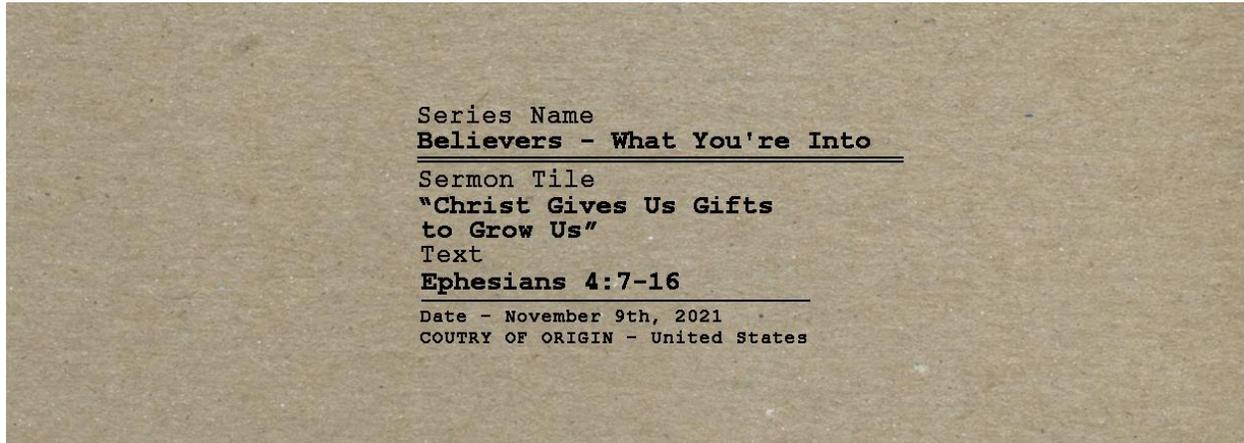


Christ Gives Us Gifts to Grow Us



Ephesians 4:7-16

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.

Sermon Transcription:

Dr. Stewart

Good morning. We're in Ephesians 4:7-16. Christ gives us gifts to grow us. If you remember from a few weeks ago, I showed pictures of an addition being built onto our house. The last time, I told you about the foundation work. We've made progress since then. And of course when something bad happens you think, surely this will be the last bad thing that will happen, surely Murphy's Law is done, right? Our contractor put the subfloor down and then he put up the walls but there was rain in the forecast. So he covered everything with with a tarp. And of course it rained and rained and rained for

days. And we didn't want our exposed wood to get wet. And there were a few little holes in the tarp. So my son and I went out and we sopped up a few little puddles. But it was pretty good overall, it was doing pretty well. And then that night a thunderstorm came through and there was a lot more rain and we put a bucket under one place that was kind of sagging a little bit and there was a drip coming through. The tarp was pretty low in a couple places. But we went to bed and we heard crash in the middle of the night. And we got up the next morning and the tarp was down and the two by four was broke in half. It's split that thing from the water and the wind and the wall came down. As we looked out, still in the morning darkness, we thought the whole thing collapsed. And my wife called our contractor and he came right over. Turns out that the weight of the water and the wind just cause these boards to break, two by fours broken. There was a lot of water on the floor but he got it cleaned up and he put the wall back up. With some help from a few guys, within a few days, over a weekend they got the roof up as well. They made a lot of progress. It's been good to see the building going up and filling out, now we have a roof we have shingles, there are windows, he's got it insulated. There's even electrical in there now. Yeah, we're excited. It looks better than it did. It's amazing to see the progress. And you know, it was kind of a group effort, unity. Time passes and the thing matures, it's more complete. And that's a lot like our passage, Ephesians 4:6-16.

This passage speaks of Jesus, giving gifts to build the church. And actually the Greek word for building is a word Oikedome. And it means to build a structure. So let's read verses 7 through 16, "Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and gave gifts to men.' (In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who also descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 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. Rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 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.

Verse seven speaks to us of the benefits from Jesus gift, his gracious gift to the body. Do you think that's the grace of salvation? It could be. But I think here he speaks more of grace to ministry, to giving us gifts that will help us serve. Verse eight, "Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men'." And this is a quote from Psalm 68, verse 18 by David, but there's an important difference. If you read the passage in Psalms, it says that the one who ascended received gifts, but is that what Paul says? No, it says he gave gifts. That's an important difference, so he's not really quoting this verse as much as using it as an example. An example of returning victorious. David was rewarded for his victory in the Old Testament battle but Jesus Christ came to deliver us and came to give gifts to us. MacArthur says, After a king won such a victory, he would bring home the spoils and enemy prisoners to parade before his

people. An Israelite king would take his winnings through the holy city of Jerusalem and up Mount Zion. Another feature of the victory parade, however, would be the display of the king's own soldiers, who had been freed after being held prisoner by the enemy. Recaptured captives, prisoners who had been taken prisoner again, by their own king and given freedom. The phrase "When he ascended on high" depicts a triumphant Christ returning from battle on earth back into the glory of the heavenly city with the trophies of his great victory. In his crucifixion and his resurrection, Jesus Christ conquered sin, and Satan, a death, Colossians 2:15, and by the great victory, he led captive a host of captives, who were once prisoners of the enemy, but now are returned to God and the people of God, for whom they belong. The picture is vivid in it's a demonstration that God has yet unsaved people who belong to him, though they're naturally in Satan's grasp. And all of us were prisoners, under Satan's control. We were in that dark kingdom, under Satan's rule. And we would remain there had not Christ, by his death and resurrection, made provision to lead them into the captivity of his kingdom. We are slaves to righteousness, right? We're not our own, we're slaves again, but now we're slaves to righteousness, in which we've been called by a sovereign election before the foundation of the world, Ephesians 1:4. He gave gifts to men.

So who were the captives which Jesus led? Some say Satan and the demons. That could be true here. But what's the focus for us? Who are the captives? Us. Yeah, it's the saints. You and me. If you're a believer in Christ, you're a freed captive. Verse nine, what does it mean that he ascended? Jesus, as victor over sin, death and Satan and his hosts, reentered heaven in full standing as the Son of God, to take his place at God's right hand, to reign with Him forever. Descended speaks of his coming down to earth. Jesus was first made low, he emptied himself, Philippians says. He was first made low then exalted. Jesus exultation resulted from his humiliation. In verse ten, it speaks to the depth of Christ's descent in coming to earth. It says in verse 10, into the lowest parts of the earth. Let's consider how low Jesus went in his descent. First from heaven to the incarnation, he became human, became a baby in Mary's womb. Was he born in a palace with royalty? No. Where was he born? It was in a stinking stall with animal saliva probably on the trough there. He was born in the likeness of men. And as a man, he could have been born into a rich family or a royal family, but whose family was he in? A poor carpenter's family. He could have been proud but it says in Philippians 2 that he was a humble man. He did not come to be served but to serve. And that's our example. He descended in his life and he descended in his death. He died the death of a criminal, crucified on a cross. He hung between two thieves, he suffered the wrath of God, he became a sacrifice for our sins, crushed by the Father. Verse 10, he who descended is also he that ascended far above all the heavens. Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at the Father's right hand, the place of power and authority. God the Father will highly exalt him and give him a name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. As I think about this, I think a people a lot of times, but you consider the demonic hosts that's going to bow. Satan that's going to bow before Jesus and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, Philippians 2:9-11. MacArthur says, Paul's point in Ephesians 4:8-10 is to explain that Jesus, paying this infinite price of coming to earth and suffering death on our behalf, qualifies him to be exalted above the heavens, to the throne of God, in order that he might rightly have the authority to give gifts to the saints.

By that victory, he gained the right to rule his church, to give gifts to his church, that he might fill all things. His filling all things has to do with his glorious divine presence and power expressed in his sovereignty.

In verse 11, Paul continues to explain the gifts he gives. You know, when we speak about gifts a lot of times we're talking about individual gifts, like helps or mercy or tongues or some of these other things that are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. But that's not the gift that he speaks of here. In verse 11, what are the gifts that he's going to give here? The people. Yeah, and special people that he's chosen for this task, godly gifted men to lead the church. Four groups: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and I'll treat it as pastor/teachers, although some people separate those. First, the apostles and prophets were given, and we've said this before when we studied Ephesians two, verse 20, which said that they were the foundation of the church. They were to receive and declare the revelation of God's word, Acts 11:28. They were to give confirmation to the words with signs, wonders and miracles, 2 Corinthians 12:12 and Acts 8:6-7. The word apostle means messenger, the original twelve and Paul who were with Jesus and had witnessed his resurrection. They had lifelong and church wide authority over life and doctrine, a special group. Prophets, who are known for their ability to predict the future, but they also apply God's truth to God's people at a time when the New Testament was not completed.

There are still people who are proclaiming God's truth, pastor/teachers and evangelists, that proclaim God's word. They don't predict new revelation, though. There are no longer apostles, no longer prophets in this sense, who give new revelation, adding to the Scriptures, because we proclaim God's word, which is a complete revelation. It's fully revealed. There's nothing that needs to be added. In fact, Revelation says that there's a curse that comes with doing that. We have to be careful. So the baton is passed from the apostles and the prophets to the pastor/teachers and evangelists of today. All were given to us by Jesus directly. When you think of an evangelist, who comes to your mind first? A person like Billy Graham? That's right, at least he's an evangelist that affected things worldwide. But most of the commentators say it's best understood to be missionaries, people who go out like Timothy and Paul and Silas. And they planted churches and preach the good news. Timothy was told by Paul to do the work of an evangelist, 2 Timothy 4:5. Paul and Barnabas and Silas were missionaries and church planters. These gifted men are uniquely designed and given to reach the lost with the saving gospel. Each assembly should raise up evangelists.

Pastor in the Greek is the word Poimen, which means shepherd. Teacher in the Greek is Didaskaloi. Does that sound familiar? Didactic is also associated with teaching. It's the primary function of pastors. They lead the church body. 1 Timothy 5:17 puts these together, Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor preaching and teaching. The idea is the labor to exhaustion and teaching and studying the Word. And our pastor is a good example of that. There are other Greek words for leaders in the New Testament. Bishop, the word Episkopos, which is an overseer, a guardian of your soul. They feed and protect and generally nurture the flock. Acts 20:28 speaks of elders, the gray haired ones, also leaders. But you know, as we read these, there's no difference. They're all the same person. Elder,

bishop, overseer, pastor, there was a plurality of these men in the New Testament churches, more than one in each church. And we see that in Acts 14, and they were appointed by Paul at that time. Every believer, all of us today, are indebted, directly or indirectly, to these gifted men God has given to the church, even our own pastor. We should love these men, we should take care of them, give God thanks for them, this gift he has given us, you and I in this church. Are you thankful for your pastor and leaders? Are you thankful that God's been good to us?

Why had God given these men? Verse 12, the purpose is to equip, equip the saints to build up the body. We're not meant to come to church and listen and go home unchanged. We are meant to grow. In the Christ Centered Commentary, I found this commentary extremely helpful the last few times I've used it, written in part by David Platt, God has blessed his people throughout redemptive history with gifted proclaimers of His Word. The author of Hebrews tells us, Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God, as you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith, Hebrews 13:7. Such leaders are instruments in the Redeemer's hands, used for our sanctification. Their teaching strengthens us and as Paul says next, equips us for ministry. What are you doing with what God has given you? The church will be enriched in worship and mission when everyone is serving. When members give...work in childcare, visit those in need, making meals for new parents, ministering to one another in groups...the body is edified, blessed and built up, Ephesians 4:12. Every member should grow up and use a towel not wear a bib. They should not be immature consumers but eager servants. And Paul Tripp says this, Your life is much bigger than a good job, an understanding spouse, and non-delinquent kids. It's bigger than beautiful gardens, nice vacations, and fashionable clothes. In reality, you're part of something immense, something that began before you were born and will continue after you die. God is rescuing fallen humanity, transporting them into his kingdom and progressively changing them into his likeness. And he wants you to be a part of that.

In verses 12-16, it's kind of like God's YouTube video of how to build a church and equip it. You ever watched a YouTube video? They show you how to do stuff. Right? God gives us that right here, in this passage. It's not really a YouTube video. I don't think you can probably find it but it's here verbally. He's going to give us a picture here of exactly what that is. And I got your attention, didn't I. Verse 12, building up. We said that Greek word is Oikodome refers to the building of a house, like my house, like our addition. In this passage, Jesus has given us gifts to build us up in him. MacArthur says, The pastor/teachers subsequent work, then, is to provide the leadership and spiritual resources to cause believers to be taking on the likeness of their Lord and Savior through continual obedience to His Word. And to provide a pattern or an example of godliness. The word equipping is the word Katarismos and refers to that which is fit, is restored to its original condition, or is made complete. The word was used medically of setting bones. Now, I know that probably none of you have this wonderful experience of setting a bone. But I'm telling you, it's very, very cool. Because you have a wrist that's curved or at an angle sometimes, and you numb it up and you take it and you go at 90 degrees and you walk that bone right back over the top with pressure. And it goes back. It's amazing! And it's together. It's complete. I'm telling you, it's great stuff. When I was in Wichita, we needed to learn how to do that. So you had to have cases and stuff. And so we would

bribe the nurses in the emergency room not to send them to the orthopedist, but to us so that we could get experience and I got some experience and did that for a number of years. I don't do it anymore, but I missed it a little bit you can tell.

Verse 13 says as we grow, we'll reach a unity of the faith. How can we do this? MacArthur says the equipping of each believer results in the unity of all. God's given us four basic tools for the spiritual equipping of the saints. These are the spiritual means because the flesh itself cannot make anyone perfect, Galatians 3:3. The first and foremost tool is his word, Scripture. It changes us and builds us, doesn't it. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work, 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The first purpose of the pastor/teacher, therefore, is to feed himself, then feed his people and to lead them to feed themselves on the Word of God. The example is the apostles who gave themselves continually to teaching the word and to prayer, Acts 6:4. That indicates that a second tool of equipping is prayer. And the pastor/teacher is responsible to prepare himself and to lead his people to prepare themselves in prayer. It's so important, it's been a very good experience for me to get together with these men on Thursdays to pray. It's a blessing and is definitely needed. We have to be dedicated to praying for the saints, not only then but throughout the week. Paul says of Epaphras, He is always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers that you may stand perfect, Colossians 4:12-13. It is essential to note that this equipping, completing and perfecting of the saints is attainable here on earth. Because Paul uses a Greek verb for equipping to refer to what spiritually strong believers are to do for fellow believers who have fallen into sin. He gives us that ability and that responsibility. The text strongly teaches that the ministry of equipping is the work of leading Christians from sin to obedience. And that's exactly what our pastor does in counseling with people, walking with them through a particular problem. And we do it here, on Sundays, as well, leading you from sin to obedience.

A third tool of equipping is testing and a fourth is suffering. These last two are often difficult and painful experiences by which the believer is refined to greater holiness. Has anyone had a test recently or been suffering? I think our church body has been suffering. We lost one of our own to Covid last week. And we had our Remembrance Service for Joan last Sunday. It's a good thing. It's painful though, isn't it? And each of us have our own trials that we are dealing with. James says, Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials, knowing the testing of your faith produces endurance, and let endurance have its perfect result, James 1:2-4. When we respond to God's testing and trust and continued obedience, spiritual muscles are strengthened and effective service is expanded. Suffering is also a means of spiritually equipping. 1 Peter says, And after you have suffered for a little while the God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself perfect, confirm and establish you, 1 Peter 5:10. We are changed, completed by suffering. My family has experienced that in our own lives. It's painful at the time. God works through it. Knowing and following Christ, in the deepest sense, not only involves being raised with Him, but also sharing in the fellowship of His suffering, Philippians 3:10. God comforts us. So let me ask, where is God when we suffer? He is close to us. But do we always see it that way? We often, in the pain, don't see it that way. We see him as far off and displaced, not with us. But he is, he's with us. In the suffering,

he comes alongside us. God comforts us in all our affliction, he says, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also the comfort is abundant through Christ, 2 Corinthians 1:4-5. That's a great verses to memorize. The sending of tests and suffering are entirely God's operation, he gives them to his saints according to His loving and sovereign will. He knows what we need and when we need it.

Prayer and knowledge of the scripture are the tasks of the gifted men. The pastor/teacher is a good servant of Christ Jesus constantly nourished on the words of the faith and strong doctrine, which he prescribes, teaches, reads publicly and exhorts, 1 Timothy 4:6. He's called to preach the Word, to be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke and exhort, with complete patience and instruction, 2 Timothy 4:2. Verse 13, we mature spiritually, not only as we come to unity, but as we gain knowledge. What's the knowledge that we gained in verse 13? The knowledge of Christ. It's not head knowledge, which can make us prideful. But it's a knowledge of the Son of God. We talked about that earlier, that the great pursuit of the believer, of any of us, is to know God, to know Jesus Christ. And we can have a relationship with him, through the Word, as we trust him with our lives, as we follow him in obedience. John 14:21 says that he reveals himself to us, God opens himself up to us that we can know Him more as we follow, as we're faithful, by a spirit. We gain maturity through this knowledge, we grow up in him. We become more like Jesus, which should be our ultimate goal, right? Romans 8:29 says "to be conformed to the image of His Son", to look like Jesus, we need to look more and more like him, in our actions and our attitudes.

You know, this showed up for me last in the form of a test or a trial, I suppose, you see, it's kind of a perfect storm. And I've explained this to the guys that I get together with on Thursdays, and probably some of the others of you. With this pandemic going on, with COVID, there's a nursing shortage and a doctor shortage for us in our little hospital. And there's been a lot of hours to work, more in a sustained period, this has been more than I've ever had in 30 years. We've done OB before, we've delivered babies and sometimes been up two nights or three nights in a row, sometimes it's a lot of work, but not sustain, that didn't keep going and going and going. This is doing that. But the problem is, I've been kind of chippy, you know, kind of snappy, just plain angry sometimes and I've said things to nurses that are kind of mean, and I've had to go back and apologize to them and ask for forgiveness. As I thought about my actions and my attitude, I wondered, why am I doing this? Why? It's because I want to be in control. And I feel like this is being done to me. I feel like these people are doing it to me, which is not a right way to see that. But I feel like I'm on a runaway train but I'm not, I'm not on a runaway train. I'm not headed for oblivion. I have a Father who's sovereign over all my times and circumstances and I need to trust him. He's in control. I'm not. I'd like to be but I'm not. No matter how good or how bad it gets, he provides. And sometimes that involves not doing everything myself, sometimes I need to ask other people for help. I don't like that. But I have to sometimes. It involves getting to bed earlier. And I don't like that either. I like staying up. But I need to get my rest. He's building me and I need to be patient and receptive and to walk with him through this, to see him as in control. So pray for me, if you would, as we go through this. In another month and a half or so, we'll have

hospitalists which will greatly help us here. We all need to grow up in him. None of us has arrived. We're like the addition to my house, a work in progress, you saw it there...water on the floor and boards hanging off. But it got repaired. It's much better now.

Verse 14, so we no longer are children tossed to and fro by the waves. Did Paul know anything about waves? Yeah, we see that in Acts. He's on a boat, a runaway boat, right? They can't stop because the winds pushing them and the waves are battering them. Jesus didn't calm the wind and the waves. That didn't happen, did it, for Paul. What did they have to do with that boat? They ran it aground and the waves did what? They destroyed the ship because they were so powerful. He knows about waves that can toss you about, he had a personal knowledge of that. He mentions here children. Why do you think he mentions children? Why are we not supposed to be like them? What are kids like? Are kids naive? Are they easily manipulated? Yes. But we adults think, we're smarter than that, we won't be taken in by Satan's craftiness, right? What does Paul say about himself in Romans 7:14, I'm of the flesh, sold under sin. He also said, Brothers, I do not count myself yet to have laid hold. I'm pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, I have not arrived, Philippians 3:14. But we can grow in maturity by applying God's means: by being in the Word, prayer, fellowship, worship, sustained from start to finish by the Holy Spirit. It's a tragedy when a child-like believer, spoken of in verse 14, is blown about by every wind of doctrine. There's no stability. They can fall easy prey to man's trickery or Satan's craftiness and deceitful scheming. The word trickery here is the greek word Kubio. You know what that word comes from? It comes from cube. And so it's like a dice. And you know what you do with dice, right? If you're a gambler, you have loaded dice, right? And what's the purpose of loaded dice? It gives you an advantage over somebody. But it's deception. That's the word for trickery. It was true back then that they had loaded dice and they're still around. But the spiritually mature will not be misled. Children, babies need to grow. You know, I don't think of myself as this great mature christian believer when I read Paul's writings, I'm not like that. But maybe I can be a little more advanced child than I was, each day as I grow.

That was the negative side, the put off. On the positive side, the put on, in verse 15. Do you see it? What are we supposed to do? We are to speak truth in love. Aletheuo is the greek word to speak, to deal, or to act truthfully, literally truthing it, walking in a truthful way. Who exemplifies this? Jesus Christ does. And John 1:14 says Jesus was full of grace and truth. The truth can be used to beat someone over the head too. Have you ever seen that? But in like manner, you can dance around an issue so much that you can't even see the truth because you don't want to hurt their feelings. So there's a balance here, between graciousness, love, and truth. This comes with growth and spending time with Jesus. He's truth and he's love, he embodies them both. MacArthur says, authentic, mature believers whose lives are marked by love will not be victims of false teaching, verse 14. This is another form of prevention, which comes with maturity, walking in the Spirit. We noticed who is the boss of this adventure in the body. Verse 15, who's the boss? The head is Jesus Christ, he's the head. Good to remember, it is his church. He said, I will build my church. It's not about me. I'm not going to build this church, I want

to try sometimes, but he is the source of all power for whatever we need in the church. He's the authority, he gives us direction.

Notice in verse 16, the joints are the points of union where the spiritual gifts are exercised. And there is ministry resulting in stronger relationships between believers. The body is healthy and functioning well if all the gifts are being exercised. There's a movie that we watched called *Lady in the Water*, by M Night Shyamalan. And there's this guy and he's kind of a slight guy, but he's got this arm that's like Arnold Schwarzenegger's arm, because he's constantly pumping iron with his one arm, and it looks stupid. I mean, it looks so out of place. And it's like somebody in the body, in the church, when you concentrate on just one gift in the body. That's what you get. It's ridiculous. One person exercises his or her gift to the exclusion of everyone else, that's not healthy for the body, it hinders good function. We need to be balanced, and all contributing. That's what it means in verse 16, it's working properly. And notice the spiritual glue that holds all of us together is love. We grew up in love. Let me share this story. This illustration, given by Tony Evans, says the body is built up when various parts contribute to the whole. California has some of the largest organisms on the planet, redwood trees. They grow massive in size and ancient in age. The secret to their stability and growth is that their roots intertwine. Underground they're all interconnected. You can't mess with one without messing with the whole grove. When fierce winds blow their connectedness allows them to borrow from one another and grow strong. So it is, Paul says, with the body of Christ. Pray that we can be interconnected, stronger that way, built up together in Christ, becoming more unified and mature in him. We're being built together, like the addition of my house, built together in him.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you have a heart that reaches out to people, even people who have been your enemies. We're thankful that you were obedient to come and to die and redeem us. And then even as we go forward, you give us gifts. And such good gifts, people in our lives that minister to us and help to shepherd our souls and teach us and help us to live for you. We thank you for your grace and your mercy that all comes through Jesus. You provided it by your rule and by your selection. We thank you for grace and mercy that comes through Jesus. In all these ways, in Jesus name, Amen.