

# Serve

Cultivate: Time to Engage Series, October 1 & 2, 2022 | Ephesians 4:11-16  
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## What difference do your God-given gifts make?

**George Bailey was asking that question in the classic movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*.**

Bailey's life hasn't gone at all how he thought it would.

He's stuck in a town he wanted to leave, instead of seeing the world he wanted to experience.

He is running the Building and Loan his father ran, rather than doing the job he wanted to do.

And the Building and Loan is bankrupt. His bumbling uncle is responsible. George Bailey is going to jail. He's convinced everyone would be better off if he were dead. Better, if he had never been born.

What difference did he make in the world?

**From heaven, Clarence the Angel gets to see the difference George's life makes.**

*It's a Wonderful Life* isn't meant to be theology, but let's think about the story for a minute.

Clarence sees that George saved his younger brother from drowning, saved the local druggist from accidentally killing someone, saved the Building and Loan. You get the idea.

**Then Clarence shows George what a difference his absence would make.**

If George hadn't been there to save his brother, his brother would have drowned.

If George hadn't been there to save the druggist, he would have ended up accidentally killing a patient.

If George hadn't been there to save the Building and Loan, the town miser would have wrecked the town.

Because George wasn't there, everything was different. In a bad way.

## What difference do your God-given gifts make?

In Ephesians chapter 4, Paul shows us some of our God-given gifts and the difference that those gifts make in the Church.

If we look carefully at this passage, we can also see what difference their absence would make.

Today we are all weighing whether to use our God-given gifts or not. Using them is incredibly fulfilling. At the same time, using them can be frightening, time-consuming, and even difficult. Not using them is much easier and more comfortable.

As we weigh whether we will use our God-given gifts to serve people, sometimes we need to know what difference their presence would make.

Occasionally, we need to think about the difference their absence would make as well.

In Ephesians 4, Paul helps us to do both.

## God gives some gifts to build up the Church.

**Paul presents a focused list of gifts God gives to the Church in Ephesians 4:11-12:**

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ ...*

**Paul starts with five gifts that Jesus gives specifically to the Church.**

Gift one is apostles. In some ways, the apostles are the twelve disciples Jesus kept around himself during his ministry. He eventually called them apostles, meaning that he sent them out in his name to share his good news and to use his power. Of course, Judas ended up leaving the group, and early in the book of Acts, the disciples chose another apostle to take his place. In that case, the apostles were those who had been witnesses to Jesus' life. In time, key emissaries like Paul, who came out from congregations, had encounters with the living Christ, spread the Gospel, and started churches were also known as apostles. Some would say that by the end of the first century, the gift of apostleship was gone. If it was still active, this gift would have been an empowerment from God to preach the Gospel regionally, to make disciples and plant churches in new places, and to lead and influence multiple churches.

Gift two is prophets. These are people who speak for God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes they exhort the Church to be ready for the future, and sometimes they exhort the Church to live rightly today. Their messages can be challenging or comforting. Since the Bible is now closed and complete, prophets are now responsible for proclaiming news that is in keeping with God's Word.

Gift three is evangelists. These are people, sometimes beyond the local church, who proclaim the Good News about Jesus and call people to commitment to him. This is not the discipline of evangelism; we are all called to share faith in Jesus. Some people are called to do that with all their time and energy, and those people are frequently given this special gift from God to do so with extraordinary effectiveness.

Gift four is shepherds. Shepherds or pastors are the leaders of local congregations. Jesus is the model here. Jesus calls himself "The Good Shepherd." He calls us his flock. Just as Jesus cares for us and shepherds care for sheep, pastors care for the people in the church.

Gift five is teachers. Teaching is not simply the transfer of information but the shaping of another person; think one disciple shaping another.

### **These are the specific gifts Paul says are given by Jesus to build up the Church.**

Notice the word "equip" in verse 12. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers are there to equip the Church. That means that those gifts are present to make sure that the Church has everything necessary, that the Church is prepared.

What is the Church prepared for? It is prepared for work, for ministry.

When these gifts are being exercised, verse 12 tells us, the Church is built up. That means it grows, it is made mature, and it is made strong.

That's the result of Jesus giving to some of his followers the gifts of apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, shepherding, and teaching.

### **There are lots of other gifts.**

Elsewhere in the New Testament, particularly in the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul talks specifically about other gifts, like helping and administration. (1 Corinthians 12:8-11)

In Romans, Paul mentions the gifts of leadership, giving, and mercy. (See Romans 12:6-8)

The Old Testament even suggests that there may be a gift of craftsmanship. (See Exodus 31.)

So far, we are talking about spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are empowerments given by Jesus through the Holy Spirit to his followers for the ministry. There are different spiritual gifts.

### **These gifts impact the entire Church.**

#### **Paul describes the impact the five gifts he named have on the entire Church in Ephesians 4:13-14:**

*... 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, 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.*

**When I read this description, I can't help but think about my own children growing into adulthood.**

I remember watching one of my sons learning to eat solid food.

We would cut soft foods into bite sized chunks and put them on the tray on his highchair.

At first, he would pick up the tiny pieces of food with his fingers and put them in his mouth.

Then he would get frustrated and pick up a fistful at a time. He would shove some into his mouth, smear some on his cheeks, and dump some on the floor in the process.

Then he would get tired and plant his face into the pile of food like a bird pecking at seed.

Now both of my sons are grown, live in apartments, and cook their own food every day!

That reminds me of how we start out, how we grow, and what we become!

That's what Paul is saying. We start out as spiritual children and grow into spiritual parents.

**We have to keep in view the problem that being spiritual children presents.**

Paul says that spiritual children are tossed to and fro. That means we are easily confused when we are spiritual children. We easily lose track of what is true and right.

Sometimes we're thrown off course by bad doctrine. We catch wind of a new idea; it sounds good (even though it's wrong), we embrace it, and we are rushing off with this new idea.

Sometimes we're thrown off by what Paul calls "human cunning." People can pull us down and pull us away from the faith just by their bad behavior and bad attitudes if we're not careful.

Then Paul says there are even deceitful schemes. As spiritual children, we are vulnerable to spiritual attack, and sometimes that comes in the form of a harmful, cunning person.

Being spiritual children means that we are weak and vulnerable!

**Paul writes that these gifts cause us to mature away from being spiritual children.**

People with the gifts of apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, shepherding, and teaching are the people given to the Church to lead and serve it.

As they lead the Church, their leadership has an impact on us all. We are not only equipped, but we mature.

When these gifts are operating in the Church as they are supposed to, we all mature from being spiritual babies to becoming spiritual parents.

**However, this passage implies that there is a danger that we might become spiritual "manbabies."**

Do you know what a manbaby is? A manbaby is someone who looks like an adult (a man) and is the age of an adult but who behaves like a child, a baby.

Manbabies are unreliable.

They can't handle stress or criticism.

They avoid commitment and responsibility.

They spend too much time on video games and TV and too little time on life's basic tasks.

Do you know any manbabies? How about any spiritual manbabies?

**The "picture" of the presence of a spiritual gift leaves behind a "negative" of its absence.**

If the presence of the gifts of apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, shepherding, and teaching equips the Church, prepares the Church for the work of ministry, and leads us all away from spiritual childhood to spiritual parenthood, then what happens when these gifts are absent?

If these spiritual gifts are absent, then the Church is not equipped. We are not ready for the work of ministry. We remain spiritual manbabies.

If the absence of the church-leadership gifts leaves such a void, what do you think happens when the other gifts are missing? What happens when your gifts are missing?

## The Church functions like a body attached to Christ, the head.

**Paul invites us to picture the Church as a body attached to Christ the head in Ephesians 4:15-16:**

*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.*

### **First, Jesus is in charge.**

Christ is the head. That is another way of saying that Jesus is Lord.

If you notice, Jesus being the head means that the various parts of the body (all his many disciples and all the various people who make up the Church), therefore, take instructions directly from him.

In other words, what Jesus says is not a suggestion; instead, it's a set of marching orders.

### **Second, the body is connected.**

You read in what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4 about joints.

In 1 Corinthians you read about different body parts.

We are connected to one another in the same kinds of ways that toes are connected to our circulatory system and our digestive system and our lungs. These organs are designed inherently to work together, not separately. When they operate together, amazing things can happen. However, when they do not operate together, everything goes badly.

### **Third, every part is needed.**

Even the parts of the body that we think are private and unimportant are needed.

We don't really know how much a part is needed until it's no longer working properly.

### **A part that is not responding to the body is like a lip after a shot of Novocain.**

I had a filling in one of my teeth repaired not too long ago.

When I did, the job was big enough to warrant getting a shot in my gum to numb the tooth.

I don't know if you've ever had Novocain with a dental procedure, but if you have, then you know that it makes your lip numb and your cheek numb, too.

When your lip is numb, it feels three sizes bigger. Plus, it doesn't work properly, so you can't always speak clearly. And sometimes I drool. It's not a good look.

A lip that you can't feel, that's not responding to the head, is just not right.

That's what we're like when we take ourselves out of the body of Christ. We cut ourselves off from the messages coming from the head, Christ. We refuse to respond. We don't work with anything else in the body. We are like a lip that's been affected by Novocain.

## Let's use our God-given gifts to serve.

### **God gives us all gifts for serving.**

We all get a spiritual gift, but that's just one aspect of the gifts God gives us for ministry.

I like the acronym "SHAPE" because it reminds me of them all.

The acronym "SHAPE" starts with the letter "S" for "spiritual gifts." We've covered those.

"H" stands for heart. God gives us love for some things and burdens for others.

“A” stands for abilities. God makes us naturally talented at some things, and we can improve the things we are naturally gifted at by practice and training.

“P” stands for personality. God made us all different, and our different personalities make each of us fit for serving in different ways in different roles in ministry.

“E” stands for experiences. God has led us all through many experiences. Some of them are good. Some of them have been rough but shaped us still.

All of these many gifts make us who we are and fit us for certain places of serving.

### **Let’s use our God-given gifts to serve.**

I would love to tell you that I can help you find the perfect place to serve that matches your gifts and your SHAPE perfectly. I can’t right now. Someday soon, I hope.

Right now, I want to encourage you to find a place to serve.

There are lots of places to serve here at Valley and lots of places to serve beyond Valley.

The important thing is that you use your gifts to serve.

### **Let’s use our God-given gifts to serve in Jesus’ name.**

I’m not suggesting that you just do something.

Just doing something doesn’t necessarily impact the world for Christ.

I am suggesting that you serve people in Jesus’ name.

By that I mean that you choose to do something that advances the cause of Christ in this world and gives you an opportunity to be overt about your faith in Christ.

### **Let’s use our God-given gifts to cultivate disciples.**

As we use our gifts to serve people in Jesus’ name, I hope that we help them to become and mature as disciples of Jesus. That is the end we want.

I hope, too, that we are cultivating disciples in the Church. As we serve alongside other Christians, they should mature as disciples of Jesus themselves by virtue of serving with us.

Plus, as we use our gifts to serve people in Jesus’ name, we ourselves become better disciples.

### ***It’s a Wonderful Life* paints a picture of one man seeing what happens when he is out of the picture.**

He didn’t like it at all. By the end of the movie, George decides that he wants to live.

He goes racing back to his house. Everyone recognizes him again.

The grateful people of the town raise enough money to replace what had been lost, so George avoids jail time.

### **What would happen if your gifts were missing?**

My sons would never learn how to eat food without their hands, manbabies would multiply and roam wild and free, lips everywhere would be numb from Novocain, and Clarence the Angel would never get his wings. (Just kidding.)

However, the world would indeed be a worse place. The Church would be weaker.

God gave each one of us our gifts for a reason. God gave **you your gifts** for a reason.

Let’s use our God-given gifts to serve.