

Four Means God Uses to Produce Personal and Corporate Church Growth - Part 1

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 August 2022

Preacher: Daniel Freeman

[0:00] Thank you. It's my joy and privilege to be here with you this morning.

It's just a sweet blessing, always a privilege to be with the saints. And as I'm sure you all know, it's sweet to be with those in your own local assembly that you know and love and cherish, but it also is sweet at times to be with others elsewhere and just be able to see another local assembly of the body of Christ.

So it's our joy and privilege to be able to be here and worship with you this morning. Yeah, as was already mentioned, we're really coming here to the Word in order to worship the Lord and have Him open our hearts.

So we cannot pray enough that the Lord would do that because it's only Him that can produce any fruit. So let's turn to the Lord one more time briefly. Heavenly Father, we thank You for the Word that You have given to us, for its clarity, for its absolute truthfulness and certainty, and for the guidance and direction that it gives for every aspect of our lives so that we can be fully pleasing to You.

Lord, I pray that You would open our eyes, open our hearts to understand Your Word, to receive it, to obey it.

[1:29] Lord, it's only by Your power that we can do anything. I pray that You would be with me this next hour, that I would teach with clarity and what You have said, and that You would be with all of us, that we would submit under Your Word.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Well, as I'm sure many of you know, there are few experiences that are more frustrating or discouraging than having the wrong tool for the job.

I experienced this just this past week. I was changing out the rubber cover over the latch on the hatchback of our van, which had been totally degraded by Arizona heat, and changing it out for a new one.

Well, the new one had come with this little right-angle screwdriver that you needed to get at the screws. And so I was kind of working it out. It kind of started, and it got stuck in the rubber, and it was having a hard time. Well, I had a little ratcheting right-angle screwdriver in my tool bag that I could have gone and grabbed, but I'd already gone back to the tool bag too many times during that little project, and so I didn't want to do that.

So I spent several minutes fiddling around with this complimentary screwdriver, not making a whole lot of progress, until I finally gave in, went back to my tool bag, grabbed the right tool for the job, and got it done in a tenth of the time that I'd spent fiddling around with it.

[2:42] Having the right tool for the job matters, and then actually making use of the right tool that you have also matters. Otherwise, you'll be left in frustration and not accomplishing a whole lot.

Well, that's true in the Christian life as well. If you don't have and make use of the tools that God has given you to grow in your walk as a Christian, your Christian life will be a bit like my experience with that cheapo screwdriver.

You'll be stuck fiddling around, wondering, why is this not working? I'm trying all these things. I'm trying to grow, but nothing much seems to be happening. And sadly, many Christians seem to be in that position.

They do not maybe even understand what the tools are that God has given them for their Christian life. And maybe even when they understand those, they don't make use of them as they could. But mercifully, the Lord has not left us without clarity in His Word as to what those tools are and how we are to pursue them. If you hear last week, my pastor, Pastor Roy, was here and he taught

you from 1 Peter.

[3:48] And there, that is actually one of the means that God has given, how we are to long for the pure spiritual milk of the Word so that we can grow up into salvation.

And so there is one of the primary means that God has given us, His Word. And there are lots of ways that His Word needs to be into our lives. And we're kind of going to look in our text this morning at some of how God brings His Word into our lives in a way that brings about that growth. The tools identified in our text this morning are also going to do that. And whereas 1 Peter 2 kind of took a more individual view, our text this morning is going to look at us as a corporate body of Christ, as the local church.

This text will be in Ephesians this morning, so you can begin to turn there in Ephesians 4. Now this was a letter written by Paul to the saints who were in Ephesus. As you may know, the six chapters of Ephesians divide quite neatly into three chapters of doctrinal instruction about salvation, and then three chapters that tell us how to live and to walk worthy of that salvation that the Lord has given us. Three chapters, Paul just lays out with great clarity just what the Lord has done for us in giving us mercy and grace in Christ. And then three more chapters where he says what that means for how we need to live.

[5:17] Now you can see that hinge right in Ephesians 4 verse 1, where Paul writes, Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, exhort you to walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called.

But what's interesting is that Paul doesn't quite get right to that just yet. He has to spend some time on one more subject before he can tell us, okay, let's get to all the practical details of how we walk. Well, what does he have to say? If you drop down to chapter 4 verse 17, you'll see that he says, Therefore this I say and testify in the Lord that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk. So he picks up the theme of how we are to walk in verse 17, but we have all this section of verses 2 to 16 that come before that. A bit of a parenthesis, you might say, that he has to get to first. These verses are all about the church, all about the local church, and how it drives growth in the life of the believer. It's kind of like Paul is teaching us to ride a bike, and he's spent three chapters telling us about a bike, and what it is, and how it operates, and what it's made of, and some of the controls on it.

[6:32] Then he's about to have us jump on and start getting into the real practical nuts and bolts of how to do it, but then he realizes that he's got to teach us one more thing first, otherwise we're just going to be sitting there on the bike, kind of awkwardly walking along.

He's got to teach us about the pedals. How do we actually engage this bike and use it to get where we need to go? So this really section that we're going to look at this morning is just crucial, and our text this morning is going to be in verses 11 to 16, which comes at the culmination of this section. This is what the church is for the growth of the believers. These are the pedals that are going to drive us forward in the Christian life. So Ephesians chapter 4 verses 11 to 16 gives us four means that the church grows.

Four means the church grows. Or we could say that God has revealed that it is through these four ways that he will grow his church both as a corporate body and then also as us as individual members of it.

Because these are the means that God has revealed for us to grow, our responsibility then is going to be to diligently pursue those means and diligently seek to take advantage and use the tools that the Lord has given us.

[7:49] Now, I have the privilege of being here not only this week but next week, and so we're going to actually cover this text over these two weeks. So we'll only get to the first two of those means this week, and then you'll have to come back next week to get the second two.

Four means the church grows. And I'll read the text beginning in verse 11. And he himself, that is Christ, gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ, so that we are no longer to be children tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming.

But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is Christ, from whom the whole body, being joined and held together by what every joint supplies,

according to the properly measured working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

So our first means is going to be in verse 11 and the beginning of verse 12. So that means number one for how the church grows, Christ's hard-won equipping gifts.

Christ's hard-won equipping gifts. These are not the only gifted people that we see in verse 11, four different types of men that God has given as gifts to His church.

[9:41] They're not the only gifted people that God has given to His church. All of us as saints are gifted by God. But these are strategic gifts because of the role that God has designed them to have in the life of the body.

They start the process that allow all the other three means that we're going to see over the next couple weeks to operate on all cylinders. Now our section begins in the middle of a larger section, and you can see that where it says, and He Himself gave.

So we've got to quickly touch on the first ten verses of chapter 4 so we can kind of see what this and is adding something onto. So going back to chapter 4, we've already seen that this section is all about the church.

This was one last section of doctrinal instruction before Paul can get to the very practical of commands and how we're supposed to walk. In verse 1 of chapter 4, Paul gives the initial command for us to walk worthy of the calling.

Then he describes the manner that we're to live that worthy walk with all humility, with gentleness, with patience. Then he gives the means by which we are to live out those virtues by bearing with one another in love and by being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

[11:02] Both of those things are clearly not stuff you can do alone. You have to have others around you to bear with. You have to have others around you to keep the unity of the Spirit with.

So it only makes sense in an assembly of other people with whom you do those things. And so Paul turns to the basis of our unity in verses 4 to 6. We read this earlier in our corporate reading.

And what a broad basis of unity that we have as believers. It's sweet being in a different church than I normally am because you just feel and sense that unity that we have.

Paul lists seven areas in which we are one with other believers. This unity of the Spirit which God created and we need to work to keep. There's one body. That is, there's one church, the body of Christ.

There's one Spirit. Hope of calling. Lord, faith, baptism, and God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. As believers, we are one.

[12:06] But in the church, there's not only a unity that is divinely created, but also a diversity that is equally divinely created. Verse 7 brings us to that diversity.

To each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. We have each been given grace. Here, this word grace refers to that grace gift given by Christ through the Spirit that we commonly call a spiritual gift.

Everyone has received a spiritual gift. It's all individualized to what the Lord wants you to do and the Lord's plan for you in His church. But each one of us has been given a gift.

And it's according to the measure of Christ's gift. It's in proportion to the generosity of Christ. None of us have been gyped. Nobody's left there standing like, oh, all the gifts have been given out and I'm left with nothing.

No one is in that position. We all have these. That is why he says, according to the measure of Christ's gift. Now, in verses 8 through 10, Paul's going to go back to Psalm 68 and he's going to show that Christ's giving of gifts flows as a consequence of His ascension in victory to glory.

[13:23] And that ascension itself implies a prior humble descent in order to save His people. Now, this quotation is from Psalm 68, verse 18.

And it is difficult to interpret in some of the details, but the main thrust is clear. And we could say it this way. Christ won the authority to give the gifts He gave by victoriously saving His people. And He did that through humbly coming among them before being exalted. And this is just like how the Lord saved His people back in the Old Testament. So, He's really not going to take Psalm 68 and say, this is talking directly about Christ.

This is fulfilled specifically in Christ. But He's going to say, this is like what the Lord did in the Old Testament. He's using it as an analogy. Psalm 68 is this grand panorama of the Lord's victory of His people.

It takes them all the way from the trek through the wilderness on the exodus out of Egypt and then sweeps all the way through until you have the Lord's kingdom established and all the nations coming and worshipping the Lord.

[14 : 32] It's this grand panorama of the Lord's victory. And what's really key about it is, and why Paul uses it, is because it begins with a descent.

It talks about God who is among His people in the wilderness. It describes Him as Him who rides through the deserts in verse 4. But by the end of it, in verse 33, He is described as Him who rides upon the highest heavens.

That's the heavens of heaven. More extreme superlative than you normally see. And I think Paul picks that up in verse 10 when he describes Christ as ascended far above the highest heavens. So Paul is definitely picking up on this theme of how the Lord came down among His people He came down at Sinai and then dwelt among them in the tabernacle went with them, saved them, then ascended back up and then from there He gives gifts.

You see that at the end of Psalm 68 that in verse 36 He is the giver of strength and might to His people. So there you can kind of see the big picture. We're not dealing with Ephesians 4, 8 through 10.

[15 : 39] We're picking up after that. So I just wanted to briefly cover that so you get the idea. But again, the main point that needs to come into our own text is that Christ won the authority to give the gifts He gave by victoriously saving His people.

And He did that through humbly coming among them before being exalted. That's why these are hard-won gifts. The gifts that Christ is giving aren't just gifts that are easy.

Like when you give your kid a Tootsie Roll. What did that cost you? Very little. This is not like that. These are gifts that cost much. So what exactly then are these gifts?

Well, there's four of them. And we see them in verse 11. Apostles are listed first. And properly in the New Testament, these refer to the 11 disciples.

So the 12 minus Judas and then plus Matthias and Paul. And these were the specially appointed delegates of Christ. Prophets are New Testament prophets.

[16 : 46] These are those who received revelation directly from God and gave it to His church while the New Testament was still being written before it had been completed. Now, a couple chapters earlier in Ephesians 2, 20, Paul had already identified these apostles and prophets as the foundation that the church is built on.

They gave the revelation that the church is still being built on. We still always go back to the Word of God. That's what we build upon as the church. And they were the ones who were the human instruments that God gave that revelation through.

Because they're the foundation, they're not needed anymore. We have the full scriptures. We have everything that God intended for us to have and everything that we need for life and godliness.

Now, evangelists are next. These are generally proclaimers of the gospel. And the New Testament doesn't say a whole lot specifically about this group of people. So there's been a lot of speculation over the years of who exactly they are.

The early church historian Eusebius described them as zealous heralds who follow the example of the apostles. For the increase in building up of the divine word. And I think that gets pretty well at the idea here.

[18 : 01] Today, we would probably call these men church planters. These are trailblazers who go out to where there is not a church established, where Christ has not named. And they go and they preach the gospel and they see a local church raised up as God saves individuals and gathers them together into a local assembly.

Pastors and teachers are grouped together by Paul, putting them in close association, but not necessarily saying that they're the same group. These pastors and teachers are men that Christ has given for the continuing care of local church assemblies.

Like this one. The word pastor means shepherd, as you know. And it literally referred to those who kept sheep, who walked around in the fields and watched and cared for sheep.

It's a favorite biblical term for God's leaders that he appoints. There's probably no term in the whole of scripture that is as used of God's leaders that he appoints than this term shepherd.

And God himself identifies as a shepherd. And Christ in the church is the chief shepherd, 1 Peter 5, under whom other men, like Pastor Jim, are appointed as under shepherds.

[19:10] And the emphasis of the shepherd idea is on this tender, closing, care, and leading and feeding, that a sheep needs so much care and so much watchfulness and so much help with just the daily routines of life that a shepherd is someone who provides that in humble, gentle, tender care.

Teachers are those who patiently and incessantly impart knowledge until it is fully and thoroughly absorbed by the students that the student then becomes like the teacher.

Jesus said in Luke 6, 40, that a disciple or a pupil, when he is fully trained, will be like his teacher. And that word trained is actually the same word equip that we see in our text.

Because Christ's purpose in giving these gifts is not just for them to do their thing, for them to be up front and to get accolades and praise. It is for the equipping of the saints, as we already heard this morning in the prayer, for the work of service.

So Cottonwood Bible Church, this verse explains why God gave you your pastor. This is why. For the equipping. The pastor and the teachers that God has given you are for the purpose of equipping you.

[20:26] The idea of equipping is to put into the proper condition for some purpose. Every tool we could say that you would need gets supplied, and you get all the training that you need to properly use those tools.

The verse I just mentioned, Luke 6, 40, uses, again, the same word group to speak of a pupil or disciple being fully trained or equipped and now like a teacher.

So, what you are fully equipped and fully prepared to do is the work of service, or as some translations say, the work of ministry.

The other means are going to dwell a little bit more closely into what exactly this work is, but we could summarize it briefly here as maturing others in the body by speaking truth to them in love. If you just want a one-sentence idea, what is this work of service? Maturing others in the body by speaking truth to them in love. Now, here we should be note that it is easy for us as Christians to think of the work of ministry as the domain of the pastor.

[21:36] Now, that's what Pastor Jim does. That's what we pay him for, right? I know, hopefully, you guys don't have that idea, but it can be very common to have. This verse, however, teaches that it's the saints, which is one of Paul's favorite terms for all believers who do the work of the ministry.

Ephesians 1.1 indicates that Paul's audience in this letter was the saints who are in Ephesus. So he's talking to his whole audience when he says the saints. So ministry, again, is not Pastor Jim's job, and I know a lot of you know this well, but it's all of your jobs.

When you think of ministry in the church, that is your job. Don't think of that as anyone else's job. It's everyone's job, and it's your job. It's your responsibility to do. Pastor Jim's job is to train, to prepare, and equip you so that you can go do your job.

The term used for giving here indicates that Christ deliberately transferred these gifts to be made use of by the church.

So these gifted men are now available to the church so that their gifts can be actively used in training and equipping the members of the church. All right. So that's kind of this first means, but at this point, let's maybe pull the car over just a little bit and think, what does this mean?

[22:59] What are the implications of how well we're doing in making use of this gift that the Lord's given us for our growth? So he's given apostles and prophets who wrote the New Testament so that we would have certain and sure truth to speak to one another and live out in front of one another to mature one another.

And he's given pastors and teachers in local churches to equip all the saints with truth so that they can grow the body by speaking truth and love. Now, from these realities, I can tell you, on the authority of God's word, that God wants you to be a part of a local church body.

That is God's desire for you as a believer under the teaching of shepherds. Even the structure, as we saw of Ephesians 4, brings out how crucial the church is to your growth as a believer.

If you are not under the faithful teaching of the word as part of a local church, you're really cutting yourself off from a primary tool that God's given you for your growth. And perhaps some of you can look back at times or seasons in your life where you weren't heavily involved in a local church and you weren't under faithful shepherding and teaching from those that God has gifted.

And you can see the effects of that maybe in that season of your life. Now, it's common for people to say that they are Christians in our day but have no connection to a local church.

[24:28] I don't know how many times you've probably all had conversations with those. Are you a believer? Oh, yeah, I'm a believer. I believe in Jesus. Oh, what church do you go to? Ah, I don't really go to a church. Oh, I go to this one maybe once a month or something like that.

And that is so contrary to what the New Testament presents as a Christian. These gifts are not something that humans have imposed over some pure teaching of Jesus.

These are actually gifts of Christ, these leaders that God has given. And they come not as some imposition of hierarchical authority but as gifts for our good.

Calvin is directly on point here. He says, What work is more excellent than to produce the true and complete perfection of the church? And yet, this work, so admirable and divine, is here declared by the apostle to be accomplished by the external ministry of the word, the word that's delivered and preached through these pastors and teachers.

That those who neglect this instrument should hope to become perfect in Christ is utter madness. If the edification of the church proceeds from Christ alone, which it does, he surely has a right to prescribe in what manner the church shall be edified.

[25:43] But Paul expressly states that according to the command of Christ, no real union or perfection is attained but by the outward preaching. We must allow ourselves to be ruled and taught by men.

Those who neglect or despise this order choose to be wiser than Christ. Christ. We are under obligation to the gifts that Christ has given to place ourselves under men that God has appointed to lead and to shepherd and to teach His church.

But it goes beyond simply being in a church, being part of a church. Imagine that you gave a teenage son or daughter a phone and you gave it to them and you told them, the reason I'm giving this to you is so that you can contact me and let me know when you're out doing something away from the rest of the family.

And your son or daughter, they use their phone all the time talking to their friends. They're texting, they're calling constantly, but they never actually call or text you when they're away on your own. Now they might come to you and say, hey mom, dad, thanks for the phone. I'm using it all the time. But they're not using it for what you gave it for. So consider that as we think about these gifts that Christ has given.

[26:55] Are you using them for the purpose that Christ gave them to you for? Again, we saw that purpose was equipping for the work of the ministry. So you can get all kinds of use and benefit from a pastor and all kinds of maybe subset ways that the Lord's able to bless us through the pastors that we've been given.

But this text is saying that the primary reason is for you to be equipped. So that's the primary reason. Is that how you approach your pastor? Is that how you approach coming under his ministry?

Now some questions might help us diagnose this. Do you come to Sunday eager to be trained in the work of service and being given and equipped with the tools to do it?

Do you seek out and proactively pursue learning from your shepherds and teachers for that equipping? Are you like a hypothetical teenager? You're using Christ's gifts for everything but the reason that he says he gave them for.

So this brings us now to our second means that the church grows, which is the saints' persistent servant work. This is in verse 12 and then 13, the saints' persistent servant work.

[28:15] Another way we could say this is that all believers must continue pressing on in the work of service until the job is done. The saints' persistent servant work.

So verses 12 and 13, he says, he gave these gifted men for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

So what is the nature of this work of service or work of ministry that we've been talking about? Now the term work is defined as zealous, useful activity that stands in contrast to laziness on one hand and mere busyness on the other.

So it's both zealous activity and it's useful activity. Now by calling it the work of service, Paul's indicating that that this work has the quality of personally rendered service to someone else. In other words, we could put this together and say this work of service is work. It's not easy, it's not glamorous, and it's not for yourself. That's kind of the way to summarize work of service, not easy, not glamorous, not for yourself.

[29 : 39] Now, when you hear about a task that we saints are equipped to do that is not easy, not glamorous, and not for yourself, it doesn't take long that it's entirely contrary to our culture and to our own flesh, if we're honest.

We are obsessed as a culture with the easy and labor-saving, the self-promoting and reputation-building, as well as the self-gratifying and self-fulfilling.

And our flesh loves those things. And Paul's culture was no different. It was very interesting that as I was studying the background to this particular word, service, they discovered that the Greeks highly valued what this resource I was looking at called the perfect development of individual personality. The perfect development of individual personality. It went on to say that they thought that the ideal man would only serve his own desires or perhaps he might serve others around him, but just for the benefit that would end up coming back to him through service to others.

And as a result, they viewed service which necessarily focused on others and their needs, they saw that as demeaning.

[30 : 54] Now that's not contributing to the development of my own individuality. Well, if that sounds familiar, it's because at that point, at least, it would be hard to find a more apt description of our own culture.

So Paul's words today are as crucial as they were to the Ephesians 2,000 years ago. We are to be equipped to perform a task that is not laborious, that is laborious, that is not glamorous, and is not for ourselves, which starts to help you understand why you need shepherding and teaching to be trained to do this task.

It's not going to come naturally. It's not going to come easily. So Paul is now going to move from the essential character of the saints' task, and now he's going to describe the specific activity of that task.

He says it's for the building up of the body of Christ. This phrase further defines the work of service and indicates the result, the result of the work of service.

The body of Christ is built up, or as some translations, edified, when the saints do the work of service. This term, building up, or edification is borrowed from the world of construction, where you would build up or build up a building, an edifice, that same word idea.

[32 : 13] And implied in this is a process that's not instant, but takes effort to build piece by piece. Our own church, Northwest Community Church, is in the middle of a building project for a new children's ministry building, and it's been a long time in the process.

Already now, at least a year that we've been raising funds for it and planning and designs and getting permits, and now we're just barely starting to see something actually happen.

And that's what a building process is like. That's how it takes. Now, when we apply this building idea to a body, which is how the church is described here, that brings in the ideas of growing, maturing, and strengthening, how a body is built up.

Now, at this point, some of you may be thinking, like, wait a minute, I thought that Christ built the church. Didn't he say in Matthew 16 and give the promise, I will build my church?

So this is a promise that Christ said he is going to do. Why is this now described as a task that the saints are to do? So who builds it, Christ or the saints?

[33 : 21] Well, the answer is yes. Christ builds his church by means of his saints. It's much like how God promises to care for our physical needs.

He promises to supply us with what we need, but the ordinary means he uses to do that is our own working, our own getting out and getting a job and working. We understand this.

If someone comes and says, oh, I'm just trusting the Lord to supply my needs. Like, oh, that's great. That's great. What are you doing? Oh, I'm just kind of sitting around and waiting for the Lord to supply my needs. Oh, are you trying to get a job?

No, no, I'm just trusting the Lord. He's going to do it. He's promised to supply all my needs. You know, we would obviously see the disconnect there. Yes, God has promised that, but he's also told you how he wants that to be done, the means that he's given for that to be accomplished, and it's

much the same here in the church.

Christ has promised to build his church and he will do it, but the means that he is appointed to do that is the saints' work of service. So, if you want the church to grow, if you want to see other believers around you mature in Christ, we need to pray for that.

[34 : 32] We need to desire that, but if you're not engaging yourself in the work of service, then it's much like our hypothetical and unfortunately not so hypothetical example of someone trusting in the Lord to provide for their needs.

The trust in the faith that the Bible talks about is an active trust that pursues what God has given us to accomplish what he's promised. Now, you may be thinking, okay, we have this work of service to build up the body of Christ and we're tasked to do that with, okay, but how long do we do this?

When are we done? When do we finish this building project? And how zealously do we need to be giving ourselves to this work? So Paul answers these questions for us in verse 13.

When is it that we can take our foot off the accelerator pedal of pursuing this work? So verse 13 says, it begins with until, until, this is when we need to go.

And there's a lot in this verse, but what Paul is essentially saying is that the saints must continue building up the body of Christ until everyone who's outwardly part of the church is truly saved and truly united with the rest of the body in faith.

[35 : 49] And everyone is brought to a complete Christ-like spiritual maturity. So this word, until we all attain, refers to reaching a destination.

It's much like the English word arrived, and you could actually kind of say, until we've arrived, which, you know, we often say, I haven't arrived, which is true, we haven't. And so that gives us a bit of an idea of how long we need to continue this work.

The first goal, we could say, is for everyone to arrive at the unity of faith and of the true knowledge or the full knowledge of the Son of God. Now, both of these phrases, I believe, refer to salvation.

Being united with the rest of the body in genuine faith and being united with the rest of the body in a true experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. We've already seen in verses 3 to 5 that the unity of faith is something that all genuine believers already possess by the Spirit and are now called to maintain.

Similarly, the term full knowledge or true knowledge is a common New Testament word that refers not merely to a head knowledge or an understanding of something, but a deep knowledge of those things given by the Spirit and thus realized in day-to-day experience.

[37 : 04] This is a knowledge that we gain at conversion and then continue to grow in. Sadly, we understand, though, that like Jesus taught in the parable of the tares sown among the wheat, that in the outward body of the church there are going to be those who are not genuinely saved, whether that is children who have grown up and have not yet come to faith in Christ, or whether that are those who are coming in from the outside and maybe outwardly associating with Christ but without a true faith and true knowledge of the Son of God.

These are going to be a part of the church. But what's going to happen? We can't be complacent about it. Paul's here saying that part of what the goal of this work of service that we're not done until we reach it is for all of those who are visibly a part of the church to truly be united in faith with the rest of believers and to truly experience this knowledge of the Son of God.

Now, I say this knowing some of you may well be in this category. You may have grown up in the church or be right now growing up in the church and you may have all kinds of outward knowledge about God and about Christ and who He is.

But have you actually attained to the unity of the faith and the true knowledge of the Son of God? Do you actually have that experienced deep unity with other believers of together you take God at His word and you trust Him entirely?

Our work is not done until all of those who are outwardly part of our local church have attained that, have reached that. Now, the second goal is for everyone to reach what we might call full spiritual maturity.

[38 : 42] Paul states this a couple of different ways. First says, until we all attain to the mature man. This word mature has the idea of wholeness, of being fully arrived at this process of development.

James 3.2 uses the terminology of mature man and talks about that. Someone who is able to restrain his tongue. That person is a mature, a perfect man able to restrain his whole body as well.

And here, in James, he identifies the control of our speech as the marker, the indicator of someone who's mature. Not because that's the only area that we need to mature in, but because typically that is the most difficult and the longest process for us to mature in.

The mature man is a whole man, not lacking in any spiritual grace, self-control over his whole body, particularly his speech. He is fully mature in all Christ-like virtues.

So, it's a lot to get your arms around. I know I'm not there yet. I would imagine that none of you would say that you're there yet. And so it's safe to say that none of us here are there yet.

[39:49] So our job is not done yet. But we're not done with our job. And Paul's actually not done describing what we need to do either. He goes even further.

As saints, we must continue laboring selflessly to see others in the church built up and edified until we all attain, he says, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

And Paul just piles on the terms here. I love it. Measure is a quantity or proportion of something.

Stature is the idea of full development of maturity, or you might say capacity.

And then fullness is the sum total of something. So putting it all together, we might say that we are to attain to the proportion of mature capacity of all that Christ is.

The proportion of mature capacity of all that Christ is. Now, it would have been enough to keep us at this task until the Lord returns or until the Lord calls us home if he had simply said, until we all attain to the measure of Christ or until we all attain to the stature of Christ or until we all attain to the fullness of Christ.

[41:00] Any one of those would have been sufficient to say, okay, we're at this task for the duration. But he says, until we all attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, until everyone in our churches has met that mark, your job as a Christian, as a saint, is not done and my job as a Christian, as a saint, is not done.

So we can't be complacent about this. It's not like, oh, yeah, that task, it's gonna, there's a lot to be done and it'll take a while but, you know, it kind of, like it's gonna happen.

We're gonna get there in the time allotted. No, we're not gonna get there. And so we need to pursue this task with zeal and with energy if we are to get close as the Lord desires.

It's very easy, as you know, to start a task and not follow through. I could easily, as I'm sure you could as well, list off a whole ton of projects and studies and who knows what that you've begun and it's gone out well.

You had some energy, excitement about it. You got some, somewhere on the project and then the excitement waned, the energy waned. Maybe you decided, ah, is this really that important? You started to pay some of the cost of doing it and it fell by the wayside.

[42:17] Maybe you found a way to wrap it up a little bit cleaner than you originally intended to and there's just less of a project or maybe it's like most of my projects just kind of sat around in an unfinished state. That is the easy thing to do.

And sometimes with some of my projects, frankly, it's for the better that they were never finished.

But we can't allow that to happen with this project of building up the church, of maturing the church. Let's consider for a minute what it would mean for our approach to relationships that we have in the church if we really believed and understood what God is telling us here.

When you've known someone for a while, it's very easy to start considering them as, oh, they're doing all right. Oh, oh yeah, Brother Bob, oh yeah, he's all right.

You know, is he perfect? No, no, but we all, who is perfect, right? You know, we all have faults, we all have failings. And it's very easy to gain this complacency. It's very easy to do this in marriage where you become complacent with the areas of your husband or your wife where he or she is not like Christ.

[43:24] And while we should not certainly be impatient with our spouses and we should be gracious and gentle as the Lord matures them, we can't be complacent and set the bar lower than where God has put it.

God's word is telling us that as saints, we need to be engaged in the servant work of building up others until everyone has measured up to the fullness of how mature Christ is.

And we tend to put the goal much lower and something along the lines of until everyone is a decently behaved person, you know, then that's a pretty good, pretty good standard.

Until everyone is, you know, got a good grasp of the Bible and lives it out all right and is doing something okay. Maturity, as Christ desires it to happen in his church, is not going to happen if we

are content to see someone mature a little bit and then plateau.

It's not going to happen if we are content to just let someone stay in their immaturity. And we're going to get next week into a lot of the specific ways that the Lord says we can do that.

[44 : 36] But Christ must always be the standard that we measure ourselves and everyone else by. Nothing else can be the standard. No human person can be substituted for that. No matter how long those around you have been in Christ, we all have plenty of room to grow.

You may have been in Christ for 50 years and you know that you're not like Christ yet. And so we all have room to grow. No one is mature enough. No one has reached the point where we can say, hey, I no longer need those in the body around me helping me to grow.

This ought to shape how we view friendships in the body. Are your friendships devoted to building one another up? To helping each other grow and mature?

This is going to be a work. It's not going to feel great in the moment. It's going to require that selfless kind of service and giving yourself, dying to self again and again.

There's that relationship and there's this immaturity and I've got to be patient with them again and I've got to be gracious to them again because they're not where they need to be yet. But Christ wants to get them there and I want to get them there and I know that Christ has promised to get them there and I know that by His word He's given everything that's needed and through His church to get them there so I can be patient, I can be gracious another day.

[45 : 57] This is just so wonderful and this captures your vision of what the church can be. The church can be like Christ where each one of us is growing and maturing to this standard where Christ is our goal and Christ is our aim and none of us are content to be where we are, where we've been, where we would be if we continue growing at the pace we are.

But where we could be if Christ took us there and if Christ used those around us to bring us there. That is the goal. That is the aim. That is why God's given you this church.

You know, look around you. That's why those who are sitting around you are here. Christ has perfectly arranged this church, this local assembly, brought everyone here in His providence so that you could be the means that grow one another.

The fruit when this is pursued is just wonderful. It's divinely marvelous because God works. And we're going to see this in just clear detail in the next week.

But what a compelling picture this is to motivate us to serve one another. So hopefully you've clearly seen from the scriptures the importance of growing as a church and are encouraged to more zealously pursue this task.

[47 : 15] Being equipped for your task by the shepherd that the Lord's given you and the teachers that the Lord's put in your midst and to more zealously then pursue engaging in that task with energy.

These are two means. Christ's hard-won equipping gifts and the saints' persistent servant work. So if your spiritual growth, you look back and it's been slower than it ought to have been.

These are two tools which are the right tool for the job. You're not going to lose heart and be frustrated with these tools. So this humble attitude and determined persistence that you must have to work to mature others and how you're equipped through the gifts that Christ has given.

Now, again, you may be asking, okay, I have this burden now, but how do I do it? Well, you'll have to come back next week or you can read ahead to the next verses in our section.

But again, as I said very briefly, it's to mature others by speaking the truth in love. Speaking the truth and living out the truth in love before others.

[48 : 29] And we'll see that with great clarity. So let's go to the Lord. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your church. Lord, we are blessed to be saved beyond measure.

and yet, beyond that, you've added us to your body. You've placed us under shepherds and under those that you've given us to care for us and to teach us and equip us.

And you've placed us with others around us who can help us to mature. Lord, we're astounded by your mercy towards us and we confess, Lord, our failure to use what you've given us.

And we ask that you would give us the grace to do that, to pursue the means, to use the tools, that your church would be what you desire it to be, Lord, that you would be honored and glorified as we are built up and become more like you, Lord Jesus.

That is our desire and that is our prayer. Lord, we know that nothing can be accomplished unless you bless, unless you give the desire, unless you give the energy and the power.

[49:42] And so, we look to you, Lord, to work through our efforts. In Jesus' name, Amen. Let's take a minute perhaps to just consider and reflect on what the Lord has said in his word. and how we might begin to live it out. Amen. Amen.