

The Gift That Keeps on Giving Ephesians 4:11-16

Shopping for Christmas can be a challenge. You might think you have the perfect gift only to find out that it didn't quite meet expectations. **Do you ever find yourself wondering where you can get exactly what you're looking for or do you end up settling for something else?**

Let's turn in our Bibles to **Ephesians 4:11-16**.

I. GOD'S PROVISION TO GROW HIS CHURCH – v. 11

In our passage, God has given the church a gift. It is the provision to grow His church, the body of Christ. In **verse 11**, His provision is personal.

A. His Provision Is Personal – v. 11a

I hope you know that God is a giver. He loves to give gifts.

James 1:17 says that **“every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.”**

We can look through the Bible and see that God has given us a number of things.

In **John 3:16** we see that God gave His Son and for those who believe in Him, He has given eternal life.

In **Ephesians 2:8-9** we see that God has given us His grace and faith as a gift.

In **II Peter 1:3-4** God has given us great and precious promises for life and godliness.

In **Hebrews 4:16** God has given us access into His presence.

In **I John 1:9** God has given us forgiveness of sin.

In **John 14:27** Jesus has given us His peace.

In **James 1:5** God generously gives us wisdom.

In **I Corinthians 12:11** God has given us spiritual gifts.

God has given us His Spirit, His Word, joy, victory

over sin, and many more gifts. And in our passage, we see that He has given us something else. It is His provision of people, certain people. People who would help His church, the body of Christ to grow.

B. His Provision Of People – v. 11b

When Paul was writing, the church was still very much in its infancy. Yes, the church was growing in number, but it needed guidance to mature spiritually. Believers were in various developmental stages of spiritual growth. Paul told the Corinthians that he couldn't address them as spiritually mature but only as infants because they weren't ready for real meaty spiritual food (**I Corinthians 3:1-2**).

You may remember starting school. You learned your ABC's, then you learned words on a vocabulary list and then simple sentences. We were given Dick and Jane to learn to read. As we progressed in school, the books we read became harder. It was the same with math. Even Matthew had to first learn how to count and add simple problems that eventually led him to his doctorate in Mathematics. Now his problems include numbers, Greek letters, and Egyptian hieroglyphics.

It's the same with any subject or skill. There are basics that must be mastered before moving on to more difficult aspects of that particular field. Ask me to go find middle C on the piano and I have 88 keys from which to guess. Ask Elaine and she could pick it out blind folded (I think).

Put a needle and thread in my hand and my stitches will look like I was sewing while riding in a covered wagon traveling over a bunch of potholes. But in the hands of Pat or Florence...

Put my cooking skills up against Laura or Deb or Arlene and my food would taste like it came out of an easy bake oven.

But they all had to begin with the basics, and they most likely had someone teach them from which over time they developed their skills.

It's the same in the body of Christ. We learn the basics that God loves us; that we have a problem called sin and everyone has the same problem. We

learn that God's love sent His Son to die on the cross for our sin and that if we want to go to heaven, we need to believe in Christ and that His sacrifice on the cross paid for our sins. When we learn those basic truths, we begin to build on them and learn greater truths from the Bible. In order to help believers grow, Paul said that God gave the church people to help with that spiritual growth.

In the days of the early church, it was the 12 Apostles, James, Paul, Timothy, Titus, Apollos, Epaphroditus and others who provided spiritual guidance for the people in the many churches that were meeting in Israel and areas of Europe. Some of those letters are preserved for us in the Bible. Notice the four types of people given by God to the church.

1. God's gift of Apostles

What was an apostle? The word means one who was sent out. In the New Testament, there were two primary uses of the term apostle.

The first group referred to the 12 apostles appointed by Christ. They were the first ambassadors of Jesus sent out with the gospel and according to **Revelation 21:14**, the city of New Jerusalem is built on twelve foundations which were the Apostles. Paul was also considered an apostle in the same ranking as the 12 but is not included in the foundation of the church. They carried the gospel with the authority of Christ.

To be an Apostle, there were certain qualifications required to hold this rank.

1. They had to have been a witness of the resurrected Christ (**I Corinthians 9:1**).
2. They had to have been clearly chosen by the Holy Spirit (**Acts 9:15**).
3. They had to be able to perform signs and wonders (**Acts 2:43; II Corinthians 12:12**)

But there was also a second group who were apostles in a very general sense. They, too, were sent ones. Barnabas is called an apostle in **Acts 13:2** and **14:14**. **Romans 16:7** seems to include Andronicus and Junias among others who were apostles.

II Corinthians 8:23 uses the same Greek word to refer to Titus as a messenger, the same word for apostle and the same with Epaphroditus (**Phil. 2:25**)

In other words, anyone who was sent could be considered an apostle in the general sense. While the office of apostle as it refers to the 12 is no longer a position within the church, the general meaning can be used for anyone who is a missionary. They are sent ones who go out and proclaim the gospel. To avoid confusion, we should stick with the term missionary today since no one meets the qualifications outlined in Scripture of who can hold the position like the 12 Apostles. With the completion of the canon of Scripture at the end of the first century, there was no longer a need for the apostles in the strictest sense of the word.

The second group given to the church were prophets.

2. God's gift of prophets

Simply put, like an apostle, a prophet was chosen by God to be His spokesman. The Old Testament refers to both men and women who were prophets. Women like Miriam, Huldah, and Deborah and men like Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Joel, and Amos, etc.

Prophets were used for two primary purposes. Some prophets were foretellers, meaning they spoke what God wanted to say about what would happen in the future. Daniel is an example when he spoke about the Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman empires that would rule in the future. He lived in the time when Medo-Persian empire conquered Babylon. He also spoke about the future tribulation that would engulf the world as God pours out his wrath, a day still to come in the future.

Other prophets were forth-tellers. That means they spoke out against the sin of a nation they were sent to with the message to repent or else God would bring judgment. The Amplified calls them inspired preachers and expounders of God's truth. Here's what God's word says. Here's what it means. Now, obey.

Elijah and Elisha went to Israel. Joel was sent to Judah. Jonah went to Assyria. Amos was given a message against several countries like Ammon, Moab and Judah. Their primary task was to point out sin and get them to repent or God would pour out His wrath.

Like the Apostle, the office of prophet in the sense of foretelling future events has ended since the canon of Scripture has been completed. But there is a place for a prophet who points out sin and need for repentance.

Paul mentions a third group given by God.

3. God's gift of evangelists

Their primary function was to spread the gospel. Philip and Timothy had that role (**Acts 21:8** and **II Timothy 4:5**). Today, we might refer to them as missionaries who take the gospel to places and people where it needs to be proclaimed.

As a church we need to be praying for our missionaries and we need to be praying for more missionaries.

Matthew 9:38 "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

The last group Paul mentions are pastors and teachers.

4. God's gift of pastor/teachers

There are some scholars who want to separate these two and make them distinct from each other, but the Greek is clear. In the Greek there is a definite article before each of the other three offices. In this case, the definite article only appears before pastor. Also, there is a different Greek word for 'and' between each office than there is between pastor and teacher. The latter connects the two terms – pastor and teacher, making them one person with two different functions, rather than the conjunction that separates them.

The term pastor refers to his role as a shepherd. The shepherd was someone who looked out for the welfare of his flock by taking care of their needs, encouraging, and supporting them. Think of the shepherd from **Psalms 23**.

The role of this person as a teacher was to instruct the church in God's Word. To help them understand it and then apply it.

Paul tells us these were given by God to the church. He then goes on to explain the purpose God gave them to the church. They were given to grow the church.

II. GOD'S PURPOSE TO GROW HIS CHURCH – vv. 12-16

God's purpose is quite obvious in the opening words of **v. 12** to perfect, prepare, equip the church. The same word is used in **Matthew 4:21** where it speaks of James and John mending their nets. The NIV translates the word as preparing their nets. In other words, they were getting ready to go out and do some fishing and they wanted everything to be prepared. The same word is used in **Galatians 6:1** where it speaks of restoring a believer caught in sin.

A simple definition of the word equip or prepare is to supply what is necessary for a particular purpose.

I want to talk about three areas these gifts of God equip the church.

A. They Equip the Church to Serve – v. 12

Robyn will tell new employees that she wants to give them the tools they will need to succeed. God wants to give the body of Christ the tools it needs to succeed as a body to serve.

Part of the function of Church leaders is to prepare or equip God's people for works of service. He then gives the reason: in order for God's people to be built up and unified.

Before we go on, I want to point out that it is not the role of those mentioned in **verse 11** to do the work, but instead they are to train believers who then do the work of serving. Unfortunately, there are churches who hire a pastor and expect him to do everything so they can just sit back and be pew sitters. In other words, Paul is saying that everyone should be involved in some aspect of serving in the church and for the body of Christ.

Alistair Begg writes that "True faith manifests itself in action." **James 2:18** tells us that our faith should be followed up with doing acts of service. Or to say it another way, service is an evidence or indicator of our faith.

Paul points out in **I Corinthians 12** that every believer has been endowed with a spiritual gift and each gift is given for the benefit of serving the rest

of the body of Christ. Now the church has been gifted with a person to equip them for service.

Paul is telling us that the pastor is not to try and meet all the needs of the church body but is to equip the body to serve and care for one another.

I Peter 4:10-11 “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to served others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”

The end result of serving one another is God’s glory. It is a daunting task to know where you are at in your spiritual journey and then to plan on how to equip you to serve. Now I can do all I can, but each of you needs to take it and be fed by it to equip you.

Don’t be like some infants who turn their nose up or push the food that’s put in front of them. That’s, I think, how Paul thought of the church in Corinth. They were picky eaters and didn’t want the spiritual food he was feeding them. Consequently, we see that there were a lot of problems in that church that Paul had to address because they weren’t letting Paul equip them. They were content being spiritual infants. That’s why we see him talk about their selfishness in things like how they were using their spiritual gifts for their own benefit instead of serving others or their selfishness during communion instead of thinking about others first.

My role is to equip you for the work of serving.

Paul goes on to explain a second purpose.

B. They Equip the Church to Mature – vv. 13-14

Let’s be clear that we’re not talking about physical, mental, emotional, or even social maturity. It has nothing to do with age or intelligence. He’s not talking about learning social graces and manners or mental stability, or physical maturity we expect that comes with age. Instead, it has everything to do with spiritual maturity, growing in faith and becoming Christlike in

character and Paul tells us there are two ways this is evident.

The first is to grow in unity of the faith.

1. To grow in unity of the faith – v. 13a

Faith refers to our common convictions about Christ and the doctrines that concern Him. We are unified in who He is both as God and about His incarnation, becoming a man. We have a unity of faith in how we are saved. We have a unity of faith around our need for forgiveness and salvation. We have a unity of faith around our destiny of eternal life in heaven. Unity of faith in beliefs leads to unity of faith in service.

Paul challenged both the church in Rome and Corinth to be in unity. To Corinth he spoke about the diversity of the body of Christ and its various spiritual gifts, yet he tied them all together by saying that while there are many members that make up the body of Christ, all the parts make up one body and every part is necessary for the body to function properly. Therefore, unity in cooperation is essential for the body to grow together.

And that leads us to Paul’s second point about God’s purpose for the growth of His church, especially as it relates to the role of the pastor/teacher in equipping the body of Christ.

2. To grow in understanding of Christ – vv. 13b-14

I Peter 2:2 “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”

II Peter 3:18 “But grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen.”

Colossians 1:9-10 “For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.”

Colossians 2:6-7 “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

Hebrews 5:11-14

Hebrews 6:1 “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.”

The other day I saw a satire on Facebook. It was a sobering question. **What if we treated our Bible the way we treat our cell phone?** It’s constantly in our hands as we scroll through it. We panic when we forget our phone but think nothing of forgetting our Bible. **How can we grow in the knowledge of Christ if we allow so many other competing things to take away from our time in God’s Word when He wants to speak to us?**

When we become saved, we are brought into a relationship with God through His Spirit who now lives in us. He takes the words we read in the Bible and teaches us what it means and how we are to apply it to our lives. When we are allowing the Spirit to teach us, He helps us know more and grow more, to become more holy.

Let’s be reminded from **II Timothy 3:16-17** that the benefit of the Word of God helps us to be **“thoroughly equipped for every good work.”**

One reason Paul tells us here that we are to grow in our understanding of Christ is to be like Christ, to develop Christlikeness.

a. To develop Christlikeness – v. 13b

When Paul writes **“until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining the whole or full measure of the fullness of Christ”** he is speaking about becoming more like Christ in character. That’s the idea behind the word ‘reach’, which speaks of striving toward some destiny or goal. The destiny he’s talking about reaching is to be like Christ in character. That’s what I see in **I John 3:2-3** as I like

to say *“I’m not what I was and neither am I yet what I’m going to be.”*

Let the words of this hymn be our daily prayer.
O to be like Thee! blessed Redeemer,
This is my constant longing and prayer.
Gladly I’ll forfeit all of earth’s treasures,
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.

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I also came across this hymn which is fitting if we desire to be like Christ in our character:
I have one deep, supreme desire,
That I may be like Jesus.
To this I fervently aspire,
That I may be like Jesus.
I want my heart His throne to be,
So that a watching world may see
His likeness shining forth in me.
I want to be like Jesus.

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John MacArthur writes **“To grow up into His likeness is to be completely subject to His controlling power, obedient to His every thought and expression of will.” (Phil. 1:21; Gal. 2:20)**

Paul continues with another reason to grow in our understanding is to defend against deceivers.

b. To defend against deceivers – v. 14

If we aren’t growing in our understanding of Christ through a knowledge of His Word, how easy it is to be swept away by every wind of doctrine that sounds plausible.

We hear something and we gravitate to that.
We hear something else that sounds right, and we move to that.

The world has lots of isms that say they are the truth, but they are led by cunning and crafty deceivers who want to pull you away from what is real truth.

Jesus asked the Father to sanctify His disciples with the truth and then described where that truth comes from. He said that God’s Word is truth (**John 17:17**).

One of God’s purposes in growing His church, the body or people of Christ, is to stand up and defend

against those who would otherwise deceive.

When I attended college, they owned all the property on one block except for one small corner that was owned by the Jehovah's Witnesses. I heard that several times they approached them about buying that property but they refused. The reason they gave was that many of their converts came from those who said they were Baptists.

If we aren't growing in our understanding of Christ, we will not develop like Christ in character, and neither can we defend against deceivers.

There is one more point to make about God's purpose to grow His church. It's found in **verses 15-16** and it is to equip the church for genuine love.

C. They Equip the Church for Genuine Love – vv. 15-16

Love and truth need to be inseparable. Tony Evans says that truth is what God says on the matter. Truth without love is destructive, that's why truth needs to be tempered with love. Love without truth is hypocritical. Love is the way unity is maintained in the body of Christ. Without love, words may be truthful, but they will be divisive. Without love there will be bickering, jealousies and insults and part of the way unity is kept is through God's gifted people given to the church to help that unity grow and be maintained. Evidence of spiritual maturity is through truth and love.

Warren Wiersbe says that **"love is the circulatory system of the body."**

God has given the church the gift of servants to help you grow in service and spiritual maturity. Once again John MacArthur says **"The growth of the church is not a result of clever methods but of every member of the body fully using his spiritual gift in close contact with other believers."**

We have looked at God's provision to grow His church.

We have looked at God's purpose to grow His church. Let's conclude by looking briefly at God's potential to grow this church.

III. GOD'S POTENTIAL TO GROW THIS CHURCH

First, there is growth through study to mature in faith and understanding.

A. Growth Through Study

- 1. Sunday morning Adult Impact**
- 2. Sunday morning messages**
- 3. Wednesday night Pathway to Power**
- 4. Saturday morning Kingdom men's Bible Study**
- 5. Personal study**

James 1 tells us trials help us grow spiritually. But we can't know how trials grow us if we don't study God's Word. Study leads to application and action. We need to make a concerted effort to engage with God's Word to mature as individually and collectively. **Proverbs 27:17** says we need to sharpen one another. Which brings me to my final point where there is growth through service. This is where you come in.

B. Growth Through Service

In other words, another way you mature in faith is when you serve. What are ways you can serve?

- 1. Ministry teams**
 - a. Missions Ministry team**
 - i. Global missions**
 - ii. Local missions**
 - b. Koinonia Ministry team**
 - i. Fellowship activities**
 - ii. Phone calls**
 - iii. Meals**
 - iv. Connections**
 - c. Discipleship ministry team**
 - i. Nursery workers**
 - ii. Sunday school/Jr. Church teachers/helpers**
 - iii. Small group studies**
- 2. Miscellaneous**
 - a. Sound booth**

It isn't up to the pastor to decide what you do. It is up to you as you are led by the Holy Spirit. Each of you has a role in this church that benefits the body. *The result of growing spiritually is serving intentionally.* God gave some for the purpose of preparing His people to serve and grow to reach unity in the faith. **How are you engaged?**