

Ephesians 4:7-26 — God Gave Us A Gift

December 23, 2018

Christmas is a time for the giving and receiving of gifts. Most of us already have gifts under the tree which we plan to open Christmas morning. Even if you don't have gifts under a tree, the chances are you gave or received some kind of gifts this season, even if they were small. We all like to give and to receive gifts, especially with those we love. The giving and receiving of gifts is a good thing. It allows us to express our love and allows us to receive that appreciation from those who care about us.

I have good news. Today, I have a gift for each of you. The gifts I have are not traditional Christmas gifts. They are good gifts, not junky gifts. The gifts I have for you are so good that I can guarantee you will not be re-gifting them next year in a white elephant gift exchange. The gifts I have for you are also useful for you and helpful to others. In fact, the more time you take to use the gift, the more joy you get out of the gift. I guarantee you will not be bored with the gift I have for you today.

I am sure you are wondering what kind of gift I have that could possibly be as good as I am describing. I will tell you more about your gift in a moment but before I do, let me take a moment to welcome you.

If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at CrossWinds. This morning, we finish our Christmas series in the book of Ephesians.

In the first week of this series we learned that God, because of his incredible grace, made us the most blessed beings in the universe through his son, Jesus. We don't deserve the gift of God making us the most blessed beings

in the universe through Jesus. God is so good. In eternity past he put us and his son together and determined to bless us forever. This morning, when you look in the mirror, you may not like what you see. Don't see yourself as you are by yourself; see yourself for what God has made you to be through his son. You are one of the most blessing beings in the universe through Jesus.

In the second week of our series, we learned that we are not only the most blessed beings in the universe, but we are also the ultimate contrast in the universe. We didn't start a relationship with God from a spiritually neutral position. We started as God's enemies. The Bible describes everyone before Jesus as spiritually dead. We were puppets of Satan. We were brute beasts living merely to satisfy our fleshly instincts such money, sex and power.

Amazingly, God had incredible mercy on us when we were his enemies. We fully deserved the Lake of Fire for eternity but when God raised Jesus from the dead physically, he raised us from the dead spiritually. When God raised us from spiritual death and judgement, he gave us the best seat in the house. Actually, he gave us the best seat in the universe. For eternity, the Bible says, we are seated with Christ. That means we sit on Jesus' lap and in Jesus' chair. What could be better than to sit with God? It is impossible to comprehend the scope of this contrast. We cannot comprehend how repulsive we were to God and now how blessed we are by God. This is all through Jesus, and we deserve none of it.

Last week, we moved from how God plans to bless us in eternity future to how God plans to bless us today through Jesus. God the Father plans to make the name of Jesus famous. God the Father will make the name of Jesus famous

through his church. We are connected to Jesus. The Bible says we are literally “in Christ.” We are also part of Christ’s church. God plans to use us to make the name of Jesus, his son, famous. He plans to do through us more than we can ask or imagine for the glory of Christ and his church.

God’s plans are not to just bless us in eternity future through Jesus but God also plans to bless us here and now by using us in ways beyond what we could ask or imagine for the fame of Christ and the good of his church.

That brings us to this morning’s and our next passage in Ephesians, which is Ephesians 4:7-16. Here we discover that God not only plans to use us in ways beyond what we can ask for or imagine for the fame of Christ in his church, but God has also given each of us a supernatural gift that enables us to serve others effectively in the church. Today, we will learn about the spiritual gifts God gives each of us.

Read Ephesians 4:7-16

This passage is about spiritual gifts and the important role they play in our lives and in the health of the church. I am going to work my way straight through these verses under seven points.

1. Christ gave each of us a spiritual gift.

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Ephesians 4:4–7 (ESV)

Even though our study begins at verse 7, to understand this verse, we need the context of the verse. That is why I started our reading at verse 4. Paul began by talking about the unity of the church. He said there is one Lord, one

faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Then, he suddenly flipped from talking about the unity of the church to talking about diversity in the church. He said, “But grace was given to *each one of us*...”

As Christians, we are not mass produced. Each one of us is unique. God gave each of us a unique gift from his spirit the moment we became Christians.

I recognize this is a little tricky to understand as we read this verse. Let me explain how this works. The English word *grace* is the Greek word *charis*. In our English Bible, whenever we see the words *spiritual gift*, the Greek word behind it is *charis-mata*. It is the Greek word for grace with a small modifier on it. What Paul did in verse 7 is he spelled out the definition of a spiritual gift. A spiritual gift is a special gift of God’s grace given to us beyond our salvation that enables us to do something unique for him.

Most translations, such as the ESV and NIV, which are more focused on translating Greek words literally into English, have Ephesians 4:7 reading like we read it this morning so it sounds a touch awkward.

If you move to translations that are not trying to translate Greek words but are trying to translate the practical meaning of sentences, you can quickly see his act of grace Paul talked about is a spiritual gift because they say that in the translation. The New Living Translation is a paraphrase translation. It unambiguously identifies this act of grace Paul talked about as a spiritual gift when it makes the translation to English.

However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. Ephesians 4:7 (NLT)

As Christians, we have all experienced God's saving grace. Amazingly, when we become Christians, at that time God also give us special empowering gifts of serving grace from the Holy Spirit beyond our salvation. Your special gift that came with your salvation empowers you and enables you to effectively serve others in the church. Every single one of us that knows Jesus has one of these gifts. It may be underdeveloped. We may not know what they are but all of us have one. Everyone that has experienced saving grace has also been given a unique gift of serving grace.

Immediately questions rise in our minds about these gifts. Who chose what gift I would receive? Who decided how strong of a gift I would receive? As Paul continued in the second half of this verse, he gave us the answer to those questions. He said our special gifts from God were given to each of us *according to the measure of Christ's gift*. In other words, Jesus decided what spiritual gifts he would give us when we were saved, and Jesus decided how much of those gifts we would receive. I know what some of us are thinking. "I don't like my gift. I am jealous of someone else's gift." Some of us wish we had someone else's gift. Some of us wish we had a stronger gift. Here is my answer to those feelings. Remember the gift you have from Jesus is a gift. Jesus didn't have to give us anything! Any gift we get is something for which we should be grateful. It is Jesus' right to give us what he wants and to give us how much of a gift he wants to give. Rather than being jealous of someone else's gift, be grateful for your own gift.

Can you develop your gift and make it stronger? Yes. We should develop our gifts. Even when we develop our gifts, we need to recognize that our

developed gift has its limitations. Some people will be able to develop their gifts to higher levels than others because some are more gifted by God than others.

This Thursday, Cindy and I had a chance to attend the home wrestling meet. Our boys don't wrestle anymore, but we love the sport and are forever fans. After watching a few matches and seeing some impressive wrestling, I leaned over to Cindy and said, "Some of those kids are really gifted athletically." If you have followed high school sports, you know what I mean. Some kids just have an athletic gift from God that others kids do not have. While it is important for all athletes to develop their skills, some kids will be able to develop their skills to higher levels than others because they are naturally, athletically more gifted by God than others. That is just the way it is.

This is similar to how it works with our spiritual gifts. We can, and should, develop whatever gift we are given by God. Realize some people simply have a higher level of a God-given spiritual gift than others. That is OK. It was Jesus' choice to make it that way. We thank him for whatever spiritual gifts we have, because we don't deserve anything.

I realize some of this can be confusing, especially coming from Ephesians 4:7, which can be a little unclear in some Bibles. If we put our fingers in the text and look around the rest of the New Testament, we find the identical themes we just discussed surfacing again and again.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace... 1 Peter 4:10 (ESV)

Peter also said God has given each of us a unique gift to serve others in the church. Peter also reminded us that we are stewards of God's grace. That

means we are accountable to God and one day will give an answer to God for what we did with the special gifts he gave each of us to effectively serve others in the church.

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...
Romans 12:6 (ESV)

Paul said each of us was given a different gift from God to serve others. Paul also said we must use our gifts, not sit on our gifts or ignore our gifts. It is when we use our gifts in the church that we find ourselves doing things we didn't even ask for or imagine.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1
Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)

We are to use the spiritual gifts God gives us to serve other people, not to serve ourselves. I like to think of it this way. Nobody is saved by Jesus to sit. We are saved by Jesus to serve. We are called by Jesus to serve one another in the church, plus, we are supernaturally gifted by Jesus to serve one others in a unique way.

At this point, we should be motivated to use our gifts. We should be excited to use our gifts. The natural question is, "How do I find my gift?" At this point, most people would refer you to a spiritual gift test with questions and tables that leave you feeling like you are taking the ACT college entrance exam. To be honest, I am not jazzed over spiritual gift tests. They are too complex.

There are two very simple ways to discover your gift.

First, listen to the passion of your heart. If you find yourself fascinated by teaching and study, God probably gave you a gift of teaching because you have a passion for teaching. If you love to show hospitality and make people feel

welcomed at your home or in the church, God has given you the gift of hospitality. If you love working with kids, God has given you a gift for working with children. Most of the time, spiritual gifts are not sensational. They are found by simply looking for the areas where you are passionate to serve people in the church.

Second, look for the place where you see fruit and affirmation. If God has gifted you in an area, when you serve in that area, people will start affirming the effectiveness of your gifts. You will see fruitfulness from your gifts as God begins using you to change lives.

2. Our gifts come from the triumph of Christ.

Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” Ephesians 4:8 (ESV)

If you read these verses in your Bible, instead of the outline, you see these verses are indented. That is because Paul quoted from a portion of Psalm 68 as proof that Jesus didn’t just save us when he rose from the dead but Jesus also gave us supernatural gifts when he rose from the dead. Paul saw prophetic evidence of this in Psalm 68.

Psalm 68 is a request for God to rescue his people in the present like he rescued his people in the past in the Exodus. Psalm 68:8 talks about God leaving Egypt and heading to Mt. Sinai where Moses was given the Ten Commandments. In this Psalm, we read the ground literally shook under God’s feet when he left Egypt and headed for Mt. Sinai. Psalm 68:11-14 describes kings and armies running for their lives because of God, while God’s people slept peacefully in his presence. Finally, in Psalm 68:16-17, God decided to leave Mt.

Sinai, where he gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, and he set his eyes on Mt. Zion to be his home, that is Jerusalem. With thousands upon thousands of chariots, God climbed the slopes of Mt. Zion to Jerusalem in victory, leading captives in his train and receiving gifts from men.

Paul took this Psalm about God's great victory in the Exodus which describes God's victory parade to his home on Mt. Zion and Paul applied it to Jesus and the victory of the cross and resurrection. Instead of marching triumphantly to Jerusalem, Paul saw Jesus after the resurrection marching triumphantly back to his father's right hand. Instead of bringing physical prisoner's of war, Paul saw Christ bringing with him the demons he conquered through his death and resurrection. Paul described Jesus' death and resurrection, conquering Satan and his demonic hordes in Colossians.

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Colossians 2:15 (ESV)

Rulers and authorities are words used in first-century Hebrew to describe powerful demonic powers.

Everything seems to run in parallel when you compare God's triumph in the Exodus described in Psalm 68 and Jesus' triumph on the cross, except for one small word. Psalm 68 says that God *received* gifts from men in his triumphal procession up to Jerusalem, but Paul said Christ *gave* gifts to men when he made his triumphal procession back to God the Father's right hand. Why does Psalm 68 talk about God receiving gifts while Paul talked about Jesus giving gifts?

There is a lot of ink spilled on this subject. We don't need to fret because there are good explanations for this discrepancy.

First, a conquering king in the ancient world both received gifts and gave gifts in his victory parade. Both of these actions took place in a victory parade.

Second, in the Aramaic Targums and Syriac translations of this Hebrew Psalm, both of them translated this verse as God gave *gifts* to men, not *received* gifts from men. Paul was familiar with the Jewish Targums teaching on this verse that said the giving and receiving of gifts took place in God's victory parade.

Third, when we turn to the book of Acts, which describes the fulfillment of Ephesians 4 when Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit, we find Jesus receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit from the Father then Jesus taking the gift of the Holy Spirit and pouring the Holy Spirit out on us. Look how both of these actions are fulfilled in this verse.

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. Acts 2:33 (ESV)

Then Paul teased out the implications of Psalm 68 for Jesus.

(In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) Ephesians 4:9–10 (ESV)

This doesn't sound exciting until you understand Jesus' identity before he was born in Bethlehem. Hebrews 1 tells us it was Jesus who carried out the creation of everything in the universe. God the Father planned creation. It was Jesus as the Word of God who carried out hand-crafting every animals, every bird, every fish, every drop of water, ever detail in your eye and the functioning of

your brain. Jesus also made every planet and personally placed each planet into orbit. Nothing exists that wasn't made by Jesus.

The amazing part is just as it was God the Father's will to fashion creation and Jesus carried it out, it was also God the Father's will to redeem us when we fell into sin and Jesus carried it out. He did that by fusing himself permanently and irrevocably with a human body in the womb of Mary to be born in Bethlehem. When Paul said Jesus descended to the lower regions, meaning the earth, that means Jesus didn't just fuse himself permanently and irrevocably with a human body but he also voluntarily relinquished the free exercise of his divine power to his heavenly Father's control. Jesus did this so he could be made like us in every way. Jesus never used his divinity to insulate himself from the pains and agonizes of humanity.

Jesus knew what it was like to put in a hard day at work. He knew what it was like to sweat and work hard. He developed callouses. He knew what it was like to be tired and need sleep. When we go to school, we have to work hard to learn and memorize. Jesus had to do the hard work of learning and memorizing.

Jesus didn't just fuse himself with a human body to be like us in every way, but he also faced the most vicious death known to man, death on a cross, and he died without falling into mental or physical sin. When he died, the Bible tells us he was made sin so the Father could pour out all his just wrath against sin on his own son. That is how far Jesus descended. He went from making everything in the universe, to voluntarily confining himself to a human body in every way, to becoming sin and dying a vicious death for us.

Paul talked about this in more detail in Philippians 2.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5–11 (ESV)

Jesus didn't just descend, in both Ephesians and Philippians, Paul was especially excited that Jesus also ascended after he rose from the dead to return to the right hand of God the Father and be over everything in the universe.

Why was Paul so excited about this? Jesus simply returned to the position he had before being incarnated in Mary's womb and being born in Bethlehem.

What is the big deal?

What makes this so exciting is that now a man has been exalted by God to the highest place in the entire universe over every created thing. This is not just any man but the man Christ Jesus. Jesus is one of us. He is our hero. He is our savior. He is exalted by God to the highest place over everything in the universe and is at God's right hand. That is mind-blowing!

The good news is every spiritual gift we have comes from this incredible victory parade of Jesus'.

3. God gave spiritual leaders as a gift to his church.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers... Ephesians 4:11 (ESV)

Paul began looking at a few of the spiritual gifts God gave some individuals in the church. He looked at the special gift of being a spiritual leader

in Christ's church. He detailed five gifts of spiritual leadership that come as a gift from God. These five gifts of spiritual leadership fall under two headings.

The Apostles and Prophets

The apostles and prophets were gifts from God that provided as the foundational leadership for the church. In Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5, Paul mentioned the apostles and prophets, so we know that in the context of this letter, Paul was talking about the original apostles. The prophets he was talking about in this context were those who preached in association with the apostles.

Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. Acts 11:27 (ESV)

The apostles and prophets are first in this list because they are gifts God gave the church to establish the church and to provide solid testimony to the truth of Jesus. Now that the foundational role of the apostles and prophets is complete, they no longer exist in this sense Paul talked about here. Their role as the foundation of the church is now played by the New Testament. All of the New Testament letters were either written by an apostle or written by someone in close association with an apostle so we know the New Testament letters faithfully represent the truth about Jesus.

That being said, there are people today who have an apostolic-type of gift from God. They are not apostles on par with the original apostles. Their gift from God is just apostolic in type. For example, they might undertake pioneer missionary work or church planting. Those are apostolic-type gifts. There are no modern day apostles running around saying, "Thus saith the Lord." Nobody today is saying, "I spent time with Jesus. Let me tell you what he would say."

Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers

While the apostles and prophets laid the foundation of the church, the evangelists, pastors and teachers continue the work of the apostles and prophets today. In doing their work, evangelists, pastors and teachers should be constantly connecting with and being guided by the foundation of the apostles and prophets found in the New Testament. This is why at CrossWinds we always say, “Keep your finger in the text.” We want to make sure we are connected to the apostles’ foundation in all we do.

Evangelists are those who have a special gift from God to make the gospel clear to those who do not know Jesus. Those with a gift for evangelism are easy to recognize. You find them consistently leading people to Jesus. Billy Graham was an example of someone with the gift of evangelism. He had a particularly strong gift of evangelism. God used him to lead many people to Christ. Billy Graham did not choose that gift. God gave him that gift. Billy Graham did not choose the strength of his gift. God chose to give him a strong evangelistic gift. The result of his gift was more than he ever asked for or imagined for the sake of Christ and the church.

The next group is the pastor/teacher group. While pastoring and teaching are similar gifts, they are not identical gifts. A pastor is someone who is a shepherd. This means a pastor provides spiritual encouragement and spiritual correction. A shepherd doesn’t just feed and care for sheep but also protects the sheep. In a similar way, a pastor protects his people from the traps of the enemy.

The other gift in this mix is the gift of a teacher. A teacher is someone who is gifted by God to understand and explain God's Word to God's people. This way God's people mature in knowing Christ and loving God the Father. Most with the gift of pastoring also have the gift of teaching. That being said, all pastors don't have the teaching gift. I know some great pastors who are terrible Bible teachers. All who have the gift of teaching don't have the pastoring gift. I know some great Bible teachers who have about as much empathy as a dead fish. So the gift of pastoring and teaching often go together but they don't always go together.

We have seen God didn't just save us. He also supernaturally gifted each of us to serve others in the church. Some people God called and gifted to be spiritual leaders for his church. They are the apostles and the prophets who provided the foundation of the church so it is connected with Jesus. The evangelizing, pastoring and teaching are still current gifts, and they continue the work of the apostles and prophets helping us stay connected with the truth about Jesus.

Even though God gave the church the gift of spiritual leaders, such as pastors and teachers, there are many who try to live the Christian life apart from the care of a pastor and the preaching of a teacher. Many claim they have a personal faith. They claim they get all they need out of reading and studying in isolation apart from the church.

John Calvin, in his reflections on this verse, commented on those who isolate themselves and don't take advantage of the spiritual leadership God gives

the church. He says they are insane. That is a pretty strong word, but I think he is right.

4. Spiritual leaders should equip the people of the church for the ministry of the church.

...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...
Ephesians 4:12 (ESV)

Pastors and teachers exist to serve the people of the church. The church doesn't exist to serve the spiritual leaders of the church. Pastors and teachers are to help Christians mature in Christ and use their gifts to help others in the body. Pastors and teachers are not to stifle the use of people's gifts. They are to help them unleash their gifts. This is super important.

It gives us a different understanding of what church should look like. Church is not like a pyramid model where the pastors sit over the people and direct the people like he is the CEO of a business. The church is also not like a bus where the pastors do all the driving and the people go along for a ride. The pastors and teachers are to help people mature in Christ and use their gifts to serve others for Christ in the church.

When everyone serves in the church, the body of Christ is built up. When it is only the pastor that serves, the body of Christ is not built up. Pastors must be open-handed and eager to get everyone involved using their God-given gift to serve one another in the church family.

In 1 Corinthians 12, the Bible describes the church like a body. Jesus is the head. Pastors and teachers play the crucial role helping everyone stay connected to the head. The importance of the body is that every part is needed and every part has a role to play. Think of your body this morning. Does anyone

have a part of their body they would like to get rid of? I don't think so. We need every part of our bodies.

Of course, some parts of your body play a more prominent role than others. All of us have a nose, and we show off our noses to the world. Our noses are always on stage. We also have little toes. Nobody is showing off their little toes. They play a completely behind-the-scenes role. If you break your little toe, you will soon discover the important behind-the-scenes role it plays in the body.

That is the way for all of us and our gifts. Some of us are given more prominent gifts. Others of us are given behind-the-scenes gifts, but all of us have an important role to play in the body of the church.

5. When everyone uses their gifts, the church grow to be like Christ.

...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...
Ephesians 4:13 (ESV)

When everyone is using their gifts in the church, good things happen. First, there is unity in the church. When everyone is using their God-given gifts in the church, the church runs like a well-oiled machine. It is interesting to study the people who come up with heresies and strange theological ideas. Most of them come up with their ideas in isolation. They are not part of a church, using their gifts and serving people. It is when they isolate themselves and stop using their gifts to serve others in the church that they create disunity.

Second, when people are using their gifts in the church they grow in their knowledge of God. How many of you found that you grew in Christ when you began serving others in the church? I consistently hear that people who are helping in AWANA are growing in their knowledge of Christ by simply helping

children learn their memory verses. When we use our gifts, we grow in the knowledge of Christ. One of the best ways to grow is to simply start serving.

Third, Paul said when we use our spiritual gifts we mature. Knowledge of Christ and maturity in Christ are different things. Knowledge is information. Maturity is life application. Many adults refuse to grow up. They content themselves to live in spiritual immaturity. They are full-grown men and women wearing diapers or Pull-Ups because they are not yet spiritually potty trained. The fastest way to mature in Christ is to simply begin using your God-given gift to serve others in the church. Don't be content to wear spiritual Pampers. Use your gift and mature into a mature Christian. How do we do that? We get involved using our spiritual gifts to serve others.

The key thing to understand is that Christian unity, knowledge of Christ and Christian maturity do not happen if we live in isolation. They only happen when we live in the community of the church and use our gifts in the church.

6. When we use our gifts, we are protected from spiritual nut cases.

...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Ephesians 4:14 (ESV)

In the Christian life, we are to move from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity. The problem with perpetual Christian infancy is baby Christians are vulnerable to spiritual nut jobs around them. Paul described spiritually immature people like rudderless boats that are tossed by the waves of a storm and pushed in whatever direction the wind and water wants them to go. Instead of being stable, they follow every new cultural fad and direction.

As I was preparing this message, I remembered one young girl in the church I pastored over a decade ago. She was home from college for Christmas. After the service, she asked me about a book she read called The DaVinci Code by Dan Brown. The book rocked her faith. She wondered if there were mystery gospels that weren't included in the Bible. She wasn't sure if she could trust her Bible. At the time, I hadn't even heard of Dan Brown's book so I didn't know what to say to her.

Thankfully, that summer she decided to get involved working at a Christian camp where she used her gifts to serve others. In the community of other Christians, she talked about the questions she had about the Dan Brown book. As she served in the camp, stayed connected to other Christians, and studied the Bible in community, she found answers to her questions. She grew spiritually mature and strong. When I later asked her about the Dan Brown book, she chuckled about it because what was once shaking her faith now wasn't even an issue for her faith.

It was using her gifts that grew her in Christ and protected her from the spiritual nut jobs that wanted to lead her astray.

7. When the truth of God's Word is spoken in love and when people use their gifts, the church grows strong in Christ.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4:15–16 (ESV)

If you go to Amazon and search for books on church growth, you will find a long list. Everybody has his or her idea on how to make the church grow. In these verses, Paul revealed to us the secret to church growth, and we don't need to

read an entire book to find it out. The secret of church growth has two components.

First, you need to be part of a church where the truth is spoken in love. You need to be part of a church where the pastors and teachers are connected to the foundation of the apostles and prophets. They keep their fingers in the text so they are faithfully and truthfully representing Jesus. When they speak the truth about Jesus, it must be spoken with love. It must be spoken with gentleness and kindness. People won't hear what you have to say if think you don't love them.

Second, everybody in the church needs to be using their God-given gifts. When everybody in the church is using their God-given gifts, the body of the church is healthy. It is strong. It grows larger. It matures in knowing Jesus and loving Jesus. People are protected from spiritual nut cases. There is unity in the church.

The secret of church growth and spiritual growth are that simple. The truth needs to be spoken in love in the body, and the people need to unleash their gifts serving one another in the body, and the church will grow.

Conclusion

This morning, when I told you I had a special gift for each one of you, you probably thought I was talking about something wrapped in paper you could put under your tree. The gift I have for you is much better. If you are a Christian, I want to point you to the unique spiritual gift that every Christian possesses. Discovering your gift and using your gift is essential for your spiritual health and maturity. Discovering and using your gift will protect you from spiritual nut cases. Using your gift is the secret to growing your church healthy and strong.

This week, when you unwrap presents under the tree, will you commit to finding, unwrapping, and using your spiritual gift? Your spiritual health and the growth of your church depend on it.



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