



# THE MINISTRY OF THE SAINTS

SERIES: HOW WE FUNCTION – FOUR KEY VALUES

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Ephesians 4:11-16  
First Message  
Gary Vanderet  
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My wife Kathy and I will celebrate our 29th wedding anniversary tomorrow. For 27 of those years I have been privileged to serve on the pastoral staff of PBC. We both feel blessed to be part of such a rich heritage. Beginning today and continuing over the next three Sundays we will look at four key values that define our philosophy of ministry and how we function as a church. These four, the Ministry of the Saints, the New Covenant, Expository Preaching, and Servant Leadership, are the product of our mother church, Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto. These are the principles that have been modeled and ingrained in me and in so many others over the years.

My own exposure to what we call the Ministry of the Saints began before I ever came to PBC. I will read from a letter that I wrote to Ray Stedman, the founding pastor of the church, upon his retirement in 1990:

It was in the spring of 1972 as a junior at Pacific Christian College that I read a new book for a Christian Education class, entitled *Body Life*. I was deeply stirred inside in a way that I never before experienced, and for the first time my eyes were open to the nature and function of the church. I was very excited to later listen to you speak in our morning chapel, and to host you as you spoke at our Body Life service at the church where I was serving, the West Covina Church of Christ. As I look back on my life, those were very significant occasions in my growth. But back then, Ray, I would never have dreamed that one day I would have the privilege of serving together with you in the same body.

*Body Life* changed my life. I still have my original copy. I encourage you to read this foundational book.

We continually need to be reminded of the radical nature of the church. When we say “the church,” we are not referring to a building. The church is made up of people. It is a new race, a new humanity, a new society which God has called out of this world. In the first three chapters of Ephesians the apostle Paul reveals God’s eternal purpose which he has been working out in history. Through Jesus Christ, and through his death and resurrection, God is creating something entirely new. It is not just a new life for us individually, but a new humanity. Once alienated, we are now reconciled. Once fractured, we are now united.

Speaking of the church, Paul uses the metaphor of a building. But he is referring to a temple made with living stones, not bricks and mortar but flesh and bones. Believers make up the body of Christ. Buildings and bodies are different metaphors, but what they have in common is that they are places in which to live. The glory of the church is that it is the building in which God lives and the body through which he works. The purpose of the church is to reflect the invisible God in our visible world. The church is not an organization, but a living organism. It does not exist to run meetings on Sunday mornings. Believers are called to be the people of God. As we go about our world we are to make God known.

Our text comes from the fourth chapter of Ephesians. I will read verses 11-16, but our focus will be on the opening two verses.

**And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 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. 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; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which 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. (Eph 4:11-16 NASB)**

Here Paul gives insight into how the body of Christ is to function and grow. In the preceding verses he wrote that every Christian is uniquely blessed with spiritual gifts. Verse 7: “to each one of us grace was given.” In verse 11 he introduces us to four of those gifts, the support or equipping gifts: apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher.

The word apostle literally means, “one who is sent forth.” It is used in three ways in the New Testament. But Paul uses it here to refer to a small and distinctive group consisting of the twelve men whom Jesus chose

(including Matthias, who replaced Judas), Paul, James, the Lord's brother, and possibly one or two others. These men who were personally chosen and commissioned by Jesus had to be eyewitnesses of the risen Lord. They had Christ's authority to formulate doctrine, write Scripture, plant churches, and speak God's word. Their authority was attested to by signs, wonders and miracles. In this sense we no longer have apostles today. No one has the same authority as these men had.

The second gift is that of prophet. John Stott comments that a prophet is one who, as Jeremiah put it, "'stood in the council of God,' who heard and even 'saw' his word, and who in consequence 'spoke from the mouth of the Lord.' ...a prophet was a mouthpiece or spokesman of God, a vehicle of his direct revelation."<sup>1</sup> In that sense we have to say that there are no prophets today. No one can claim an inspiration comparable to those prophets, who could preface their words with the phrase, "Thus says the LORD." If there were prophets today who could make this claim, then we would have to add their words to Scripture. Earlier in Ephesians, Paul described apostles and prophets as the foundation of the church and the recipients of fresh revelation from God. That foundation which they laid was completed two thousand years ago, and we can't interfere with it in any way. There may be secondary meanings to both of these gifts today, but that is not Paul's intent here.

The ministries that continue today are those of evangelist and pastor-teacher. This word evangelist occurs only three times in the NT: here in Ephesians, in Acts 21:8 (referring to Philip), and 2 Timothy 4:5 (referring to Timothy himself). The verb to evangelize is used to describe the spreading of the good news. Every Christian has the opportunity and obligation to be a witness, to share his or her faith. But evangelists must be more than that. They have the unique capacity to share their faith and the word of God effectively with non-Christians, and the ability to teach believers how to share their faith. At PBC in Palo Alto we had a pastor on staff who was an evangelist. I watched him lead scores of men and women to faith. He had a gift, a supernatural ability to do that.

The last gift mentioned in our text is that of pastor-teacher. While it's not apparent in our English translation, it's clear from the Greek text that this is referring to one person, not two. The gift of pastor-teacher is a single gift. Every pastor must be a teacher, but not every teacher is a pastor. The pastors and elders of this church are the shepherding teachers. We do not have a senior pastor. There is only one Senior Pastor, and that is the Lord. He is the Chief Shepherd (that is what senior pastor means). The rest of us are pastor-teachers. Our responsibility is to water the seed which the evangelists have planted. Evangelists plant the seed; pastor-teachers nurture it. That is how a church grows.

In verse 12 the apostle describes the ministry of a pastor-teacher. This description is contrary to what many people think: "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." The KJV inserts a comma between the first and second phrases: "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." That is wrong. There should be no comma there. The comma gives the impression that the pastor-teacher does everything. Reading the text this way infers that the pastor's job is to equip the saints, to do the work of the ministry, and to build up the body of Christ. But that is wrong. This translation has given rise to much of the clericalism that characterizes the evangelical world today; the idea that the pastor is the main man, the senior executive sitting at the top of the pyramid with everyone else arranged in various levels of subordination under him. John Stott uses the analogy of a bus driver to describe this. The pastor sits in the front of the bus with his hands on the steering wheel, and everyone else is seated behind him, watching. And the pastor announces to everyone, "Just relax and leave the driving to me."

We will talk more about this in a sermon on eldership on July 4th. When the NT refers to church leadership, it is always plural, never singular. Singular leadership in a church is always dangerous. The New Testament warns against it. The apostle John speaks about Diotrephes, "who loves to be first" (3 John 9). Multiple leadership is the norm, as we will see.

The way this verse should read is that a pastor-teacher has one job, and that is to equip the saints – you, in other words. It's your job to do the work of the ministry. But many churches don't operate this way. It's the pastor's job to do all the preaching, all the counseling, all the visitation and all the evangelizing. He is the chief administrator. He's on every committee, he's at every meeting. After all, he has the training. He's been to seminary. That is what he is paid for. He gets paid to be good, while the saints are good for nothing!

But when ministry is reserved to the professionals there is nothing left for people to do other than come to church and listen, and bring others with them. So Christianity becomes a spectator sport, very much akin to someone's definition of football: 22 men on the field desperately in need of rest, and 50,000 in the stadium desperately in need of exercise!

According to Paul, the job of a pastor-teacher is to "equip" the saints. That is a colorful word. When Jesus first saw Peter, Andrew, James, and John, they were "mending" their nets. That is the same word that is rendered "equipped" here. They were getting their nets ready, fixing them, preparing them. The word is used outside the NT of setting a broken bone. According to Thayer, it means, "to make them what they ought to be." Ray Stedman used the phrase, "to shape up the

saints.”

A pastor’s role is that of shepherd. He cares for the flock primarily by feeding the sheep, either the whole congregation or smaller groups within it. He equips primarily through teaching. He is a shepherd: there is a relational aspect to his ministry. And he is a teacher: there is a revelational aspect to his ministry. Ministry is not difficult. Ministry is making friends and imparting truth.

So pastors are called to the ministry of the word and prayer. Sadly, however, many pastors function more like administrators. They fill their time with programs and committee meetings. They are absorbed with business and organization. They think they have to be multifunctional. They spend more time on the telephone, or email, the modern telephone, than they do in the Bible. As a consequence they have little time to study or pray. How can pastors preach or teach if they don’t have adequate time to study and pray? That is why there is such a low level of teaching in so many pulpits. Pastors are absorbed in the wrong kind of ministry. How can the church be equipped to maturity if the pastor isn’t teaching the people? The devil is delighted with this, because he has succeeding in his strategy of distraction.

Personally, I struggle in this area. I am a people person. I love people, I love counseling, and I love building community. People energize me. Studying is hard for me. The continual exhortation to me from my brothers on the elder board is, “How is your study time? Are you taking time to study, to let God speak to you through the word?” I am happy to have brothers who push me to keep the main thing the main thing.

Preaching declines when a congregation or its pastors are not doing what God calls them to do. Christian understanding and living decline also. The church is prey to all kinds of false teaching and is stuck in a state of perpetual immaturity.

But there is a second tragic result of this condition that is prevalent in churches. Pastors are tired, they are worn out and are not studying and praying. The result is that the saints are not equipped. They are not using the gifts that God has given them. They are prevented from functioning in their God-given roles. Oftentimes pastors want to hold all the power and authority for ministry in their hands. Their congregation can’t do anything without checking in with them. That’s not biblical. The pastor’s role is to equip you and set you free for ministry. You don’t need approval to start a ministry.

Many of you understand how God has gifted you and you know the joy of ministry. The word gift comes from a root word that means grace. It is a graciously given gift of God, a supernatural capacity to serve the needs of others in the body of Christ. It’s not a natural

talent, like athletic ability or musical talent. Those abilities are given to people everywhere, whether they are believers or not. But spiritual gifts are given only to Christians. And no one is left out. Each one of us has at least one, and probably more. We can assume that gifts are imparted when the Spirit himself is imparted at conversion, but we don’t know.

The NT has four lists of spiritual gifts: Ephesians 4, Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and 1 Peter 4. Each of these lists is different, which may mean that the NT does not have an exhaustive list of gifts. God, who is a lavish giver, has an infinite amount of gifts to give out. So we probably have more than one.

You discover your gift by getting involved in the needs of others. Start loving people! Ask yourself, How am I burdened to love others? It is important to note that every passage on gifts is followed by a discourse on love. The purpose of spiritual gifts is to benefit others. Gifts are the means by which we love others. And each of us loves differently. Get involved in the needs of people around you – on campus, at home, here in our group. You might also gain some insight into your gifts by observing the kinds of people for whom God burdens you. Be willing to do anything.

Don’t give up if you fail at something. Gifts take a while to develop. There is a saying, “If a thing is worth doing, it’s worth doing well.” But I think if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly! If it’s worth doing, just do it. Be aggressive in taking advantage of the opportunities God opens up to help others. Gifts, like talents, may lie undiscovered for years, and then a combination of circumstances may bring them to light. And you will know after a while that you either have a certain gift or you don’t. If you don’t, try something else. Others in the body can tell best how you minister to them, so ask, and listen.

How many of you know your spiritual gifts and feel that you are using them on a regular basis? How many of you say you don’t know what your spiritual gifts are or where you are gifted to serve? Many of you are using your gifts. It’s a joy to watch how excited you are to have Jesus Christ living inside you, touching people with his love and bringing life to others.

The body of Christ has no insignificant members. The reason why many struggle with this is because they think that ministry happens only on Sunday morning. Read Paul’s words from 1 Corinthians 12. There are many different needs in this body and in your world. The work of the church is to heal the brokenhearted, give deliverance to the captives, preach the good news to the poor and despairing, and encourage and strengthen others. All that doesn’t happen on Sunday. We come to church to help get equipped for ministry.

Only a few gifts function on Sunday. The majority of

ministry takes place during the week, in your home, in your office or workplace (which for many of you is your major platform of ministry). Unemployed people have financial needs. Deteriorating marriages need encouragement and counsel. One of the great deceptions in the church is the notion that unless you have a degree in counseling you can't help anyone. While some have special training that is extremely valuable, it is wrong to think that you have to be specially educated to help someone. There are numerous ways in which we can encourage others around us. There is an important place of service in the body of Christ for you.

All Christians are called to be ministers, to serve, to use their gifts in ministry. Some of you have been called into ministry in the secular community: technology, business, the media, education, etc. Others of you have been called into ministry at home, as a wife and mother, a homemaker. That is fulltime Christian ministry.

The human body is the most beautifully balanced and delicately articulated instrument in the world. All the computers on earth cannot do what a single human body can do when it is functioning properly. In the same way there is nothing more beautiful and balanced than the church of Jesus Christ, his body. Spiritually speaking, it is the most marvelous organism in the universe. Even the angels look into how the church functions.

A church should not be built around the gifts of one or two people. The body of Christ is like an orchestra: people play different instruments, but we all play the same melody. When that is going on, a church is functioning as God intends. Life is about losing yourself in the lives of others, giving yourself away. May God multiply that core value in our body.

1. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1979), 161.

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