

Life Together: God's Plan – M³ (for Ministry, to Maturity, in Mission) Ephesians 4:11-16

MPS Jesus empowers the church for ministry by grace for all to become like Him by the gospel.

OBJ Every Christ-follower can understand God's Plan for walking worthy by Three "Ms": for ministry, to maturity, in mission.

INTRO Total Gym for the total body workout. If it was good enough for Chuck Norris, then it is good enough for me. It didn't work, not even close! **HOW is it that the human body is so good at healing itself, but unable to fitness itself?**

Q? Have you ever considered how God intends for the body of Christ to build itself up?

Last week we began a series titled "Life Together" in which we are considering our life as the church. We started with God's purpose - to know and be known, and the basic understanding of salvation, and how that provides the foundation for Life Together. Today we see God's Plan to build the church; grace given in gifts for ministry, to maturity, in mission.

Ephesians 4 outlines God's plan for building up the church. Before we consider our text for today, we need to remember how Paul began the chapter to understand why he explains all that he says. Paul begins chapter 4 by urging the Ephesians to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called". He is exhorting every Christ-follower to live in a way that is true to our salvation in Christ. [4-6] He reminds us of our foundation for this life, that we are one in the body of Christ and led in our faith by the Spirit who empowers, the Son who is Lord, and the Father who is sovereign. [7-10] Then he says that grace is given to every person as measured out of Christ. **Christ is worthy to bestow these gifts because he defeated and conquered Satan once and for all.**

What is God's Plan for you to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling" in Jesus Christ?

Life Together is at the heart of God's plan for you, Christian. Your becoming like Jesus largely depends on the church.

Jesus empowers the church for ministry by grace for all to become like Him by the gospel.

OBJ God's Plan for Life Together can be understood by Three Ms: ministry, maturity, and in mission.

1. **God's plan is that His people be equipped for ministry. 4:11-12**

There is a common mindset in the church today that "ministry" is what the professionals do. And depending on one's preference determines where you go for ministry. So, if you want to learn and grow, you find a professional preacher or teacher; if you want to be entertained, a professional performer; and if you want to be amused, a professional entertainer. The entertainers typically have the best stage props. The performers have the best lasers and special effects. And the best preachers is a matter of personal opinion. Now I do not have anything against any entertainer, performer, or preacher. But the Bible reveals a much different plan that we can understand in two parts.

First, Jesus gifts His church through leaders to equip every Christian to serve. Verse 11 states five gifts that Jesus provides for the church that come through specific leaders in the church. We do not have time to cover each gift extensively but I do want to outline them for you briefly by defining the gift with a central focus for each one.

1. **apostle** means 'one who is sent'. This gift functions by starting new works in 'common faith'. This gift is most evident in the founding of the church through the New Testament office of Apostle. These men were identified by distinct qualifications to serve a unique purpose in God's Kingdom, and act as human authors in writing holy Scripture. Apostles today, as we are discussing, have a similar gifting but do not hold the office, serve the same purpose, or hold equal authority as New Testament apostles. Their focus is starting church and organizing them for or gospel proclaiming ministries. Most who identify these as gifts point to the work of church planters and missionaries for this gift.
2. **prophet** is one thru whom God speaks to strengthen, encourage, comfort and build up the church. Again, this is not an office, like in the Old Testament, but majors on truth-telling what has already been revealed in God's Word. Their focus is on the Truth of God's Word and righteousness in living, with a love for God as a leading theme of their ministry work.



3. **evangelist** is one gifted to share the redemptive message of the gospel, and usually holds with a strong appeal to people. All Christians are commanded to evangelize, but this individual holds a strong gift that models and equips others to fulfill the command to evangelize. The evangelist's focus is sharing the gospel, and is often found connecting with a broad variety of people, inviting them to church, and regularly sharing the gospel.
4. **pastor** holds a great concern for the care and growth of people, and well as godly leadership in the church. This role is closely associated with teaching and helping others to understand and follow God, with a strong focus on the care and guarding of the flock through sound doctrine.
5. **teacher** holds great concern to communicate truth so people can understand and apply to life. Their focus is on making truth simply, meaningful, and applicable. This gift is usually paired closely with pastor / shepherd.

These gifts are given to the church through individuals that lead for the purpose of equipping the body to do the work of ministry. You can identify this gift in a person the same way you identify any gift, not through an assessment score but as their strengths come forth through serving in ministry so the congregation can recognize and affirm their gifting.

TRANS There a movement that perverts these gifts to practice deception.

APPL The New Apostolic Reformation, which is not as new as it sounds, and is also known as the "Third Wave of the Holy Spirit", seeks to restore the church offices of apostle and prophet. But it is a dangerous perversion of this passage, seeking to re-establish supra-Biblical authority in charismatic personas and individuals who demonstrate a high level of gifting. There is much to this movement, but it is principally identified by its focus on prophetic words and miraculous signs and wonders. Jesus condemned the Jews for demanding more signs when no more were necessary^{Matthew16:4} and warned that false christs and prophets would arise performing signs^{Matthew24:24}. Paul responded to the Jews demands for signs with the preaching of Christ crucified^{1Corinthians1:22}. **Therefore, Christians today should guard themselves not to demand nor be deceived by signs and wonders, but to focus on the preaching of the gospel.**

Second, Jesus empowers His church by grace to build itself up through ministry.(.12) Once rightly equipped, the body activates in the work of ministry to build itself up. All Christians are equipped by grace to do the work of ministry for building up the body. Sermons in the worship gathering are important, but they are not enough to build the church. The faithful proclamation of the Word is intended as the catalyst for equipping the church. Every worship gathering, ministry and teaching environment, and community group is the same; they are not intended to entertain, appease, nor impress the attender, but to equip the participant. So, when you attend with no intention to participate, but only to be inspired, impressed, enthused, or energized, you forsake God's purpose for your life. And anything the church does, or demands, that takes the focus off equipping, only deters from the purpose of the gathering. Each person's expectation for why you gather changes the way you participate when we gather. **God's grace is active among the congregation to accomplish His work when leaders equip the congregation to serve and build up the whole. First, God's plan is that His people be equipped for ministry.**

2. God's plan is that every Christian labor in ministry so each person can grow to maturity. 4:13-15

Maturity is the aim of all ministry, BOTH for the one being ministered to AND for the one doing the work of ministry. No Christian matures without serving so others can mature. And no person becomes more like Jesus without someone serving. In serving, the simplest act performed in humble submission produces the most powerful outcome in the church for both the sake of the one serving and the one being served.

So to understand what serving produces, we should ask the question, "**What is maturity?**" This is no easy answer to provide, and one we get wrong a lot. One comparison that is necessary in our day is distinguishing between "growth" and "growing up". The church has offered countless opportunities for people to grow but with little aim toward growing up. **Maturity is more than only a process or a point of arrival, but a person to which we attain to become like, Jesus Christ.**

Our aim in serving is maturity of each person, which is measured by the standard of the fullness of Jesus Christ. Paul describes maturity as "unity of faith and of the knowledge of the son of God". Unity of the faith refers to a faithful, gospel doctrine of who Jesus Christ is, His teaching, the work he accomplished in his death, burial, and resurrection, and why that matters for us in relation to God. Knowledge of the Son of God is relational, as we looked at last week from



Galatians 4. Maturity is walking by faith in obedience to God's Word by the power of Holy Spirit. And this is why Jesus is our standard of measure, because he walked in obedience to the Father perfectly for us. Finally, when we remember that all serve until all have attained to this, we can also conclude that the one who is mature takes responsibility to labor for others. **Maturity means that all serve until each one trusts in Jesus to walk in obedience to the Word, because Jesus walked in perfect obedience to make a way for us to know God.**

Verse 14 provides **the purpose of maturity**. God does not want us tossed, carried, driven, and deceived by ungodliness. God's purpose for your maturity into Christlikeness is so you will not fall prey nor be swayed by teaching that is counter to His Word, no matter what persecution may accompany it. When we live faithful to God's Word in a world of rocked by spiritual chaos, we declare the glory of the One to whom we trust, Jesus Christ. ^{1Peter2:9} **ILLUS** Christian, God is maturing you into Jesus' likeness so you can recognize the hollow lies and false hope of social media, so you can discern and reject the false teachings of sexual immorality that destroy lives, and not give in to the Enemy's schemes to deceive you. **Maturity makes us more like Jesus to walk by faith according to His Word, even in hardship and persecution, because we know Jesus stood in our place condemned before God.**

TRANS How, though, HOW do we do this?

Verse 15 provides **the process that produces maturity**. Instead of being rocked by bad teaching or deceived because we raise our sails to every new idea, we speak God's truth in love to light up the lies and expose what is not love at all. "Speaking the truth in love" is how we conquer the enemy and his lies, deceit, and accusation. Paul tells the Corinthians, *"For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,"* **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**

And we do this, WE do this, not just you or me, but together WE do this to grow up and become like Jesus. You can grow individually, but you cannot grow up alone. No person grows to maturity to become like Jesus without others. There is no individual process to maturity that excludes other believers. There is no maturity without being equipped and serving. There is no maturity without obedience by faith. **APPL** LifePoint, let us not be a people who pursue growth but give little priority to growing up. **Maturity springs forth as we speak the truth in love among our community and love one another to walk together by faith in obeying Jesus.**

The **promise of maturity**. God will not, no, never quit on you.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. **Philippians 1:6**
Second, God's plan is that each Christian labor in ministry so every person can grow to maturity.

APPL We are laboring to add 100 more adults in Community Groups in this season, over the next couple of weeks, for this purpose: maturity of becoming more like Jesus by speaking the truth in love into one another's lives.

3. God's plan is that when every Christian does the work of ministry for each one to mature, Jesus builds the church up in mission. 4:16

When the gospel is the central conversation of the church by speaking God's truth in love, Jesus is the one working through it all to build up His church. And this is how His Kingdom advances in the world. Every person in the church becomes more like Jesus because they are all growing closer to Him. There is no secondary plan, only the gospel can build the church up to be like Jesus. And when the church is serving in ministry by God's grace to mature every person, she is built up to go and fulfill the Great Commission for the redemption of all peoples. When the church is being built up by God's grace working among the people, we are the most attractive force in the world; love and sacrifice for one another; hope and joy when the world offers none; truth and love in a world filled with lies and deceit, fakeness and masks of deception. The world has no answer for what God designed in the church. The world does not understand why we live the way we do, how we give the glory for every joy of our life to Him alone, and why we would remain steadfast in turbulent times to trust His grace to work in hard times. The world doesn't confess their sin, they hide it. The world doesn't celebrate humility, they loath it. The world doesn't value giving one's life away, but they bolster everything that steals life from you. And that is why we are here, LifePoint, to declare the excellencies of His glorious gospel among the tarnished strivings and warrings of this world. When



the church is growing by God's grace at work through her people, we are a body of people that are going to the world as God came to us in Jesus Christ, to share the good news, to invite people into a community unlike any other, to teach and train one another to know and apply the gospel in our everyday life so that each and every person learns to walk in a manner worthy of our calling!

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Are you laboring for the gospel among God's people?

