

Lesson 4

Gifted, Godly Leaders

Empowering the Local Church: Unveiling the Role of Spiritual Leaders

Before You Begin:

Read Ephesians 4:7-13.

Pray for an open mind and heart to receive the Word with humility and receptiveness. And, pray a prayer of thankfulness for the spiritual leaders God has put in your life and for greater appreciation of their role and desire to support and encourage you in your spiritual life.

Set Your Intentions: What do you hope to achieve from this lesson?

Journal Your Thoughts. Journaling can be a valuable tool for spiritual reflection and growth.

Introduction

And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Previously, we have explored what happens in our spiritual adoption – how we have been transferred from spiritual isolation to belonging to God's family (Colossians 1:12-14), marked by a new identity and a set of values rooted in love and unity. Now, we will learn about another remarkable characteristic of our adoption: the invaluable presence of godly, gifted leaders in the local church.

In Ephesians 4:11-12, the apostle Paul unveils a divine design for the spiritual edification of our spiritual family. He reveals that Christ Himself has bestowed upon His church a group of leaders -- each endowed with unique gifts and roles – who are instrumental in equipping and empowering the body of Christ for the work of service, leading to its growth and maturity.

In this lesson, we will discover the significance of spiritual leadership in the church's life and its profound impact on our individual and collective spiritual growth. We will explore the roles these leaders fulfill, the power of their ministry, and the principles of servant leadership they exemplify. I hope our hearts are stirred with gratitude for the leaders God has graciously placed in our midst and that we are inspired to actively participate in building up the local church we are part of.

Why God Has Given Us Leaders

In Ephesians 4, Paul presents a call to action for the Christian – "walk worthily." This command forms the basis for Christian living, urging us to conduct our lives in a manner that aligns with our newfound identity in Christ. This is not a passive acceptance of salvation; instead, it is an active, intentional pursuit of righteousness and holiness.

In verses 2 and 3, Paul elaborates on what this worthy walk entails, outlining key attributes such as humility, gentleness, patience, forbearing love, and unity. These virtues are essential marks of the

Christian life, shaping our interactions and reflecting Christ's character to the world. Furthermore, Paul identifies the foundational principles of this worthy walk in verses 4 to 6. He speaks of the "seven ones" – unity in the Spirit, the Son, and the Father – which serve as the bedrock of our faith and practice. In essence, our walk in unity with God and fellow believers is inseparable from our identity as children of God.

Next, to empower believers to walk worthily, Paul highlights the abundant resources available to us in verses 7 to 11. First, he reminds us of the personal gift received from Christ upon salvation, abundantly providing us with the necessary grace and spiritual enablement to live victoriously. Additionally, Paul emphasizes the role of leaders within the church – who serve as conduits of God's grace and wisdom. We need to see and appreciate them for what they are: divine gifts bestowed upon the church by Christ Himself.

In understanding their significance, it's crucial to recognize their purpose and mission. They have been called to diligently work for the spiritual growth and maturity of believers. Evangelists and shepherds, in particular, are entrusted with nurturing believers toward full maturity in Christ, guiding them in becoming more like their Savior.

We could summarize Ephesians 4:1-11 in this way:

- 4:1 – Live the life.
- 4:2-3 – How to live the life.
- 4:4-6 – The foundation of the life.
- 4:7-11 – The resources for living the life.

Our Leaders Equip Us

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

The God-given task of evangelists and pastors is to promote our spiritual growth and maturity in Christ and His Word. Their role extends beyond filling up church buildings or providing programs and entertainment. Instead, their primary focus is guiding individuals toward spiritual stability and maturity in their faith. This purpose aligns with Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians as expressed in 2 Corinthians 13:11.

Become mature, be encouraged, be of the same mind, be at peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.

The mission of those who serve us is centered on building growth, stability, enthusiasm, unity, and peace within the local church.

Moreover, true spiritual leaders approach their ministry with passion. For them, it is not just a profession. They understand how they have been called to dedicate themselves fully to their work, wholeheartedly expending their energy and efforts. As highlighted in Colossians 1:28, their proclamation of Christ is accompanied by warnings and teachings, delivered with wisdom acquired through deep thought, study, prayer, and discernment.

We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Their teaching isn't reactionary; it is strategically designed to fulfill God's purposes, which requires time and discipline. Our leaders have no off-hours; their commitment extends to wrestling in prayer, as seen in the example of Epaphras in Colossians 4:12, who tirelessly interceded for believers' spiritual maturity and assurance. Thus, their dedication and passion are indispensable in guiding us toward maturity in Christ and fulfilling God's will.

How Leaders Equip the Church

The continual teaching of sound doctrine

This is emphasized throughout Scripture as essential for our spiritual growth and edification. In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul instructs Timothy to preach the Word faithfully, regardless of circumstances, and to correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and teaching. Similarly, in 1 Timothy 4:6, Paul emphasizes the importance of pointing out the truths of the faith, nourishing those in the church with sound teaching. The point is to continually instruct, bring forward, and lay the truths of Scripture before the church with gentle, humble persuasion, ensuring that our leaders think biblically and apply biblical principles in their teaching.

Constant Reproduction of Mature Believers

Paul's exhortation to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 emphasizes the importance of passing on sound teaching to faithful individuals who will, in turn, teach others. Likewise, in 2 Timothy 2:15, Timothy is urged to diligently present himself as one approved by correctly teaching the word of truth. This commitment to training rightly and adequately reflects the dedication of elders, ministers, and teachers to nurturing spiritual growth and maturity in the church.

Set an Example

Shepherds, ministers, and teachers are called to set an example for believers to follow. In 1 Timothy 4:11, Timothy is commanded to teach and command with authority. The effectiveness of this instruction lies in the consistency between the leaders' lives and the message they preach. They diligently read, explain, and apply Scripture, ensuring that their lives align with the truths they proclaim.

Teach the Whole Plan of God

This is another vital aspect of biblical leadership. As seen in Acts 20:27, leaders do not hold back from declaring the entirety of God's truth, even when specific topics may be sensitive or controversial. This commitment to faithfully proclaiming God's Word is essential because, as Acts 20:28 illustrates, elders are appointed by the Holy Spirit to shepherd and care for the church purchased with Christ's blood.

Equipping Brings Unity

Equipping the local church for ministry is central to the role of our leaders, as stated in Ephesians 4:12. The word "equip" implies completing or perfecting the saints, building unity, understanding, and

conviction among them. This equipping work aims to unite us in fellowship, ministry, admonishment, confession, and forgiveness, thereby maintaining unity within the local congregation. Ultimately, our leaders work tirelessly to create an atmosphere conducive to spiritual growth and unity, ensuring the ongoing health and vitality of the local church.

What's In This for Us Today?

1. Teaching sound doctrine is essential for spiritual growth and edification (2 Timothy 4:2, 1 Timothy 4:6).
2. The role of leaders is to continually instruct, persuade, and apply biblical principles in teaching (Ephesians 4:11-12).
3. Leaders are tasked with constantly reproducing mature believers (2 Timothy 2:2, 2 Timothy 2:15).
4. Setting an example is crucial for leaders, as it ensures consistency between their lives and the message they preach (1 Timothy 4:11).
5. Teaching the whole plan of God, even sensitive or controversial topics, is essential. (Acts 20:27-28).
6. Equipping the local church brings unity, understanding, and conviction among church members (Ephesians 4:12, 1 Corinthians 1:10).
7. The ultimate goal is to foster spiritual growth, maturity, and unity within the local church.

Conclusion

This lesson has been designed to help you see the significance of godly, gifted leaders in the local church and their indispensable role in facilitating spiritual growth, maturity, and unity. Through the continual teaching of sound doctrine, reproduction of mature believers, setting of examples, and faithful proclamation of the whole plan of God, our leaders *equip the saints for the work of ministry, building up the body of Christ*. As we reflect, may we appreciate the invaluable presence of our ministers, elders, and teachers and actively participate in the collective work of building up the local church. Let us continue to support, honor, and pray for our leaders as they diligently serve God and His people, striving toward the unity, growth, and maturity of the body of Christ.

For Discussion

1. How does understanding the role of spiritual leaders in the church impact your personal growth and spiritual life?
2. Reflect on when a leader's teaching or example significantly influenced your faith. What lessons did you learn from that experience?
3. How can you support and encourage the ministers, elders, and teachers in your local congregation?

4. Consider the qualities outlined in Ephesians 4:2-3 (humility, gentleness, patience, forbearing love, and unity). How can you embody these attributes in your interactions with others within the local church?
5. What steps can you take to ensure you continually grow in your understanding of sound doctrine and biblical principles?
6. How can you actively participate in the elders' mission of bringing you to maturity in Christ?
7. Reflect on the example-setting aspect of spiritual leadership mentioned in 1 Timothy 4:11. How can you strive to set a positive example for others in your walk of faith?
8. Think about instances where you've experienced unity and understanding within the local church. What factors contributed to these positive experiences, and how can you cultivate them?
9. How can you contribute to the ongoing work of equipping the saints for ministry and building up the body of Christ within your local church context?