

The Most Glorious Opportunity

Ephesians

By Ty Blackburn

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Ephesians 4:11-16
Preached on: Sunday, January 27, 2019

Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of Ephesians, Ephesians 4. I appreciate Jess preaching last Sunday morning. I was able to listen to most of that already myself, "The Five Keys to Courage," a very helpful and just appropriate message, especially in light of what we're talking about with the doctrine of the church. We're working on the beginning of this year really a practical ecclesiology. Ecclesiology is the doctrine of the church and so as we've come into this new year, we've set aside our study of James for a few weeks to really look at what the Bible says about the church. We've done that because we have felt the need to work on a building program, as Jess mentioned earlier, the budget for that. We're prayerfully considering what God wants us to do as far as expanding parking and possible facility improvements, and as we've looked at that and prayerfully considered, we're still working through details, I ask you to continue praying for us and that we'll be sharing a lot of that at the ministry update meeting, but the thing that has been impressed most firmly upon our hearts is that we must really focus on, when we think about things like that, we must focus on what God really is building which is the spiritual body, the spiritual building the people of God, and it's easy for us to forget and to lose sight of the incredible opportunities that we have being a part of the body of Christ.

So one of the things the Lord has been doing in our lives as elders, my life particularly, is helping us to really think about the glory of the church, the beauty of the church, and so we started out this series of messages the first Sunday in January, the title of the message that day was "The Most Beautiful Place on Earth," and I suggested to you that the Bible makes clear the most beautiful place on earth is wherever the people of God gather around the word of God to lift up Christ. The local church is the most beautiful place on earth to God therefore it's the most beautiful place on earth. If it's the most beautiful place to God, then it is the most beautiful place.

Then last time, two weeks ago, "The Best Place to Work" is the church because we come together to build this temple for God to dwell in. That's the imagery that we see in the New Testament and so it's the most wonderful place to be able to work. We're building each other. We're building a corporate house, not of bricks and mortar but of people, of living stones who are being fashioned by the word of God to be more like Christ and together we are inhabited by his Spirit in increasingly clear ways.

So I want us to continue that thought moving that forward to help us really lift our estimation of what the church is because I shared a few weeks back the temptation that we have. I think I shared from C. S. Lewis' "The Screwtape Letters" and how we tend to have a low view of the church. We look at people around us, we see their weaknesses, their flaws. You know, when you first come to a church, sometimes everybody looks really, "Wow, this is impressive." I see this happen a lot, "The greatest place. We're so excited to be here." And if you're new and you're excited, I don't want to dampen that too much but I do want you to have realistic expectations. The more you get to know me, the more you get to know us, the less impressed you will be, and that's really as it should be because as we get to know each other more, the thing we ought to be most impressed with is Jesus Christ and that he uses weak, flawed people like us to shine his glory. But so often we have that idea that, "Man, this looks impressive," but then after you get to know the people, then the pendulum swings too far the other way. "What am I doing here surrounded by the people I'm surrounded by?" That's where we need to put God's, the glasses of Scripture on and look through the Bible at one another and what we see is even with the flaws and all, warts and all, this is the most beautiful place on earth. This is the best place to be on earth. This is the most exciting place to serve.

This morning, what I want us to start doing, I want us to look again at a passage we looked at last time, Ephesians 4:11-16. Last time we looked at Ephesians 2:19-22 and then went to 4:11-16 and showed how there's this connection; that we're building a building and we're building a body and it's two ways of saying the same thing. I want us to look at Ephesians 4:11-16 today as we continue looking at this practical ecclesiology and really begin unpacking a little more. I think we're going to be in this passage for more than this Sunday, but unpacking what Paul is trying to do as he writes to a local church, to the church at Ephesus, and he's trying to lift their eyes from their tendency to see the things around them, the obvious, the physical, the weaknesses, the flaws, to let them see what God is doing, and that if we can keep our eyes on what God is doing, we know what he's doing, we know what we're supposed to do. We see the work that he's called us to and it is the most glorious opportunity. That's the title of the message this morning, "The Most Glorious Opportunity." In a word, what we're going to see is this most glorious opportunity that we have when we gather together, when you unite with a church, when you commit yourself to be a part of the body life of a church and you begin committing yourself to relationships and you commit yourself to getting to know one another and serving one another and ministering to one another through the various storms of life, the various circumstances, the good times, the bad times, that this most glorious opportunity that Paul is saying that we have here is that we actually in our corporate relationships as we relate to one another, we are the one place in the universe where the invisible God becomes visible and that's the opportunity. In a word it is to make the invisible God visible. People are saying, "We wish we could see God. We wish he would make himself known." Well, he's made himself known all throughout the universe. I mean, his creation is testifying to his glory but where you see the most clearly, where his character is on display the most vividly is in the church and this is exactly what Paul is saying in Ephesians 4:11-16.

So let's read the passage together. Verse 11,

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of 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 a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, as we come to Your word, we always come aware of our inadequacy, our inability to understand things apart from You revealing them to us, Your Spirit must work, and so, Lord, we ask You to grant us Your grace, to open the eyes of our hearts that we might see and understand things that are too wonderful for us. Lord, our eyes are upon You. Our desire is for Christ to be exalted and we pray in His name. Amen.

I want us to think about as we look at this passage, that there's essentially one goal and there's one task to reach that goal. So there's a goal that we're all supposed to be working toward and we have one job and that job has two subpoints. The second point is going to have two subpoints. So I've got two points, first point, second point has two subpoints, okay?

Now the goal. What is the goal that God has in the church? What is God building? If you think about a blueprint, you know, when you're building a building you have to have a blueprint. People don't just show up on a job site and, "Hey, let's order some wood. Let's just start putting up walls and let's just see what happens." That might be kind of fun if you're making a tree house but if you're going to live there, that's not the way to do it. No, you have a blueprint and you've laid it out and you have conceptual drawings that show you what everything is supposed to look like and where everything is supposed to go and you know where this wall is, and you know where that pipe is. Everything is laid out. And so God has for us a blueprint as to what we are to be about and the problem comes when we forget to look at the blueprint. This does happen even in buildings where there are blueprints, doesn't it? They mis-measure somehow and suddenly a wall is three feet in from where it was supposed to be. This happened with our house. In some way I think what happened was it was a miscommunication about the blueprint. We wanted to make a change and so we wanted to expand a wall by three feet but somehow when it happened, they only did halfway across the house they went three feet. We wanted them to go the whole way three feet. So we ended up with a room that was a lot smaller than

we intended but we didn't recognize it until later because I wasn't that tuned in, I guess. When you're looking at, you know, when you don't know what you're doing, you don't see how, "Well, that concrete should be three feet over there." But if I had had the blueprint with me, looking at it and really knowing what I was looking at, I would have known, "Hey, there's a problem."

So I'm encouraging us to keep the blueprint in front of us. What are we trying to build? What are we trying to do? How do we know, how will we know when we've arrived there? What is it that we're called to do? What is our goal? In our relationship as we come together to the church, what is our goal? As we minister, as we speak to one another and encourage one another, just have the opportunity to have small talk, when we meet together, when we take a meal to someone, when we visit someone in the hospital, what is it that we're really trying to do? What Paul is saying here is something that I think is a lot bigger and a lot more glorious than we tend to think. We have eyes that just see what's in front of us and we forget what we're really doing. What he's saying here is that the goal in our corporate relationships is to make Jesus Christ visible; to make the invisible Christ visible. Now Jesus is invisible on the earth today because his physical body is in heaven but the second person of the Godhead has always been omnipresent and he's omnipresent here. He is here today, he's in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We have the opportunity to make him visible, that's exactly what Paul is saying; that there is a sense in which the church as we learn to love each other and we work together and we work through our problems, we offend each other, we confess our sins to each other, we forgive each other, we serve each other, that what happens is we are growing as we're speaking the truth in love to one another, we are growing to look more and more like Jesus not individually merely, that's the goal individually too, but Paul's not talking about that here. He's saying we look more like Jesus from the outside as a whole. He's saying that unbelievers on the outside who see us, the goal is that when they see us relating, they literally somehow see Jesus. The invisible Christ becomes visible.

That's what he's describing. Look what he says, "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers," and they are equipping the saints and the saints are to be about the work of ministry, the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ. So we're working, we're serving, we're being equipped. We're working, we're serving, we're all seeking to attain, to arrive at a destination. That destination is the unity of the faith and the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God. We're growing in faith. We're growing in knowledge to a – here's the key part of that verse 13 – "to a mature man." We're growing and we're growing up to be a mature man. Corporately we become a mature man. What is that? "To the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." We grow up like a child, a little boy growing up into a man.

You know, you think about you may have one of the things that my grandmother used to do was measure the grandchildren and you can go on the back of her bathroom door and you can see where, you know, people, they were measuring up and you can see my nephew or my cousin actually, and watch our cousins as they're growing up. I was already an adult so I didn't get to get measured every year, you know. It would be

shrinking now, I think, right? We shrink at some point. At 45 he's here. At 50 he's here. At 55 he's here. No, but you know what I'm saying. When you watch a child, isn't it something to see that? Here is this little boy at four years old. Here he is at six years old. Here he is at eight years old. Here he is at 16 years old. And what he's saying is the church grows to the measure of the stature of Jesus. The church as we relate to one another looks more and more like a grown man, the man Christ Jesus. We measure up to look like him. The fullness of Christ. He's laboring at language to say this isn't just some distant kind of, you're going to manifest the fullness of Christ. How can that be?

In verse 15 he says, "we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." Jesus is the head, we are the body. We are growing up into the body of Christ so that the lost around us see Jesus. Now think about that for a minute. Have you ever thought, you know, how wonderful must it have been to have been somebody like Zacchaeus that actually saw the Lord Jesus Christ with his eyes. He heard. He heard God speak. He actually heard with his ears the human vocal chords of Jesus, the sound of his voice. To touch him. To see him. To hear him. I mean, to have been somebody at the pool of Bethesda who saw Jesus heal that man. Or to have been there when he healed the blind man, the man was born blind. To have been one of the mourners at Lazarus' tomb when Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth!" To hear those words uttered by a human mouth and to see that happen. How amazing to see Christ. Paul says God's intention is that people would see Jesus, see him, hear him, feel his touch in our corporate interactions. Mysterious yet absolutely real purpose of God.

There was a song I used to like years ago, "Was it a morning like this?" Sandy Patti sang it. "Was it a morning like this?" talking about the resurrection day. Was it a morning like this? I forget the words but the part that I remember is, "Did the grass sing?" The day Jesus walked out of the tomb, imagine that. The Lord of life is dead, the body is in the tomb, the stone is rolled away, the Father calls him to rise, Jesus walks out of the tomb, "Did the grass sing? Did the earth rejoice to feel you again?" The glory of the presence of Christ. The power of that, that even the earth would want to sing, delighted just to be able to touch Jesus.

God is saying that his eternal plan through the ages was to make himself known by becoming man, that's what happened in the Incarnation, the invisible God became visible. That's exactly what John is saying in John 1:14 when he says, "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory." "The Word became flesh," God, he makes it even clearer when you go on down and he says, "Jesus full of grace and truth," John 1:18, no man has seen God at any time but the only begotten who is in the bosom of the Father. He has exegeted him. He has declared him. No one has seen God except when you look at Jesus, now you see God. Then that's even carried forward later in John 14 when, was it Philip who said, "Show us the Father and that's enough for us," John 14:8, and Jesus said, "Have I been so long with you and you don't know that he who has seen Me, he who has laid eyes on Me has seen the Father?" Made visible. God is made visible. That's what happened in the coming of Christ.

God was made visible. What is God like? What is the invisible God really like? His glory is seen in the creation in some wonderful ways. His eternal power, his majesty is seen in what is made. His wisdom in the way that he's crafted everything and made the complexity of the universe, the complexity of the smallest ecosystem, his artistry is on display but what is he really like in his heart? That's where you look at Jesus and you see him exegeted. He leads out the heart of God, "This is who God is. Come unto Me you who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Come if you're thirsty." Jesus invites you. That's the heart of God. Do you want to see what God is like? God is meek and approachable as Jesus says, "Come unto Me you who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me." Listen to these words, "For I am gentle and lowly of heart." How can God be gentle and lowly of heart? He is. Look at Jesus. He's approachable.

What is this God who has made the universe like? We live in a world where so much is wrong, tragedies happen and all that, what is God really like? Does God really care? Look at Jesus. "Come unto Me you who are weary and heavy-laden. Come, embrace Me in all of your striving and I will give you rest. Take My yoke. The paradox you find rest by working, yoking yourself to Me. Submit to My Lordship and you will find rest because I'm gentle and lowly. I will walk alongside you and I won't be like an ox, unequally yoked ox that pulls the other ox along. I'm gentle and lowly. There's no better place than to be next to Me." So what is God like? That's what God is like.

So there are people today saying, "What is God like? What is the invisible God like?" and God's intention is to show them through you; to make visible his heart through you and me and the way we relate to one another. That is his plan from the time of the ascension of Christ until the return of Christ. That is his agenda. He's put everything here. All of his marbles are invested in the local church. This is his plan and that is a high calling. That's too much for us but it's not too much for him.

The invisible Christ is made visible. That's what he wants to do, he wants to make the invisible God visible, the invisible Christ visible. That's what Paul is saying, that as we are speaking the truth in love, as we are being equipped, as we are serving one another, as we're doing our part, Jesus is coming into visibility right before people's eyes. That's the calling. That's the goal. That is the goal, the first point. Our goal is to make Jesus visible and that is truly staggering.

So how do we do it? How do you work to meet that goal? How do I do that? That's the second point. That's the task or the job, the work that he has for you and me. What is that? If the goal was to make Jesus visible corporately and that's what it was, the goal, the first point was to make Jesus visible corporately, the task is to make myself available personally. Make myself available personally. It doesn't happen automatically. I have to commit to this. I have to make myself available. That's what we're seeing in the text and we'll see as I show you. The two subpoints here, to make yourself available, there are two things that I think the text calls us to do. To make myself available personally I need to do two things. So point 2 has 2 subpoints. A. Be committed. Be committed. And we're going to see the second is: be connected.

Be committed. He's not just telling us it happens automatically, no, he's calling us to get on the job. He's put before us the blueprint and now it's our job, we're all at the work site and we each have a task and if the goal is going to be realized, we all have to do our job. We all have to be committed to work. I mean, look at the language in the text, "the equipping of the saints," verse 12, "for," key phrase, "the work of service." To be a Christian, to be a follower of Jesus Christ, church is not something you come to just to get sort of, you know, encouraged to go back out. I mean, it is that. It is that but it's not just merely that because what I'm trying to get at is we don't come as consumers, we come as workers and the wonderful thing is God does bless us and fill us and help us and part of what our working together is to keep helping each other, and we find out that it's more blessed to give than to receive. When you come with an attitude to give, you end up receiving. Actually, the irony when you lay down your life, you find it.

But we need to be committed to the work, the work of service. Some translations say the work of ministry. That word translated "service" or "ministry" is the word "diakonia" which we get our word "deacon" is related, "diakonos," and it means "table service; to wait tables; to just do menial tasks." There are various theories about the etymology of the word "diakonos." One of those ideas is possibly it means dia, through, konos, the dust. The idea is certainly, though, whether it's that or not, the idea is of being willing to do whatever has to be done. So it's humble. We come not with an attitude that says some things are beneath me. No, we come ready to do whatever the Lord puts before us, however we can serve.

But we come to work. I mentioned that last time. This is the most wonderful place to work. You come but you come to work and we really have to change our mindset. I want to challenge you. I really believe that, I mean, the Lord is working on me in a really big way of showing me things in my own heart that are just deficient in so many ways in the way that I think about my own life ministry, and certainly the church. I mean, I've had too low a view of the church. And I think it's just we have to, how do you change that? Well, we have ways of thinking and beliefs that we form through patterns of thinking that we have to change. How do you do that? Meditation. What you do is you meditate on the fact of what we've been talking about. You meditate on the fact things like Zion is the beauty of all the earth. The church, I'm getting ready to go to the most beautiful place on earth.

Now let me ask you this: if you, you know how sometimes you don't feel well and you, you know, "I don't feel like going to church today." If you were on, now there's a balance here because you also have to serve your brothers and sisters. If you have the flu, you serve best by staying home, right? That is true and so but what I want you to do is pray for wisdom about that kind of thing and serve the Lord and serve your brothers and sisters but there are oftentimes where we just don't feel that great. You've got a headache. We just feel a little under the weather. If you were on vacation and your schedule said you were seeing the Grand Canyon today for the first time, would you let a headache keep you from that sight-seeing? That's a good way to ask maybe am I well enough to go or not. Would this keep me from going to see, you know, the art museum that I've wanted

to see. What is it, the Louvre? As I get older... Am I right? What is that? France, right? Am I right? It suddenly sounded like the other name for the subway in London. I'm just like, my brain. Anyway. You know what I'm talking about regardless. If you only got one chance to see it, maybe I would say a headache is worth staying home from that, I don't know, but many of you would not and this is far better than that.

So it's a matter of meditating on that and saying, "I'm going to think like God thinks about the church." It's not going to happen without meditation upon his word so that I begin to think his thoughts after him and what happens then is I begin to value what he values. That's my problem and all of us, our hearts are to be renewed. Even though we've been born again, we have to work at renewing our hearts. That's renewing our thinking, renewing what we want, renewing what we choose. So it means we have to form habits of belief which only comes through meditation on Scripture and values very much the same way, really thinking about it. And I think one of the powerful things about meditation that helps values is so much of Scripture appeals emotionally to you if you really are listening to it. God speaks in emotive terms because he's trying to capture the heart.

So look for the pictures, celebrate the pictures, delight in the pictures, keep thinking about the pictures and keep telling yourself that what God says is true, what I think is not. So we reprogram ourselves and so I'm going to work. I'm not going as a consumer. I'm going as a worker and it's going to take repeated meditation on that and it's going to take new habits and one of the habits is get the habit of going to church. Some of you need to make it much more of a habit than you are. Some of you may be watching on Facebook live because you're not here and you should be. You need to make it a habit because it is the wise thing to do in light of all that God has said in his word. You and I need this and what an opportunity and you come and you have the opportunity to do the most glorious and beautiful thing that the world can see. You have an opportunity to make Jesus visible.

This idea of work is there throughout, the building. You have kind of an inclusio of the building up. We come to work and the goal is building up. We're building up the building. We're helping the body grow up. See verse 12, "to the building up of the body of Christ, the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ." You see, at the end of verse 16, "causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." We're building up. We come to work and we're building.

We're building one another and we're building up, but he makes it clear that we all have a part to play, especially in verse 16 when he says, "according to the proper working of each individual part." The idea there, there's a footnote in the NAS that says, "working in measure," and that's what it really is. It's literally he's saying, "From whom the whole body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the measured work of each single part." According to the measured work of each single part. The idea is there's an apportioned work for each single part. There's a big task to do and everybody's got their role.

Think about, you know, an assembly line. If somebody takes five minutes off the assembly line, we're in trouble. Putting things together where that bolt didn't get there. Your job was to put that bolt there. Now the car is not gonna work properly. You've gotta do your part. We need to have an urgency that says, "Hey, listen, you are that valuable." I mean, don't overestimate yourself, Romans 12, but there's this balance. Romans 12:3, "Let not each man think more highly of himself than he ought to think but so as to have sound judgment." Do you know what he talks about after that? Spiritual gifts and the point is don't think you're sufficient in yourself, think, understand you need the other members of the body but don't think that you're invaluable, they need you too.

But each of us has, in God's mind each of us has a task. Every time we come together, God has a portion of work for you and it's true throughout the week when you have a phone conversation with someone, when you meet them, when you run into someone, there's an apportioned task for you. But think of it especially when we're together as a body because he's talking about the building up of the body here. When we are building one another up, you play a role that no one else can quite play the role you play, and if you don't play it, it's not gonna happen.

You know, think about, I remember when, you know, playing football. It's always a good illustration to me, sports illustration. One of the guys in men's Bible study used a football illustration the other day, Eric Gilmore, and I wanted to go up and hug him after he did that. No, but I love football illustrations but, you know, one of the things about a play in football, you know, you draw up the X's and the O's and this guy is supposed to block this guy, this guy is supposed to do that, this guy is supposed to do this, this guy is supposed to do that, and if everybody does their part, you score a touchdown or you at least get 10 or 15 yards. Maybe you can't block one guy, the guy fakes that guy out and it's a touchdown. Well, if 10 out of 11 guys do their part, you may lose five yards. You may have a fumble. Ten out of 11, that's pretty good. I mean, that's over 90% but that's not enough. Eleven guys must do their individual part and they must not do what somebody else is supposed to do, they've got to do their part first. I mean, if you're supposed to block that guy, you block him and you knock him down, now you can go help somebody else but make sure you get him first. We all have our part.

The idea of spiritual gifts, let's turn over to Ephesians, I mean 1 Corinthians 12, from Ephesians to 1 Corinthians 12. This is a great passage to meditate on to help us understand our role and responsibility and how we should see one another. Verse 11, Paul says, is basically saying, "Listen, we all have gifts because we're part of a body and God has planned to distribute gifts among the body so that we would work interdependently, we would need one another and we could serve one another and in doing that, we would manifest the glory of the unity of the Godhead and we would show the glory of Christ." He says in verse 11, "But one and the same Spirit works all," this is 1 Corinthians 12:11, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." The Spirit is the one who chooses. He gives the gifts. "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ." Christ now, his body is the members of this church. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks,

whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be?" He goes on down to say, "You know, we can't say I have no need of you. Even the parts we don't think that we need naturally, we need even the most."

The reason the Lord did this as he says later on in verse 25, 1 Corinthians 12:25, "so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." He wanted us to need one another and there are not to be divisions so that we would come together. I mean, to not be together would be like walking through life without a left foot or even a left big toe. That would be a big loss, wouldn't it, if you'd lose a big toe? Your pinkie toe is more valuable than you think it is. I mean, you'd rather lose it than the big toe maybe, but I bet you'd fall a lot more if you didn't have your pinkie toe. Anyway, I'm sorry I got off on that, but the point is you need every part of your body. You need everything that God has given you. We all do.

Now think about what this means. When we, when someone has a need in the body, back to how people see it visibly. Let's think about this. Someone experiences an illness, someone experiences death, bereavement and their neighbors, their unbelieving neighbors, their unbelieving family members watch us minister to them and if we're all doing our part, if the finger and the toe and the eye and the ear, the hand, the foot, are doing their part, then they see Jesus. They see Jesus. They just don't see an impressive church, they see Jesus. That's what Paul is saying. You make Jesus, the invisible Christ, visible by using your gift.

Now you say, "What's my gift?" I think it's not as complicated as people want to make it. People have spiritual gifts tests and all that, I take those with a grain of salt. I think the best thing to do is if you just make yourself available, if you're committed and you're doing, you're committed to ministering and you are walking with the Lord praying, then just look for what you see and what you notice and what you'll find is we see and notice different aspects of even the same problem.

Do you remember that story I've told you before about the Romans 12 gifts, the seven gifts? I mentioned Romans 12 and the seven spiritual gifts, or think no more highly of yourself than you ought to think, then he goes through seven gifts, and I've used that illustration before of the dinner party where the administration, service, somebody drops a dish, falls on the floor, and you have seven spiritual gifts there and they all think differently about what happened. You know, the prophecy says you should be more careful. You know, thank you. You do need to know that. God willed you to know that. The Lord loves you enough to let you know that. The teacher says, "You know, I think if you had actually been carrying, distributing the weight better in your hand, not trying to hold it with one hand, you probably would have been better off." The encourager says,

"Hey, I'm sorry but this is gonna be okay. We'll do better next time." Mercy says, "Oh, you must feel terrible. I'm just, my heart is breaking with you." The servant is already cleaning up the mess. The administrator is telling, you know, "Hey, Bill, call for pizza. Sally, get the mop." Whatever. And you know, that kind of thing. So it's all happening, the giver is, "Hey, I've already called. I've got, it's on my credit card. I'm paying for the meal." Those are the gifts that are there.

Well, you move at it with the gift and the orientation God has given you and it's distinct and you see an aspect of the problem that is different, but when everyone is functioning, that person, look how that person is cared for. Every part of the need is cared for. That is exactly how Jesus would minister to them. Jesus would minister to that person in every way in perfection because he is the embodiment of every spiritual gift at its perfection and so when we serve one another, that's what happens. So when you do your part of ministering that bereavement situation, ministering to that person who's dealing with marital difficulty, maybe their spouse has left them and you're ministering to them, their unbelieving family, their neighbors who watch that have an opportunity to see Christ. That's one of the things we should be excited about. Hey, when the unbeliever, family member is there, we should really be excited. "Lord, this is an opportunity for them to see Jesus. Fill me with Your Spirit. Help me make the most of this opportunity. Help me. If I'm just bringing a meal here, let me do it with the kind of joy and just spiritual love that this person will see." It's that kind of moment is happening. These are the opportunities and too often we squander them. We don't realize that we have an opportunity to impact in an eternal way, to do something that is more glorious than anything else that can happen in the universe right now. God is letting us, can you believe that, he's letting us do that. He's inviting us to be a part of that.

So be committed to that. Determine you're gonna do your part. "Lord, let me see what my part is. Give me eyes to see and do it." And then the last subpoint is: be connected. Make myself available personally. We're trying to make Jesus visible corporately by making myself available personally. Be committed. Be connected. And to be connected primarily in Ephesians 4 is be connected to Jesus yourself. Be connected to the head. Don't just be trying to find out what's wrong and minister to it. Yes, do that but stay connected to the head.

I mean, think about how our bodies work. The reason that my hand does this is my brain is telling it to do that right now, right? If my brain, somehow the nerve was severed between my brain and my hand, my hand would not work. That's what happens with paraplegia or quadriplegia, there is nerve damage somehow, severing of the spinal cord and now the signals of the brain are not able to animate the members of the body. Well, how are you going to be, do your part as the finger of Christ if you're not straining and striving to be connected to the head? This means your eyes have got to be on Jesus. You've got to be focusing on him even as you go, even as you come to church on Sunday to go to work, your focus is, "Lord, help me. Give me eyes to see. I want to be pleasing to You. I want to be delighting in You. I want to serve You. I'm yoking myself to You. You know what I need to do. I don't feel like I've got anything to give. I feel bad, Lord. I don't want to be here right now. I don't think I have anything to offer but I'm yoking myself to

You because You said when I am weary and heavy-laden I can come to You, You will give me rest, and You'll set me to work and Your work will be rest because You will do it by Your power for Your glory." And when you come like that, when your eyes stay on Christ, then you are that hand of Jesus, the ear, the eye, and if we can all stay connected and speaking the truth in love, we keep helping each other to keep being refocused on connecting to Jesus. You and I need it continually. We're sheep. We forget. And we keep helping one another.

This is what we're to do, keep looking to him and it's essentially always the ministry that we're doing is if we go to that person who is bereaved, what we're wanting to do basically is somehow let them see Jesus in me and point them to him. Sometimes it's by mourning with them and not saying a whole lot, sometimes it's by actually speaking a word of correction or encouragement, but it's always in a heart that says, "Lord, just let them be drawn to You. Let them be focused on You." That's why Jesus said, "Abide in the vine, abide in Me. I'm the true vine. Abide in Me and you will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing."

So we stay connected, we're committed to do the work, we're committed because we have such a lofty goal, the goal is to make Jesus visible corporately, we make ourselves available personally by being committed to the work, and we keep ourselves useful by being connected to Christ. That is the high calling of God. There is nothing more exciting that you can be involved in in your life than that. There is nothing more beautiful that you can do than that. Lots of wonderful things that we do and I'm not diminishing any of them, but this surpasses in every way every other thing because this is what God values most. That's exciting. May God help us to do that.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your incredible grace to make salvation available to sinners like us. Lord, we in ourselves there is no good thing. We come into this world against You, determined to live for ourselves, for our own glory, but You've made a way to save sinners like us through Jesus Christ dying for us on the cross and paying for our sins so that everyone who repents and believes becomes Your child and becomes a part of Your family and a part of Your house that You're building, a part of Your body. Lord, we need You to keep changing our thinking. Let Your word, help us apply our hearts with all diligence to these things, to meditate upon these truths, to act on these truths. Keep teaching us in days and weeks to come how to become the church that You want us to be. Our desire is that we would look more like Jesus every day and that when You give us opportunities to serve one another, that people would be impacted in more powerful ways with the glory of such a beautiful and wonderful Savior, that they would see Him in us. We pray this in His name. Amen.