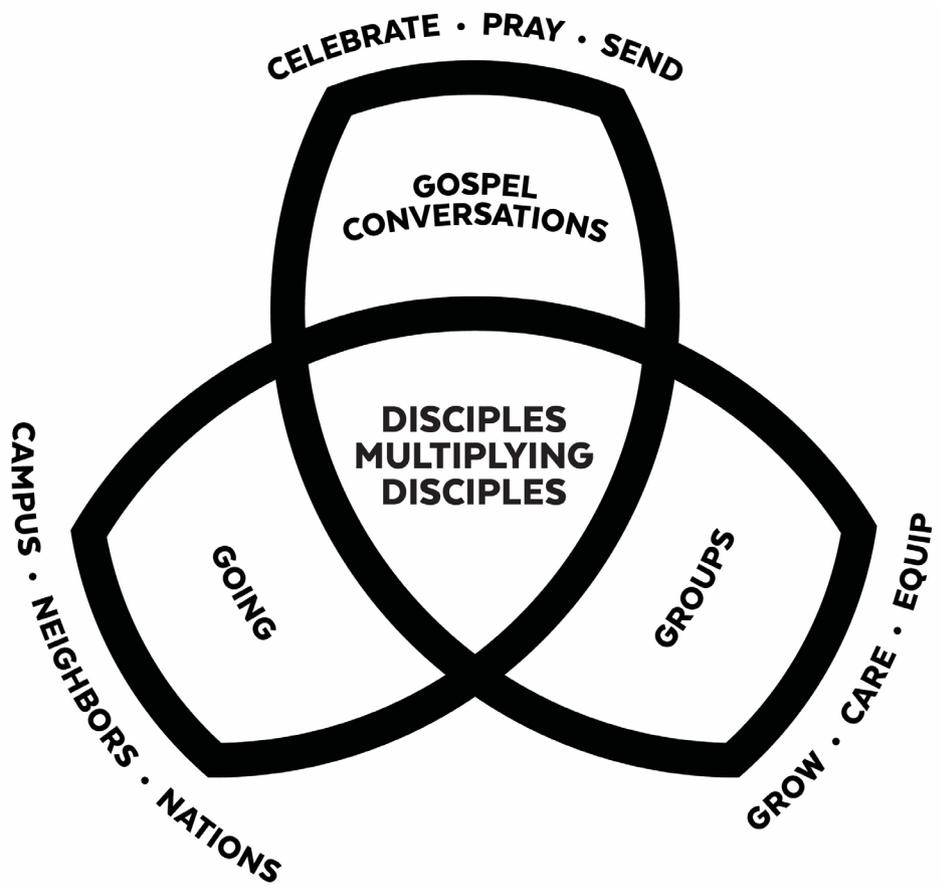
Prayer of Response

Close your group meeting in prayer, asking that your group members would continue committing to spiritual growth and unity. Pray that they will choose to cooperate with one another so that they can remain in step with one another and continue building up the church.

Additional Resources

- *Showing the Spirit* by D.A. Carson
- *Until Unity* by Francis Chan
- *The Gospel* by Raymond Ortlund Jr.

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



For Next Week

Session Title

- What We Value: Intentionally Innovative

Main Passages

- 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Session Outline

1. The Exhortation Toward Innovation (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)
2. The Example of Innovation (Acts 17:16-32)
3. Seeking Innovation Through Intercession (John 17:6-26)

Memorize

But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ.

- Ephesians 4:15

Historical Context of Ephesians

Purpose

The book hints at several purposes. The apostle taught that Jewish and Gentile believers are one in Christ. This oneness was to be demonstrated by their love for one another. Paul used the noun or verb form of love (agapē) nineteen times (about one-sixth of the total uses in all the Pauline letters). Ephesians begins with love (1:4–6) and ends with love (6:23–24).

Paul implicitly addressed matters raised by the mystery religions in the Lycus Valley. The letter has much to say about redemption (1:7) and the divine intention for the human race (1:3–14). Additional themes include grace (1:2), predestination (1:4–5), reconciliation, and union with Christ (2:1–21).

Central to the message of Ephesians is the re-creation of the human family according to God's original intention for it. The new creation destroys the misguided view that God accepts the Jew and rejects the Gentile. Paul says the distinction was abolished at Christ's sacrificial death. Thus no more hindrance remains to reuniting all humanity as the people of God, with Christ as the head (1:22–23). The new body, the church, has been endowed by the power of the Holy Spirit to enable them to live out their new lives (1:3–2:10) and put into practice the new standards (4:1–6:9). In sum, we can say that the overall emphasis of Ephesians is on the unity of the church in Christ through the power of the Spirit.

Author

Paul referred to himself by name as the author of the book of Ephesians in two places (1:1; 3:1). Many regard this book as the crown of all of Paul's writings. Today some scholars think the book contains a writing style, vocabulary, and even some teachings that are not typical of the apostle. If that is the case, then it would mean a disciple of Paul had surpassed him in theological insight and spiritual perception. Of such an erudite disciple the early church has no record. Furthermore, pseudonymity (writing under someone else's name) probably was not practiced by early Christians. We can conclude, in line with the indisputable acceptance of Pauline authorship in the early church, that there is no reason to dispute the Pauline authorship of Ephesians.

Setting

Paul penned the letter while in prison (3:1; 4:1; 6:20). Disagreement exists concerning whether Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea (Ac 24:22) around AD 57–59 or in Rome (Ac 28:30) in about 60–62 when he wrote this letter. Tradition suggests that Paul wrote the letter from Rome around AD 60–61 which would have transpired while Paul was under house arrest in guarded rental quarters (Ac 28:30). Paul most likely wrote Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians during the same imprisonment.

Special Features

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is an anthem to the sovereign grace of God displayed toward sinners in Christ. It contains some of the worst news ("you were dead in your trespasses and sins") and best news ("but God . . . made us alive with Christ") in all of Scripture. In view of this grace, Paul calls believers to "live worthy of the calling" we have received.

Extended Commentary

Ephesians 4:7-16

4:7. Verse 7 introduces the subject of our spiritual giftedness. In so doing the emphasis turns slightly from the church's unity to individual diversity. Each of us received a spiritual gift by the grace of God. That grace has not been apportioned equally. Rather Christ has chosen how to divide grace to each member. Each is distinct and different.

4:8. In verses 8–10, Paul digresses from his direct argument to provide scriptural proof. Instead of giving a direct quote of Psalm 68:18, he apparently gave a general summary of the entire psalm. Psalm 68 is a victory hymn composed by David to celebrate the conquest of a Jebusite city. It describes a victory parade up Mount Zion, going beyond the literal, historical victory parade to attribute the victory to God. Thus it talks about a figurative victory parade with God ascending, not up to Mount Zion, but up to heaven.

Historically, it was typical, after a king won a significant military victory, to bring back the spoils of war, including enemy prisoners, to display to his people. In addition, however, if there were any of his own soldiers whom the enemy had previously captured, the victorious king would bring them back and parade them before the home crowd. These were often referred to as recaptured captives—prisoners who had been taken prisoner again by their own king and then given freedom. It was a great honor to release these captives. David pictures God ascending to heaven after having been victorious against his earthly enemies and freeing those who had been captive to the forces of evil.

When he ascended on high depicts a triumphant God returning from battle on earth back into the glory of heaven. He led captives in his train perhaps refers to those who have been delivered from captivity to evil.

4:9–10. Jewish rabbis interpreted Psalm 68 in light of Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai. Paul interpreted it in light of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Ascended refers to Jesus' ascension from earth to heaven (Acts 1:9–11). He ascended from earth to heaven to reign forever with his Father. Paul then explains that if God ascended he first descended. If, as seems clear, ascended refers to the Lord's being taken up to heaven, then descended seems to refer to his coming down from heaven to earth previously. The lower, earthly regions complicates the interpretation. This passage has historically been understood as Jesus' having descended into hell and preached a proclamation of freedom to someone there. Recently, that interpretation has fallen into disfavor. The weight of evidence and the preponderance of modern commentaries now lean toward saying that the intent of the phrase is not to point to a specific place, such as the inner core of the earth, or to "hell," but simply to refer to the incarnation.

John MacArthur writes:

To understand the phrase "the lower parts of the earth" we need only to examine its use elsewhere in Scripture. In Psalm 63:9, it has to do with death, being related to falling by the sword. In Matthew 12:40, a similar phrase "the heart of the earth" refers to the belly of a great

fish where the prophet Jonah was kept. In Isaiah 44:23 the phrase refers to the created earth. Psalm 139:15 uses it in reference to the womb of a woman where God is forming a child. The sum of these uses indicates that the phrase relates to the created earth as a place of life and death. In the majority of the uses it appears in contrast to the highest heavens (Ephesians, Chicago: Moody Press, 1986, 139).

Therefore “descending into hell” is certainly a possible explanation, but not a necessary explanation. The contrast is between an ascent to heaven and a descent from heaven. The descent would then be to earth, from earth to hell. The descent from heaven to earth could refer either to Christ’s incarnation or to the coming of the Spirit as Christ’s representative. The problems which arise from trying to interpret it as descending into hell are so formidable that MacArthur’s is the generally preferred interpretation. The emphasis of the passage is on the ascent, not the descent. Christ ascended above the heavens to take his place beside the Father ruling the universe.

In order to fill the whole universe is an uncertain phrase, but may mean that Jesus, as head of the universe (Col. 1:18), resumes his position of authority over the universe and therefore the right to bestow gifts on his subjects.

4:11. This verse ties directly back to the last word of verse 7. Verse 11 picks up again the subject started in verse 7 to tell us the relationship between the call to unity and the spiritual gifts Christ has given us. Spiritual gifts are at the heart of Christ’s strategy for building his church. The gifts are ministers (or ministries) for the church. While this issue is strongly debated, particularly by Pentecostal and charismatic theologians, evangelical doctrine has traditionally held that of those four gifts two of them are still in existence and two have passed away. These gifts will be looked at more closely in the “Deeper Discoveries” section. For now, it is adequate to make the observation that the apostles and prophets seem no longer to be part of God’s work in the church. The church was laid on the foundation of the ministry of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). Now that that foundation has been laid, the evangelists and the pastor-teachers are being used by God to build the superstructure.

4:12. It is not the task of these gifted people to do all the work of the ministry. Their task is to prepare God’s people for works of service. When believers are equipped and people accept the adventure of ministering to others, then the whole body is built up, matured, strengthened, and flourishes.

4:13. Diverse gifts create and build up one body in unity. This unity is in faith and knowledge of Christ. Christ does not try to build up superstars in his kingdom with superior faith or superior knowledge. He tries to build up a church unified in its faith and knowledge, each member being built up to maturity. All are to reach the fullness of Christ. The church’s goal is that each member and thus the entire church will show to the world all the attributes and qualities of Christ. Then the church will truly be the one body of Christ.

4:14–16. The result of these spiritually gifted people’s equipping the saints is that believers are not to be like children, easily persuaded and confused, jumping from one opinion or belief to the next, like waves on the sea being driven by gusting winds of false teaching. Rather, the believers are to speaking the truth in love. Speaking the truth in love is a mark of maturity, which will enable us to grow up spiritually.

Immature people often fall into one of two opposite errors. They speak the truth, but without love, or they love without speaking the truth. When we do the first, we often brutalize others, pounding them with truth but doing it in an unloving way. When we do the second, we don't tell others the truth, thinking that by shielding them from the truth we are sparing them from pain. We are not, however. All we are doing is delaying their maturation. To share the truth with our fellow believers is a mark of maturity, but to do it with love, with understanding, with compassion. From Christ the whole body is gifted, and as each one uses his gift for the benefit of others, the whole body matures. We must recognize that we belong to one another, we need one another, no matter how insignificant we think our contribution is. There are no little people in the kingdom of God, as Francis Shaeffer used to say, and there are no little jobs. Just as a physical body needs red corpuscles and livers more than it needs a handsome face or beautiful hair, so we all belong; we are all necessary. We all can contribute, and when we do, we all grow to maturity in Christ.

4:14. The Ephesian church, as most of the churches Paul wrote, faced teachers with opposing viewpoints. They divided the church body into factions, each opposing the others. Their presence required the type of spiritual maturity and church unity Paul had described. Without such unity the church would act like a group of babies, each crying out because of his own pains and needs, each inconsistently saying one thing and then another, each at the mercy of cunning, deceitful teachers. To avoid infantile behavior, the church must mature into unity of the faith and of knowledge of Christ.

4:15. Such maturity involves teaching the truth in love. False teachers showed no love or care for the members; they simply wanted to get their own way. Mature believers search for the truth as a united body, loving and caring for the needs of each member. Such loving, caring search for truth allows them to grow as members of the body whose head is Christ, for Christ is the truth.

4:16. The head allows each part of the body to mature and grow, not concentrating on special knowledge and growth for a favored few. Each of the parts of the body is needed to hold the whole body together in unity. The body is truly a maturing, loving body only as each part is encouraged to grow and do its part of the work.¹

References

1. Max Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians*, ed. Max Anders (Nasville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>.

Author Bio

Max Anders (Holman New Testament Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians)

Dr. Max Anders is the author of over 25 books, including the bestselling 30 Days to Understanding the Bible, and is the creator and general editor of the 32-volume Holman Bible Commentary series. He has taught on the college and seminary level and is a veteran pastor. Max provides resources and discipleship strategies at www.maxanders.com to help people grow spiritually.

Francis Chan (Until Unity)

Francis Chan is the best-selling author of *Crazy Love*, *Forgotten God*, *Erasing Hell*, *You and Me Forever* and the host of the BASIC.series (*Who Is God & We Are Church*). Currently, Francis is planting churches in the San Francisco area and recently launched a countrywide discipleship movement called *Multiply with David Platt*.

Showing the Spirit (D.A. Carson)

D. A. Carson (PhD, University of Cambridge) is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and is the author or editor of more than fifty books, including *The God Who Is There* and *How Long, O Lord?* He is one of the founders of The Gospel Coalition and an active guest lecturer in academic and church settings around the world.

The Gospel (Raymond Ortlund Jr.)

Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. is the pastor to pastors at Immanuel Church in Nashville, Tennessee. He is the author of several books, including the *Preaching the Word* commentary on Isaiah and Marriage and the *Mystery of the Gospel*, as well as a contributor to the *ESV Study Bible*. He and his wife, Jani, have four children.