

Spiritual Growth

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[0 : 00] Amen. Well, thank you, David and Michelle and for everyone else who's been involved in the service. My name is Alistair. I'm the assistant pastor here at Brunsfield, and it is my absolute joy to open up this passage of Ephesians 4 to us.

But I want you to think back as we begin. Maybe one of the things that you probably remember growing up as a child is that proud day when you and your siblings were all lined up ready to have your height marked on the doorpost.

Normally it was in the kitchen or in the cupboard doorframe. Now, I am from a family of three boys, so we can get quite competitive at times. And I remember puffing out my chest, standing as tall as I possibly could, just to see how much I'd grown over the last few months.

So you'd stand with your back to the post and your, in my case, my mom would put the pencil on top of my head, ready to make the mark. And before she'd even made the line, the question would inevitably come, have I grown?

When we're younger, we do everything we can to grow. We are fascinated with being older, with being taller, with being big. How does that happen?

[1 : 18] Well, if we eat enough good food, if we get enough good exercise, and if we believe what our parents tell us, if we don't eat too many sweets. Children want to grow, and that growth is a good thing.

Now, carry that same thought across to the local church. How do we, as a church, grow? I don't mean numerically, because numbers are no indication of how we're actually doing as a church. I mean spiritually. How does the church grow? Well, the message that we hear ringing through the passage that was read to us just a moment ago is that we, the church, are gifted to grow.

We have received gifts from Christ that we need to help us grow in unity and in maturity so that we can become the church that Jesus Christ has called us to be.

The spiritual growth of the local church does not come about by following the newest trends or by listening to a particular leader.

[2 : 36] The church grows as every single member uses their God-given gifts to serve the church, which is built on the Bible, the very words of God.

Now, the main focus of this passage this morning is not us as individuals, but instead it is about the local church, and we are gifted to grow.

Now, to help us see that this morning, we will ask two questions of the text. And the first question is, what were we given to grow? In verses 7 to 11, what were we given to grow?

Read verse 7 with me. But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. Now, grace is a word that we throw around a lot in Christian circles.

You've probably heard it to explain God's goodness and kindness to his people. Ian Hamilton, a minister and theologian, says this about grace.

[3 : 41] Grace is God's undeserving kindness to judgment-deserving sinners. Now, where we hear the word grace, Christians stand up and we scream, yes, amen.

We have been given grace by God. And we usually think about grace in terms of our salvation, that wonderful, miraculous wonder of forgiveness that has been given to us through Jesus and his death on the cross.

But that's not what Paul is actually getting at here in Ephesians. Looking at the context of the whole book and the way Paul uses the word elsewhere in Ephesians, the grace that he is speaking of is and must be gifts given to us by God.

But Jesus isn't like Santa, who takes in a wish list once a year and dishes out good gifts to those who happen to make it onto the nice list and gives coal to those naughty children.

No, God in his immeasurable grace calls sinners like you and me to become Christians. But that grace doesn't stop there because as verse 7 says, God continues to equip his people by his grace. [5 : 03] He gives us gifts. Now, maybe you're sitting there thinking, well, this doesn't really apply to me because I have no gifts. We can often think that gifting must equal platform and recognition.

We equate the gifts with the upfront stuff that we see going on in church or the miraculous gifts that we read elsewhere in the New Testament. And those are part of it.

But thinking that you're not gifted just because you're not preaching or you're not leading a ministry, thinking that you're not gifted because you're not doing what someone else is doing is wrong.

Look at what the Bible says in verse 7 to each one of us. Friends, each and every one of you listening in this morning is gifted by Christ to build up the church.

No exceptions. And to back this up, Paul quotes from Psalm 68 and relates it specifically to Jesus' work and tells us how Jesus is able to give gifts to his people.

[6 : 16] Paul uses this psalm to describe the ascension of Jesus that we read about in the book of Acts and how because of his reigning victory over our enemies, he is now seated at the right hand of God the Father.

And by grace, he gives us gifts. When Jesus took on flesh or descended to the lower earthly regions, as verse 9 says, he stooped from his place of glory with the Father in heaven and became one of us, yet was without sin.

And through his death on the cross, he defeated the spiritual forces that wage war against humanity every single day. He defeated sin. He defeated death.

And after his ascension, when he returned to the Father, he sat at his right hand and is now reigning in absolute control over all things, as verse 10 says.

Friends, this is the Savior that we serve. And as if that wasn't glorious enough, he has given each of us gifts. But he has also given particular, he has gifted particular leaders to the body of Christ.

[7 : 38] And that is what we see in verse 11. Christ has gifted the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers to the church.

Now, the pastors and teachers, those are one office. And are what we currently understand to be pastors and elders. But why does Paul mention these four leaders?

Well, if you think of the global church as a building, it will help us understand. You see, the apostles and the prophets are the foundation of the church.

That's what Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2, verses 19 to 20. Read with me. The apostles here in this passage are the twelve apostles and Paul himself.

They are the ones who knew Jesus, who saw him and who were called to be sent ones. That's what apostle means. They are the foundations of the church, which is ultimately built on Jesus Christ.

[9 : 03] The prophets were those who spoke the word of God to the people of God. And again, remembering the context of Ephesians 2, 20.

The prophets were the original New Testament prophets who taught the church. So if they are the foundation of this house, the body of Christ, the next leaders are the frame put in place to help the building grow.

The evangelists are those who took the gospel to the people who don't know Jesus. And there are those who continue this work on a daily basis in their friends and family circles, on street corners and in marketplaces all over the world.

And there are those who are especially gifted in this phenomenal work. But if you think that this is a get out of evangelism free card, you are wrong. That's not the case.

This does not mean that the rest of us can sit back and leave the work of the Great Commission to a select few of evangelists. Every single Christian, according to Matthew 28, is called to share the gospel.

[10 : 17] And then we have the pastors, those whose job it is to care for the Lord's people and to teach them. Do you notice one thing that connects all of these offices?

Well, it's the word of God. The apostles and the prophets built the church on the word that they had received from Jesus. The evangelists share the good news of Jesus as we find it in the Bible.

And the role of any pastor, any elder, is primarily to be a teacher of God's word. Now, this is really important because if we misunderstand this, if we move away from the Bible, then friends, we are done for.

Because we're not built on the cornerstone that is Jesus Christ and the foundations of solid teaching. To be a local church family that grows in our unity and maturity, we don't need to look at the world and do the newest trendy thing.

We don't need growth strategies. And we shouldn't be trying to become more like the world to seem more normal. If we want to be a church that grows in unity and in maturity, then we need to get our heads in our Bibles.

[11 : 48] We need to know the word. We need to live in the word. And use the gifts that Christ has given us. To be taught by the leaders that God has given us.

And to live for Jesus. By grace, Christ has given each and every single one of us gifts.

Well, maybe you're left thinking, why? Why did Jesus do that? What's the point of him giving me a gift? That's the second question we need to ask of this passage.

Why were we given them? Verses 12 to 16. Why were we given them? When thinking about every Christian receiving a gift, the temptation might be to think about the how and why to use those gifts merely in an individualistic way.

But we're not called and gifted to make ourselves great. We're not called and gifted for ourselves to be the focus. This whole passage is about how we can use our individual gifts for the upbuilding of the local church.

[13 : 02] Even the leaders in verse 11, they weren't called and gifted so that they could be put on a pedestal. They're not perfect. But so that they could do all the work in the church themselves.

Their role is, verse 12, to equip his people, that is God's people, for works of service. And this is what we call every member ministry.

As elders, we believe that each one of you is gifted. And our role is to equip and enable you to serve the church with your gift.

As a church, we are gifted to grow. Now this flies right in the face of something that is such a relevant temptation for us at the moment during another lockdown.

It is so easy to roll out of bed on a Sunday morning, turn on YouTube, and then not think about church until the next Sunday comes around.

[14 : 04] Consumer Christianity is always a temptation. But maybe it's even more of a danger now than it was before.

As Christians, we weren't called to sit and twiddle our thumbs. We were called by God to glorify him and to serve him. And that means that every one of us should be using our gifts in the church.

That every one of us should be sharing the gospel and reaching the lost. And we get this repeated again in verse 16. The church grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Friends, if you're not serving in the church at the moment, why not? Or if you're unsure which area you're gifted in, we'll come and speak to myself or any one of the other elders.

Our role is to equip you to serve so that we as a church can be built up to maturity and unity. The way we serve can look different for each one of us.

[15 : 22] And age is no limit. We are not a young people's church. Are you older and have been a Christian for a long time? Don't sit back, but why not use that experience and get in a one-to-one with a younger person?

As you grow and study the Bible together, as you share life with one another, you will both be blessed. Are you a young person and you've got a busy work schedule?

You've got a busy family life. Maybe you've got a busy social calendar. Well, the Bible gives nobody an excuse not to serve their local church.

We are all to serve by using our gifts out of love to build up the church. Maybe you're able to serve in welcoming people to church and inviting people to the Life Explored course coming up so that they too can hear about Jesus.

In sharing the gospel with people every single day or by encouraging people and calling them up during lockdown to see how they're doing and how you can pray for them. This is all of our job as Christians who are gathered together as one family in Brunfield Evangelical Church.

[16 : 39] Every single one of us should engage in ministry because each of us have been gifted to grow. And Paul gives us three reasons for this every member ministry in the local church in verses 12 and 13.

Firstly, so that we would all reach unity in faith and full knowledge of God's Son. Secondly, maturity.

And finally, so that we may attain to the fullness of Christ. Now again, remember the focus of this passage is congregational, not individualistic.

So our maturity and unity as a church is measured by how our relationship as a congregation is with Jesus. If we grow in our maturity and our unity, then we will become more like Christ.

We will attain to the full measure of Christ, which is the goal. Now what does that look like? Well, verse 14, read with me. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful schemes.

[18 : 05] A church that is equipped to serve through the teaching of God's word will not be infants, but mature. A church that grows in maturity and in unity will not be tossed to and fro by every wind of teaching.

A church that grows in maturity and unity will be discerning about what they listen to and who they follow. So flip that around.

What does a church look like that is not based on the Bible and that doesn't focus on growing in maturity and unity? Well, they're like a rubber dinghy in the middle of a rainstorm caught at sea. Imagine a blow-up lilo that you use at the seaside. They are fun to relax on and lie in the water for a while, but they are not built to keep you afloat in the middle of a storm.

A Christian, a church that is not rooted in their theology, a church that doesn't strive for maturity and unity is like a lilo being tossed to and fro in a vicious storm.

[19 : 18] And notice the warning there, blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

This is why it is so important to be careful who we listen to. If we listen to just anyone speaking about the Bible and take their word for it, we are not being mature.

If we're sick, we wouldn't go to just anyone for a diagnosis or a course of treatment. We would want to make sure that we're going to a doctor, someone who knows their stuff, who's been to medical school, someone who has good knowledge of our symptoms.

And if we do that with our physical health, we pay close attention to the advice we're listening to, to the people we're speaking to. Why would we not do it with our spiritual health?

Because our spiritual health lasts for eternity. Friends, there are countless false doctrines and false teachers all over the world who would seek to distract you from the truth and draw our attention away from Christ.

[20 : 32] It's tempting because we all want to think that everything will be fine. We want to think that we will have our best life now, that our prosperity is the focus of life.

But Paul says that such departures are, verse 14, deceitful schemes. Think back to the context of Ephesus.

this city filled with pagan worship and idols. Paul is calling this church to be discerning, to know what they believe and why they believe it so that they can stand up against the onslaught of attacks that will come their way.

And our context today isn't much different, really. We're surrounded by different religions, different ideas, and even different theological schools of thought and false gospels.

The call is the same. Be discerning. Do not be caught off guard and be tossed to and fro by every new teaching that comes your way.

[21 : 46] Our role as Christians, according to verse 15 and 16, is to speak the truth in love and to build up the church in love.

All the use of our gifts are worthless, utterly worthless, if they're not being used in love. Go later on and read 1 Corinthians 13 and you'll see that very clearly.

this means that we need to hold each other accountable, that we will speak to each other about things in our lives that should not be there and we will do it out of a deep love and care for people so that, verse 15, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head that is Christ.

from Him the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Friends, Jesus has gifted each and every one of us for growth. Each of us has a part to play in the growth of the local church, not the numerical growth, but the growth in unity and maturity so that we can attain to the full, the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

[23 : 18] Think back to the markings on the doorpost when you were a child. Imagine going back to that house years later, you've probably grown a fair bit since then, I know I have.

But now think if it were possible to do the same with the church and our spiritual growth. Would we be able to see a difference in our growth in maturity and unity as a local church over the last 50 years?

Over the last 20 years? Over the last five years? What about over these last 10 months of lockdown? Friends, we have been gifted for growth.

to build up the church to actively serve with the goal of growing in our maturity and unity as a church family.

You are gifted to help Bruntsfield grow. And so let me leave you with a question this morning. What are you doing to help the church grow in maturity, in unity and to become the bride of Christ that Jesus has called us to be?

[24 : 40] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that by your grace you have called us to be Christians.

But Father, we thank you for the wonderful news that even more than that your grace doesn't stop there, but you have given us gifts so that we can serve your church.

Father, forgive us for the times where our goal has not been to serve but to consume. Forgive us for the times where we have kept our gifts to ourself and not sought to grow the church in unity, in maturity, so that we would become the bride that you have called us to be.

Father, help us all think about how we can serve, help us all figure out the areas in which you've gifted us so that we can build up this local church that is Bronzefield Evangelical Church.

Father, we ask all of this for your glory and in the precious name of our wonderful saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[25 : 53] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.