

Gifts for Preparing God's People

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[0 : 00] There was a man who was shipwrecked on a desert island. He did an amazing job and moved into his own survival skills.

And after many, many months, he managed to attract the attention of a boat that was passing by. And as the rescuers came onto the island to take him back to society again, he was proud to show them what he'd achieved.

And as he showed them, he said, here is the house that I've built. They were very impressed. This is where I sleep. And here's the kitchen. This is where I store my food, the fish that I've kept, the berries, the fruit that I've collected.

And here is the church where I worship every day. And they were so impressed. One of the rescuers said, what's the other building over there?

The man sort of shuffled, looked at his feet and looked embarrassed and said, that's the church I used to worship at. The thing this morning is we talk about unity and maturity in the body of Christ.

[1 : 15] That we should all grow into that maturity that Paul is encouraging the people of Ephesus in our writing.

That they were setting up new structures. They were beginning new things. This was all new to them. This was the importance of preparing them to be one.

In amongst all our scriptures told us. As we would know that we can be moved. We can be shifted. Thrown all over the place. Unless we focus on the main thing.

The main thing that Paul is talking about here. Is this new sense of pioneering. New, innovative, courageous, exciting, risky.

So if I put those words together. Courageous, exciting, pioneering, innovative. In a sentence. Does that express God's wider church to you today?

[2 : 15] Because it should. It should be exciting, innovative. I have to admit I was struggling with that myself a bit. Paul is writing a group of people who are working things out.

And I had to passionately and actively rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. To become the people that they were called to be. Nothing changes.

We need to be that people. Maybe that is the catalyst. Earnestly and passionately seeking the gifts of the Holy Spirit. To build us up as one in unity.

Just as he would want us to. Why? Because to be the church that reflects God's purposes. To be that thing where people walk in through the door.

To be where we meet people in the everyday. And they receive something of God's welcome. And are drawn and attracted to him.

[3 : 15] Do we see the church and being followers of Jesus? Disciples. One people. Being an adventure. Do you ever feel to say you've grown out of the adventure?

Be honest. The issue is here. Is Paul is saying to an early church. Planning and preparation goes into what he does. He doesn't do it alone.

Unity is at the heart of the adventure. Of the Christian faith. And hence we are supposed to be as one. Paul is saying. Look at the gifts. If you are planning.

And preparing to follow me. That the gifts might flourish in each and every one of us. As we think about ourselves as one. As one body.

Not just here. As God's wider church. And perhaps very timely as we enter this week of prayer for Christian unity. Because often in our mindset is. Oh it's that week of prayer for Christian unity.

[4 : 13] And we better pray for Christian unity this week. We should be 24-7. 365 days of the year. Thinking about what it means for us all.

To be the body of Christ. How does that work together? Where do we lose our way? Paul is saying here. There are qualities in building and growing for adventure.

Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient. Bearing with one another. In love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.

Humble and gentle. Is that a strength? I think it is. It's what I see in Jesus. Perhaps the most courageous and powerful person that I've ever known.

And will know. And here it is. As Jesus' ministry is marked out with humbleness and gentleness. You know. Gentleness isn't weakness.

[5 : 12] Humbleness isn't weakness. It's a great strength. This is why we earnestly seek the spiritual gifts. And you don't have to be impatient.

They come. We ask. We seek earnestly. If you know me well enough. You know I want everything yesterday. You know. We need to patiently but earnestly seek those gifts.

To build up the body of Christ. Bearing with one another. In love. It says though. When somebody wants to come to you and say.

Oh. I need to tell you something in love. Head for an air raid shelter. And you know. Because probably it isn't in love.

We have to learn how to talk and act and be. In kindness and in love. To build up the body. When unity fractures. When unity fractures.

[6 : 11] Love is invariably lost. I don't need to tell us that. We would know that from our own time in life. No wonder as Paul is spelling it out.

Make every effort. Make every effort. To keep the unity of the spirit. Through the bond of peace. All that the spirit speaks to us.

And embraces us. Why? Because the essential is. One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One God and father of all.

Who is over all. And through all. And in all. One God. You know. Post-reformation. Accelerated the growth of dynasty.

Diversity. And maybe. We may see. That is fracture. Of what was. God's view. Of the church. And through us. Should have been.

[7 : 09] And in this global body. Of more than. Two million. Billion Christians. We are now. Separated. Into thousands. Of denominations.

And in fact. I think at the last count. It is estimated. There are. Forty five. Thousand. Different. Christian. Christian. Denominations. Perhaps.

Just. Because. Of that. We need. To refocus. Again. On the purposes. Of God. In the power. Of the Holy Spirit. You know.

Put aside. Our historic. Differences. Our disagreements. Our deviations. Our preferences. Our mistakes. Maybe more importantly. Our insecurities.

In order to come back. Empowered by the Holy Spirit. To move. As a people of God. You know. Here is the early church. Preparing. To be one.

[8 : 06] To go out. And impact. The world. Where did we lose. The impact. And where are we losing it. Maybe to come back. And be that church.

That Paul is talking about here. In the power of the Holy Spirit. In that. Growing. Maturity. And I think. There is something here.

That Paul is talking about. Let's be mature. About this thing. You know. Let's be mature. And own this. And grow into being. More like Christ. Don't. You know. It's. This. Binding us.

Together. Don't worry. I'm not going to break into. A 60s chorus here. Bind us together. But. But it's a good song. And it's a good meaning. And it brings us.

To this place. Of unity. And maturity. A person goes in at Christmas. Into the post office. And said. I'd like sort of 50 stamps. And she said.

[9 : 00] What would you like? I'd like the Christmas stamps. You know. She said. What denomination? She said. Well. I'll have 15 Roman Catholic. I'll have. Eight Protestant. I'll have the rest in Pentecostals.

Is that okay? You know. I think. We laugh. And I'm glad you did. But. When the whole message. Is about love.

Hope. Forgiveness. And being one body. We have to admit. That we are a fragmented body. We need. To be one. And it starts with us.

You know. We can point out. We can point our finger. Wherever we like. But invariably. It points back at ourselves. And we become. One body. One Lord.

One faith. One baptism. One God. And Father of all. Who is over all. And through all. And in all. Even amongst Christians today. The verse may not seem.

[9 : 56] To be politically correct. Isn't that a shame? You know. That your. Your God. In your own denomination. Become. Actually. Who your God.

Who is made. Within your denomination. And that is really sad. You know. It's like those teddy bears. That you buy at the mall. You know. I can go in. And I can make it look like.

Whatever I want it to be. To suit my preference. And to suit whatever it wants to be. You know. I had a bit in here. And I had a bit in there. No. One God.

In unity. Even amongst Christians today. You know. In the early church. There was plenty of those gods around. That's why Paul is reinforcing this point. That's why Paul is saying.

Don't choose the God that you want. Choose the one true God. To follow. In unity. In maturity. And in love. No wonder Paul is passionate.

[10 : 50] And insistent. About this continued message. This was the new covenant. This was the reminder. Of the early church. About adventure.

Most people. I meet. And talk to. Who aren't yet Christians. I love that term. Who aren't yet Christians.

It gives some hope. Don't really bother. About denomination. They haven't got a clue. And maybe they don't want to. Because.

The fact is. I watched the other night. My son invited me. To join him. Worshipping. At their church online. Up in Brighton. And they had this lovely term.

That they used. Of. We're here to exist. To invite people. To meet with Jesus. That is our sole purpose. To invite people.

[11 : 44] To meet with Jesus. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. What denomination. They're being invited to. They're being invited. To meet. With Jesus. And I watched this.

And I thought. As we earnestly. Seek the gifts. And name those gifts. More and more. Amongst ourselves. As a body. To encourage. And build each other up. In the body.

That we've been given. And we discover. How to use those gifts. We get courageous. And confident. In the adventure. Of inviting people. To meet with Jesus. Just like the early church.

Can we do that? I'm sure we can. Maybe. As we talk about. These spiritual gifts. Today.

We would ask. Earnestly. More and more. Why? To build up the body. The eye doesn't do. What the foot does. It's unique. The hand doesn't do. What the ear does.

[12 : 41] But as a body. Which is what we're called. To do in the gifts. We have that unity. And that thrill. Of being who God calls us to be.

Unity. That keeps the unity. Of the spirit. And the bond of peace. Bond is an agreement. We are in agreement. We are not at variance. With one another.

We have a common purpose. Next week. Is covenant Sunday. And we will stand. And we will make. Some hefty promises. We will read the words.

Off the screen. But I don't know about you. I can't fulfill those. Unless I do them. In the power. Of the Holy Spirit. I am incapable. In my humanness.

Of fulfilling those things. That I am promising. To God. And maybe. As next week. As we prepare for that. As we stand. To renew our covenant promises.

[13 : 36] As a body of Christ. We will think this week. How can I do that. More and more. In the power. Of the Holy Spirit. I had this.

Thing as well. About unity. We met this week. As a strategy team. To think about. The year ahead. And I thought. What does that actually. Look to me for. About unity.

And I thought. One of the things. Which would be wonderful. For us. As a church. That we wouldn't have. Any notices. Asking for people. To do anything.

That actually. As a body of Christ. The Holy Spirit. Would speak to us. And we would say. I have these gifts. How can I use them. In the service of God.

No more notices. Asking for. People to do this. Or people to do welcome. That sense. The Holy Spirit. Speaking to each. And every one of us. That says. How can I serve.

[14 : 34] How can I serve. Not only here. But how can I serve. In the everyday. In my workplace. In my home. In my family life. How can I serve you Lord. How can I serve you. In unity. Across this

time.

And then. I was thinking. Maturity. The thing about maturity. Is growing up. And I'll tell you. The measure. I think. Of that culture. Is in that maturity.

Of maturing so much. That we can dwell. And bear with one another. No more complaints. No more. No more criticism. Being together.

As one. That when people. Join us. They come. And they say. Wow. I've never been in. I've never been in. A setting like this. Where everybody speaks. Well of one another.

Where people are kind. Where people are understanding. Where I walk out that door. Feeling. As though I'm ready. For the week. So encouraged. And empowered. Somebody came over. And gave me a word.

[15:32] Of encouragement. That really built me up. For this week. And maybe. As well. Not only in there.

But thinking about this thing. About love. Being more disciples. In the making. Unity. Maturity. And love.

That the love. Of God. Just flows in us. And through us. In the power of the Holy Spirit. That people are drawn to us. But most importantly. Do you want to meet with Jesus?

Because they're drawn to us. That's Christian maturity. This coming week. The week of prayer. For Christian unity. Maybe we could ask. For that vision. Of adventure again.

That vision of us. Being an adventurous people. In the power. And gifts. Of God's Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[16:28] Amen. Amen.