

## Ephesians 4:7-16

### Introduction

Once a year we set aside one Sunday to consider how we can all play our part in the life of the church. We call it our Serving Review, and that's what we're doing this morning. We're thinking about how we can each play our part in the life of the church. And, inevitably, that means focusing on the need we have for people to get involved in our different ministries.

Really, I could point to every area of ministry, because no matter which part of church life we turn to, we could always do with more people.

Last year we thought about some of the more practical roles that we need people to take on. If you were here, you may remember that we spoke about the cleaning team, the gardening team, the maintenance team, the sound desk, and the projection team. I'm very grateful to everyone who serves on those teams. And we do still need more people on those teams, so if you *can* commit to serving in one of those ways, please do let me know.

But what I want to think about this morning is serving in one of the Bible teaching ministries in the church. Things like Home Groups, Men's and Women's ministries, Youth Bible Study, Sunday Club and so on.

It's what we might call 'leadership' in the church.

And I want to begin, this morning, by looking at one aspect of what the Bible says about leadership, which is the purpose of leadership.

### The purpose of leadership

The question I want to start with is this: What kind of church does God want us to be?

And that's where the passage that we just had read for us helps us. It tells us clearly the kind of church God wants us to be.

Look at the end of the passage with me, from verse 13.

**...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

**Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole**

**body, joined and held together, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**

That's the kind of church *God* wants us to be. United. Mature. Stable. Firmly connected to Christ. Not like an infant, who wobbles around on their feet as they learn to walk. Not blown here and there by the latest fad, like a plastic bag being blown around by the wind. Not tossed back and forth by false teaching, like a boat being buffeted by the waves in the sea. A church that stands firm on the truth of God's word and reveals his glory to the world. Perhaps we might picture a mature oak tree. Or more accurately, a mature, fully grown body. It's a church that's stable and steadfast.

That's the kind of church *God* wants us to be. And it's the kind of church we want to be. Not only for our generation but also for generations to come.

So how can we ensure that this is the kind of church we are?

Well, see how the passage begins.

It begins with a wonderful statement. Paul says that each one of us has received a gift of God's grace.

Please look down at verse 7.

**But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says:**

**'When he ascended on high,  
he took many captives  
and gave gifts to his people.'**

**(What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)**

The key sentence for us to grasp is the first one.

Paul writes: **But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.**

The grace Paul's referring to here is not saving grace but gifts of ministry. He's saying that the risen Christ has graciously given to each one of us gifts and opportunities to minister to others in the church. Each one of us has a part to play in the life of the church. We won't all play the same part or have the same gifts. But we do all have a part to play because God has given us skills and talents which, in some way, are unique to each one of us. What's

more, he's given us opportunities to use them. And he's has given us leaders in the church to help us do it. This is where we discover the purpose of leadership in these verses.

Please look at verse 11.

**So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

Notice the various links of the chain in these verses.

First, Christ gives to the church people who are involved in Bible teaching. That's what these various groups of people all have in common: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. They're all people who we might describe as the church's leadership. Paul has a specific group of people in mind here, but I think we can apply what he says to those in various Bible teaching or leadership roles in the church. Faithful Bible teaching is the foundational role in the life of the church.

And then, second, the purpose of church leadership is to equip the whole church for works of service. Christ gives us people who teach the Bible so that all of us can be properly equipped by God's word to serve one another.

And that's how we arrive at the third link in the chain, which we've already looked at. As the church members are equipped to serve one another through the teaching of the Bible, the church grows and builds itself up in love, to become the church that God wants us to be.

This passage is telling us that the purpose of leadership is to see every member of the church equipped to serve one another, using the gifts Christ has given us, so that the church grows to maturity and stability.

Notice, in verse 15, that it means speaking the truth in love. In other words, it involves all of us talking to each other about the things we're learning from God's word and doing so in the context of loving relationships. And notice, at the end of verse 16, that it involves each part doing its work. In other words, it involves everyone doing their bit.

So, if we're to be the church that God wants us to be, and that we want to be here at Emmanuel, then we need people in leadership roles who will help us. We need people who will help us to study God's word, whether from the pulpit, in home groups, in children's groups, Youth Bible Study, the men's and women's ministries, one-to-one and so on. And that could be you...

You might be sitting here thinking, “No, Martin, that really isn’t me...” But can I encourage you to think that it could be you... because without people being willing to take on Bible teaching roles in the church, we cannot be the mature and stable church that God wants us to be.

### The leaders we need

So, who are the leaders we need?

Well, we already have an excellent children’s ministry, and I’m very grateful to everyone who serves on the various children’s teams, whether as leaders or helpers. They are vital roles. But we can’t be complacent. We regularly need to identify new leaders and helpers for all our teams. At the moment, for example, we’re looking for new leaders for our toddler group, Buttons, and for our Youth Bible Study. And as we look to the future, we need to keep doing that. So I want to continue recruiting people to serve in our children’s ministries. Could that be you?

And the same is true of home groups. We have seven excellent home groups meeting every week. But they’re all nearing full capacity. As we look to the future, we need to identify and equip more home groups leaders too. Perhaps *that* could be you...

But we have a particular need for new leaders in two areas that are part of our 5-year plan for the church.

Firstly, youth work.

I’m delighted that we have now started to advertise for the new post of Youth & Families Worker. Isn’t that great news. The adverts are out there. All the details can be found on our website under the Jobs tab. It’s easy to find on your mobile phone. Please do share it with anyone you know who might be interested.

As I’ve said many times, we need to build an excellent youth ministry to go alongside the excellent children’s work that’s already happening. At our Giving Review, we set ourselves the target of raising £90,000 to fund the role for three years. And we’ve done it! The fact that you’ve all given the money so generously to make it possible is testimony to the gospel heart of this church and also to our shared commitment to the next generation. I’m really thankful for the way in which our church has got behind this clear gospel need. So, let’s pray that God will lead the right person to us.

But one person on their own will not be able to run the youth ministries that we want to establish. That person will need teams of volunteers to help with the work of teaching the young people about Jesus. So, it’s particularly important that we identify and equip the right people from among us to serve under our new Youth & Families worker when, God willing, they arrive. Could *that* be you?

The second area that's part of our 5-year plan is senior's ministry.

We want to start a mid-week seniors' group that encourages Christians and evangelises non-Christians. The PCC hasn't got any concrete plans for that yet. We still need to discuss that more. But, nonetheless, we need leaders to make it possible. Could *that* be you?

What I'm saying is that as we look forward to the years ahead, we need to identify and equip more leaders and helpers for our existing Bible teaching ministries and for the new ones we want to develop.

Now, clearly, all of those require good knowledge of the Bible and the ability to teach it, or help teach it, to others. And you might be thinking, "No, Martin, that's still really not me." But could it be you in a year's time, or two years' time, if you received the right training and equipping? I want to suggest that it could.

And what I want to suggest this morning is that one way to move in that direction is to sign up for a new training course that's going to start in September. I'm really excited about this. And I'll tell you why in a couple of minutes. But first, let me show you a short video that introduces this course to you.

### SMTC video

That is a great course that has been run by the Sussex Gospel Partnership for many years. The problem for us is that it's often been too far away for us realistically to take part. Next year, for example, the Saturday training course will be running in Hove, which is too far for most of us.

But I've spoken with Spencer Shaw, the Director of the SGP, and I'm delighted that he's agreed to let us run the course here in Hastings in Mendham Hall via a live link. The talks will be livestreamed from Hove into our hall. And we will be able to meet together as a satellite group, once a month, on a Saturday morning, along with members of St Matthew's church and St Mark's, who will join us.

Please can I commend that to you. There are lots of good reasons for doing this course.

You might do it for your own benefit, to deepen your understanding of the Bible. The course will really help you get to grips with the story of the whole Bible. That would be a good reason for doing it.

You might do it as a refresher, if you've already done a course like it. That would be another good reason for doing it.

But, perhaps most importantly for us, you might commit to doing it not only for your own benefit, but also as a first step to equip you to serve in the church by teaching the Bible. Or

being on one of our ministry teams and helping others to teach the Bible. That would be a great reason for doing it.

Perhaps you're already involved in leading a home group or serving in one of our children's ministries. This course would be a great way to be even better equipped for the ministry you're already doing.

As we look to the future, I would love to think that everyone serving in a Bible teaching role in this church will have done this course, or something like it, to equip them.

No doubt, you'll need more information. Some literature for the course was included with your service sheet. Please do read it. It's an excellent course. You'll see that there's a cost to doing it. But I don't want the cost to prevent anyone from considering it. So please do speak with me if you are interested in doing the course but are concerned about the cost. And I would be delighted to talk with you about the course and try to answer any other questions you might have, after the service.

So can I just end by commending this course to you, particularly as an excellent first step if you would be interested in serving in one of the Bible teaching ministries of the church in the years ahead.

## Conclusion

We've seen in our Bible reading, that the risen Christ has graciously given each of us gifts and opportunities to minister to one another in the church. And we've seen the vital role of leadership. The church needs people in Bible teaching roles to equip us all to play our part in the life of the church, so that the church grows to maturity and stability. If that *could* be you, then please do think and pray about signing up for this course.

Over the next two weeks I'm going to be preaching two more sermons on church leadership. Next week, we'll think about the nature of leadership. Then, the following week, we'll think about the responsibilities of leadership. I hope those sermons will encourage you to think about serving in leadership at Emmanuel and help you to understand what that involves.

Let me say a prayer.

Loving Father, thank you for the gifts and opportunities we have each received from the risen Jesus. Thank you for your word, the Bible, which equips us to use those gifts for the sake of one another. And thank you for those who serve in the church in Bible teaching roles. As we look to the future, please raise up more in those roles, so that we might be the church that you want us to be, mature and stable, not thrown off course by false teaching, but secure in the truth. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.