Walki ng Forward

Christ gives the church gifted leaders to help believers mature and minister.

Ephesians 4:11-16

Memory Verses: Ephesians 4:14-15

Read Ephesians 4:11-16, First Thoughts (p. 84), and Understand the Context (p. 84). Note the progression of development and how the equipping of believers contributes to the overall health of a church.

Study Ephesians 4:11-16, using Explore the Text on pages 85–89. As you study, focus on how Christ gives the church gifted leaders to help believers mature and minister. Identify the specific ways God has gifted you to lead.

Plan Ephesians 4:11-16, using Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 90–91) and More Ideas (p. 92). Keep in mind ways you can use this text to help people better understand why God gives spiritual gifts to His people, and how your group members are uniquely gifted. Also refer to QuickSource and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible for other ideas.

Grow with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

Gather the following items: □ Personal Study Guides; and □ Encouraging quotes made by famous coaches. Prepare to display the following Pack Item: □ Pack Item 3 (Poster: The City of Ephesus). Make copies of: □ Pack Item 7 (Handout: Ephesians Time Line); and □ Pack Item 10 (Handout: Ephesians and Colossians).
**FIRST THOUGHTS**

Gift giving is part of life. On special occasions and holidays we give gifts to one another. Sometimes, they are given in a perfunctory manner with little forethought about the recipient. On other occasions they are enthusiastically received because they meet a great need. The giver of the gift is always glad to hear the other person say, “I have been needing one of these!”

(In PSG, p. 73) **Name a gift you received that you didn’t appreciate at first but later came to realize how much you needed it.**

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**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

**EPHESIANS 4:11-16**

The Ephesians lived in a world with many different kinds of leaders. Certainly, the most exalted political leader was the emperor of the Roman Empire. He held power over a vast kingdom. As the capital of Asia Minor, Ephesus was a colony of Rome with many political leaders living in the area. One of those, a city clerk, is mentioned in Acts 19:35.

In addition to political leaders, Ephesus was accustomed to many religious leaders living within its confines. Priests and priestesses served the many foreign gods located within the city. Each had their own responsibilities in conducting worship and fulfilling the duties required by those above them.

The Jews also had leaders in Ephesus. This included rulers of the synagogue (Acts 19:9) and also itinerant Jewish leaders who performed exorcisms (Acts 19:13). It included traveling preachers, such as Paul, who were invited to speak in the Ephesian synagogues.

It took a variety of leaders to conduct both the political and religious business in Ephesus. People were accustomed to leaders. Leaders provided guidance for the people. Without the people, the leaders would have been ineffective in their duties and useless in their purpose. The same was true for the church when it came to the need for leadership. In this passage, Paul detailed some of the leaders called and gifted by God for the church. He emphasized the purpose of their calling.

Jesus is the ultimate leader of the church, but He has gifted others to provide leadership within the church under His direction. These human leaders are not gifted to do all the work of the church. Rather, they are gifted to organize and administrate the work of the church so that all the members might do the work of the church together.
VERSE 11
As Paul entered the second half of his letter to the Ephesians, he began to show how theology impacted daily life. He had talked about unity and diversity in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:1-6). He had emphasized that people were gifted with various gifts, but they served the same Lord (4:7-10). With so many gifted people in the body of Christ, the church needed leaders to coordinate and encourage those gifted people in their growth into spiritual maturity. In verse 11 Paul listed gifts of those who were called to build up the church. He listed five different callings, but by the grammatical construction he indicated four different positions.

The use of the pronoun, he himself, emphasizes the fact that Christ is the one who sovereignly calls and gifts people to ministries that serve the church. All of these gifts were needed within the body to build the church to maturity. Though the list of gifts is thorough, it probably was not intended to be exhaustive. These gifts were foundational to the development of the early church, but other leadership roles would develop within the history of the church to continue providing leadership.

The first gift that Paul mentioned was apostles. This word was used in three ways in the New Testament. First, apostle was used to describe those who were sent with a message. This is the lexical meaning of the word. It was used of Epaphroditus, who was a messenger sent to Paul with the letter of Philippians (Phil. 2:25). Second, the word apostles often referred to the twelve disciples of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:5; Rev. 21:14). They were eyewitnesses of Christ and could validate the teachings and ministry of Jesus. If Paul used the term in this sense, then apostles would not be a valid group of leaders in our day because they died in the days of the early church. However, there is a third way that apostle is used in the New Testament. Others who were not a part of the twelve had the designation, apostle. Paul was an apostle, as was Barnabas (Acts 14:14). James the brother of Jesus was also called an apostle (Gal. 1:19). Timothy and Silas, coworkers of Paul who helped write 1 Thessalonians, did not want to be “a burden as Christ’s apostles” (1 Thess. 1:1; 2:6-7). Paul seemed to place both himself and Apollos into the category of apostles in 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:6,9). This third category seemed to represent those who were in leadership in the early church, providing pastoral leadership in a role similar to a modern-day missionary or church planter.

The second calling Paul mentioned was prophets. Already in Ephesians he had connected apostles and prophets as foundational to the establishment of the church (Eph. 2:20; 3:5). Prophets in the Old Testament were those who either revealed the Word of God to people in their generation (forthtelling) or predicted the future as God revealed it to them (foretelling). This dual function continued in the New Testament. Agabus the prophet predicted the Judean famine and Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11). As Paul described the gift in other places, it seemed to be a gift that was...
used to edify the church (1 Cor. 14:22). This was a gift which the church was not to put aside (1 Thess. 5:20-22) and one that was needed within the body of Christ (1 Cor. 14:1). The early church needed those gifted to bring a message to the body of Christ, and the church today also needs those who are gifted to apply the Word of God to specific situations.

A third way Christ gifted His church was by sending **evangelists.** While prophets brought their message to the church, evangelists were gifted to proclaim the gospel to those outside the church. By using their gift to share the gospel with the lost, they encouraged others within the body to lead others to faith in Christ. Luke referred to Philip as an evangelist (Acts 21:8), and Paul encouraged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). Though the whole church was called to evangelize, people gifted in this area built up others so that they would also engage people outside of the church with the gospel.

The grammatical structure of verse 11 indicates that the final two roles were functions of the same office—**some pastors and teachers.** Each office prior to these had its own usage of some, but the final two roles are grouped together with the word some. They represent the work of the pastor-teacher in the church. The pastor of the church had two primary roles in his congregation. First, he was the shepherd of that congregation, which is the meaning of the word for pastor. The idea of leaders as shepherds of the flock was a common Old Testament idea (2 Sam. 5:2; Ps. 78:71-72; Jer. 23:2; Ezek. 34:10). A pastor is charged with the care of the congregation. The second function of the pastor was as teacher. The pastor was not necessarily the only teacher of the church. Others could teach who were not pastors, but the responsibility of that teaching ministry rested with the pastor.

**TO MOVE BELIEVERS FORWARD** *(EPh. 4:12-14)*

**VERSES 12-13**

12 equipping the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.

The individuals gifted for building up the church are not superstars, and they are not to use their gifts to bring attention to themselves.

The goal of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers was to **build up the body of Christ.** These gifts do not exist for the sake of the gifted or for the glory of the gifted. They exist for the **good** of the church. The word for build up previously occurred in Ephesians 2:21, where the new temple made up of Jews and Gentiles was being put together into a holy temple in the Lord. It implied the growth of a building or structure. In both cases in Ephesians, it meant the growth of the body of Christ. The term body often referred to the church as an extension of Jesus (Rom. 7:4; 12:5;
The individuals gifted for building up the church are not superstars, and they are not to use their gifts to bring attention to themselves. They are humble servants dedicated to helping the local congregation to engage the world around them.

How do the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers build up the church? Their role is **equipping the saints for the work of ministry.** The role of the church leaders is not to do the work of ministry but to equip the entire church body to do that work. The word *equipping* was sometimes used to refer to the mending of a net (Matt. 4:21) or the restoration of those who had fallen (Gal. 6:1). In places outside the Bible it referred to the setting of a broken bone. The mending role of church leaders rules out divisiveness that often divides the flock. Rather, they are setting everything right in the church so that every person has the opportunity to do the work of ministry. The word *ministry* is the same word used to designate the deacon. It emphasizes a servant role.

**How does your church view its leaders—as equippers of ministry or doers of ministry?**

Verse 13 further defines what it means to build up the body of Christ. First, the body of Christ should strive that everyone would **reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son.** Paul had previously indicated that everyone in the church shared one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:5). Though faith has several usages in the New Testament, here it seems to refer to the body of doctrine that people believe about the gospel. Those who serve the church as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers have a goal of equipping the church so that it is not divided by false doctrine. The church must be together in the faith, and an important part of that faith is the knowledge of God’s Son.

Secondly, building up the body of Christ involves **growing into maturity.** The Greek literally stated “into a perfect man.” Paul’s desire was that church members would move out of infancy and into their responsibility as spiritually full-grown adults. The church should be characterized by maturity rather than childish behavior, and its leaders should equip the members of the church to move from infancy to maturity in their faith.

**The measure of maturity in the church is how much it looks like Christ.**

Thirdly, to build up the church means to aim for **a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.** The measuring stick for any church is not some other church or some objective standard outside of Christ. The measure of maturity in the church is how much it looks like Christ. Paul previously
referred to the church as “the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way” (Eph. 1:23). The church is an expression of Christ. As the church matures, it looks more and more like Christ.

**Immature Christians are gullible and easily deceived.**

**VERSE 14**

14 Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit.

As the church matured, Paul believed it would know how to stand the onslaught of false teaching that would arise. He said that mature believers would no longer be little children. In contrast to the maturity mentioned in the previous verse, Paul referred to immature members as little children who could not take care of themselves. Immature Christians are gullible and easily deceived.

Immature church members will be tossed by the waves. Like a small child caught in the pounding of the surf, they have little power to stand against those who teach false doctrine. He also described them as blown around by every wind of teaching. Like a child in gale force winds, immature church members are unable to remain firm in their faith.

Paul characterized the false teaching that threatened the church as human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. The Greek word for cunning was used to refer to a person’s cheating in games using dice. Cleverness was associated with Satan and his deceit of Adam and Eve. False teachers cheat and seduce others through their techniques of deceit, and immature Christians are powerless to know they are straying from the truth. The work of leaders in preparing the church to stand against such an onslaught is crucial.

(In PSG, p. 78) **How does each action identified by Paul in verses 12-14 pave the way for the next action or result identified?**

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Some will use the truth to their own advantage or to club those whom they don’t value.

**AS A BODY (EPH. 4:15-16)**

**VERSE 15**

15 But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ.
body that is not afraid to speak the truth but always does so in the context of loving relationships.

As the leaders and members of Christ’s body speak the truth in love, the church will **grow in every way into him who is the head**. Paul wants the body to grow into maturity in relationship to the head, which is **Christ**. The head of the church is not the pastor or some other prominent member. The standard is Jesus. As the head, Jesus is responsible as both the leader and nourisher of the body. He is actively involved in stimulating and facilitating growth in the body.

**VERSE 16**

In our physical health, we understand the wholeness of the body. Problems in one part of the body affect other parts. Likewise, it is **the whole body, fitted and knit together** that is called to fulfill the purposes of God in the world. The whole church is dependent upon Christ just as the body is dependent upon every ligament that joins its independent parts together. Anyone who has ever torn an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) or bruised a medial collateral ligament (MCL) knows the importance of every part being held together and working efficiently. Those who have experienced such trauma know that the **proper working of each individual part** is dependent upon the thing that holds it together. It is Christ who holds everything together (Col. 1:17).

When church members are properly related to Christ, they also will be properly related to one another.

Christ as the head who holds all things together **promotes the growth of the body**. Spiritual maturity cannot come apart from the working of Christ as the head of the body. When church members are properly related to Christ, they also will be properly related to one another. As individual believers grow in Christlikeness, they will in turn begin to help the other parts of the body achieve maturity as well.

What are the areas where your church works together well?
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCTION: Search the Internet for encouraging quotes made by famous coaches (search using “encouraging coach quotes”). As the group arrives, call attention to selected quotes displayed in the room. Ask: How can the right coach inspire a team to greatness? Explain that owners provide coaches with the intent of them helping the team perform to their potential.

STATE: God gives the church gifted leaders who help believers mature and live out the mission God has given them.

EXPLAIN: One of the main responsibilities of any leader or coach is to facilitate growth and positive change in the lives of those who follow them. They can tell when their players are stronger and better than they believe. Good coaches push the players to grow in strength, self-confidence, and unity as a team. In much the same way, God gives the church gifted leaders who help believers mature and live out the mission God has given them.

REVIEW: Discuss key points from Understand the Context in the PSG (p. 74). Direct the group to Pack Item 3 (Poster: The City of Ephesus) and distribute copies of Pack Item 7 (Handout: Ephesians Time Line). Review these items to remind the group of the context for this Letter to the Ephesians.

TRANSITION: With Ephesians 4–6, Paul focused on the practical application of how believers daily grow in spiritual maturity. A key aspect of this growth is through God’s gift of spiritual leaders in the church.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Read aloud Ephesians 4:11, giving emphasis to who gave the gifts to leaders.

EXPLAIN: Several times in his letters, Paul wrote about spiritual gifts given from God to His people for use in the church. The list in Ephesians 4 stands out for its emphasis on the giftedness of church leaders.

MINI-LECTURE: Direct the group to pages 75–76 of the PSG to gain insight about the roles Paul identified. Draw attention to Jesus giving the church these leaders.

ASK: What are the implications of viewing church leaders as Christ’s gifts to the church? (PSG, p. 75)

STATE: Emphasize from the PSG (p. 76): Every gifted leader serves an important role in the church. No leader possesses all these gifts and callings, which is why Paul repeated the word “some” in his descriptions. The giftedness of church leaders is varied but all the gifts are needed. They are God’s appointed means to equip His church for ministry and mission.

TRANSITION: In verse 11, Paul described who God uniquely equipped for leadership. In verses 12-13, he answered the question of why gifted leaders are needed in the church.

READ: Create small teams. Direct the teams to read Ephesians 4:12-13, paying attention to the reasons Paul identified for giving the leaders.
HIGHLIGHT: Christ gave gifted leaders to the church for two reasons, supported in this text: 1) equipping the saints for the work of ministry, and 2) building up the body of Christ.

ASK: From these verses, what can we conclude is the goal of this equipping and building up of believers?

STATE: Christ gave us spiritual leaders in order to move believers forward toward spiritual maturity. With the help of godly leaders, believers can grow in their belief and understanding of the gospel and participate more fully in the church’s mission.

ASK: Paul drew a direct correlation between the mind-set and the mission of the body of Christ. How does the equipping of people for service contribute to the development of confidence in God’s truth?

EXAMINE: Direct a volunteer to read Ephesians 4:14 aloud and take a closer look at each of the descriptive phrases and actions Paul included. How does each action identified by Paul in verses 12-14 pave the way for the next action or result identified? (PSG, p. 78)

CONSIDER: God gives gifted leaders to the church who teach the truth and apply it to this cultural moment in time. This type of equipping helps believers move forward in their faith and maturity. Share with the group about a time when your faith was moved forward by the type of equipping mentioned here. Then invite one or two volunteers to share their examples.

TRANSITION: Paul concluded this section of his letter with a reminder that maturity is seen in a confident faith in Christ, and that confidence always has a positive impact on the entire body of Christ.

READ: As you read verses 15-16 aloud, call for the group to visualize the metaphor Paul used in these verses.

STUDY: Lead the group to complete the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 80). Then ask: Why do you think Jesus compared the church to a body? Lead the group to see that growing in Christlikeness together is the goal not only of spiritual leaders but of the church body as a whole.

ASK: Why might a person’s ability to express God’s love increase with spiritual maturity? (PSG, p. 79)

DISCUSS: Paul closed this section on spiritual leadership and the forward movement of the church with a visual imagery of the human body. Lead the group to discuss how this analogy illustrates the health of the church body. Then ask: What are some other ways of illustrating Paul’s point other than a human body? (PSG, p. 80) Why is it important to remember that love is the motive for our ministry, both to one another and to the world?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

CONCLUDE: Jesus’ mission on earth was one motivated and defined by love, and Paul reminded us time and again that ours should be, too.

CHALLENGE: Lead the group to brainstorm answers to the following question (PSG, p. 81): What could your small group do to support the equipping ministry of your pastor and other church leaders?

PRAY: Close in a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the spiritual leaders He has placed in your church. Pray for those church leaders by name.
PRACTICE

- Compile a list of members who have not attended the group in several weeks or months. Call on a few group members to help you make a special effort to reach out lovingly to these brothers and sisters in Christ.

- Spend time personally reflecting on the third question set under In My Context (p. 81): *What is your strategy to grow in Christlikeness? What particular attributes do you need to target? Ask God to move you closer to Him.*

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace the Focus Attention activity, divide the group into pairs and have them discuss the question on page 73 of the PSG. Have a few partners share their responses with the whole group. When the sharing time is done, read the paragraph from page 73 aloud.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To help bring to life the different types of spiritual leaders mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, talk briefly about key biblical characters who model each type: Peter (apostle who walked with Jesus and then told others about Him); John (prophet who recorded the visions God gave Him); Stephen (evangelist who shared the gospel even when it cost him his life); Timothy (pastor who took seriously the responsibility to teach the Word of God to others).

- To further enhance understanding of Ephesians 4:12-14, spend some time brainstorming the differences between spiritual immaturity and spiritual maturity. Write responses on a board, beginning with the differences pointed out in these verses, but including other thoughts or supporting texts the group suggests.

- To support the discussion of the body of Christ in Ephesians 4:15-16, identify Christ as the head of the body. Note that this was also discussed in Colossians 2:19. Distribute copies of Pack Item 10 (Handout: Ephesians and Colossians) and review other similarities between the two letters.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Guide the group to create smaller teams and discuss the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 81): *As a means to ongoing spiritual maturity in your walk with Christ, list one ministry in which you could participate more fully. What steps do you need to take to become more involved in that ministry? Commit to holding one another accountable in this area of growth.*

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Listen to the song “O Church Arise (Arise, Shine),” by the Gettys. Encourage the group to listen to the lyrics as they think about how God has uniquely crafted the body of Christ to live out His mission.