SESSION 8

WALKING FORWARD

EPHESIANS 4:11-16

11 And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 equipping the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness. 14 Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. 15 But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. 16 From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.
1. EQUIPPERS GIVEN (Eph. 4:11)
   - Paul listed four types of gifted leaders Christ gave to His church.
   - Explain that God gives His gifts of grace to every believer (4:7) and that each type of leader listed exercises one or more spiritual gifts.
   - Focus on the type of spiritual leadership each leader provides.
   - Paul linked pastors and teachers as having similar responsibilities.
   - Affirm all spiritual gifts as necessary and important.

2. TO MOVE BELIEVERS FORWARD (Eph. 4:12-14)
   - Paul explained that the purpose of the gifted leaders listed in verse 11 was for equipping and building up the church with a goal of its believers reaching maturity while doing the work of ministry.

3. AS A BODY (Eph. 4:15-16)
   - Paul reminded his readers that confident faith in Christ is a testimony to spiritual maturity.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
Christ gives the church gifted leaders to help believers mature and minister.
- Christ gives leaders to equip His church for ministry.
- With the help of godly leaders, believers can grow in their belief in and understanding of the gospel and participate more fully in the church’s mission.
- All believers are to grow in Christlikeness and strengthen the church by doing their part.
FOCUS ATTENTION
When is “I’ve arrived” a positive and negative statement to make?
• It’s gratifying to arrive at a destination after a long trip.
• Until believers reach heaven, we won’t arrive on our Christian journey. Christians must never become spiritually complacent; they must continue walking forward.
• Jesus gives His followers what we need to mature.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE
EPHESIANS 4:11
What has God done to ensure believers keep walking forward?
• God takes our spiritual maturity personally. He gives us leaders with specific roles and functions to equip the church to fulfill its mission.
• Apostles are people sent with a divine task. Prophets are spokespersons for God.
• Evangelists are gifted at spreading the gospel and training others to share their faith.
• Pastors care for the congregation, providing oversight, comfort, guidance, and discipline. Teachers instruct believers in the truth of God’s Word and help them apply it to their lives. All pastors are teachers; not all teachers are pastors.
• Some believe apostles and prophets laid the foundation for the gospel and no longer exist, and now God uses pastors and teachers to equip His followers. The point is God wants His church to grow and has given leaders to make that happen.

EPHESIANS 4:12-14
How does Paul’s statement compete with a “we pay a pastor to do that” attitude?
• A common and dangerous misconception is that church leaders do all the work while members pay the bills and reap the benefits.
• In reality, God gifts the church with leaders whose responsibility isn’t to do all the work of ministry but to help believers discover, develop, and deploy their own gifts for service.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE
What’s the take-away from this lesson for church leaders and members?
• Church leaders shouldn’t do all the work of the church; they equip members to do so.
• Church members should appreciate and learn from their leaders, contributing to the health of the entire church body by doing the work of ministry.
• When we all contribute in the unique ways God has gifted us, we all walk forward to maturity in Christ and together display Jesus to the world.
• Personal Challenge: In what areas do you need to move forward spiritually? Don’t settle where you are, but use the gifts Christ has given you to help you and others walk forward into new dimensions of faith and service.
SEVERAL KINDS OF GIFT PACKAGES

Before the session, prepare several different kinds of gifts (beautifully-wrapped, a gift card, a plastic bag, and so forth). Arrange the gifts around your meeting space and label them with various titles, such as Purposeful, Practical, Personal, Procrastinator, Regifter, or Reluctant. As adults arrive, request they stand near the labeled gift that best describes the kind of gift giver they are. Invite volunteers to share why they chose that label.

Read Ephesians 4:11-16. Determine the displayed labels that best describe the kind of giver God is to His church. Ask: What does God personally give to the church according to verse 11? How should recognizing church leaders are a gift from God impact how we relate and respond to our leaders? Emphasize that God expects leaders to fulfill their roles of equipping church members and church members to respect their leadership and do the work of ministry.

Ask: How can we know God is a purposeful gift giver? What’s the purpose of God giving leaders to the church and giving church members tasks and the spiritual gifts to fulfill them? The purpose God has in giving individual believers gifts isn’t for personal fulfillment, but it’s so the entire church can experience the fullness of Christ. This happens when every believer is maturing in faith, unity, service, and knowledge of Christ and God’s Word.

We should regularly evaluate our gift giving and receiving. Ask: How can we best receive the gifts of leaders God has given our church? How about the ministry gifts He has given us individually?

EQUIPPING

The work of a pastor can take various forms. He teaches the congregation (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:2), he evangelizes the lost (Matt. 28:19-20), he prays for his flock (Jas. 5:14), he provides spiritual leadership and oversight (1 Tim. 3:1-2), disciplines those new in the faith (Titus 2:6), and is an example of godliness to the church (Titus 2:7). Each task is important, and yet God has designed each to serve a unifying purpose. God uses the gifts and talents of church leaders for “equipping the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12).

The term equipping that Paul used in this verse, carries the idea of furnishing someone with something they needed to complete a task at hand. If they aren’t furnished this equipment, then they’ll be hampered in completing the task. It would be like trying to install a new roof without a hammer or a nail gun.

This furnishing assumes one provides the proper equipment. Think of it in terms of showing up to play golf but to find that, instead of clubs, your kids have replaced them with rakes and shovels (although for some like myself, these may come in handy with how often I find myself in a sand-trap).

There’s another level to consider, and that’s being appropriately furnished in regard to the right training. If I’m to work in an Information Technology department, I need to be taught how to work with computers. If I’m to take a job as a mechanic, I need to know how to replace a catalytic converter or repair a faulty thermostat. Not being trained well in my field sets me up for failure.

Church leaders must be constantly concerned with equipping their church members. They must give them the tools and training they need to do what God has called them to do. In this divinely orchestrated order, if the church leader doesn’t equip the church member, he isn’t fulfilling the God-ordained reason for his ministry. And at the same time, if the church member doesn’t take that equipping and minister, he or she isn’t fulfilling his or her God-ordained role as a church member.