



Ephesians 4:7-16 Pt 2 God's Gift to the Church

This morning we jump in right where we left off last week. We read about God's gifts to the church:

Eph 4:11 And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

We spent time last Sunday speaking about each of these, who they are and what they do. But we also noted why they exist and that is here in verse 12:

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

Of course you remember "the saints" is a reference to all Christians. Young, old, male, female, no matter – if you are a Christian, you are a saint, and therefore, as a pastor, I'm supposed to be here to equip *you* for the work of ministry.

Now, that might not be what you expect. You might think "ministry" is done by pastors at the church or by missionaries on the field. But according to the Bible, all Christians are saints, all are called to the ministry, and the truth is, some of the best ministry happens, not at the church, but in the car, or on the sideline, or spontaneously at the side of your desk or in the hallway.

Ministry happens when you least expect it. It happens through texting and Facebook when someone reaches out to you. It happens in your neighborhood or on the shoulder of the highway. Wherever you go, whatever you do, that's where ministry is supposed to occur – not just here in this place. So since you're "in the ministry" let's take a look at three questions this morning:

- What is ministry?
- What does ministry produce?
- How do I know what ministry I'm called to?

We start by asking the first question: what is ministry? If you look at this passage in the Greek language, the language it was originally written in, you discover the word here is the Greek word *diakonia*, it's the root of our English word deacon.

The first deacons were appointed by the early church to help with the practical needs of people. The church was providing widows with meals and the deacons were charged with making sure the food was getting to the people who really needed it, in a manner that was fair and just. The work they did was called ministry *diakonia*.

And so we read in Acts 6:

Acts 6:1 Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve [*diakoneō*] tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry [*diakonia*] of the word.”

Both serving tables and teaching God’s Word are called ministry. I need you to notice that. Do you remember last week I encouraged you to ‘own’ your ministry – whatever it is that God has called you to, own it, care about it, take it as seriously as someone in ‘full-time ministry’ – because you’re both “in ministry” whether you realize it or not. *The deacons and the apostles were both doing ministry.* Some was practical, tangible, hands-on kind of stuff, and the other was spiritual, intangible, ethereal but it was all ministry.

And did you notice the qualifications necessary to minister by serving tables? You needed to have a good reputation and be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. God isn’t looking for people who think they’ve got this on their own, even when it comes time to distribute food relief, welfare, and social justice, God wants people who reflect and rely on Him.

So let’s get personal – are you relying on Him? Do you feel like you still need ‘equipping’ for the work of the ministry? Or do you think you’ve got this? God wants you to be reliant on Him for all that you do in His name – even down to the ministries of daily and domestic life. If God has called you to the ministry of marriage or parenting, the Scripture is still true, He wants to equip you for it, so turn to Him in absolute dependence and ask Him for strength.

Let me give you a few more examples of what ministry might look like:

Do you remember the story of Mary and Martha in Luke’s gospel? Jesus and the disciples came to Martha’s house and her brother and sister were visiting with them and listening to Jesus teach but Martha was running around trying to take care of everyone, the word is *diakonia* – she was trying to “minister” to everyone by being a good hostess, but she had a lot of people over and she was getting worn out.

Eventually, she complained to Jesus and told Him to tell her sister to get up and help her. Jesus said no, but only because Mary had chosen a better thing, at the moment. There is a time for running around and taking care of everyone and everything, there is a time for being busy. But it wasn’t right then when Jesus was teaching, that was time to be still and rest and learn.

If you're called to Martha's ministry, it's a good ministry. In 1st Corinthians Paul commended the household of Stephanas because

1Co 16:15 ... they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints

People with a gift of hospitality ministry make things beautiful, they make things comfortable, they take good care of people. You don't have to be Martha Stewart, you're not trying to impress people with your style and design and culinary skills, you're not 'entertaining' or trying to impress, you're just trying to make people feel welcome and loved. That's a ministry – it's a God-given ministry, embrace it for what it is and do it for God's glory. Just remember to take the time to sit and rest too, because there's always one more thing that could be done.

There are other ministries too. Later in the book of Acts we see that giving money to those in need is ministry -

Acts 11:29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief (*diakonos*) to the brethren dwelling in Judea.¹

When you give to the church, or to support some relief effort, or some missionary, that's ministry. And God has called some of you to give more than others. We should all give, the Bible tells us God loves a cheerful giver, but some of you have been specially wired, or specially blessed, to be able to give in a dramatic way. You need to know, that's *diakonos*, that's ministry. That might be a big part of the work of the ministry that God has called you to – giving to help others and make ministry possible.

On the other hand, perhaps God is calling you to the ministry of going, being the one sent out to do ministry and provide relief. After the ministry of giving had been done, it was the ministry of others, in this case two men named Paul and Barnabas, to take it to the people who needed it:

Acts 12:25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry [*diakonia*] ...

So giving is ministry, and going is ministry too. It doesn't matter what God calls you to do, it only matters that He is the One who is calling. He calls some of us to pull out our passports and others to pull out their wallets. But it's all ministry.

And while we're on this topic, let me just ask you to keep the elders in prayer, because we're in a season right now of praying through what God is calling us to support when it comes to ministries and missions. We have a lot of opportunities at home and abroad to get involved with giving and going and we're trying to pray and think through: which of these opportunities are the ones that God really wants us to focus on and stand behind as a

¹ See also 2 Cor 9:12

congregation? What are the things we should be taking on individually, and what are the things we should be taking on corporately?

Those are the things we're asking God about and reflecting on together, so please, pray for us and pray that we would best know how to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, which we've seen can be rather diverse – everything from taking care of widows, to providing hospitality, to giving, to going and this is only a small sample of things that the Bible calls ministry.

But they all have something in common – they help other people know Christ and grow in Christ. So we find here the answer to our second question: what does ministry produce? Look with me back at Ephesians 4

Eph 4:11 And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

Maturity is the goal, Ministry is the method. Do you remember that from last week? Maturity is the goal, Ministry is the method

Is that happening for you? Are you being equipped for maturity and ministry? God has given you a place to belong in the church. He has given you pastors to equip you for the work of the ministry, and He has surrounded you with other Christians, some of whom are also called to serve you in the course of their ministry. He has set the stage for your growth. He loves you. He wants to undo the damage you have done to yourself and that the world has done to you.

Each week when you walk into here, God wants to instruct you, correct you, train you, and bless you by and through the people around you and He wants to use you to do the same for them. He wants them to see Christ in you and you to see Him in them. That's the direction all healthy, maturing, Christians should be headed. That's the direct He is leading, and that is why He has given gifts.

14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

When we all use our gifts for the glory of God and the service of others, the entire church benefits. I grow through you and you grow through me. This is the ultimate goal of ministry – mine and yours – we're supposed to help one another grow up to fill out the whole body of Christ. Diversity is more than just a liberal sociological goal – it has

theological implications. We need the whole body present and working together. And we need all the various parts of the body to be strong and healthy, not just a few standouts.

Think about what happens when you take a superstar and put them on an average team – the team performs marginally better, but they'll never perform as good as an entire team of superstars. You soccer fans can think of the impact Gareth Bale has on the Welsh national team. Bale is the most expensive soccer player in the world, and he plays for one of the most famous club teams in the world – Real Madrid in Spain where he is surrounded with other superstars.

But he's not a Spaniard by birth, he's Welsh. So, when it comes time to play for things like World Cup qualifiers, or Olympic qualifiers, other events where you play for your nation instead of your club, he goes back to his tiny little home country where he has a tremendous impact on a small team. But he's only one of 11 men on the field and no matter how well he plays, there's still a big difference between the Welsh national team and Real Madrid.

When it comes to the body of Christ, the goal is that we would become more like Real Madrid – each player a superstar compelling one another to greater levels of performance and moving the whole team forward. Bale can score goals all day long, but he can't do that and play defense, he can't be both a forward and a goalie at the same time. And the opposite is true, the world's best goalie can keep the other team from scoring, but he can never help his own team win, because he can't score goals. All the members of the team need each other. And we, as the parts of the body of Christ, need each other.

So what position do you play? What's your part in the body of Christ? What is your ministry? That's our third question this morning. How will you know what your ministry is?

The answer is, it all begins with desire and availability. Be willing to do whatever needs to be done.

You know, one of the interesting things about pastoring a church here in the DC area is that I have seen people in the church, people that the world would say are very important, people with long titles, people they play special music for when they enter the room, people appointed by presidents, I've seen them show up and quietly serve by setting up the sound system, stacking chairs, folding bulletins, taking out trash – things the world never expects them to do. And they do it because it's ministry, they do it out of a response to all that Jesus has done for them. That is a glorious display of the radically transforming work of God – to simply desire to do whatever needs to be done for sake of Christ.

So the first step is, make yourself available. And then, as you serve, you may find that you have a particular desire for a certain kind of ministry – you might develop a sense of calling, this is it, this is what God wants you to do. Or you might sense a calling to another area of ministry.

When it comes to sorting this out listen for the voices of both God and men speaking in a way that reinforces and confirms. God might speak to you personally about opening up your home for ministry and then later in a separate conversation someone asks if you could. Or, someone might say, you're really good with kids, you should consider Children's ministry, and God takes that suggestion and won't let it die in your thoughts. If you find that the things you sense from God and the things you're hearing and experiencing from others line up consistently, take that into special consideration.

And then, if this is really your ministry, as you step out in the opportunities that come your way, you should expect to find confirmation. People will affirm, and especially the leadership of the church will affirm the fruitfulness and effectiveness of your ministry.

And the more visible your ministry, the more you should expect that to be true. God may call you as an individual, but He always confirms it through the church.

And allow me to say, though this will step on some toes: confirmation should come through the local church – not the para-church, not the ministry or missions agency. The primary place your ministry should be affirmed and confirmed is by the church.

I say that from Scripture and personal experience – there was a time when I was serving in a ministry capacity for both a missions sending organization and my local church. And the missions organization wanted to ordain me, but my church said no, they intended to do it instead. They believed, and I strongly agree, that only the local church has the authority to ordain people to ministry.

Missions agencies, evangelism ministries, camp ministries, radio ministries, Bible Colleges, are all great things, they do good work, but they are only a segment of the body of Christ. The local church is where we see the entire body represented, it was established by Christ Himself. He said He will build it, and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Other organizations and other efforts may receive a non-profit status, they may be a ministry, but they are not the church and that distinction is important.

Your calling and contribution in ministry should be recognized by the people in your church. In fact, before I was ordained, I was serving in various ministries, doing whatever needed to be done, and people would ask me – are you a pastor? And I would tell them: you tell me. Is that what you see, is that what you experience, am I being used by God to equip you for the work of ministry, to build you up in the body of Christ?

You don't just go off and get some academic qualification for ministry, you just start, right here and right now, responding to the desires God places in your heart and see where it leads and whether the church confirms.

So I want to speak directly to the young men of the congregation for a moment and ask – could God be calling you to serve as a pastor-teacher or evangelist? Is God calling you to a life set apart for service to the local church or mission field? Parents, do you ever discuss that possibility with your children? God gave your son to you as a gift, but does He also

want to give him to the church, to call or to equip others?

Many pastors can tell you of developing a sense of calling as a young man, a sense that God wanted to use them or they wanted to serve Him as teenagers or even younger. I know ladies serving on the mission field who say God grabbed them in junior high or high school and began to burden their heart for the mission field. Young men and women, you are not safe – ministry is not just for your parents and grandparents, it's not just for old people. Is the Lion of Judah calling out for you? Is He stirring you? It might be happening, and it would not be odd. In fact, it would be expected. God cares about you right now, long before you ever graduate. And He wants to shape and mold your hearts as much as any adult.

And that's true for adults too. Will retirement open up a door for additional ministry for you? Or, is God calling you mid-career to abandon ship and follow Him? Don't think it's impossible. Remember, *He Himself gave some to be*. It's up to Him, not you. Your only choice is to submit and follow or wait for the fish that going to come swallow you, Jonah.

If you have a desire to serve in some ministry capacity, you should make it known.

1 Tim 3:1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

Now, I know, not everyone is called to serve as a pastor or evangelist or ministry leader, but even if He's not calling you to serve as someone with a title, those people are supposed to be equipping the saints – that's everyone else in the church – for the work of the ministry. So, no matter who you are – male or female, young or old, married, widowed, or single, tarnished past or spotless – if you are a Christian God has a ministry for you and when you fulfill it, others will grow and the whole body of Christ will benefit.

Paul wrote another letter, like this one, to the church in Colossae, and when he got to the end he tagged on one more thing – he called out someone who was resisting the call to ministry and wrote:

Col 4:17 And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

Is that an admonishment for you this morning? What is the ministry that you have received in the Lord, and are you fulfilling it? Are you being equipped for it? Is God using others to help you grow, and is He using you to help others grow? These are important questions to be asking because God does have a plan for you life.

A plan that begins with confronting you on your sin. Confronting you with the reality that your best efforts on your own are never quite good enough, and sometimes you're just flat out awful. That inadequacy is called sin and it's what separates you from His holiness. Left alone, undealt with, it will lead you to eternal separation from Him in hell. So he took action, He sent His son as atonement, a substitute for you – to suffer in your place and offer you the great exchange – He would take your sin and offer you His perfection. That's what

happened on a wooden cross outside of Jerusalem so many years ago.

But it doesn't stop there. After the exchange, comes an indwelling. God comes to live inside you, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit for salvation, and you are called into ministry. You get to go from offending and resisting God to representing Him to others. Not because of what you have done, but because of what He has done for you.

We celebrate and remember that this morning as we receive communion. And as the men come forward to distribute the elements I want to encourage you to ask the question – since God has done this for me, now how does He want to use me? I'm saved from sin, but I'm also saved for ministry – how does God want to use me to help others grow?

Let's pray.