

*Building Biblical*  
COMMUNITY *in* CHRIST

*Shaping up the Saints*  
Ephesians 4:7-13

*7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.  
8 This is why it says:*

*"When he ascended on high,  
he led captives in his train  
and gave gifts to men."*

*9 (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to  
the lower, earthly regions? 10 He who descended is the very one who  
ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole  
universe.) 11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be  
prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and  
teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the  
body of Christ may be built up 13 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. Eph 4:7-13*

We have our children with us this morning and I would like to invite all those who would like to join me here in the front.

You know, our human bodies are very interesting and wonderfully made. Have you ever kicked off your shoes and wiggled the small bones in your feet? Let's just do that right now...this is going to be fun. Take off one of your shoes and sock, and let's move those toes. Did you know that each one of those bones is only half the width of a pencil, and yet they support your entire weight when you walk.

Now, let's spread out our arms (make sure you don't hit your neighbor!). Immediately millions of muscle cells expand and contract in concert.

Hey, can any of you wiggle your ears? Did you know that deep inside your ear are fine hairs that carefully monitor a swishing fluid? This is a built in alarm system that automatically notifies me if I lose my balance.

Now, take your hand and rub it across your face. What do you feel? You feel the stimulation of touch cells, over 450 of them in each one inch square patch of skin.

Now do this, take your hand and place it on your stomach. Inside my body, your stomach, spleen, liver and kidneys – each packed with millions of cells – work so efficiently that I don't even perceive their presence.<sup>i</sup>

Every single part of your body has a special role to play. Did you know that the Bible compares the church to the human body? Why do you think that is?

And that's what we're talking about this morning. Let's read together these verses from Ephesians 4:15, 16 –

*We will in all things grow up into 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.*

When my body is in shape and all the parts are efficiently working together, I experience what Dr. Paul Brand, a surgeon, calls the “ecstasy of community.” He goes on to explain that in the human body there is no pleasure nerve. There are nerves for pain, cold, heat and touch. But there is no nerve that has the specialized function of giving a sensation of pleasure. The sensation of pleasure is rather the healthy by-product of the cooperation of many cells within the human body.

I believe the same is true in the church, the Body of Christ. Paul describes for us in these verses what Dr. Brand calls the “ecstasy of community.” You ask me what my dream is for Central Bible Church, or even for the Church at-large? This is it! The *ecstasy of community* which comes about when each part, each individual, brings his/her giftedness and contributes to the whole.

In verses 1-4 of this chapter Paul is talking about the whole. Seven times in verses 4-6 he uses the word “one” to refer to the *unity* of the Body. But now in verse 7 he makes a dramatic shift from the subject of unity to the subject of diversity and mutuality.

Notice what he says in verse 7: *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.*

Paul here is not talking about *saving* grace, but about *servicing* grace. Earlier in this letter he talks about the grace that saves: “*For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is a gift of God*” (Eph 2:8,9). But the same grace that saves us, bringing us into relationship with God, also equips us to serve, bringing us into relationship with others.

Using a different form of the same word, *grace*, Peter puts it this way: “*As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God*” (1 Pet 4:10).

What are Paul and Peter speaking of? They are both referring to *gifts of grace* given to you and to me that enable us to effectively serve one another. These grace gifts are *not* our natural talents, such as gourmet cooking, telling jokes, playing a musical instrument or skateboarding. On the other hand, our natural talents may be one way our spiritual gift is expressed. Someone who has the spiritual gift of encouragement might combine that with a natural musical talent to encourage others through the music they write.

Neither are these grace gifts to be confused with what the Bible calls the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, etc. The fruit of the Spirit describes *who we are*; the gifts of the Spirit describe more *what we do*.

One of the most common mistakes is to confuse the spiritual gifts with a particular role in ministry or even a particular title or position in the church. This often results in stereotyping the gifts, thinking that such and such a gift will always demonstrate itself in such and such a way. “I don’t have the spiritual gift of teaching,” you say, “because I could never teach a Sunday School class or preach a message on Sunday morning!” But let me remind you: the spiritual gifts are *relational*, not *institutional*. Most of them have little to do with the *organization* of the church, and everything to do with the church as a living *organism*. They have little to do with *positions* in the church, and everything to do with the *people* of the church. Authentic, effective ministry does not begin with a particular role, but with relationship. Do you want to discover your spiritual gift (s) and be involved in ministry? Get involved in someone’s life!

So if these grace gifts are not natural talents, the fruit of the Spirit, or a particular role or ministry, what are they? Here’s a simple definition: *they are spiritual capacities given by Christ to each believer for the building up of His church.*

Notice: they are spiritual capacities given by Christ *to each believer*. Every believer sitting here today in this auditorium has one or more spiritual gifts that you have received from Christ himself and for which you are responsible. And each one is gifted differently and the way those gifts manifest themselves in each believer is different. John Stott puts it well when he says, “We have not all been mass produced in some celestial factory!”

I’m reminded of young David’s experience in the book of 1 Samuel. Do you know what it says? *“David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. “I cannot go in these,” he said to Saul, “because I am not used to them.” So he took them off.”* ~ 1 Samuel 17:39

David, the young shepherd boy, heard the challenge from the Philistines to send someone to fight Goliath. No one volunteered to fight except David. King Saul reluctantly agreed and offered David his armor. David put on the weighty equipment, but quickly concluded he could not fight in this heavy armor.

God equips each of us in such a way that is unique to our strengths and abilities. David was trained as a shepherd to use another weapon. For David, it was a slingshot. David showed great maturity in realizing he could not be effective with Saul's armor.

What are the gifts and talents God has given to you? Have you ever tried to accomplish a task with tools you were not trained to use? God allows each of us to develop skills that are unique to our life. He will not call you to use someone else's tools.

It’s said that the great evangelist, D.L. Moody, was asked by his grammar teacher, “How dare you preach the gospel when you murder the King’s English every time you speak?” Moody replied, “I’m using what God has given me; what are you doing with what God has given you?”

I have found over the years that in just about any church or any ministry, those that spend their time criticizing others are usually sitting on their duff not using the gifts God has given them.

What are *you* doing with what God has given you? The dilemma is this: Some of you may be serving in areas for which you are not gifted. The

result? Wasted energy. Just think. What if David has decided to march out there in all that armor that swallowed him up and hindered him from the free expression of the gifting God had given?

But there is not only the problem of wasted energy. A more common problem is that of wasted potential. Some of you are spectators in areas where you are gifted to be participants. And this effects not only you, but the entire body. Someone has put it this way:

“God gave me a gift,  
not for me but for you,  
and God gave you a gift,  
not for you but for me.  
If you don’t use your gift,  
you’re depriving me;  
if I don’t use my gift,  
I’m robbing you.”  
Rick Warren

By the way...I have an announcement to make. We are all saddened to learn this week of the death of one of our church’s most valuable members, Someone Else. His passing created a vacancy that will be difficult to fill. Else has been with us for many years, and for every one of those years, Someone did far more than a normal person’s share of the work. Whenever leadership was mentioned, this wonderful person was looked to for inspiration as well as results: "Someone Else can work with that group." Whenever there was a job to do, a class to teach, an outreach to organize, a small group to lead... one name was on everyone’s lists- Someone Else! "Let Someone Else do it" has been a common refrain heard throughout the church.

You know, it’s common knowledge that Someone Else was among the largest givers in the church. Whenever there was a financial need, everyone just assumed Someone Else would make up the difference. Someone Else was a wonderful person, sometimes appearing superhuman; but a person can only do so much. Were the truth known, everybody expected too much of Someone Else. Now Someone Else is gone!

We wonder what we are going to do. Someone Else left a wonderful example to follow, but who is going to follow it? Who is going to do the things Someone Else did? Remember- we can’t depend on Someone Else anymore!<sup>ii</sup>

When it comes to ministry in and through the local church, that “Someone Else” is sometimes the pastoral staff or church leadership. To a certain degree, this mistaken idea is understandable. After all, isn’t that what we pay them for?

Well, let’s look more closely at what Paul says. Look with me starting in verse 11:

*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...*

Just who are these four categories of people (apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers) and how do their spiritual gifts relate to me and my spiritual gifting?

I like to compare these gifted people to the four corners of a jigsaw puzzle. All the parts of a puzzle are of equal importance and without all the parts the puzzle would be incomplete. However, when building the puzzle, what parts do you look for first? Right, you look for the four corner pieces which are foundational to the completion of the rest of the puzzle. In a similar way, the four gifts mentioned in verse 11 are foundational to the growth of the church to maturity. But in the process of growth, *each and every piece is needed*. For example, in puzzle of 500 parts (sort of like Central Bible Church), if even one part is missing, the overall picture is affected!!

We’re not going to talk this morning about what these four gifts (or better, gifted individuals) are in verse 11. We’ll do that next week. But I do want you to notice what their job description is. It’s clearly stated in verse 12: *To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...* Did you get that? The job description of those who make up the four corners of the puzzle (by analogy the church), is *not* to *do* the work of ministry, but to equip or prepare God’s people to do the work of ministry!

There is really a “chain reaction” sequence here. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers *equip* God’s people for ministry. Then God’s people do that ministry. And the result of God’s people – and I remind you, *all* of God’s people – doing the ministry, is that the Body of Christ is built up (i.e. edified).

For this sequence to take place, we need to understand then what it means to “prepare” or to “equip” God’s people. Paul uses an interesting word that was

often used by Greek physicians of his day to refer to the setting of dislocated bones. Interestingly, the same word is used in Mark chapter 1, verse 19.

Here's what it says:

*When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Mark 1:19-20*

Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee calling his disciples. He sees James and John “preparing” their nets. What were they doing? I imagine they were cleaning off the seaweed, repairing holes, taking out the snags and making the nets useful.

So the first idea of “equipping” the believers is to *repair*. Admittedly, if our “congregational net” is full of holes, disorganized and full of snags and inner conflict, it will be difficult to effectively fish for people around us and point them to Christ. “Repairing” believers involves mending broken and dislocated Christians so they can be effective in the Christian life and ministry. That is one of the jobs of those who have one or more of these foundational gifts of verse 11.

But there is in this word, not only the idea of *repairing*, but more positively of *preparing*. The word was also used in the secular language of Paul's day to refer to outfitting an army with full provision for battle. That is the role of these gifted individuals who are foundational to the church. Their role is not to *monopolize* the ministry, but to *multiply* the ministry by helping each individual discover and develop their gifting within the Body of Christ.

This is the job description of the church. This is what the leadership of this church is committed to. We are not here to monopolize the ministry, but to multiply the ministry. To help you “fill in the picture of the puzzle” so to speak. Are you committed to this? Are you ready and willing to serve, using the gifts that God has given you?

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<sup>i</sup> Image adapted from Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 26.

<sup>ii</sup> Illustration adapted from [www.SermonCentral.com](http://www.SermonCentral.com) by Davon Huss.