

Going in Ministry

November 5, 2023

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Ephesians 4:1-16

Session Outline

1. Walk Worthy (Ephesians 4:1-3)
2. Be Unified (Ephesians 4:4-10)
3. Lead & Equip (Ephesians 4:11-16)

Theological Theme

God intends His church to reflect His nature as a diversity of people who function in unity as one for His glory and our joy. There are no spectators in the life of the church, only participants who use their gifts to build up the body of Christ.





Leader Guide

Going in Ministry

Introduction

There is a well-known movie made several years ago titled *Rudy*. The film is about a young man who loves Notre Dame football and had a lifelong dream to play there. Unfortunately, he is not physically gifted with size or natural talent, so his hopes of making his beloved team are far-fetched at best. If you've seen the movie, you know how the story goes. He finds a way to get enrolled at Notre Dame and eventually fights for a chance to be on the practice squad. He pours out his time and energy practicing against the guys who will be suited up on game day. He earns the grudging respect of other players and eventually the coach promises that he can dress out for one game and be on the sidelines. After that coach is replaced, it seemed as if all his work is for naught but in the last plays of his last season, the entire crowd and team begin to chant his name until finally the coach sends him into the game.¹

Rudy made it onto one of the most legendary fields in all of college football, not because he was the most gifted, but because he used all he had been given to make the rest of the team better. Rudy never had the spotlight and never scored the points, but he worked day in and day out through the opportunities he had and was willing to serve to make the whole team stronger. Paul referred to the church similarly—they are those gifted in order to serve, minister, and make the whole group better. There may not be a movie made about us, but when we obey the Lord and fulfill His calling on our lives, the reward is much greater.

-  Why do you think it is important to be willing to work to make the whole team better?
-  Why is it unusual to celebrate the people behind the scenes who work in this way?

Session Summary

Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus with words of encouragement and taught about the purposes behind spiritual gifts. He made it clear that any gifts given were done by divine appointment and with definite intention. Spiritual gifts are meant to serve the church and build up the body of

Christ. We are all gifted in some way when we accept Jesus as Savior, but some gifts are meant to be used for leadership. Paul highlighted those gifts and emphasized that those who have the leadership gifts must use them appropriately.

Leaders are called to teach, mentor, equip, and develop the Christ followers around them to take part in serving and ministering in Jesus's name. The more people who are maturing in the faith and growing up spiritually, the stronger, more productive, and healthier the church will be. The leaders have the responsibility of leading, and the church should step up and do their part in pursuing growth, so they are no longer influenced by every new thing they hear. Christianity is not a spectator sport. We are all on the team and should be doing all we can to be the most effective and united body possible.

God's Gifts

Borrowing an illustration from Psalm 68:18, Paul described the gifts given to the church. God is both sovereign and generous in His distribution of the various gifts.

1. Walk Worthy (Ephesians 4:1-3)

In Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, he gave instructions that apply to the church today. After reminding them of all God had done for them, he strongly encouraged the people to consider what was required for following Jesus. Notice that his call to live worthy only came after explaining what God has first done for us (Ephesians 3:20-21). Those who follow Jesus are to take seriously the way they live and the impact their lives can have on the rest of the world.

- Why is it important to be reminded us of what God has done for us before being challenged to live worthy lives? What difference does this make?

Once we understand all God has done, we are better motivated to make our decisions according to what will please the Lord instead basing them on our own selfish desires. When you realize the magnitude of God's love and mercy toward you, the natural response is to live to serve and obey Him out of gratitude. We aren't called to walk worthy of the Lord to earn His love but because we are loved by Him already. It is not about earning but about giving back in gratitude.

- What does it mean to live worthy of the calling of Christ? What does that look like in daily life?

So there would be no confusion or uncertainty, Paul went on to describe what a worthy life looks like. Paul sought to communicate specific things that characterize a life lived for God. He started with humility and gentleness. Why might he start here? These both go directly against what the world at that time (and in this day) taught. The world does not celebrate humility but instead tells us to stand up for ourselves and put

ourselves first. We are constantly encouraged to fulfill our own wishes and desires without regard to God's standards or expectations or the needs of other people. Often our culture does not elevate the gentle person but celebrates those who operate with pride and aggression.

God's desire is for His followers to be diverse yet unified. This requires patience and bearing with one another. We will face conflict and struggles. The key is to learn to walk worthy of the Lord and deal with anything that comes our way with this goal in mind. Our aim should always be to bring people to Jesus and share His love with them, not insist on our own way.

Having a humble, forgiving attitude toward others helps bring about the unity of the Spirit. Paul said we should be eager to maintain this unity and foster peace. Consider how unusual this is to those who don't know God. When Christians act with humility, gentleness, and patience so they can be unified, it stands out and draws attention because it is countercultural. The good news is we are not called to pursue and keep unity on our own. This unity is brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit in us and through us. Notice how these Spirit-led traits work together. The humbler and gentler we are, the less divisive we will be. The more unity we strive for, the more peace we will experience. This is the call of God on the life of every person who chooses to trust Jesus. Living this way brings glory to God and connection with others in the church.



Application: What do you need to change to live a life worthy of the love you have received from God?

2. Be Unified (Ephesians 4:4-10)

From the days of Paul to today, people have needed to better understand why unity in the church matters and how we are to pursue it. Paul focused on what believers have in common. He listed the things we are united in—we are one body, with one Spirit, one hope, one calling, one faith, one Lord, one baptism, and ultimately one God and Father over all. To overcome the different backgrounds, cultures, experiences, norms, and anything else that separates us, it is important to begin with the things that unite us.



How does focusing on the things that unite the church help us overcome our differences, which can be significant?

God is intentional about the way He gifts His people uniquely and specifically. Christians are to recognize how we can use those gifts for His glory and to promote unity. With a highlight on how we have all been gifted with grace from God, Paul moved to describe the finished work of Christ that uniquely suits Him to be the one who distributes spiritual gifts

to God's people. Every person who trusts in Jesus receives spiritual gifts of some kind and is expected to put those gifts to work for the good of the body of Christ, the church.

Just as we did nothing to earn the grace offered to us through Christ, we also did nothing to earn our spiritual gifts from the Lord. We must think about gifts in that way emphasizes Paul's exhortation to live lives worthy of our calling out of gratitude for all that we have been given and not from an attempt to earn something from God. If it were possible to earn our gifts, they would become wages and no longer gifts from God.

- Why is the grace Christians have received powerful to overcome any differences or divisions within the church?

Paul's description of Jesus was that of a conquering hero distributing gifts following a victory. These words are a paraphrase of Psalm 68:18. Jesus ascended to heaven following the resurrection. Jesus is the only One who has defeated (or could defeat) death and hell, and He alone deserves our gratitude. Our lives should reflect our recognition of all Jesus has given us by grace.

- Application: What do you need to change so that your life reflects gratitude for the grace and gifts God has given you? If you aren't yet a follower of Jesus, God has still given you grace in many ways. What are some of these ways you recognize?

3. Lead & Equip (Ephesians 4:11-16)

Spiritual gifts are distributed by divine appointment and are not a product of human invention. This matters because it keeps us from believing we can manufacture the gifts we think we need or the ones that we desire. Gifts are not primarily for our benefit but to be used for the glory of God and the good of the body of Christ.

- How does it shape your perspective to recognize God given spiritual gifts come with a divine purpose? How does this change the way you might look to use your gifts?

The gifts Paul named reflected areas of leadership in the church. This is not a comprehensive list of gifts as not all are called to these areas of leadership and there are other gifts listed in other passages of Scripture that benefit the body in other ways (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12).

Paul clearly stated that the ultimate goal of leaders is "to equip the saints for the work of the ministry" (v. 12). The word *saints* as used here does not apply to those who have gone ahead to heaven but rather all who are

included in God's people. Saints are the everyday Christians who make up the body of Christ. Saints applies to you if you have trusted Jesus as your Savior. Yes, even though you are not perfect or sinless, you are considered a saint of God.

One of the main responsibilities of those gifted for leadership is to ensure that all the others in the body of Christ are equipped to serve and minister as well. The word *equipping* is connected to training and developing but also includes the idea of "setting to rights." Picture setting a broken bone, putting it back to right for when it heals. Think about how that applies to your life. As you are equipped to serve and minister in Jesus's name, though you have been broken in some ways, you are mended so you can serve and build up the body of Christ in a new and healthy way. This is a picture of what it means to be equipped and developed into a mature, healthy Christian.



How does the idea of being mended back to wholeness apply to your life when you think about serving the Lord in the church?

Paul pointed out that as God's people are equipped, they come together in spiritual unity around a common faith. The gifts are to be aimed at reaching unity, but even the use of the gifts moves toward the goal of a unified body. It should be the goal of each of us to grow up, no longer living as children in the faith, but striving to mature into healthy spiritual adults. Those with leadership gifts are to equip the saints but the saints must also be willing to do their part in the growth process. Paul said as we mature, we will stop being tossed about and falling prey to every false teaching that comes our way. He was aware of the tendency in that day to claim belief in Jesus but also allow other false beliefs into one's life. Today there is also a trend of being fine with Jesus but accepting of other false teachings and ungodly belief systems alongside this claim. Paul said we should grow up in Jesus and stop being tricked by the world so that we can fully know and serve God. To live this way means to recognize Jesus as the only way to God, truth, and life (John 14:6).



Application: Where is God calling you to pursue Christian maturity? How can this group and our church as a whole support you in that?




Conclusion

Paul made sure the Christians at Ephesus understood why the way they lived mattered. He called for them choose to live worthy of the Lord and His calling on their lives. This was not to be done in an effort to earn gifts or rewards but instead to be motivated out of gratitude for all that God had so freely done and given to them. The same is true for us. All

Christians are given unmerited favor and spiritual gifts through Christ. Our response should line up with Paul's challenge to the Ephesians so that we live worthy of the Lord.

It is also important to realize the purpose and goals for spiritual gifts. Paul stressed that these gifts were given by divine inspiration and not conceived by humans. There is a purpose for every gift God gives. They should be used to bring glory to the Lord and build up the body of Christ, so the church grows strong and healthy. Paul pointed out that when Christians take seriously the challenge to live worthy of Christ and obey God's directions about the spiritual gifts, we become unified. The church should be unified around a common faith and purpose to reach the lost world with the gospel of Christ and bring glory to God.

By specifying certain leadership gifts, Paul emphasized the role of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. No church leader is to shoulder all the work of the church. Instead, those gifted for leadership are to be focused on equipping the other saints to do the work of the ministry. They are to disciple and develop the church to grow in their faith and mature spiritually to serve and carry out the ministry of the Lord.

-  What is God calling you to change to live worthy of His call on your life? How will you respond? Might Jesus be calling you to place faith in Him for the first time today?
-  What can you do to help promote unity in the body? Do you know your spiritual gifts? How might you use these to benefit others in the body and pursue unity?
-  How will living as a unified body stand out in the church and give us opportunity to share the good news of Jesus with others?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for all the ways He has blessed and gifted you. Commit to using your gifts for the good of the body of Christ and the building up of the church. Confess any places you have been division and renew a commitment to pursuing unity within the church.

Additional Resources

- *Spiritual Gifts* by Daniel Darling
- *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* by Tony Merida
- *Be Rich* by Warren Wiersbe

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Questions to Guide Your Group's Discussion

1. What does this passage say?
2. What did this passage mean to its original audience?
3. What does this passage tell us about God?
4. What does this passage tell us about man?
5. What does this passage demand of me?
6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (*How can you use this information this week at work or with friends and neighbors?*)
7. How does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

*Adapted from Seven Arrows by Matt Rogers pastor of The Church at Cherrydale, Greenville, SC

For Next Week

Session Title

- Going on Mission

Main Passages

- Romans 10:1-17

Session Outline

1. Knowing the Message (Romans 10:1-8)
2. Believing the Message (Romans 10:9-13)
3. Sharing the Message (Romans 10:14-17)

Memorize

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope, at your calling—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. — Ephesians 4:4-6

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).

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 4:1-16

4:1 This exhortation serves as a major transition in the letter as it moves from the church's belief statement to the church's mission statement. Paul insisted that a believer's behavior must be worthy of his divine calling.

4:2 Humility, gentleness, and patience are absolutely essential if unity is to be maintained.

4:3–6 Believers have the responsibility to keep unity in the body of Christ. The seven “ones” enumerated in these verses constitute the foundation on which the Trinitarian God creates a oneness in the church. Paul's plan can be seen from the vantage point of the work of the one Spirit creating one body; the one Lord Jesus Christ creating one hope, faith, and baptism; and the one God the Father bringing about one people of God.

4:6 One God and Father of all reminds believers that God's oneness defines the church's oneness.

4:7 Paul grounds variety within the church's unity. God has granted a measure of grace to each believer as a gift from Christ.

4:8 This verse is an allusion to Ps 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.

4:9–10 Paul emphasized that the resurrected and exalted Christ now imparts all the fullness of his blessings to the church and to the universe (1:10, 19–23; 3:20–21).

4:11 The description here is more about gifted people (natural gifts that can be honed and used for the kingdom) than about spiritual gifts (contrast with Paul's meaning in Rm 12; 1Co 12–14). Five groups of gifted people are listed: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Apostles and prophets are foundational for the church's work (Eph 3:5). The term apostles primarily refers to people sent with a divine mission or task. They also served as spokesmen for God, bringing new revelation and understanding to the church. Prophets revealed God's will to believers for the present (forthtelling) and predicted the future (foretelling). All apostles were prophets, but not all prophets were apostles.

Evangelists were gifted to spread the gospel and plant churches. Evangelists proclaimed the good news in word and deed and instructed others in evangelism. Pastors and teachers shared similar responsibilities. Pastors provided oversight, comfort, and guidance as the church's shepherds (Ac 20:28; 1Pt 5:1–4). Teachers instructed and helped apply God's revelation to the life of the church. Teachers were concerned with passing on the church's revealed teachings (1Co 15:3–4)

rather than bringing new inspirational insights like the prophets. Teachers are indispensable for building up the church and are necessary to enable believers to distinguish false doctrine from true teaching.

4:12 The purpose of the gifted people is to equip others to minister. Like many other long sentences in Ephesians, vv. 11–16 form one long sentence in the original Greek text. The term translated equipping was sometimes used to refer to mending or restoring.

4:13 Ministry is intended to move believers toward accomplishing three goals: (1) unity of faith and full knowledge of God’s Son, (2) maturity, and (3) the fullness of Christ. Maturity and unity are measured in terms of the relationship of the body to the head, Christ.

4:14 When the gifted people equip the church, the community of faith will evidence stability in precept and practice.

4:15 Speaking the truth in love: When a church is faithful to speak truth in love, it will have transparent relationships where people edify and benefit one another.

4:16 Ultimately the church will grow up into Christ in all aspects, with each part fitting together and supporting the other. Each member of the body must function properly if the body is to grow. We get our English word harmony from the Greek term translated fitted and knit together.²

References

1. *Rudy*, directed by David Anspaugh (1993; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures, 2000), DVD.
2. David S. Dockery, “Ephesians,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1876.

Author Bio

Daniel Darling (Spiritual Gifts)

Daniel Darling is an author, pastor, and leader. He is the director of the Land Center for Cultural Engagement at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dan is a bestselling author of several books, including *The Original Jesus*, *The Dignity Revolution*, *The Characters of Christmas*, *The Characters of Easter*, *The Characters of Creation*, *A Way With Words*, and a children's book, *The Biggest Best Light*. He is the general editor of a small group study on racial reconciliation, *The Church and the Racial Divide*, author of a Bible study on spiritual gifts, and a contributor to *The Worldview Study Bible*.

Tony Merida (Exalting Jesus in Ephesians)

Tony Merida is lead pastor of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, NC, and associate professor of preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC.

Warren Wiersbe (Be Rich)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of Back to the Bible, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.