

Equipped For The Ministry

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[0:00] Please take your Bibles and open them up this morning to the book of Ephesians. We are continuing our series and our mission and our ministry priorities here as a church! here in the month of January.

And this morning we are in Ephesians chapter 4 verses 11 through 16. If you were in the Grow Class Hour, you got a little preview of this, but if not, either way we'll do this together this morning. So Ephesians chapter 4 verses 11 through 16. And when you found it, let's stand in honor of the reading of God's Word this morning. And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

[1:42] The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord endures forever. Father, we praise you that you have designs for your church, that its growth and its methodology and its mission is not up to us to invent.

But God, you have set in motion, set in place. You have prescribed for us in your Word what you desire us to be and to do. And so we pray now, would we submit ourselves to it as we open up your Word?

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. Now, there is probably nothing more entertaining and sometimes frustrating than watching youth sports.

And I say that from a place of experience. Amongst our three boys, we have gone to a lot of youth sports games. And you can tell pretty quickly as you're watching the games, there are some teams that get it and some teams that don't.

And sometimes you watch the games and it's almost like these two teams, it's hard to know whether or not they even recognize that they're playing the same sport. You have kids running all over the place.

[2:51] You can tell sometimes the players, they don't really know the positions and where they're supposed to be. Sometimes they all just rush together in a big mob after the ball. Sometimes they get distracted by something on the ground or something that they see up in the sky.

Sometimes it is one big, disorganized, chaotic mess. But it's fun to watch. But on the other hand, some teams actually get it.

And it's actually, it's really awesome to see when it happens. It just kind of comes together. And sometimes you can tell, man, these guys, they really understand what they're trying to do. They have a shared purpose.

They're all working in the same direction. All these players, they know their role. They understand their position. The coaches, they've done a good job setting the team up for success and training them for the task.

And it all just seems to work together. It doesn't really matter the age. It doesn't really matter the sport. I think it's true across the board.

[3:54] For a team to be successful, they need to understand their roles. They need to understand their goals. And they need to understand their game plan.

And of course, that isn't just true for youth sports. As we open up the word this morning to Ephesians chapter 4, we see that that is also true for the church. It is true for our church here at Seawee Bay.

For us to thrive, for a church to be successful, we must understand our roles. We must understand our goals. And we must understand our game plan.

So let's look at our passage this morning here in Ephesians 4. And we're going to see all three. We'll see our roles in the church. What are our positions? We'll see our goals for our ministry. And we're going to see our game plan for how we're going to go about it here at Seawee Bay. So first, what are our roles? What are our roles?

[4:59] And let's get our bearings here because we're jumping in halfway through the book of Ephesians. For the first three chapters of the book of Ephesians, what Paul does is he just unpacks the glorious good news of the gospel for the church there in Ephesus.

Chapters 1 through 3 are all about what God has done in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so he says in chapter 1, all the way back in eternity past, God has chosen you, believer.

He has predestined you. He has adopted you in Christ. He has loved you in Christ from before the foundations of the world. He says in chapter 2, you were dead in the trespasses and the sins in which you once walked.

But now, but God has made you alive together in Christ. So he says in chapter 3 that the church, this gathering of believers, is God's eternal plan for making his wisdom known throughout the ages in heaven and on earth.

In other words, the church exists by God's grace and for God's glory. That's chapters 1 through 3. Now here in 4 through 6, he takes that truth of the gospel and he applies it to the church.

[6:16] So chapters 1 through 3 of Ephesians are the what of the gospel. And chapters 4 through 6 are the so what of the gospel. And he says, because of what Christ has done in the gospel, we are members of one body.

We all play on the same team. So he says in verse 4, there is one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. In Christ, in the church, we all put on the same jersey. We are all members of the same team. But at the same time, we don't all play the same position.

We are not all identical. Unity does not mean unanimity. We are distinct. We have different gifts. We have different abilities.

We have different roles within the church. And so he says in verse 7, grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

[7:27] And that's how teams work, isn't it? That we share one united purpose, but we have different complementary pieces, different positions working together to make it happen.

The team doesn't need five point guards. I'm coaching basketball right now, if you can't tell. Right? And one of the first things you have to get across is that we can't have five people back here waiting to bring the ball up the court.

We need somebody down there to pass the ball to. One point guard, one center, one small forward. We have different positions that make the team work. Paul, here in Ephesians 4, he's listing off the different positions in the church.

Look there to verse 11. I see three main positions here. Three main positions. First, he starts with the head. There is one head of the church.

See there in verse 11, the first name that he mentions. Who is it? He. And he gave. Who is that? It's the he that he's been raving about for the first three chapters.

[8:34] It's Christ. Christ lived and died and rose again to redeem his people. We are his creation. We are his bride.

We are his blood-bought people. We are his body. So whatever else we may understand about the church, we have to start right here. Christ is the head. And every idea, every ministry philosophy,

every thought that we have about what the church ought to be and ought to do must flow from Christ the head.

But in his wisdom, verse 11, we see that Christ the head gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers.

This is the second category here. This is the second position. These are formal, recognized offices of the church. Formal offices of the church.

Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. And of course, we should understand and recognize that many of these offices are no longer in function in the modern day church.

[9:48] Many of these offices have ceased. In fact, all but one have ceased. We no longer have apostles today. We no longer have prophets today, despite what some may claim about themselves.

Paul says in chapter 2, verse 20, that these are foundational offices. These were key for laying the foundation of the church. They spoke with all the authority of the Lord.

Their writings are included and counted as holy scripture, the very word of God. The apostles were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ. But now, that foundation has been laid, and now those offices are no more.

We do not have apostles, and we do not have prophets. And I would argue that we also no longer have the office of evangelist. That's not to say that we don't evangelize.

Come back next week. But the office of evangelist, as a formal, official office of the church, these were pioneering foundational offices.

[10:57] The closest thing that we have today might be maybe a missionary going and pioneering, in a pioneering context where the gospel has never been proclaimed, and proclaiming the gospel there.

To be clear, again, every Christian, every member of the church ought to be busy with the work of evangelism, but that specific formal office of evangelist is no more.

So, what are we left with? There are two offices of the local church. And we have them both here, at Sea Wee Bay.

The New Testament church has two offices. It's the office of deacon, not mentioned here in the passage, and the office of elder. And it's that last office, the office of elder, that he does mention here at the end of verse 11.

It says, he gave the shepherds and teachers. Really? That would be better understood as one hyphenated office, one hyphenated term, this joined-together term.

[12:02] He gave the shepherd teachers. The shepherd teachers. The pastor teachers. Who is that? That's the elders. The pastors.

The role of a pastor, or an elder, that's the same thing, is to shepherd the church of God. How? Primarily by teaching the word of God.

Their ministry, my ministry, my position on the team, my role, Treg's role, Treg's position on the team, is primarily the ministry of the word and prayer.

But not only this, it's the ministry of the word and prayer. And verse 12, the ministry of the pastor is to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

This is the third position on the team. And it must not be overlooked. Christ, the head, officers of the church, and now we see third, the members of the church.

[13:07] Christ gave pastors to equip the members for the work of ministry. And now we start to see a team taking shape, don't we?

The role of your elders is to equip you, members, for the work of ministry. Which means, guess what your role is, members?

Your role is to be about doing the work of ministry. Look how much space here in this passage is spent talking about the pastors. You see that?

It's one verse, not even, just a few words. And the rest of the passage is spent talking about what the church, the members, the saints is meant to be and meant to do.

We are to equip you to do the work of ministry. The ministry of the minister is to equip the member for the work of ministry. Say that ten times fast.

[14:05] Maybe we'll get it. I wonder, church, is this how you see it? Is this how you understand that the church is meant to function?

There's a bit of a problem, I think, zooming out of our own local context here. There's a bit of a problem with the church at large, especially the church in America, where many churches, many Christians, many pastors, simply do not line up with this simple vision of ministry that Paul gives us in Ephesians chapter 4.

Many Christians, many churches, many pastors, think that the pastors are the ministers. That's what we pay them to do, right? We just outsource that to them.

They're the professionals. People need to hear the gospel. Whose job is that? That's the pastor's job, right? People need to be discipled. Well, that's what we pay the pastors to do, right? Well, the sick need to be visited.

The weak need to be encouraged. The wandering need to be rebuked. Whose job is that? That's the pastors. That's what we pay them to do, right? I'll tell you what happens if that's the perspective.

[15:19] If that's the perspective that we take, for one thing, pastors will burn out. Why? Because they are taking on more than they have ever been designed to take on.

It was never meant to hang on one or two or three people. It was meant to be the whole body at work together. And for another, the church never grows up.

They're left as infants, just expecting to be spoon-fed. They're never feeding themselves and certainly never feeding others. I think if we take a look at the landscape of churches, it's far too common for a church to have a consumer culture where you come to have your needs met, to get your fill, rather than what it's supposed to be, which is a provider culture where you come to be equipped to do the work of ministry.

Would you agree that there's a world of difference between a church that exists to draw a crowd and entertain them and a church that exists to equip the saints for the work of ministry and then deploy them to do it?

We need to ask which one do we want to be. I don't think that we have much of a choice. For one thing, I'm not very entertaining. But more importantly than that, God's design for His church is clear.

[16:54] Christ has given pastors to the church to equip the church, to equip the saints for the work of ministry. In other words, if you are a member of this church, you have a job.

Every member is a minister of the gospel. Every member of the church is a minister of the gospel. You didn't know you were getting a job today, did you? You came in here. You're hired. In fact, you were hired the moment you joined the church. It's in your job description.

You are a minister of the gospel. You're not just here for you. You are here for one another. My work is to equip you to do it.

You have a job. So second, we ought to ask, well, what's the goal of this job? What's the goal that we're targeting? What are we measuring success by here?

[17:52] And that's important for any job, right? You have a job. You want to know, well, what does success look like here? What am I targeting? What am I shooting for? And some jobs, you better get some percentage of year-over-year growth, or you're probably going to get fired, right?

And others, it's about customer service. You got to keep the customer satisfied so that they keep coming back and being repeat customers, coming back for more. How many times have you felt some pressure to fill out that survey at the end of the call just because you know that person's job is dependent on it, right?

You have been given a job, and so you need to know, well, what is it that we're actually trying to accomplish? And here is, again, where sadly, it sometimes seems like churches aren't even playing the same sport.

If you do a quick Google search for fastest growing church in America, what will you find? You will find a lot of different definitions of what that means, growing.

And some measure success by, well, how many people are in the room? It's attendees. If the room is full, then that's a successful ministry. And so we do whatever it takes to get that room full, and if it's growing numerically, then we're happy it's successful, whether it's biblical or not.

[19:13] For others, the measure of success is getting some sort of visible response, some sort of visible decision, whether it's maybe walking an aisle or signing a card or even getting baptized.

How many people can we get this year to do this thing? And then success the next year means more of that visible response. Still others, let's be honest, success is measured in dollars.

It's giving. It's the bottom line. If the budget is increasing, then the ministry must be successful, right? And the thing is, church, none of those things are inherently wrong in and of themselves, especially if they're approached with the right heart, the right attitude.

We want to see this church full. Amen? I hope that you are inviting others to come and join us for worship. We want others to come and join. We want this church to be full.

We want to have responses to the gospel. We want to see non-believers come to faith. We want to see baptisms increasing, which means membership is increasing.

[20:23] We want you to give generously. I think that would be a good thing. But all of these, none of them are the primary target. All of these are secondary at best.

We need to understand that the church is not a business where growth can be measured and manufactured and manipulated through human effort. The church is a spiritual work.

And results are often invisible and often unimpressive to the natural eye. Paul gives us a slightly different metric for success here, doesn't he?

He gave the shepherd teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry. What work is that? Building up the body of Christ.

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

[21:38] Again, praise God. We don't have to define what success looks like. God has defined it for us. He gives us the target.

He gives us the measure of success in the ministry. What is it? What are we shooting for? The goal of our ministry is building up the body of Christ.

The goal is to be strong and stable. And that takes time, by the way. There's a reason why gyms are full in January and February and then it's a little bit less by March and then it's almost empty by April.

Why? It's because people are chasing fast results. And the people that chase fast results get discouraged if it doesn't come quickly or as visibly as they expect.

Well, the same is true for the church. We aren't chasing fast. We don't want show muscles. We want to build real, lasting, stable strength in the church.

[22:43] And listen, that takes time and hard work. It takes dedication and discipline. It takes perseverance. It takes faithfulness over the long haul to build up the body of Christ.

That's what we're after. He says, we're chasing unity of the faith. It's not just how many people are here, but whether there are 50 or 500, are the members one in the faith?

Do we know who the members are? Do the members know what binds us together as one? It's not common background. It's not common preference. It's the common gospel.

He says, we're chasing knowledge of the Son of God, not just a decision made and then off you go. We are chasing knowledge to know Him and to know more about Him day after day after day, week after week.

Success looks like members hungry and eager to open up God's Word together. members coming together, eager to know the Lord, not coming here to gain some sort of popularity contest, some sort of political points, to have influence or any sort of measure of man-made approval.

[24:00] You come to know God together. We're chasing maturity. We don't want to be this time next year where we are right now.

We want to put on holiness. We want to put off the old man. We don't want to be stagnant. We want to grow in maturity. How mature are we aiming for?

How do we know when we can just take our foot off the gas pedal? He tells us we can calm down a little bit when we've reached the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

How's that for a goal, church? Anybody hit that yet? I haven't. You haven't either. And whether you've been walking with the Lord for a day, for a year, for 50 years, none of us have arrived at this measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, which means we all have room to grow up together.

See, the goal isn't just more people. The goal is more mature people. More people maturing in Christ.

[25:15] And guess what will happen? As an overflow of that, I think we'll see all the other things. But none of that's primary. One more, verse 14.

He says, we are chasing stability. You see that? So that we may no longer be like children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

Don't you love that imagery? Success looks like stability. You could rephrase it like this. We are not set into a frenzy by every post you see on Facebook or every reel that you see on TikTok.

I mean, I know that all the time there's these videos. We found the new gospel. Evidence that the Bible's been corrupted and changed. There's all sorts of people all the time feeding your brains with nonsense.

How do we know what's real from what's false? You grow up in maturity, stable, steadfast, mature. Church, is that your goal?

[26:24] Is that how you understand the goal of this church? We are aiming to grow up together in Christ. That's the measure of success.

So then, third, how do we do it? How will we do it? Third, what is the game plan?

What's the strategy? What play are we supposed to run? And once again, praise God, it is not up to us to decide. God has given us his game plan to grow his church as he sees fit.

What's God's ministry strategy for the church? It's not up to us. What's God's ministry strategy for the church? Look there to verse 15. He says, 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.

What is God's playbook to grow the church? What must we do if we're going to grow up in the ways that God wants us to grow? It's right here.

[27:54] It is very simple, isn't it? The game plan is every member speaking the truth in love to one another. What are the pastors given to equip the saints for?

It's the ministry of speaking. The ministry of proclaiming the truth. How will we hit these big ministry goals of unity and Christlikeness and stability and maturity in the faith by each and every member speaking the truth?

That is not a flashy ministry strategy, is it? But it's the only ministry strategy that is 100% effective to accomplish what God intends.

Listen to what he says in Isaiah 55. He says, As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and don't return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. Do you realize that every time the word of God is spoken, it is 100% effective to accomplish God's purpose for sending it out?

[29:21] Or listen to what Paul says in 2 Timothy. He says, All scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete and equipped for every good work.

Do you realize the word is sufficient for the work? Now, why should we think it would be any other way? The word of God was powerful enough to create all things in the beginning.

It's the word of His power that upholds the universe, He says in Hebrews. It is His word that saves sinners, that calls us out of darkness and into His glorious light.

It's His word that creates the church and sustains the church. Of course it's His word that will build the church. God's word is sufficient to do God's work.

This is a no-fail approach to ministry. That's exciting for me. I want to give myself to something that is sure and that will last into eternity. We can put all of our eggs in this basket and trust that God will use it as He sees fit.

[30:41] But you know what is also exciting for me about this? every member can get in on this ministry. Every single member can be a part of the most fundamental, most important ministry of the church.

Whether you are 10 years old or 100 years old, you can be a part of this. You're called to be a part of this. You can speak the truth in love to one another.

If you just survey the New Testament, read through the New Testament, you will see that it's filled with clear expectations that this ministry is happening in every church and that all the members ought to be engaged with it.

It's not just the pastors. It is you, church, all of us. Paul teaches about the return of Christ in 1 Thessalonians 4 and then he turns and says, you encourage one another with these words.

He says later in 1 Thessalonians 5, you, church, admonish the idle. You, church, encourage the faint-hearted. You, church members, encourage one another.

[31:51] You, church, build one another up. He tells us the same church in 2 Thessalonians. If anyone doesn't receive Paul's teaching, he says, don't consider him as an enemy, but you warn him.

You do that. The church does that. The author of Hebrews tells the church, consider how to stir one another up to love and to good works and don't neglect to gather together, to meet together as a church.

He says later in Ephesians 4, you, let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear.

In 1 Corinthians, we'll study this in the grow class, 1 Corinthians 2. He says, my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the power of the Spirit so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

But it's not just my speech. He goes on to say, together, we impart wisdom. We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

[33:03] We impart this in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit. We interpret spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. We preach Christ crucified.

Whose ministry is this? This is our ministry together, church. What is the ministry? It is gospel proclamation.

Word ministry. Who are the ministers? We are. The whole church. We are all called to speak the truth in love and in so doing, we will grow up in every way into Him who is the head.

this is God's methodology for growing the church. I wonder, is that enough for us?

Are you content with this? Do we have the same confidence in the Word of God to do the work that God intends to do in us?

[34:16] Do we really believe, do you really believe that the Word of God is enough to grow the church? I love this image of the church as a body.

I mean, it's so easy for us to understand, right? We all have bodies. We know what it's like to have a head and to have members of our body, different parts and pieces, arms and ears and eyes and legs and we know what it's like to have a part of our body that's just not working quite like it should. It slows the whole thing down, doesn't it? Nothing's moving like it's supposed to. Everything's just kind of held up. It's gluing up the whole process. I mean, don't you just wish that you could have full use of all your parts again?

Imagine what you could do. Paul ends our passage saying, this happens, this growth happens, when 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.

Can I just be straightforward with you for a minute as we close? God bless you God bless you and I have never seen this before.

[35:42] I have never been a part of a church where every single member was working properly. body. I've seen some impressive growth with like a half active body or a three quarters healthy active body but I have never seen this before where every single part, every single member, down to every joint and every ligament, every single one of us was giving ourselves fully to this ministry of speaking the truth in love to one another.

I can't even begin to imagine the growth that we would see this year if every single one of us said I'm going to be about this ministry. I'm going to speak the truth in love to my neighbor.

What does this look like practically? It could be formal and organized in the ladies Bible study, men's Bible study. We have these church orchestrated functions where it's structured and it's orchestrated.

I'm excited about those things but for the most part, this ministry is not structured and organized. This ministry is not from the top down scheduled, put on a calendar and made to happen by the leaders of the church.

For the most part, here's what this looks like. This looks like you member looking at your other church member and saying how can I pray for you this week?

[37:12] This looks like you seeking out that member that you haven't seen in a while to encourage them and to call them back. It looks like you, more mature saint, looking around at the younger believers in the church and saying, would you come and spend some time with me so I can instruct you in the word?

It may just look like, let's just spend a week together once a month. Once a month. We'll just open up the Bible, we'll bring our bulletins, we'll share what we're learning, and we'll just talk about the word and apply it to one another's life.

It is so simple, church, that this is how the church grows when every single member is busy about the work of gospel proclamation to one another.

Isn't that the pastor's job? To visit the sick and to make disciples and to pursue the lost and the wondering, to call back the sinners to repentance, to teach the word, to proclaim the gospel, isn't that the pastor's job?

Yes, it is, and it is your job too. Do you want to see the church grow this year? I do. I desire to see you grow more and more and more into the image of Christ, into maturity.

[38:37] I want to see this church be stable and steadfast. that is my goal. Would you look around you to your left and to your right and see your brothers and sisters in Christ?

See your fellow church members and would you just consider for a moment, how can I minister to them with the word? Who can I encourage with the word this week?

How can I strengthen them? How can I teach them? How can I correct them? How can I love them with the word of God this week? Church, this is how we will grow.

We will run God's playbook. We will speak the truth in love to one another as we seek together to grow up into Christ.

Let's pray. Father, we believe your word is sufficient to do the work of ministry. And we pray, God, that you would create here a culture that's not just a consumer culture where we consume the word, but Lord, that out of that we would then go provide for others, that we would be active in the work of ministry, active in the work of gospel proclamation to one another.

[40:03] And we pray that in so doing, that this church would grow leaps and bounds into Christ this year. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.