

Gifts to Serve

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. Keep your Bibles open there at Ephesians chapter 4. And I've got a sermon outline as well, which you can get on the St. Paul's app, or if you want one in your hand, there's one there.

And I'm probably following something along that, but who knows, after 17 hours on a flight, we'll see how we go. Our world has changed quite a lot in the past 75 to 80 years.

For instance, our consumer mentality since the end of World War II has had a positive impact in that it's helped us kick industry along really well in such a way that the standard of living has risen not just in the West, but in fact in the world generally.

But the same mentality has also had quite a detrimental impact on society. Classic example of this is the shift that's happened in advertising and in, for instance, as one example, military recruitment advertising since World War II today.

And it gives you a picture of the way society has moved. During World War II, you may have been familiar with this if you were there, which you probably weren't. But during World War II, there was advertising like, Uncle Sam wants you in the US.

[1 : 2 5] You've got this sort of stuff. I want you. Another one was the call to duty, to join the army for home and country.

It's my duty. I'm doing it. Are you doing it? So it's a guilt people into fulfillment of a duty. So you sign up and you fulfill your duty to country, to the nation for the good of humanity, unless, of course, you are a woman.

And then in that case, the advertising was, I wish I was a man so that I could fulfill my duty. I'm making no comment on that whatsoever. Similar advertising operated throughout the United States, like the UK, Australia, New Zealand, other places like that.

Now, military advertising is this. Be number one. It's about you. It's focused on you. Or you be all you can be and come and join the armed forces.

We need you. And in its worst case, there's this running in the United Kingdom at the moment. You, me, me, me, millennials out there, the military needs you for your self-belief.

[2 : 3 9] We're desperate for you, you-centered people to come and be part of us. We are lost without you. Be all you can be.

And it's no longer about duty. It's no longer about anyone else. It's no longer about society, about your country. It's about you. Advertisement is you focus.

It's a massive shift. I suppose it should not come as a surprise, since it's a direct result of the expressive individualism of modern Western culture, which has replaced the community-first loyalties of previous generations, former generations.

Individuals have been taught to be consumers, not only of retailers and merchants, but also of institutions and organizations.

Individuals have been shaped by the culture to think of their own happiness and prosperity first, and to avoid letting commitments to any group or institution become a barrier to finding personal fulfillment.

[3 : 56] The concept of service and sacrifice are viewed as psychologically unhealthy in the West. One of the things that church planters did, this is back in the 1990s, around the 2000s, when the church growth movement was on its peak.

One of the things they did as a result of the church growth movement was conduct neighborhood surveys in advance of going in and planting a church into a neighborhood to see what the values of that neighborhood were and how the new church could come in and connect with those values.

They would start, get out there, meet the neighborhood, and the assumption was that if we could start a church to meet the values of our neighborhood, then people would just flock into that.

One neighborhood, having done one of these surveys, one pastor went and did these surveys, and one neighborhood said that the church that they were looking for, bottom line, would never ask them to do anything.

[5 : 11] That's the church they're looking for. Never make demands on me. Never call me to a commitment. We don't want to minister to anyone we expect to be ministered to.

Well, there's a great foundation to start a church. Our modern society, as well as many, I think some churches, potentially many churches, many members of churches, are on a collision course with the one who redefined greatness for us.

I come not to be served, but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many. That's the foundation of our existence.

Now, if you've just joined us, we're in our annual vision series. We are in Ephesians because this letter is about the church, it's about who we are as a people.

We are God's new society. We are God's family, a new creation, a new humanity, characterized not by walls of hostility and division, but by unity and peace.

[6 : 21] And we saw in the first couple of chapters of Ephesians that we have, as a new humanity, these wonderful blessings in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's because of the good news of what Jesus has achieved for us.

It's the gospel. It's on the back of your service sheet. And the gospel, this good news, is the foundation of what we believe at St. Paul's, and it is life-changing.

Let me just put it to you in case you haven't got time to read it. The gospel is the good news that God sent his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the world to live a perfect life, to die as a substitute for sinners, to absorb the anger of God, to take away our guilt and our shame, provide the gift of right standing before God, and to give eternal life and joy through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, apart from any works of obedience on our behalf.

And that statement, from that statement, from the grasping of that gospel, multitudes of blessings flow to those who embraced it in Jesus.

As we saw last week, one of those is, God transforms our character in such a way that he becomes our new identity and he fills us up from the inside and grows us in humility at the very least.

[7 : 51] So we're back in Ephesians 4 today. We're going to spend three weeks here. And to see that the gospel, through the gospel, because of the gospel, God also doesn't just fill us up and give us a new identity and a character, but also gives us gifts, his gifts, to serve.

We saw it in chapter 2, verse 10. As a consequence of God's work of salvation, it says, we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Now, I've been emphasizing our unity in Jesus over the past couple of weeks. Now, let's have a look at our diversity. We are not clones. Yes, there is one faith, one baptism, but our unity does not mean uniformity.

In verse 7, Paul writes, to each of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. And grace here means the ability to perform the task that God has given us to do.

In chapter 3, verses 7 and 8, Paul says that his apostleship came with the gift of God's grace. The point for us is this.

[9 : 17] Each of us who are in Jesus has received this enabling grace in the exact proportion that Christ gave it.

And the message of this verse is that that's all of us who are in Jesus. No exceptions at all. All of us have a serving grace which has been given to us by Christ in perfect measure.

That is, we all have a special part to perform. Some have put the diversity of gifts that have been given to God's people from Jesus into three broad categories.

Prophetic gifts, priestly gifts, and kingly gifts. Prophetic gifts are abilities based on understanding and articulating biblical truth.

They are the gifts that represent God to others. The gifts that represent God to others. And are marked by boldness and clarity. Things like evangelism, teaching, speaking, discernment, prophecy.

[10 : 32] Priestly gifts are abilities based on understanding a supply and to supply basic needs. To understand and supply basic needs.

They represent God to the world. And are marked by things like sympathy and sacrifice and care, encouragement, helping, pastoring, mercy, those kinds of things.

Kingly gifts are abilities based on understanding direction and whole group needs. They represent Christ's vision, his vision, to others.

And are marked by wisdom, practicality, leadership, things like apostles, founders of ministries, leadership, administration, wisdom, faith, courage.

when you put it all together, and I think one of the clues here is that it is very rare, extremely rare for anyone to have all three of those categories in equal measure.

[11 : 46] Extremely rare. when you put it all together, each person's person's gifting is as unique as a thumbprint.

The implication is that there is a ministry that only you can do. Spiritual gifts fit you for the mission in life that God has given you.

Paul goes on to say in verses 8 and 10 that not only do we have a special grace, but our individual graces have a spectacular origin.

Have a look at it. Verse 8. This is why it says when he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men. What does he ascended mean?

Except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions. He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe.

[12 : 56] Now what Paul is doing there, he's borrowing a line from Psalm 68 verse 18. In Psalm 68 verses 16 17 just before it, God sets his sight on Mount Zion and moves as it says there with tens of thousands and thousands of thousands of chariots up the slopes of Jerusalem in victory leading captives in his train and receiving gifts from humanity.

So Paul takes that image and he shifts it. He changes it from the conquering king to Jerusalem receiving gifts from humanity for being the conquering king to now the conquering king throwing out, casting out gifts to humanity.

The triumphant Christ gave gifts to people. He's simply borrowing the image of Psalm 68 and applying it to Christ coming into this world and his return to heaven.

The fact that he ascended is another way of indicating the humiliation, his humility of coming into this world. His descent to earth meant that he set aside the independent exercises or the independent exercise of his eternal divine attributes.

Submitting the exercise of those attributes to the father's will. he went down and down and down in humility and became man.

[15 : 06] And he went further down still to death on a cross. This is Philippians chapter 2. Death on the cross and actually becoming sin for us.

But then he burst up in exultation so that now he fills the whole universe as the conquering king and joyously lavishes gifts upon his children.

And what are the gifts he gives his children? His gifts as prophet, priest and king.

He gives abundant gifts to his church and gives his people power to fulfill their gifts. The gifts and enabling grace which we have have been given to us by the conquering king as he has apportioned them.

They come from the conquering king. There's no room for rivalry and jealousy here. they are given with great expectation on his part for he expects us to use those gifts to bring power and victory in the church.

[16 : 32] He expects those gifts to be used to advance his work in the world. Not your glory. gifts he gives us are his gifting to complete his mission.

We carry on his work. At the beginning of the book of Acts, it says there, Luke says about his gospel, we've heard already about all that Jesus began to do and teach.

And now in the book of Acts, his mission continues on as he continues to do and teach through his disciples in the world. The use of the gifts of grace that God has apportioned to us is also, according to Ephesians 4, how we make every effort to maintain the unity that we have in Jesus.

So, first of all, character, growing downward as Jesus did in humility, bearing with one another in love, and also the exercising of gifts to one another.

The bottom line here is that every Christian is in ministry through the church. No one, no one, did you hear it? Let me just say, how was it?

[18 : 04] Not a single soul who is in Christ is merely a consumer of services. Everyone is also a distributor of services.

Although we are different in the ministry, we do. Ephesians 4, verses 11 and 12 gives us a glimpse into the relationship. It's just a brief glimpse. There's other bits of the New Testament unpacked this, but a brief glimpse, relationship between church leaders and church members, between those who are in vocational ministry and those who are as members of the church.

Verse 11 reads, Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and the teachers. So why did Christ give these to the church?

Verse 12, to equip his people for works of service. The word service there is interchangeable with the word ministry.

What's the end goal of God giving church leaders to equip his people for the ministry? Verse 12 again. Keep reading.

[19 : 15] So that the body of Christ may be built. Christ gives the leaders to equip the members for the works of ministry in such a way that the whole body of Christ gets built.

We all have a ministry. Leaders have primarily an equipping ministry and members have primarily a doing ministry but we all are called to minister together as Christ has apportioned it to build his church.

So we should not think of the local church as being the manly ferry. On the ferry you get on the ferry and you have a few staff who get you from point A to point B or it's like the airplane that a few of us just flew back on yesterday.

The vast majority of people sitting on that airplane are passengers. We're getting fed and watered and everything else and there's a few people up the front doing the driving of the thing, flying of it, whatever you want to call it, and a few other people helping out, get on, people serving snacks and cleaning stuff up.

But the vast majority are consumers of services. Everyone else is sitting there passively in the seats, awaiting to arrive the destination and taking some photos along the way.

[20 : 52] The local church is much more like a sailing boat in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race.

Everyone on board has a crucial role to play and frankly there are no passengers on those yachts heading to Hobart once a year.

No passengers catching a lift to Hobart to visit some family. You're a dead weight is what you are. The captain's job on that is to set the course, to direct the crew, to do their part and to work together to reach a goal.

All of God's people are called to be a corporate priesthood, either an equipping ministry or a doing ministry. Throughout history the church has been built on a foundation of diversity.

It was interesting to hear one person at the conference say their biggest loss in their church, the biggest loss in their church when they moved from being a monocultural church to a multi-ethnic church, they said was from the majority culture that had been used to being served and a multi-ethnic church now meant we needed to serve one another.

[22 : 21] And so they just upped and moved to a church where they would get the services they heard, the music they wanted, the liturgy they wanted. They just upped and moved.

The foundation for them was I am here to be served. God works with diversity and quite ironically he uses that to build our unity.

Did you notice that in verse 12? So that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature.

It's a beautiful image. The image I have here is of an orchestra. Now I'm fairly clueless when it comes to music. I don't have a lot of skill set in that regard.

The first time I went to watch an orchestra was at the Sydney Opera House and I did it to impress Nat. That's the reason I was there. In fact I might have even bought the tickets in order to be even more impressive.

[23 : 32] If I went to watch an orchestra nowadays it would be to impress Nat. I do remember sitting in my seat at the Sydney Opera House and watching them tune and warm up before the whole thing got going.

It was like all this racket of noise that was going on. It did not sound right at all. Then the conductor walked on and started.

Wow. It was music. All their little different bits coming together. All the diversity of instruments coming together and it was fantastic.

And I enjoyed it. God's design for us is to be different. But when we get put together we come up with a harmony that is absolutely impossible when we're all the same.

That's the genius of God. It's because we are so different that we need each other. That means we are all involved in the ministry to prepare God's people for works of service.

[24 : 55] When you use your gifts that God has given you to strengthen me instead of gratifying yourself and when I use my God given gifts to strengthen you instead of gratifying myself, then our diversity will build us up into a beautiful harmony in truth and love rather than fragmenting us.

Serving is putting the needs of others ahead of our own or putting the needs of the community ahead of our individual needs. things. And this day of age of consumerism, what Jesus is saying here, what Paul is saying here is like a fist in the face.

This is so countercultural what we're seeking to do here. Totally countercultural. Why would you do this? Well, there are a few personal benefits.

benefits. The first benefit is self-knowledge. Don't think you know your real gifts and capacities until you do a whole lot of humble serving in many different capacities across generations and across cultures.

Don't think you know your true self until that happens. We've already seen this in this series already. only as you do that with others you'll come to understand your own self more.

[26 : 28] The second benefit is community. When you approach the church as a consumer, that is only to get your needs met, only to get your needs met, you are in solitary mode of being.

Solitary mode of being. And you know what happens? You sit on the sideline complaining that your needs are never getting met. You come with a consumer mindset and you'll be critical of the church because they're never meeting your needs.

They're never coming up to standard. It's a consistent thing. And then you walk out the door and go, I'm on the conveyor belt to leave because I'm not here to serve, not here to connect, not here to build anyone.

I'm on the conveyor belt to leave to the next church. Throwing grenades at the previous one until you discover that the next church you go to has got exactly the same problems.

And the problem is you. You're a consumer. When you reject the consumer mindset, serving will draw you out of yourself and into relationships.

[27 : 38] relationships. The third benefit is the fulfillment and joy of those relationships and especially seeing others touched through you.

Deb highlighted this last week. Or seeing something great happening through the part that you play in the body of Christ. Paradoxically, if you serve primarily for the benefits to yourself, then it actually isn't serving and you don't get the benefits.

The only workable dynamic for every member ministry is Mark 10, 45 and the standard that Jesus set. Because Jesus served you in such a radical way, you have a joyful need to serve.

It's a form of praise that doesn't fully enjoy what admires until it expresses itself in service. service. So, finally, this is all going to encourage you to sign up to serve.

I want to suggest three broad ways that, ways to serve God at this church, which would be the same as any church, but let me make it specific about this church. James has already mentioned them, time, talents and treasures.

[29 : 00] Firstly, time. Easiest way to serve God with your time is frankly to turn up and engage with another individual who's different from you. That's the easiest way. Don't underestimate the role you play by turning up and going across barriers to engage with another individual.

Take the time to talk, to encourage, to listen, to pray. As you speak the truth in love to them, you are ministering to them. When you think of ministry at a church, we normally think of formal ministry sense, a position on a team or a specific role on a roster or something like that.

That's a very small portion of the ministry that happens at St. Paul's. A small portion. And it's not the starting point for ministry, nor the end point of ministry.

The informal ministry is what happens outside of the formal structures and gatherings of St. Paul's. And it is absolutely crucial for building each other up.

It takes time, it takes effort. But ministry doesn't stop there though. And I do want to encourage you to join a ministry team. And it's already been pointed out there on the wall. You can grab some information.

[30 : 26] There's a table out in the middle of the atrium to sign up and get involved. involved. I would say do it today. We're going to keep hitting you with it the next time it is, but do it today. Get involved. Say no to my selfishness.

Say no to my individuality and get involved in others. You're also accountable for your time to others.

service. When you're part of a ministry team, you don't put the time in, then others have to carry the load.

There might be an opportunity for some of you who, because of life circumstances, are able to give larger chunks of time and ministry to this church. In a previous church I belonged to, a teacher retired.

In fact, he was my science teacher. Not that I tried to remind him of that. We didn't have a great relationship. But he retired at normal retirement age for a teacher and immediately got himself ordained into the Anglican church to serve his local church in a full-time capacity, now that he'd retired.

[31 : 45] And he still ministers there in his early 80s, still ministers, I think, four days a week doing ministry in that church as part of the staff team.

Secondly, talents. Bibles uses the language of gifts. I'm going to launch more into this a bit next week and we talked about it already today, so I'm not going to go further into talents and gifts.

Third, and the final way you can serve God in this world is with your treasure. next Sunday is, no, two Sundays time is Vision Sunday.

It's Vision Sunday where we ask our people here at St. Paul's, you, their church family, to make a financial pledge for the ministry of St. Paul's into 2020 and to continue for this vision to go forward.

We're also asking you to give us, in two Sundays time, \$75,000 to support the work of developing the gifting of others to serve God's global mission.

[32 : 53] Wherever these people might go in vocational ministry, I would love them to leave St. Paul's, if they're not here, to leave St. Paul's with God's vision for his church that he has here to take it wherever he has, has sends them to be unifying for their neighborhood.

No less than five times in the New Testament, the language of supporting a missionary or supporting a church financially is described as ministry, described as a service.

Some of us here have a special gift of giving. It's part of what God has given you in displaying, disseminating his gifts to us.

Some of us here have a special gift of giving. And I would be encouraging you in two Sundays time to use that gift of giving. But regardless of that, every single Christian has been called into it.

It might not be your gift, but it is your duty. So exercise it in two Sundays time. A key ministry that all of God's people are involved in, regardless of their gifting, is to use our treasure to serve the conquering king and his mission.

[34 : 20] Now, like our gifting, it is something we do in differing degrees. We give according to what we have rather than what we have not. The principle that I like to use here is unequal giving but equal sacrifice.

Our act of giving is an act of worship. This is why the Bible calls us to give from our first fruits and to live on the rest rather than giving God what is left over.

If God has saved you in Jesus Christ and gathered you to himself, his purpose is to grow you to be like Jesus in both his character and his work.

And so my final call for you is to get behind the vision of this church. It is unique in our context. We are seeking to do something here which is unique for our context.

Get behind it, serve it, serve God with your time, your talents and your treasures. So please share your passions and your talents and your treasures.

[35 : 26] Your core también your talents and your treasures.