

I am a minister of Christ

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[0 : 00] So we're reading Ephesians chapter 4, verses 1 to 16. I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you accord to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But 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 he 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 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 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.

[1 : 54] 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. Good afternoon, everyone.

So we've been in two congregations now for two months. There you go. Have you noticed the increase in needs of moving to two congregations?

The upfront needs have doubled, like service leaders and readers and prayers and kids' talks and music. These roles have doubled.

The Grace Kids teachers and helpers, that role has doubled. The sound and tech guys has doubled and you've got the cameras now and Zoom. Moving from online back into the building, all of a sudden we need to clean the place again.

[3 : 08] Our welcoming team has moved from two people at the door with a bulletin to a small army. The Lord continues to bring new people to us.

And we're no longer in such a large crowd where we can just leave it to someone else to welcome them. We can see more clearly when someone's by themselves. We have the small groups still going and playgroup and fresh and youth and sport.

Those needs continue. We've got a multitude of meals and phone calls and visits during the week. Those needs continue.

And I think moving to two congregations has revealed needs in two other ways. I think being in a smaller gathering, we've now got the opportunity to talk to the same people, in a sense, week after week.

We can go deeper in relationships. We can have a longer conversation, I think. And the more we get to know each other, the more opportunity we have to speak truth into each other's lives.

[4 : 19] The ministry we could do at a person level, it's endless. So that's one way. I think we've got more opportunity to know each other deeply.

I think a second way being in a smaller gathering has increased the need is in a large group, when this room was just chockers, it was easy to think that we really were connecting over the age differences, the different cultures, the different personalities.

And we were to some extent. But how much were we just talking to people who were just like us? I think when you're in a smaller group, it's more obvious when you do that.

You realise, I haven't talked to that person for weeks, maybe months. So I think we've got an opportunity to just be the church across all the potential divides between us.

So there's an increase in need. And that's why we've got this four-week series on every person ministry. We need all hands on deck. Let me just quickly point out that these needs aren't just the result of COVID getting in the way.

[5 : 37] Do you really think that God is restrained by coronavirus and the government restrictions? Is God subject to them? And he's just going, oh, well, this will have to do.

I don't think so. Surely not. God wants us in this context at the moment. And if this is where God wants us at the moment, then we can be confident this is the context.

He wants us not just survive but thrive in our faith and love. So let's spend four weeks in Philippians 4, 1 to 16, just picking out bits and pieces of this passage.

You could be forgiven for thinking at this point, I'm just trying to pad out the rosters. But the real change we hope this series will achieve is at a heart level, in our motivation.

If you picture a relay race, there's four runners in a relay. They could be running as hard as they can. But at the motivation level, there could be something different going on.

[6 : 52] For one runner, she might be just craving that acceptance to belong in the team. And she's just running as hard as she can so that she can finally feel like she belongs.

It's almost running out of fear of not belonging. Whereas another runner might be just completely assured that they belong to the team. But they run as hard as they can for the sake of the team. It could look exactly the same. But the motivation driving it is very different. One runner might be looking for their own glory at the end.

Another runner is looking for the glory of the team or maybe the country they're representing. So the goal of this series is our motivation level.

So let's move into Ephesians. And not be motivated by guilt or fear. But out of the overflow of God's grace to us.

[7 : 53] That we now belong to his people. So before we get to chapter 4, I think we need to first understand God's big plan.

God's eternal plan that he's working towards. If we understand where God is aiming for, what he's going to achieve, we can understand our part in it. So what is God's goal for all history?

What's he moving things towards? Can you turn with me to Ephesians 1 verse 10 to see the answer to this? Ephesians 1 verse 10.

God's goal. God's goal. To unite all things in Christ.

Things in heaven and things on earth. United in Christ. And how are people united in Christ?

[8 : 52] Here we're going to flick to chapter 2 verse 16. Chapter 2 verse 16. So there can be all sorts of divides between people.

We're seeing it at the moment in the US. The Republican versus Democrat divide. Maybe we're feeling it a tiny bit in Australia. The Victoria versus the rest of the country.

But you don't find a bigger divide between people than Jews and Gentiles. God's people and the nations. But here's the power of the cross.

Verse 16. To reconcile us both to God. All people were enemies of God in our sin.

But the power of the cross is to reconcile us both to God in one body. Christ's body. And how is that achieved?

[9 : 57] It's through the cross. Through Jesus' death. And he kills the hostility between people. Anything that divides people, the cross breaks down.

Reconciled to God, breaking down everything between us. Jesus was killed to kill the hostility between us.

To unite us in him, in God. We all need washing of our sin. And we're all given the same spirit, Christ's spirit, of humility and as a desire to serve God by loving service.

We're all washed. We're all given the same spirit. Ephesians talks about it as a new humanity. All of us come into a new people. A people, a society characterized by joyful, wholehearted laying down their lives for one another.

Not competitive. Not seeking status for themselves. Not violent like Andrew's story of the guys came across.

[11:19] But laying down your life for the other person. Isn't that a society you want to be part of? Where do we find this society?

This people? Turn to chapter 3, verse 10. We find this new, unified, loving community in the church. Through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. Even the heavenly beings are looking at the grace of God to create this new community and going, Wow.

The church is obviously not there yet. We've got to move a long way and God's working among us. But we're not where we were.

We have moved. We're not there yet. But from God's point of view, since it's his grace that guarantees that we're going to get there, the church really is unified.

[12:28] The start of chapter 4, we're not going to unpack this too much, but we are as unified as the Father, Son and Spirit is unified. We have the same Lord. We are filled with the Spirit.

We call on the same Father. We are unified and we're called to express that. So how do we become part of this community?

Before we talk about serving and doing things, we need to work out, we need to remind ourselves how are we brought into this community in the first place. And chapter 2 describes this.

We were spiritually dead towards God, each one of us walking in the ways of this world, living for me only, living for myself. We were spiritually dead towards God.

We were by nature on the brink of receiving God's wrath. We deserved it. Now at the moment in our house, we have spiders are coming out everywhere.

[13:31] I don't know if it's the season or what's going on, but spiders are everywhere. And this other night there was this particularly ugly spider and I sprayed it multiple times and it still wasn't dying and I just couldn't wait until it fell so I could just smack it.

All I felt for this spider was loathing. Jonathan Edwards famously uses the spider analogy as how God feels towards us when we live for ourselves and just completely disregard him.

It is so offensive. We were on the brink of God's wrath. But for his grace alone.

There is only one way you become part of the community. That's God's grace alone. His call to bring you in. Forgiven.

Given new resurrected life. Alive spiritually to God now. Created for good works now. A member of God's household.

[14:58] Okay, I think we're ready for chapter 4. How are we to live now that we belong to Christ's body? Christ's people. Chapter 4 verse 1.

It's the first command after three beautiful chapters of theology. And here's the command. And it kind of overarches all the rest of what we're told to do in the rest of the book.

Here it is. I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord. I urge you. That's a strong word. I beg you. I beseech you. To walk. To live.

In a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. Our calling is to live for Christ as a member of his people.

Loving like he loved. And we didn't choose to become part of this community. God called us. Can you imagine the honour it would be to play sport for Australia?

[16:01] Or the honour it would be to be elected as a member of parliament? These are high callings.

Or what about the respect I have from you all now that I'm called a pastor? That's a high calling. I heard in High Anglican Church that a bishop only recently banned the practice of people kissing the bishop's ring as an expression of submission and respect.

And I've got a ring here. Now, the only respect I get in this church is Sarah Morris saying the other day that this rose gold ring is feminine.

What about you? Are you called to ministry? If calling is about being a pastor or an evangelist on the mission field, then most Christians should conclude, no, I'm not called.

We've got to be really careful how we use this term calling. Because if we do that, then suddenly there's a divide in the body. There's those who are called to ministry and then there's ordinary Christians.

[17:32] Those who are called can feel superior and just be trying to get the affirmation of their giftedness and their status. They can be proud.

Those not called can feel inferior and be envious, trying to vie for position or just complacent. What does God say about who is called to ministry?

Look at verse 7. Verse 7. But grace was given to who? A few? The elite? Grace? No, grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Notice three important things here. Firstly, the grace here is not the salvation grace that reconciles us to God. The word grace here is what John Stott calls service grace.

So Christians receive salvation grace and Christians receive service grace. The second thing to note is that the grace is given.

[18 : 41] It's given. It's a gift from Christ who owns heaven and earth. He's the one who gives it. He decides what each of his servants will be equipped to do.

Like our salvation, so too our service. There is no grounds for boasting. We've received everything. And third, just to reiterate, we're each one.

Each one. It's really emphatic. Each one is called to serve, to minister. Grace is be given to each one. So what is your model?

What is your framework for how this church, a church, should do ministry? Should the church operate like a bus where you've got the driver and then you've got everyone else in the seats being carried and directed by the driver?

Basically, this model says the staff or the pastor is the one who does ministry. Everyone else is kind of carried by that person or maybe a few persons.

[20 : 00] Now, if that is your model of ministry, then the goal is to raise as much money to get as many staff members, as many passes going. Now, I'm hoping you don't like that model.

I hope you're concluding after today that's not a biblical model. But let me ask to see if we can think this way practically.

In theory, we might say, no, that's not a good model. But do we practically think this way? So I'm going to use an example. What about welcoming visitors? We want all visitors who walk in these doors to feel the welcoming grace of God through the gospel by our welcome of them, don't we? Is it the pastor's job to welcome people? Is it just the pastor's job to welcome people? If we think it is, isn't that really just the bus model in operation?

Here's another model for ministry. It's the pyramid model. So there's a hierarchy of positions. You've got the staff or leaders at the top. And then you've got the coordinators, the ministry coordinators, those who are youth leaders, those who are worship leaders, those who are the kids ministry leaders.

[21 : 30] So you've got this hierarchy of organisation. In this model, really, it's about those who are in positions.

Maybe it's in the welcoming team. It's those who have a position who do the ministry. But I don't think that fits. Because what we've heard is that Christ has given grace to each one.

It's not just those with a position who serve the rest. Christ has given grace to each one. If you go for a walk with your friend, and I assume you're talking while you're walking, is that ministry?

It should be. It can have profound influence. We can encourage one another, speak the truth in love in those conversations.

I don't think it's just about positions. Formal positions. So if it's not a bus, it's not a pyramid, what is God's model?

[22 : 46] What means does God use to build the church to become more like Christ? We see it most clearly in verses 15 and 16, if you want to have a look with me. 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, the body, the whole body joined and held together by every joint. With which it is equipped. When each part is working properly, it makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

The biblical model is the body. You need each bit, each function. You are essential to this church growing and functioning as the community of truth and love that we're called to be.

Christ has given serving grace to each one of us, each joint, each ligament. We need every single bit.

[23 : 59] So can I ask you again, are you called by Christ to ministry? I hope you're answering yes from scripture.

We're all called to ministry. Every person ministry. Now there is an order in Christ's church.

A process. Not an order of importance, but an order of process. Look at verses 11 and 12. 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.

So prophets and apostles finish when the written word of God was finished. But we still need evangelists. We still need pastors and teachers. And their role is to equip God's people for all the rest of ministry.

Now I know this is an oversimplification, but I still think it's true. In a sense, my calling is to teach. Your calling is to do the rest. I know it's oversimplification, but we're all called to ministry, each part. [25 : 24] Now you might be thinking, I don't feel like I have anything worthwhile to offer. I reckon that's probably because of the bus and pyramid model that's just in our head.

But in a body, you need every little bit to function properly. So during high school, I bruised one of my toes just before my soccer semifinal.

And it was just bruised. It wasn't broken. And I went to the game knowing that I'd be on the sidelines, but I wore my gear anyway, just in case. And the team was kind of struggling on the field, and I just really wanted to get out there.

It was a semifinal. We had to win. And I asked the coach if I could go on the field. He let me go on. And I was really encouraged. The team actually cheered when I came on.

I was like, oh, wow, I'm appreciated. There you go. But I was absolutely useless. I couldn't make the simplest movement pass.

[26 : 35] I was actually hurting the team by being on there because of the toe. We need the whole body functioning to function properly.

A body doesn't elevate one type of function over another. But it needs and it rejoices in all the various parts, the diversity.

The diversity is part of the wonder, the amazement. The church needs both the people who get up front and those who, at home, behind closed doors, the only person listening is God, and they're praying for people in the church.

We need both. We need both. The church needs the person who can winsomely share the gospel and those who call those who are unwell, those who cook meals.

We need those who can earn money to give. We need those who understand roofs and how to fix them. We need those who understand how parents and singles feel walking into this building.

[27 : 55] We need those with a burden for refugees and so on and so on. We need extroverts. We need introverts. We need speaking people, practical people, and up front and behind the scenes.

We need everything. But together we mature to become the community of truth and love we were called to be.

So how do you know what good works Christ has gifted you to do? To answer this, I just want to share a bit of my story and hopefully it illustrates something.

So finishing the HSC, I wanted to pick a career that avoided public speaking. That was high on my list of criteria and God's got a sense of humour.

The first time I was invited to teach at the front of a church, I was so close that morning to just calling in sick.

[29 : 03] I just felt so nervous. By my own natural temperament, I would much rather not be a leader. I would much rather not be up here right now.

But the problem was, brothers and sisters in the church, just bit by bit, said that I helped them when I spoke.

And they just urged me to keep learning and learning and learning and learning. And God can use our natural temperament, and he often does.

Our natural giftedness, things we're comfortable with, our talents, he can use those things. But don't be constrained by that. Just because you're afraid and just because you feel inadequate doesn't mean God hasn't called you to do it.

If there's a need, that's a much bigger indication that God's called you to do it, if you can see that need.

[30 : 03] So here's my two rules of thumb. I just said one. If you can see the need, that's a great starting point, that God's given you wisdom to see a need that needs addressing. Why not assume that God's called you to do it, or find someone who can?

The elders can't see everything. We can't. So if you can see a need, try and meet it. Another rule of thumb is, like in my own story, I honestly would not be in ministry if people didn't almost force me into it.

If people were saying they're helped by something you do, that's a great indication that Christ wants you to do it, I think. It's a better indication than you just thinking, I'm gifted for this.

If the church is saying, yeah, keep doing this, this is really helpful, I think that's a great indication.

So if you notice someone sitting by themselves, go talk to them.

If you notice that there could be a much better system to make something run more smoothly, then talk to those involved and see if your idea is as good as you think it is. But let me offer a warning that I know all too well, all too personally, which we just so quickly fall into.

[31 : 30] Don't confuse your gifting for your calling. You are not your gifts.

You may have music ability, but your fundamental identity is not as a worship leader.

Your identity is as a member of God's household called to live for Christ and to belong to his people. So understand your calling first and foremost and make sure we keep that central.

The gifting can change. Because here's the problem. If my identity was in my gift, so if my identity was in a pastor, as a pastor, then I must be that to be myself.

I must do it well to be myself. And all of a sudden our motivation subtly shifts from doing it for the sake of love for others to doing it to reaffirm your own identity.

[32 : 41] It's just a subtle shift in motivation. So don't confuse your calling and your gifting. You are a member of God's household.

You are called to serve Christ. That never changes. He is the head of the body and he decides what opportunities you have, you and I have.

He decides your agenda each day. He decides your capability in any given task. And he so often loves for us to feel weak so that we rely on him. He gets all the glory.

And he decides what level of success that you have in your service as well. He is the Lord. He is the Lord. So let me finish by painting two contrasting pictures of what the body looks like when we're not living up to our calling and the beauty of the body when we do.

So what does it look like if we don't walk worthy of our calling? I just want to point out three things.

The body will get a sore back.

[33 : 54] So when a person goes to a physio with a sore back, sometimes the cause has nothing to do with the back. It's some other muscle not functioning properly.

And it's putting strain on the back. When only a handful of people are carrying the burden of the needs in the church, there's going to be a sore back.

They can't handle that strain. We need each part of the body functioning in proportion. When only a handful are carrying it, it's just a recipe for resentment and burnout.

So a sore back is one thing. Another thing is the danger of just the ugliness of one part of the body being boastful. It's so ugly when a member of the body takes the gift that Christ has given them by grace to love others and then they use that to make it about themselves.

Now, I'm guilty of this. But it's so ugly. The church shouldn't be that. That's what the world does.

That's where we've come out of. It's got no place in the church.

[35 : 23] So I had a teammate on my soccer team who thought he was a striker. But he was much better for the team as a left back. Now, you don't know this person, so don't try and guess who it is.

But there's no glory as a left back. Trust me, there's not. There's glory as a striker. None as a left back. Only if you make a mistake does anyone notice.

But the team was stronger if he was a left back. Are you willing to be a left back? One last way I'll mention is when we have a really fixed or rigid idea of our giftings.

So if we think we only have this gifting, maybe one or two gifts, we just have blinkers on and we just become blind to other needs that we could be meeting because it's not my gift.

So let's not have a rigid idea of gifting. Christ can change our gifting over time according to the needs he wants us to fulfill.

[36 : 40] And nothing is beneath us. So a preacher can't say, oh, it's beneath me to take the bins out. Christ came and humbled himself, becoming like one of us.

Identifying with sinners. Shamefully accused going to his death for our sake. If he did that, nothing can be beneath us.

So let's not have a rigid idea of our gifts. Let's be flexible and look for needs to be met. Okay, so what will the church look like if we do walk worthy of our calling?

I find live orchestras one of the most emotionally powerful and peaceful experiences.

It doesn't matter if you don't share that with me. But I think it's a great picture of the unity and the diversity the church is meant to have, which will glorify God's grace in creating this community.

[37 : 52] In an orchestra, each member has their part to play. It's got a specific sound. It creates, on its own, the instrument and the sound is kind of bland.

But together, when each part does its bit, even the symbols that only might clash once during a movement, like that's all they get. One. They're just waiting, waiting, now.

That's their bit. But each part, when it works together, coming in at the right time, it creates a sound more beautiful and powerful than the sum of its parts.

That harmony. And part of the beauty of an orchestra is not just when the player comes in at the right time. Part of the beauty is when that player stops and let others come in.

For me, I think that's a picture of how the church is to function. Every part doing their bit, coordinated, motivated by love, seeking God's glory.

[39 : 05] Nowhere on earth will you find a community so unified, rejoicing in each other's contribution rather than competing.

Not seeking their own glory, not seeking their own glory, not seeking their own glory, but motivated by love, as you will in the church when it's working properly. So let's be a body that shows the watching world and the watching heavens.

The incredible grace of being called into this new community of truth and love. I want to finish by reading chapter 5, verses 1 and 2.

Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children. And walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your grace to us.

[40 : 23] While we were dead in our sin, just living for ourselves, you called us out of darkness into your wonderful light. And we thank you for your grace to us to serve one another.

We thank you for your spirit that motivates us to love like Christ loved us. Father, help us to be the body. Help us to be unified and to express that.

Help us to serve, not for our own glory, but for the sake of others' good, that they might know you and live for you. Lord, help us be this.

We can't do it in our own strength. We thank you for your grace to us. In Jesus' name. Amen.