

Equipped for Ministry

Scripture: Ephesians 4:11-16

Introduction

Back in 2012, Gena and I came to Good Hope Baptist and began serving here during a very challenging time in the life of the church. When we arrived here at Good Hope, we began seeking God's direction and a vision for the church. We began praying and asking God where He wanted to take Good Hope and what we needed to do to move the church forward. One thing we developed was a mission statement for the church — a statement that would capture the vision and the work we believed Good Hope Baptist should have. That mission statement is as follows:

At Good Hope Baptist, we are Sharing the good news about Jesus Christ, creating a Loving place, where His people are Discerning the work He has called them to do, and where His people are Equipping one another to do His work.

That mission statement says several things that we, as the church, would be doing: *Sharing* the Gospel; *Creating* a *Loving* place for God's people; *Discerning* what God has called us all to do; *Equipping* one another to that work God has called us to do. Since the time we developed that mission statement, we have really focused on how we all are responsible for fulfilling that mission. We have tried to emphasize that the work in the church is not limited to any one person, or even one group of people. It is the responsibility of all of us. Only by working together will we accomplish this mission.

Around the same time as we developed Good Hope's mission statement, we also began studying what God's Word had to say about the Church — what it is and what it should be doing. What we saw among other things is that a church is a group of people God has called together to glorify His Son and to reach the world for Jesus Christ. A church is not a building. A church is not a club. A church is not a business. A church is a group of God's people who gather together to glorify Jesus Christ and are on mission for Him. To do the work God has called a church to do, God has given each of us specific gifts, talents, and responsibilities. God has also given certain people to a church for them to do specific things in order to equip His people to do the work He has called the church to do. It is this aspect of *equipping* about which this passage focuses.

God's Gifts to the Church

Speaking of God's gifts, we may often think of His gift of grace, His gift of forgiveness, or His gift of salvation. We may even think of His spiritual gifts such as wisdom, faith, prophesy, healing, discernment, and others. Paul wrote in verse seven of this chapter that "grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift." As His children, God has given each of us certain things that we are to use for the benefit of the whole church. According to this passage, those are not the only gifts to the Church. There are gifted people who are also given to a church for the greater good of the church. Look at verses eleven and twelve that speaks about these people.

Ephesians 4:11–12 ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

These verses basically tell us that God gave (or appointed) certain people to specific roles within the church. The list of people includes apostles (those who God sent on mission as His special representatives), the prophets (those who God called to speak God's Word to others), the evangelists (those who God called to proclaim the Gospel, particularly where it had never been heard), and the shepherds and teachers (those who God called to care for and to teach a church). The first three of these (apostles, prophets and evangelists) seem to be itinerant ministers who were preaching wherever they found an opportunity, like traveling ministers or missionaries. The last group, pastors and teachers, were attached to a particular congregation or location, like pastors are today. All of these leaders, though, were given to the Church for a purpose.

The list in verse eleven should not be considered complete since deacons are not mentioned. Deacons are called by a church to serve in specific ways. In Acts chapter six the first deacons were set apart from the Apostles in order to accomplish a specific task in the church. The focus in this passage in Ephesians is that God has called (given) certain leaders to a church to help a church accomplish its mission. What this does *not* mean is that these leaders of a church are above or somehow better than the other members of a church. They are not. They are working beside the other members in a church to accomplish what God has called the whole church to do. I emphasize "other members," because we should never consider the leaders in a church to be mere hired or replaceable people. They are members of a church who have specific roles and responsibilities in a church just like the rest of the church members.

God's Workers Who Are Equipped

So, if God gave these leaders to the Church, how many ministers are in a church? One? Two? Three? One church in the area has nine pastors and several other people called ministers. Before you answer this, look at verses eleven and twelve again:

Ephesians 4:11–12 ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

Who is it in a church who does ministry? Who are the workers in a church? It is not the task of the leaders God calls to service in a church to do all the work of ministry in the church. It is not primarily those mentioned in verse eleven who do the work of ministry, rather it is the people they equip. The task of these individuals, and others, is to prepare God's people, the saints, to do ministry in a church. The "saints" is another way of saying the whole church. If you trust in and follow Jesus Christ, you are a saint of God. If you are a saint of God, He is equipping you to do something. To equip the saints means to prepare them for the work God has called a church to do. Not long ago, I read a post on Facebook that I think captured this idea of equipping people for ministry.

“Our role as pastors and leaders in the church is to equip and serve our people to be the church to one another. From discipline to benevolence -- through equipping our leaders to shepherd well -- we continue to push ministry...to where it belongs. There is no substitute for the body being the body!” -- The People Of God

All Christians have spiritual gifts that should be used to minister to each another. In another letter Paul wrote, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:7) The leaders in a church should be pushing ministry to the rest of the church. They should help each member discover his or her own gifts for the purpose of serving the church. The Apostle Peter also wrote, “Each [of us] has received a gift, [therefore] use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” (1 Peter 4:10) We will take a closer look at that passage next week. The point here is that the ministry in a church is not the work of a select few. It is not the work of the pastor or the deacons or the other leaders in the church. These people should be equipping the rest of the church to do ministry.

There should not be a dividing line between those called “ministers” and those who are not. According to this passage, the saints of God are the ones equipped to minister. If you are a saint of God, you are a minister of God and have a responsibility to be serving each other. The leaders in a church should be equipping you, teaching you, encouraging you, and helping you find opportunities for you to serve in the church. Think of it in this way, God has given the church an enormous responsibility — to make disciples in all nations. That is literally a great mission. It involves evangelizing, baptizing, preaching, teaching, mentoring, giving, nurturing, serving and a lot of other tasks. No one person can do it. All of the saints of God are needed to fulfill this mission.

God’s Purpose for Equipping the Saints

So, what is the purpose of God equipping the saints for work? Why does God give apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers to equip the church? The first purpose, as we have seen, is to prepare God’s people to serve the church. The various ministries of the church, the different ways we serve each other and the community, are the work of the saints — the whole church. Whether it is teaching, or caring, or hospitality, or leading a small group, or leading in music, each of us serves the church in different ways. But there is more to this. Look at verses twelve and thirteen.

Ephesians 4:12–13 ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ 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,

The second purpose for God equipping you is quite literally to help the church grow. It is easy for us, including me, to focus primarily on the numerical growth of this church. It is easy to come here each week and really desire more people to fill these pews. I think we all want that, and that is good. But there is another, more important, aspect of church growth. How are we growing in our relationship in Christ and in our relationship with one

another? How are we growing together as His people whom He has called together? The work that all of the saints should be doing is for the purpose of making the whole body grow and be built up in love. Our individual gifts are meant to benefit everyone so that the whole church grows and thrives. God gave leaders to a church so that they may prepare the saints to serve one another, and in this way, all the members of a church may build up the Body of Christ.

That is why we have focused on ministry teams and small groups here at Good Hope. By becoming involved in a specific ministry with other members (teamwork), and by cultivating those small fellowship groups outside of our regular corporate worship times, we can build up the church and help move us toward greater maturity in Jesus Christ. The Church is God's way to not only reach the unbelieving world but to also sanctify His people through discipleship, accountability, and worship. We are also to continue ministering and building up the church until the whole church is fully grown. When is that? Probably when Jesus returns to get His Bride. So, what are you doing to build up the church? How are you helping the whole church to grow in Jesus Christ? Look at the exhortation Paul gave in verses fifteen and sixteen.

Ephesians 4:15–16 ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ 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.

In verse sixteen, it is the “whole body” that is equipped and when working properly that “makes the body grow.” The equipped saints make the whole church grow. Notice the importance of love here: Truth in love; Built up in love. Some of you know the truth but do not speak it in love. Why? It is because you do not love others as you should. All of us, including me, do a really good job *talking about* each other, but we do not do so well at *lovingly talking to* one another. We need to talk to each other, pray for and with each other, and not talk about one other. Ask yourself this: if we ought to be building up one another in love, how well are you doing that? Is there someone you need to love better? Is there someone with whom your relationship needs some growth? Is there someone in this congregation that you could be helping to grow closer in Jesus Christ? That is the work of the saints. We can get so focused on reaching those outside the church that we miss the work we ought to be doing within the church. So I encourage you, get to work.

Conclusion

In closing, in what way are you serving the church? What are your gifts? How is God using you to fulfill the mission of the church? We are a team and teams work together for a common goal. What is that goal — to build up this church until we are fully grown in Christ? What can the leaders in the church, your pastor and other leaders, do to better enable you to serve God and His people? Let us know. The church ought to do the work of ministry in love for Jesus and in love for each other. We do this for the purpose of building up the church and glorifying Jesus Christ. Since we are the church of God, let us act like the church of God. Let's get busy, folks! Thanks be to God. Amen!