**Build up the Body**

Ephesians 4:7-16

There are four Bible passages that address the matter of spiritual gifts:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Pet. 4 | All Gifts | Speaking & Serving |
| Eph. 4 | Leadership Gifts | Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers |
| 1 Cor. 12 | Sign Gifts | Wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning spirits, tongues, interp. of tongues |
| Rom. 12 | Practical Gifts | Prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, zeal, mercy |

**Peter is so pragmatic** simply dividing the gifts into those who speak and those who serve. Ok, you WORDS people, don’t judge the WORKERS and the other way - you Marthas out there don’t judge the Marys. If you speak, speak with the authority and love of God. If you serve, serve with the strength only God can supply so He gets the glory not you.

Paul teaches on spiritual gifts in ***three different letters, with three very different lists***. If there was only one definitive list of spiritual gifts the apostles would have been sure to pass that list along. Instead, they gave us numerous lists addressing different churches and different situations. And that fact alone is a critical lesson! Don’t take YOUR spiritual gift or your ministry passion and get irritated that all believers don’t have the same gift and passion. Instead of getting frustrated, ***be THANKFUL for the diversity in the body of Christ.***

***If you love to work with your hands***, be thankful for those who love to use words. If you enjoy working with people but can’t screw in a lightbulb, be grateful that Jesus has gifted His church with things called DEACONS. If you are musical don’t be annoyed when you stand in front of me and realize I miss some notes in a big way. I follow Luther’s principle when I sing - “Sin boldly.” I “sing boldly” even if it misses the mark. Once in a while the sound guys prank me by leaving my mic on - really they are pranking all of us when they do that, especially when it’s preserved for all time in the livestream.

***If you’re an EYE who sees things very clearly*** don’t resent the MOUTH that can’t see as clearly but just wants to talk about it. Get the EARS involved to moderate. And be grateful there are HANDS and FEET around to turn off the lights and lock up after you.

***The consistent message*** that ties all four of these passages together - with their wildly different lists - is **LOVE**. 1 Corinthians 12 talks in detail about miraculous gifts, but then flows right into 1 Corinthians 13, the most beautiful poem in the Bible - and arguably in the world - about love. We are in Ephesians 4 today, so turn back to how Puaul opens this chapter:

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, ***bearing with one another in love***.” Ephesians 4:1-2

***The purpose of the spiritual gifts is to build up the whole body in loving unity.*** The gifts are **not to elevate any one person or group**. That is the opposite of what the gifts are for. That is WORLDLY leadership, worldly influence - use your gifts to maximize your influence, establish your platform, get the most followers, advance your brand. Jesus explicitly told his followers not to live like the Gentiles who were constantly posturing against each other, arguing about who was better and smarter and more impressive. Jesus said, “Just serve each other. Better yet, be like little children.”

***How can we walk worthy of the call of Christ?*** By **LOVING** each other! How? With ALL HUMILITY and gentleness. Not with pride and harshness. Not with judgmental criticism and bickering but with patience, compassion, understanding and gratitude. Love. We just spent three weeks reflecting on how very much we have been loved by God and therefore must love one another in that same way.

God gave spiritual gifts to build up the **Body** not the **Believer**

“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***.” Eph. 4:11-12

Will you be encouraged as you use your spiritual gift? Of course! Will you be more fruitful and fulfilled if you operate in areas of strength and gifting? Yes. But those are side benefits to OBEDIENCE. And if you make them central, you end up missing the whole point! As Helen said to Bob Par, aka Mr. Incredible, ***“This is NOT about YOU!”*** (Oh, that’s one of the great scenes in movie history - and it starts with Helen grabbing something from Bob’s shoulder saying, “Is this RUBBLE?” “It was just a little workout,” Bob mumbles as he stuffs chocolate cake into his mouth. Genius. “It was coming down anyway.” “You knocked down a building?!?” “It was coming down anyway. Structurally unsound.”)

Anyone with supernatural gifts like Mr. Incredible would have trouble not letting those powers go to his head. But the beauty of that original Incredibles Movie is how the family, by the end, comes to value and appreciate each others’ abilities and they learn to work as a team. Instead of pulling in five different directions (Yes, I’m including Jack Jack because he’s awesome) they start pulling in the same direction and find their powers multiply when combined.

***So hear this from Elastigril to all of us Mr. Incredibles*** out there, **“This is NOT about YOU!”** It’s about the BODY OF CHRIST, which is first and foremost and forever about CHRIST! Even though he was a superhero, Bob Par had some serious growing up to do - and so do we. All of us have gifts that make us super - but we have to think about them and use them in the right way, for the right reasons. So, let’s study Ephesians 4 and find that right way, those right reasons to use our gifts. We’ll see:

**Three Steps to Supernatural Service:**

1. Grow up
2. Speak up
3. Work up

First, we need to grow up in our attitudes - seeing that our gifts are not about us but about Jesus, His church, and His mission. Then we need to speak up - becoming a community that speaks the truth in love, calling out the gifts and potential in one another. And third we need to work up - stepping up our commitment and involvement to very simply DO THE WORK OF MINISTRY. It’s there to be done. We just - a lot of the time - don’t want to do it. Which brings us back to step one. First, we need to grow up.

**Three Steps to Supernatural Service:**

1. Grow up in your **Attitude**
   * It’s about **Jesus**, not you

“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” Eph. 4:7

**Spiritual gifts in the Bible are CHARISMATA**, from which we get the word charismatic. But the root word is CHARIS which simply means grace. The charismata are grace-gifts or just graces that God has given to us. Here in Ephesians 4 Paul doesn’t even use the word charismata but instead uses the more basic word for gift, probably to make the point - this isn’t about YOU and YOUR spiritual gift.

This is like ***Spiritual Gifts for Dummies*** in the sense of Paul saying, “Don’t make your spiritual gifts about YOU, Dummies.” Our gifts are not about us - they are about JESUS. Why would we focus on the gift recipient when we can and should focus on the gift GIVER?!?

It would be like Christmas or a birthday and you give a really thoughtful and personal gift - like when my family bought me the **Lego X-Wing fighter** for my 40th birthday. If I had taken that gift and run upstairs, closed the door and worked on it alone - it would have focused on the gift rather than the givers of that gift. It was way better to work on that X-wing with my boys - who, by that time, had far surpassed me as brickmasters anyway.

Listen to the emphasis in verses 8-10.

1. Grow up in your **Attitude**
   * It’s about **Jesus**, not you

“When he ascended he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men… he who descended is the one who also ascended…” Eph. 4:8-10

Paul quotes ***Psalm 68,*** a victory Psalm about King Jesus - the conquering Messiah who leads all of His enemies in a victory parade, like the kings of old would do after a huge military conquest. Having won spoils of war, the generous King distributes the spoil even to those who did not help win the battle!

That is not how it works in warfare! **To the victor the spoils** - to the soldiers who fought and risked and sacrificed - they divide up whatever was won. If you didn’t fight, you don’t get any of the gold or cows or houses or whatever.

But not with **King Jesus**! ***He alone fought the battle against sin and death.*** He descended from heaven, taking on a weak, frail, temptable human body to do so - and went all the way into the depths of sin and into the domain of death itself - to save us. You and I didn’t even hold up a torch in that battle. We weren’t even there. Jesus did it all from start to finish. We don’t deserve any of the spoils. But our generous King shares them with us anyway! We march with King Jesus in His victory parade!

So, we need to grow up in realizing that everything ***in history and in life is about Jesus not us.*** And as we think about spiritual gifts, they are about the body of Christ, not about us as individual parts of that body.

1. Grow up in your **Attitude**
   * It’s about the **Body**, not you

“Bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit…” Eph. 4:2-4

The broader context of this passage is about **walking out the gospel**. Because we’ve been loved in Christ, we must be agents of His love! Because we were dead in sin we must be patient with others who struggle with sin. Because we know how far from Christ we were, we must not judge others who serve Him differently than we do. There is only ONE body of Christ.

In those days ***there was not a Jewish body and a Gentile body.*** Oh, that would have been much easier! Then everyone in a local congregation would have dressed the same way, eaten the same kinds of food, celebrated the same holidays and been much more comfortable when their kids married each other. But the truth Paul expressed in Ephesians is that **our unity in Christ is a GOSPEL ISSUE.** We need not divide, indeed we must not divide over secondary issues. Let’s love one another and be patient with our differences because in the end, it’s not about your preferences or my preferences - it’s about the Lord Jesus and His preferences. And He has made it clear that He prefers UNITY in His body.

The danger with spiritual gifts is to get all American and individualistic thinking entirely in terms of ***“my abilities, my desires, my passions, my experiences,”*** and then the goal is self-awareness, self-expression and self-actualization. Self-self-self. That is not the Christian way! That is the way of the world! We need to grow up past this self-focused way of thinking by remembering it’s about the whole body - the whole church. Each of us is just one small cell in a great global body.

Verse 14 shows us the danger if we don’t GROW UP.

1. Grow up in your **Attitude**
   * It’s about the **Body**, not you

“So that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine…” Eph. 4:14

**People are sneaky**. Paul is mainly concerned about overt false teachers, but all people are selfish and short-sighted and at least a little manipulative. If we don’t stand firm in the truth of God’s Word we will be blown around by every wind of teaching, every breeze of preference, every little concern and complaint. Does this happen in the church? Well, not THIS church, but I’ve heard that it does in other places.

* Some churches have ***worship wars*** because one or two people elevate their preference on music style to a matter of priority and conviction.
* Some churches ***fight over doctrines*** like Calvinism or the End Times because certain factions think any compromise on their views is a compromise to something essential so they can’t deal with anyone who disagrees with them.
* Some churches fight about ***programs and activities*** - do we have an Awana club (that’s a Bible club for kids) or not; do we have small groups or Sunday School? Are we doing enough for the youth or the seniors or the [fill in the blank for the group you’re concerned about]?

All of those, and any number of other issues that cause division in the church are examples of **one or two body parts staging a COUP** and trying to take over control of the whole body, instead of just playing their part and leaving management decisions to Christ, the Head, and His appointed representatives (in our case, an elder board that answers to a voting membership). Praise the Lord, Oakwood does a good job of majoring in the majors and giving freedom in secondary matters, so there is not a lot of fighting about little things. That is a wonderful gift of God’s grace and sign of health and maturity in our local body. Our people do a good job of keeping it about JESUS and about the BODY - not about one or two of us and our individual preferences and convictions.

1. Grow up in your **Attitude**
   * It’s about the **Mission**, not you

“He who descended is the one who ascended far above the heavens, that he might fill all things.” Eph. 4:10

This is the ***preventative and corrective treatment*** Paul is giving to a divided church or a church that is feeling tempted to divide: grow up. Focus on Jesus, the head. Remember it’s about Him, not any of us. Remember, it’s about the whole body, not a couple of individual parts, even if one is an eye and one is a mouth. One person sees what they think is the whole picture and the other wants to talk about things all the time - so that combination is dangerous.

**But if we focus on the MISSION,** it will keep us all moving and pulling in the same direction WITH JESUS. He descended to earth as a human to save us and unite us into His one body. He ascended back to heaven so He could pour His Spirit into our hearts and direct every atom in the cosmos from His seat of glorious authority as Prime Minister of the Universe. He already upholds to universe with the word of His power, and His mission is to increasingly unite all things in Himself - to reconcile the whole world, every particle of it, to God the Father in the power of the Spirit.

Jesus is working, right now, to fill all things. He is doing it now through US - His body. He speaks through our words. He touches and heals through our hands. He goes to new places with our feet. He fixes and builds things with our sweat. He shows compassion with our tears. ***Where a Christian goes, King Jesus goes, and His Kingdom expands just a little more.***

And that’s what it means in Revelation that ***we will “reign with Him” forever!*** We will continue to expand the rule and reign of King Jesus throughout the new earth and the new heavens for all of eternity. Jesus’ goal is to fill ALL THINGS with His glory, love, goodness, and power. One day, when He returns, that work will be completed for this stage of salvation history.

So, let’s focus on King Jesus. Let’s keep it about His body, not us and our little parts. And let’s keep it about His mission, not our own little agendas. That is how we GROW UP. The second step to supernatural service is to speak up.

**Three Steps to Supernatural Service:**

1. Speak up in your **Relationships**

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” Eph. 4:15

Each of us individually needs to grow up and commit to keep maturing as we walk with the Lord Jesus. Part of that growth process is our relationships with one another in the church family. We need to figure out how to do this well: to speak the truth in love.

Look at the **beautiful outcome** - “to grow up in every way into Him who is the head.” In EVERY WAY! This means we grow up to be LIKE JESUS as we grow up to be CLOSE TO JESUS. We grow up INTO CHRIST, who is our head.

It’s a funny reality with **babies that their heads are super huge** relative to their bodies until those bodies grow up. Over time, as children mature, they get taller, and the body catches up proportionally to the head. A baby’s head is 60% of her adult size the day she is born; 80% adult size by age 2 and 90% by age 3. That’s why their noggins look so round - because they are! It’s amazing toddlers can carry their heads around at all - no wonder they toddle like they do!

This is a picture of the Christian life! ***We are spiritual toddlers***, trying to grow up to match the wisdom and holiness and love and patience of Jesus, our PERFECT HEAD. 

My pastor friend Scott Lothery defined **the 13 perfections of Jesus** and showed how each of them is a gospel reality and invitation.

* Jesus is perfectly ***loving***. We are naturally calloused and uncaring. But as we experience the love of Jesus, He changes us so we become less selfish and more loving, like Him.
* Jesus is perfectly ***wise***. We are naturally foolish. But as we learn from the wisdom of Jesus and increasingly listen to Him instead of to our sinful flesh, we will become less foolish and wiser, like Him.
* Jesus is completely ***faithful***. He never gives up, never loses patience. We are naturally unreliable. We give up as soon as things get hard. But as we learn to rely on the power of the Spirit and not on ourselves, we will become less fickle and more persevering, like Him.

**Jesus is our Big Brother**. He shows us what the ideal person looks like and calls us to grow up to be like Him. More than that, He has already given us HIS CLOTHES. His robe of righteousness doesn’t fit us yet, but it’s ours to wear, and as we understand and appreciate what it cost Him to give us that gift of JUSTIFICATION it helps us grow more and more to walk in it, so it fits us better.

**Three Steps to Supernatural Service:**

1. Speak up in your **Relationships**

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” Eph. 4:15

And one of the practices that accelerates that growth is **fellowship** with other believers who will speak the truth in love to us.

* **Marriage** is an excellent growth accelerant for just this reason. Communication is a necessary part of a healthy marriage - and if a couple can learn to speak the truth in loving and respectful ways, they will help each other grow in the Lord.
* **Community Groups** help in this area as you share your story and share your journey with other believers who can help you carry your burdens and process life together.
* **Discipleship Groups** are micro groups of 2-4 Christians who come together to encourage and challenge each other to grow in specific issues and in specific ways. They commit to speaking the truth in love to one another for the purpose of growth. In a sense, then, D-Groups are just more intense versions of Community Groups.
* **Mentoring** is what happens over time when a relationship develops with a more mature believer who walks with you and encourages you over years and decades. Parents can play this role or just other godly people who come into your life.

One of the best ways we can serve one another by speaking the truth in love is by helping each other discover and use our spiritual gifts. ***The test of a gift is not just that you enjoy using it, but that others are BLESSED as you use it.*** AFFIRMATION from the church body is a great CONFIRMATION of a spiritual gift.

* Just because someone likes to **sing** doesn’t mean you should give them a mic. I, for one, do like to sing - you should hear me in my car when I’m alone. But there’s a reason they don’t give me a mic here.
* Just because someone likes to **teach** doesn’t mean they are gifted to teach.
* Just because someone likes to **work with teens** doesn’t mean they should definitely work with teens.

When it comes to finding a way to serve in the church YES, **find something you LIKE to do**. But also listen for affirmation from the church family that you are GOOD AT IT. And if someone has the courage to point you in another direction, let’s be humble enough to take the hint.

***The mature Christian is one who is able to speak the truth in a loving way*** to help others find ways they are spiritually GIFTED to serve. No doubt, if we practice this discipline, we will mess it up in various ways - speaking too much or too little; speaking up but without love or speaking up but without clear truth. But if we are to grow up as a body it means we need to learn to SPEAK UP in loving, helpful ways.

One more key step in using your spiritual gifts: DO SOMETHING.

**Three Steps to Supernatural Service:**

1. Work up in your **Gifts**

“From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint… when each part is working properly…” Eph. 4:16

**The human body** is a truly remarkable creation! There are 206 bones that are held together by complex interconnected ligaments and tendons. I am most intimately familiar with the Achilles tendon because I managed to rupture both of mine playing soccer. Isn’t this the way of things? You only come to really appreciate a part of your body when it fails? Suddenly you’re like, “Wow, that achilles tendon really makes a lot of things possible like pointing your toe, pressing down on the accelerator or the brake, standing up on your tiptoes to reach up high, jumping…”

***The human body has 206 bones and 78 major organs.*** All of these bones and organs must work together so we can function as human beings. Some of you deal with chronic pain or ongoing medical challenges. Many people close to me have this reality from back pain or lifelong illness they simply have to deal with. Say you have migraines once or twice a week; or you have a damaged disc in your back or a chronic digestive problem. Some people deal with daily pain - some failrly low level and others very high level, daily pain. My wife will attest that I have a very LOW tolerance for pain. I get to a one or two, and then I’m taking Tylenol. Level 3 or 4, I’m adding ibuprofen and going to bed, even if it’s 10 am. Level 5 or 6, I’m going to the ER.

All 78 of our organs have numerous ways they can fail. And if any one system goes haywire, it affects your whole life in a major way. Trust me, when my Achilles was torn, my whole body shut down. I was utterly useless for a good two weeks. Then I was mostly useless for another 6 weeks, on crutches, gimping around, very fussy.

***Within the church, we are a BODY*** - and we need all the different parts of the body working and working well, so we can do the work God calls us to do.

1. Work up in your **Gifts**

* Drawing **Power** and direction from Jesus

“From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint… when each part is working properly…” Eph. 4:16

For each of us to do our part, **we need to draw power from the Lord Jesus** - we need to remain closely connected with Him. He is the VINE, we are the branches. We can only bear fruit if we abide in Him by praying, trusting, loving and honoring HIM. “From HIM the whole body” is joined and held together. He is our HEAD - in terms of giving direction and in terms of being the SOURCE of our power and life. Head in Greek is just like English - it can mean head, like noggin - this thing on top of your body. Or it can mean headspring, like the source of a river up in a mountain.

***Jesus is our LIFE SOURCE***. We depend on Him and draw life from Him just as we depend on and draw life from the water we drink. If we are going to do ministry that changes lives and changes the world, we must be closely connected with Jesus, drawing life from Him. If we are going to function as a healthy, active BODY, we must all be closely connected with Jesus, the HEAD.

This means going to Him for both power **and DIRECTION**. If a body part doesn’t respond to your head we call that *paralysis*. Sadly, the American church has gotten used to pretty chronic and pervasive paralysis within the body of Christ. We have accepted very low level obedience to Jesus as standard, rather than the “all the way, right away, with a happy heart” obedience we try to train our children with.

Consider that the typical American churchgoer volunteers for 1-2 hours per month. That’s an active, regular attending, committed volunteer. A lot of people who attend don’t come all that regularly and a shockingly high percentage don’t volunteer at all. So the “good ones” volunteer for 1-2 hours each month. Superhero volunteers serve for 1-2 hours per week. But those are very rare, even in churches that have multiple services so you can theoretically worship one hour and serve the next.

So take that ***“model American Christian” who serves 1-2 hours per month***. Does that fit the John 13 example Jesus set when he washed the disciples feet and then said, “There you go - that’s your model - serve each other like that”? Does that 1-2 hours per month fit the example of Jesus who carried his cross to Golgotha after being beaten bloody and nearly unconscious? “Take up your cross monthly by holding the doors for a few minutes and helping to pass the offering plate” (remember when we still did that?).

Now again, **Oakwood is much healthier** than the average American church. Around half of our regular attenders are connected in a Community Group - and most of our groups meet every week. Plus we have a lot of people who serve a lot more than 1-2 hours per month. But we are still an American church and all of us generally default to the mindset of “what did I get out of church” rather than “what did church get out of me?”

The question is valid for all of us - **are we in tune to Christ** as the Head of the body - drawing our power and direction from Him? Or are we sometimes paralyzed - not listening to Jesus or not responding to His guidance?

The exhortation of this core value is for all of us to ***step up our involvement*** here at Oakwood. Listen to the end of verse 16:

1. Work up in your **Gifts**

* Diligently doing your **Part**

“When each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” Eph. 4:16

One of the most amazing things about the human body is its **ability to self-repair**. If only our houses and appliances and cars had this ability, right? Many problems the human body is able to fix on its own, with time and fluids and rest. The church is like this too. Programmed into the body of Christ is the ability to “build itself up in love.” Not only are we commanded by the Lord Jesus to love and serve one another, it is in our very nature to do so.

If we **GROW UP** in our attitude, remembering that it’s not about us as individuals but about Jesus, His body, His mission. If we **SPEAK UP** in our relationships, learning to speak truth to each other in loving ways so everyone can find that sweet spot in ministry where they can serve and make a difference. And if we **WORK UP** in our gifts - diligently contributing as the Lord has enabled each of us. God has given His grace to each of us individually and to all of us corporately “according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

Let’s pray for wisdom and power to use all we have and are in service to the Lord Jesus, our Head!