

## Introduction

Good morning, everyone! I'm so excited to have the opportunity to preach today. I'm also excited to be able to share so many things later today with you all on behalf of the elders. It's no secret that there is a lot going on at CBC and we praise God for that. It's exciting. We're not who we once were. God is taking us somewhere. This journey starts in Ephesians 4.

Go ahead and turn with me in your bibles to Ephesians 4.

As we think through this as a church today, I want to share four plumb lines that capture how we as elders have been thinking about where we're at. I will also show how in a few minutes they capture Paul's logic in Ephesians 4 as well.

I've taken these straight out of Dwight Smith's book, "Renovation," a great book that we're working through as elders. These are four convictions about what the church is. They're in your handout too for later reference.

- First, whatever God is going to do in the world, He is going to do through all Christ's people.
- Second, whatever God is going to do in the world through all Christ's people, He is going to do through leadership that makes it a high priority to empower Christ's people.
- Third, whatever God is going to do in the world through all Christ's people, He is going to do primarily through a decentralized leadership structure.
- Fourth, whatever God is going to do in the world, He is going to do through local churches directly involved in going, sending, participating, cooperating, and being held accountable for the gospel and its extension.<sup>1</sup>

All Christ's people. Empowering leadership. And it's exactly what Paul describes in Ephesians 4:11-16.

Let's go ahead and read our passage together today. Go ahead and stand with me as we read God's word.

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Dwight Smith's "Renovation," page 30

*Read Ephesians 4:11-16*

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Let's pray. You may be seated.

I need you to use your imagination for a minute. Can we do that?

It's the Fourth of July. You're at a family cookout. The burgers are done, the corn is ready, the kids are running around the yard. And somebody (probably your father-in-law) decides it's time to move the massive wooden picnic table to the other side of the yard because the sun shifted and now everyone's going to be sitting in the heat. Fair asks.

So, five or six people wander over. One guy starts dragging. Another guy lifts from the wrong angle. Then there's a teenager, because there's always a teenager. And he's sort of leaning on the middle of the table. Is he helping? Is he resting? Nobody knows. Probably not even him. And then there's the one person who's standing about three feet back with their arms crossed, giving feedback from afar. Meanwhile they haven't touched the table.

Almost everybody's doing something, but nothing is happening, because nobody's together.

Then your mother-in-law shows up. 'Stop. Put it down. Two here, two here, one on each end. We lift on three.' One, two, three. And the table moves in five seconds.

What was the difference? It wasn't strength. It wasn't desire. It wasn't even the number of people. The difference was that every person was led to find their position, and every part did its work.

Nobody argued about the leader. Nobody griped about what part or position they were in.

That story seems silly and relatable I'm sure, but how often is that illustrative of how we function in churches? ?

Do we look like the people who all found their spot, lifted together, and moved the table? Or do we look more like the teenager leaning on the table? Or the one guy trying in vain, while some stand back and offer suggestions?

Most churches don't have a people problem. We have enough people. Most churches don't have a desire problem. People genuinely love Jesus and want to see His kingdom advance.

What we often have is a coordination problem. An every-part-working-properly and together problem. A "does everyone know where they fit and are they actually doing their part" problem.

And this, friends, is exactly what the Apostle Paul addresses in Ephesians chapter 4. He's not writing to a church that's too small. He's not writing to a church that doesn't care. He's writing to a church and saying, "Here is how the body of Christ is designed to function."

Here's the big idea from the text today, and it's in your handout as well. Here it is: **CHRIST GIFTS LEADERS, LEADERS EQUIP, AND EVERY MEMBER DOES THEIR PART IN UNITY, SO THAT THE BODY MULTIPLIES IN LOVE.**

## Body

Let's look at the first point now.

### 1. Christ Gives – vs 11

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*Read Ephesians 4:11*

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Verse 11 starts out with Jesus giving. "He gave." This is Christ. Verse 7 says, "grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift," and verse 8 quotes Psalm 68: "When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

When Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father after His resurrection, He did not leave the church empty-handed. He gave gifts. And the gifts named here in verse 11 are people. But they're not just any people. These people are leaders.

Now Psalm 68 is a picture of a conquering king returning from battle, leading captives in his train, and distributing the spoils of war to his people.

Paul is saying that what Christ did in His incarnation, His life, His death, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension, that was the conquest. He triumphed over sin and death!

The leaders that Christ gives to His church here were won through this victory. If Christ paid that much to rescue and supply His church, we should not treat those gifts as optional.

***We should not bury what He bled to give us.***

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. We could spend an entire sermon series on these, but Paul is getting at this idea that there are very specific gifts that He gave to equip the church.

The apostles and prophets were foundational to the once-for-all giving of revealed truth, and that foundation has been laid.

What continues in every generation since the age of the apostles and prophets is Christ's ordinary provision for His church through the ministry of the Word, as He raises up people with the gift of evangelism, and pastor-teachers to preach the gospel and tend to souls.

This passage shows that leadership in the church is not a human idea. It isn't something we took from the business world and just shoved it into the church. Leadership is a gift from the conquering King Jesus! So when God raises up a leader among us – this is not our own doing – it's a gift of Christ!

When that happens, it is Christ providing for His people. And that matters right now, because we are stepping into a season of developing more and more leaders to keep up with the equipping of this church's ministry. As we do it, we are not trying to manufacture something new. We are trying to steward what Christ has already given to us!

## 2. Leaders Gear Up The Saints – vs 12

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*Read Ephesians 4:12*

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And here is where that second plumbline I read at the beginning really lands. ***Whatever God is going to do through His people, He is going to do it through leaders who make it a high priority to empower (equip) His people.*** Do you see how that comes out of Ephesians 4?

The purpose of leadership in the church is not to do all the ministry. It is to equip. They are meant to train and unleash everyone else for ministry. That is exactly where verse 12 takes us.

Now I want you to slow down and look at the logic of verse 12:

- Christ gave leaders, to do what? To equip the saints.
- And the saints are equipped, for what? For the work of ministry.
- And the work of ministry results in what? The building up of the body of Christ.

This is God's design. This is the pipeline.

Notice where the “work of ministry” lives. The job of leaders is not to do all the ministry while everyone else watches and critiques. The job of leaders is to equip the saints so that they do the ministry!

And to be honest, this is a major correction to how a lot of churches function. In too many places the model is that the leaders do the ministry and the people just watch. That is not the New Testament model.

And that harkens back to that first plumbline we started with. **Whatever God is going to do in the world, He is going to do it through all of Christ's people.**

Not through a handful of people or through the “professionals.” Through the saints. And then the equipped saints build the body through their work of ministry.

Now let me make this personal for Cornerstone. Our Spiritual Formation Assessment last fall surfaced something important. Many of you said you know your spiritual gifts. But far fewer said those gifts are being meaningfully used.

So we have a gap between knowing and doing. And that gap is, in large part, an equipping gap. It means we as leaders need to do a better job helping you get connected to real places where your gifts can be deployed. And it also means you need to step into the opportunities God is putting in front of you.

We need people who will pour into others, and we need people willing to be poured into. Because there is no spectator category in the body of Christ.

This is why our Vision is that:

*“We desire to see every member equipped and sent to bring the transforming power of Christ to every home, workplace, school, and neighborhood in Central and Eastern Geauga County, to the glory of God.”*

That is not marketing language. I hope you see that comes out of Ephesians 4!

Every member equipped. Every member doing the work of ministry. And as that happens, Christ builds His body up in love, to the glory of God here in Geauga county. And your loved ones, your friends, your coworkers, your elected officials, everyone in our spheres of influence is confronted with the transforming power of Christ.

Everyone in this building unleashed in growing number to go impact our county with the gospel! Everyone in this building flooding the people of this county in targeted prayer. Everyone in this building on their knees begging God to move in this county.

Can you just imagine for a second what that would look like? If we, this quaint group of nobodies unite for the sake of the lost here in Geauga County? Can you imagine the privilege it would be if God used us to lead a great awakening here in Geauga County?

What if we went from being the 4<sup>th</sup> largest Amish settlement in the world to the 40<sup>th</sup>? What would it look like if abortions in Geauga County went to 0?

What would it look like if the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witness, the Roman Catholics, the Episcopalians, if all of these buildings closed their doors because their people left them for the light and hope that only the gospel can bring?

Church, let's have prayers and a vision so big that if they come true, we know that it only happened because God himself did it. Amen? Amen.

### 3. The Church Grows Up – vs 13-14

But moving on to the next point.

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*Read Ephesians 4:13-14*

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In verses 13-14, Paul now tells us where all of this is heading. It has a destination. It is driving toward unity and maturity.

You see it in the word “until” there in verse 13. That should slow us down. This is not some weekend project that I start and then my wife has to call Brad Baker to come over and finish. This is not some quick fix.

This is a lifelong, generational pursuit. We are pressing toward something that will not be perfectly completed until Christ returns.

Even still, Paul articulates that we are still to press on towards a few different lifelong pursuits:

***First, the unity of the faith.*** Not uniformity. We do not all have to have identical opinions on every secondary issue. But unity around the core truths of who Christ is and what He has done. And honestly, one of the encouraging things from our Spiritual Formation Assessment is that there is real doctrinal clarity here. We know what we believe about the essentials. That is something to thank God for, and it is something to guard.

***Second, the knowledge of the Son of God.*** Paul is not talking about trivia. This is not just knowing facts about Jesus. The word he uses carries the idea of full, lived,

experiential knowledge. We cannot just know about Him. We must know Him in a way that changes how we think, how we speak, how we respond, how we live.

Now I know the moment some people hear “unity of the faith” and “knowledge,” they get nervous, because they say, “ooohh, doctrine, that’s divisive...” And it can, when sinners mishandle it. We have all seen that.

But I want you to hear this: doctrine rightly received does not divide. It fuels worship. Think of it like throwing dry wood on a fire.

If you have even a small flame of love for Christ in your heart, and then you begin to see more clearly who He is, what He has done, how vast His grace is, how sovereign His plan is, what happens? That doctrine does not cool your affection. It feeds it. It turns a small flame into a wildfire of worship.

The more you know Him, the more you love Him. The more you love Him, the more you want others to know Him. That is what Paul is getting at here. Knowledge that produces worship, and worship that produces mission!

***Third, Paul says we are pressing toward mature manhood and to measure up to Jesus.*** Or in the Greek, to a “full grown man.” He is talking about growing up. We’ve got to man up! Notice he says, “until we all attain.” Not just the leaders. All of us, together, moving toward maturity.

And then verse 14/15 gives you the contrast. It tells you why we press on to these things. See the purpose clause there? The opposite of maturity is being like little children, tossed around by every wave, carried by every wind, pulled by every persuasive voice, every cultural trend, every new idea that sounds spiritual.

Immature people produce immature churches. Immature churches are unstable churches. They chase fads. They get fractured by controversy. They lack discernment. Paul says the antidote is maturity. This maturity comes through the equipping process that he just laid out.

Now bring that third principle back into this. **Whatever God is going to do in the world through all Christ's people, He is going to do through leadership that makes it a high priority to empower Christ's people.**

And what does that mean for us? It means the goal is not a few strong leaders and a building full of dependents. We are not trying to produce one impressive man and a crowd of followers. That man lived and died 2,000 years ago and his name was Jesus Christ!

We are trying to produce a church full of mature, equipped, discerning believers who can stand on their own two feet, who know what they believe and why, and who are not tossed around when the pressure hits.

We want people who can boldly step onto the world stage as ambassadors for Christ making an appeal, imploring people to be reconciled to God!

When this happens, we have distributed strength. This is a church that does not collapse when one leader moves away or steps down or whatever but endures because every part has been built up.

And this is why our core values are what they are:

- A Culture of Truth, so we are not carried around by every wind of doctrine.
- A Culture of Dependence, so we are rooted in the Spirit and not in human strategies.
- A Culture of Compassion, so our maturity shows up as love for people, especially the lost and hurting.
- A Culture of Stewardship, so we handle what God has given us with faithfulness.

Those are **NOT** corporate buzzwords. These are the marks of a maturing church, and I hope you can see that from Ephesians 4.

#### 4. The Body Builds Up – vs 15-16

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*Read Ephesians 4:15-16*

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Here in verses 15-16, there is this kind of crescendo in this passage.

***First, notice the posture:*** “speaking the truth in love.” That is the mature Christian’s way of engaging. Not truth without love, because that is harshness. Not love without truth, because that is sentimentality. Truth and love together, always.

***Second, notice the direction:*** “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” Christ is the head. We grow upward into Him because He is the standard, He is the goal, and He is the source. Everything flows from Him, and nothing in the church makes sense when it is disconnected from Him.

And then verse 16. Let me highlight four things.

1. **“The whole body.”** Not some parts of the body, the whole body. Every member working together in ministry.
2. **“Every joint with which it is equipped.”** The joints are the connection points. Relationships, serving teams, small groups, mentoring, and even those conversations in the parking lot after service. Every point of connection matters, because growth does not happen in isolation. God uses the ordinary, faithful bonds between believers to hold the body together.
3. **“When each part is working properly.”** Each part, your part and my part. Paul says when each part is working. Now I hope nobody feels called out if they’re not fully plugged in. Friend, that is not meant to burden you, it is meant to dignify you! In Christ, every single member of his body matters, and every member of his body has a role. If you’re here, it is because Christ wanted you to be here. You’re here for a reason. And we need what you have! We won’t be complete as a body without it!
4. **“Builds itself up in love.”** That is multiplication. That is what happens when equipping leads to ministry, ministry leads to maturity, and maturity leads to more equipping. This equipped maturity produces mission and multiplication. And the fuel is love. It is a cycle of growth that feeds itself, and the fuel is love.

This is where that fourth plumbline lands: **Whatever God is going to do in the world, He is going to do through local churches that are directly involved in going, sending, participating, cooperating, and being held accountable for the gospel and its extension.** This is our fulfillment of the Great Commission! And it requires every member ministry!

Now one problem here with this passage. Do you see the problem here? Paul said, ‘until we all attain.’ You know what that means? Movement is expected. Growth is required.

We all should be expecting to grow. When we’re all being equipped, growing mature, we multiply the mission. We multiply the gospel.

Now I know sometimes when we think of personal discipleship, we need to take the theoretical and make it practical. So here's a simple way<sup>2</sup> to see what growth looks like and what it requires. This is in your handout too.

	<b>Spiritually Dead</b>	We need to move towards these people with urgency. And if this is you today, you need to move towards Jesus with urgency.
<b>Trait</b>	Unbelief	
<b>Need</b>	To Be Born Again	
<b>Task</b>	Share your life, your story, and the gospel	

	<b>Spiritual Infant</b>	Needs help learning to walk.
<b>Trait</b>	Ignorance	
<b>Need</b>	Growth	
<b>Task</b>	Share life, truth, new habits	

	<b>Child</b>	Now sadly, I think this is where the largest swath of people exist today in churches. And this doesn't mean age. It means maturity. People in this category need repentance and reorientation from selfish consumerism to selfless service.
<b>Trait</b>	Selfishness (consumer)	
<b>Need</b>	New Focus on God & Others	
<b>Task</b>	Connect to God, small groups, and a bigger purpose	

	<b>Young Adult</b>	Needs opportunity and equipping to carry weight and reproduce.
<b>Trait</b>	Service (contributor)	
<b>Need</b>	Opportunity to Engage in Ministry	
<b>Task</b>	Equip	

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Jim Putnam's "Real Life Discipleship," and Thad Bergmeier's work with Every Ethnē

	<b>Spiritual Parent</b>	Needs a reproducible path and freedom to invest in people.
<b>Trait</b>	Intentional	
<b>Need</b>	Reproducible Process to Make Disciples	
<b>Task</b>	Mentor and Release	

	<b>Spiritual Grandparent</b>	Needs celebration and encouragement to keep multiplying.
<b>Trait</b>	Multiplying	
<b>Need</b>	Platform for Celebration	
<b>Task</b>	Encouragement to Continue	

When this happens consistently, and people are moving through these stages of greater faithfulness and personal growth, we're doing what Paul is talking about in Ephesians 4. We're growing up into the fullness of the stature of Christ. We're being conformed into the image of Jesus!

This is a body where each part is working, and each part is growing. Where the whole church is involved in the mission – some going, some sending, and all participating, all cooperating – and all accountable to one another for the advance of the gospel.

That is what verse 15/16 look like lived out. And church, that is what we are pursuing.

### Closing

Let me close with this. Everything we have seen in this passage answers one simple question: How does Christ build His church?

As my Thad Bergmeier puts it:

*“As I have had time to interact with hundreds of pastors and churches in the past several years, is that the church, at least in North America, might be more like the people in Genesis 11 building the Tower of Babel, than like the NT Church. We have become so enamored with trying to build our structures and grow larger with programs all at the neglect of the one thing we have been told to do. Make Disciples. We are so busy trying to build the church when Jesus has never told us to do it. He builds His church. We make disciples. That WAS . . . IS . . . & always WILL BE His divine plan for the church... Jesus builds his church through the bold witness of his followers who live in submission to his Spirit.”<sup>3</sup>*

Not through one unusually gifted leader. Not through anything impressive. Christ builds His church through a body, His body, where leaders equip, members serve, maturity increases, and love multiplies.

Now we’ve talked a lot about a lot of things, so let’s try and land this plane. Everything that we’ve discussed today rises and falls on one reality. You know what that is?

### ***Christ is the Head of the Church.***

You cannot have the body without the Head. You cannot have the life of the body without union to Christ. We can imitate church. We can attend church. We can admire church. We can even serve in church. We can full everyone that we’re a part of Christ’s body! But we cannot grow into maturity, and we cannot participate in this kind of gospel fruitfulness, unless we belong to Jesus Himself.

Why is Christ the One we grow into? Because He is not only the standard, but also the Savior. He is not only the goal, but also the Redeemer. He is not only the Head who directs the body, but also the Lord who bought the body.

So when you read things in this passage that like “speaking the truth in love,” don’t hear a communication principle. Hear the gospel! God spoke truth to us in love.

***You want an example of that? Look at the cross.***

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<sup>3</sup> Thad Bergmeier, preached on 4/16/23 at Cornerstone Bible Church

At the cross, truth and love did meet. God did NOT set aside truth to show love. And He did NOT set aside love to uphold truth. In Jesus, He upheld both. He was both just, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus lived the life we could not live. He bore the wrath we deserved. He died in the place of sinners. He rose again in victory. And He calls people not merely to join some community called a church, but to die to themselves and come and live as his body. To come to Him, to trust Him, to be forgiven, and to be made new.

Is that you today? Do you need to be made new? Do you feel the Spirit leading you? Don't wait until tomorrow, tomorrow is the Devil's Day! Repent today and believe the Gospel!

Christ equips His church because He is the victorious King. He matures His people because He is faithful to finish what He started. The body only grows when it is connected to the Head, and that Head is Jesus Christ, the one who gave up his life to ransom this body, we call the church.

As we close, every single one of us sitting here today is in one of three places in our walk. And I want you to ask the Lord which one He is calling you to right now.

***First, move up.*** Some of us have been faithfully serving for years, and we have more capacity than we are using. Step into greater responsibility and faithfulness. We need to shoulder even greater kingdom responsibility.

***Second, move over.*** This one I think is very important for our church, as we seek to multiply our existing maturity. Some of us do not need to do more. We need to reproduce what we are already doing in someone else.

Make room. Train someone. Share the load. If we hold on to everything and retain all the ministry opportunities, nothing multiplies. But if we pour into someone and release them, the work spreads.

***Third, move in.*** This is for two groups of people.

### **1. Christians who need to make their faith real**

- a. Moving in though is also for believers who have been attending without truly committing. For people that are spiritual infants. Maybe you come on Sundays, but you are not really connected. And if I may be so bold, maybe you're not serving. Not in a small group. Not

pursuing membership. You are on the fringes of the body, and the body needs you in the middle.

- b. So my exhortation to you is to move in. Get connected. Get committed. Get involved. The body builds itself up when each part is working, and your part matters. God put you here in this church on this day with this sermon for a reason. Fulfill your ministry at Cornerstone Bible Church, and by doing so, love your neighbor.

## **2. Move into a relationship with Jesus**

- a. If you are here and you have never entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ, you have been around the edges, watching, listening, evaluating, but you are not His. You're not a part of his body. Today is the day to move in. Not into an organization. Into Christ. Into the Head. Turn from your sin. Stop trusting yourself. Come to Him. Repent and believe the gospel.

All of us have one of three things to do. Move up. Move over. Move in. Which one is the Spirit pressing on your heart this morning?

And remember that picnic table. Everyone needs to come together and lift together. Same church. Same people. Same mission. Not because we are strong, but because our Head is strong. Not because we have it all figured out, but because Christ is faithful to build His church, and He will build it. And the gates of Hell will never prevail against it. Amen? Amen.

Let's pray.

### **Benediction**

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

And all God's people said, amen.

For those staying for our Annual Meeting, if you could please help the crew moving chairs/tables, we'll be looking to reconvene here as soon as the tables are set up and will be eating lunch between 12:00 pm – 12:15 pm.

Series: Standalone  
Every Member Ministry | Ephesians 4:11-16  
2/22/26 | Cornerstone Bible Church

If you're not helping with chairs/tables, if you could kindly head to the foyer or the back classrooms, it would help get all the things setup. As you help, there's a blueprint on the screen and markers on the floor. If you have questions go to Glenn, or Dave, or Allen, or John.

If you're departing at this time, we'll miss you, and at the expense of the deacons and those who planned this meal, we'd encourage you to stay. But if you're leaving, may God bless you and keep you, go in peace, and be sent!