

The Prison Letters...

Ephesians 4:1–16 LIFE LESSON

Today we're covering the first half of Ephesians chapter four, where Paul reminds everyone that he's writing from prison. However, Paul understood he was called to endure this, so he was trying to make the most of it, which is exactly what he asked the people of Ephesus to do as well...

📖 **Ephesians 4:1-6 (NLT)** *Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.*

➔ **Based on what Paul said, what does it look like to live a life worthy of God's calling?**

All of us have been called to be humble and patient with everyone (even our adversaries), or to deal with the faults and flaws in other people in a gentle and loving manner. On top of that, we're to make every effort to stay united in peace with other believers! So in other words, when we're unjustly persecuted, or just dealing with a frustrating follower, God wants us to behave in a manner that mimics His loving characteristics. That's what Paul was trying to live out, and that's what he was asking everyone within the church to do as well; to live our lives in a manner worthy of God and His calling. However, associated with that calling, God also gives us spiritual gifts or special abilities, and Paul alludes to this next...


📖 **Ephesians 4:7-10 (NLT)** *However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. That is why the Scriptures say, "When he ascended to the heights, he led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to his people." Notice that it says "he ascended." This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world. And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.*

➔ **Have you ever received a "generous" or "special gift" from someone? If so, can you share what you received and why it was given to you?**

When it comes to these gifts and abilities from the Spirit of Christ, Paul spoke of them to multiple churches and even listed what some of them looked like back then. But regardless of the gifts given, all of them were intended to benefit the entire church, not just the person receiving the gift. For example, here's what Paul said to the Corinthians about this...


- ➔ **1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (NLT)** *There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.*
- ➔ **Based on what Paul said, regardless of the spiritual gift we've been given, it is the Spirit of God that "does the work in all of us." What do you think this means?**
- ➔ **Regardless of the spiritual gifts or abilities you've been given, what is something you know you can do to help others in the church?**

God is still giving gifts to everyone who believes in Him, and He expects us to use these abilities to help others in the church. For instance, here are some of the gifts given to people back then. However, keep in mind, the gifts we receive today aren't necessarily the same gifts they received, but are nonetheless just as important to the health of the church.

 **1 Corinthians 12:8-11 (NLT)** *To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.*

- ➔ **Why do you think the Spirit gave these gifts to the church back then?**
- ➔ **What kind of gifts do you think the Spirit has given the church today?**

Again, every follower of Jesus has been given a gift or ability to help others in the church, and for a specific reason. And again, God expects us to use our gift! However, if you're struggling to understand how God has gifted you, don't worry, that's what a pastor is supposed to help you discover. In fact, look at what it is Paul said next...

 **Ephesians 4:11-16 (NLT)** *Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.*

- ➔ **What is the primary responsibility of a pastor or teacher? Or what do you think it means to “equip” others to do God’s work?**
- ➔ **If those who are gifts to the church are equipping others well, what specific things should we see in the church?**
- ➔ **For the church to be healthy and growing and full of love, what must happen first?**

God gives certain people the specific responsibility of equipping others so that the church is built up! Which means, Paul’s primary job (and every other pastor as well) is to get everyone working in their gifts or abilities because it helps others grow and ultimately makes the whole body healthy and growing and full of love. And the ultimate sign indicating we are all working in the abilities God gave us, will be maturity instead of immaturity, confidence in the teachings of the God instead of confusion with weird new teachings or lies so clever they sound like the truth. Additionally, everyone will be able to speak the truth in love, and be growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. So if you’re a follower of Christ, it’s time to discover how God has gifted you, and get to work!

MEDITATION PASSAGE FOR THE WEEK

In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

Romans 12:6-8 (NLT)

EPHESIANS 4:1-16

LESSON GOAL: Kids will learn that God has given each of us gifts to use to serve the church, and that serving others helps everyone in the church get along and grow as followers

MEMORY VERSE:

'Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.' | **EPHESIANS 4:2 NIV**

UNITY IN THE BODY

The NIV translation of the Bible calls Ephesians 4:1-16 "Unity and Maturity in the Body of Christ" and the NIRV calls it "Growing Up Together in the Body of Christ." No matter which translation of the Bible we're reading, the point is clear. Paul wants the church (that's us!) to understand that God expects us to get along and to keep growing in our faith and obedience, and he knows that we do that best when we work together.

'I am a prisoner because of the Lord. So I am asking you to live a life worthy of what God chose you for. Don't be proud at all. Be completely gentle. Be patient. Put up with one another in love. The Holy Spirit makes you one in every way. So try your best to remain as one. Let peace keep you together. There is one body and one Spirit. You were appointed to one hope when you were chosen. There is one Lord, one faith and one baptism. There is one God and Father of all. He is over everything. He is through everything. He is in everything.' | **EPHESIANS 4:1-6 NIRV**

Paul tells us to “put up with one another in love”, or in other words, treat others with gentleness and patience, even when we feel frustrated or angry at them. This means we must work hard at getting along.

The Holy Spirit gives us special gifts and abilities that we can use to serve others and since each of us has different combinations of gifts and abilities, when we all serve and work together, the “body” can function just the way God intended.

'But each one of us has received a gift of grace. These gifts are given to us by Christ. That is why Scripture says, “When he went up to his place on high, he took many prisoners. He gave gifts to his people.” (Psalm 68:18) What does “he went up” mean? It can only mean that he also came down to the lower, earthly places. The one who came down is the same one who went up. He went up higher than all the heavens. He did it in order to fill all creation.' |

EPHESIANS 4:7-10 NIRV

There are all kinds of spiritual gifts and the Holy Spirit is who decides what gifts we will be given. They’re not all listed here, but Paul does describe some specific “gifts” or jobs that the Holy Spirit has given to the church and the responsibilities that the people who have received those gifts, or who have been called to those roles, have when it comes to using them to serve the body of Christ.

Whether we know what gift(s) the Holy Spirit has given us or not, we can and should be doing whatever we can to serve the body of Christ. The church we attend or belong to is a great place (maybe even the best place) to serve other followers around us and to find out the different ways we can serve the whole body of Christ. Serving is often how we figure out what we are gifted to do, or what we’re not. And we don’t need a special gift or invitation to use the abilities we were born with to help others.

'So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, 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, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.' | **EPHESIANS 4:11-16 NIV**

DISCUSSION | REVIEW

- Think about the kinds of things that come easy to you or that make you feel good when you do them - certain subjects at school, sports, being creative with art or music or making up stories, making new friends, keeping your room clean or helping with housework...
 - Can you think of a way you could use that thing you're good at to serve someone else? (Examples - good at math? tutor another student; keep a clean room? Pick up some chores around the house; great at singing? Sing a song to cheer someone up)
- Take a few minutes to think about one way you could serve your church, either now or when you're older. Take a few minutes to pray about it and ask God to help you identify ways you can use your gifts and abilities to serve others in the church.
- What is one thing you learned today that you can share with a friend?