

Journey To A Better Life

Lesson 8 . . . How To Grow Spiritually (Ephesians 4:11-24)

Notes

We learned in the last lesson that when Christ triumphantly ascended back to heaven as Victor over our greatest enemies, death and the grave, He *gave gifts to men* (4:8). These enabling graces, or spiritual gifts, are given to us with great expectation on Christ's part. He expects us to use them to build up His church. When we do not find, develop, and use our gifts, the church is like a human body with missing parts. For the church to be complete and to function as Christ intends each one of us must mature by finding and using our spiritual gifts.

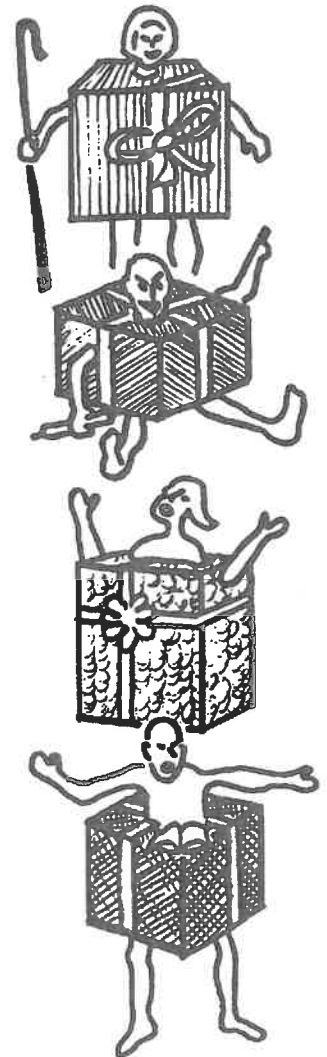
There are 19 spiritual gifts mentioned in the NT (Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, Romans 12:6-8, and 1 Peter 4:9-11), and each of us has at least one. In the text for this lesson, Paul focuses on the four gifts that are the foundation for spiritual growth. Here we find at least three things that are necessary to grow spiritually, beginning with . . .

Instruction (4:11-12)

Paul writes, *It was he* (Christ) *who gave some* . . . (4:11a). Christ is the One who sovereignly gives the gift, and it is the Holy Spirit who energizes the gift. How did Christ indicate this in Acts 1:8a?

The first gift mentioned, *apostles*, translates a Greek word (*APOSTLOS*), which means "one sent with a message." It is the idea of proclaiming a message in new areas. Missionary and apostle can in a practical sense be one and the same. The gift of apostle, not the office that was limited to the original twelve, then involves being able to serve the Lord in new areas and often cross-culturally.

Most of us will not be called to be a missionary in a new culture, but we are called to be missionaries in our communities and at our workplace. Every day when we go to work we need to remember what fact found in 2 Corinthians 5:20a?



You represent Jesus where you work. God has placed you where you are so you can represent Him. Work takes on a new meaning when you understand, "I am here as a missionary, to be a light in darkness."

Prophets (4:11) translates a Greek word (*PROPHETES*) that means "a proclaimer of a divine message." A prophet is literally God's spokesman. The prophets in the OT did some foretelling, but that was not their primary function. They spent most of their time preaching against Israel's sin and exhorting the people to repent and turn back to God. First Corinthians 14:3 describes the three functions of the gift of prophecy in the NT and for us today. What are they?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Anytime we use the Word of God for *strengthening, encouragement, and comfort*, we are exhibiting the gift of prophecy.

The word *evangelists* (*EUANGELISTES*) means "bearers of good news." It is the gift of sharing the Gospel in ways that people respond in faith, accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Evangelists are itinerant, traveling extensively to proclaim the Gospel and win people to Christ, and then moving to another location. Unlike missionaries, they do not spend a lot of time in one location teaching and training so that churches are established. Billy Graham is the best-known modern example of an evangelist.

Not everyone has the gift of evangelism, but we are all commanded to share the good news of Christ. How does 1 Peter 3:15b make this clear?

Next, Paul writes that Christ gifted some to be *pastors and teachers* (Eph. 4:11). The fact that *some* is not repeated before the word *teachers* indicates this is the same gift with two functions. The word *pastor* (*POIMEN*) means "shepherd," indicating that the local church is the flock.

The pastor has a God-given "staff" that he is to use to guide and lead the flock. That staff is the Word of God—the Bible. Therefore, pastors have another function. They are to be *teachers*. A pastor/teacher is dedicated to a particular flock or church. Apostles, prophets, and evangelists are more itinerant in nature. However, all are gifted by God to instruct us in the way

of salvation and maturity in Christ. The first thing we need to grow spiritually is **instruction** from gifted leaders, and the second is . . .

Involvement (4:12-15a)

The result of pastors' fulfilling their spiritual gifts will be *to prepare God's people for works of service . . .* (4:12a). Some Christians have the mistaken idea they hire the pastor to do the ministry of the church. But the Bible says a good pastor prepares or equips God's people, the congregation, to do the *works of service*, or ministry, *so that the body of Christ may be built up or matured* (4:12b). No church can be what God wants it to be unless the pastor equips or trains the members to do the ministry of the church.

Every believer should be involved in some kind of ministry that builds the church. On the front of our church bulletin is a box with the heading, "Our Ministers." Then it reads: "Every member is a minister. The following have been called by our church to serve as equippers in our ministry." Then our paid ministers are listed. This is the biblical pattern for ministry.

There is a longstanding view that the ministry is to be done by paid, professional clergy. This view believes the laity are to be beneficiaries of ministry through preaching, counseling, visiting, consoling, and the other things the church does. But the reason God gives gifts to church leaders is to equip the church for ministry so she will be a mature, mobilized army.

A biblical church in which the pastor equips by helping members find, develop, and use their spiritual gifts will cause that church to *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* (4:13). When each of us uses his or her spiritual gift, there will be maturity in the church. The ultimate goal of spiritual maturity is found in Romans 8:29. What is it?

When we are mature, *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 men in their deceitful scheming* (Eph. 4:14). Here Paul describes the church as a ship on stormy seas with the pastor\teacher keeping a steady hand on the church's rudder, the Bible, to hold it steady and keep her on course.

Leading people to maturity should always be done by *speaking the truth in love* (4:15a). How do you know if you are speaking the truth in love? You must ask yourself, "For whose benefit am I saying this? Is it for my benefit

so I can appear smarter, more spiritual, or put someone down in some way? Is it so I can get it off my chest? Or am I doing it for the other person's benefit?" *Speaking the truth in love* means using carefully thought-out words at the proper time to attack the problem, not the person. What caution do we find in Proverbs 12:18?

When we speak the truth, we have a choice; we can hurt or help. We can build people up or tear them down. To grow spiritually we need **instruction, involvement, and . . .**

Empowerment (4:15b-24)

The power for growth and ministry does not come from gifted leaders, but *we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (4:15b-16).* When each individual member uses his or her gift, the entire body grows and matures *in love*.

When we become Christians, we must remember our sinful nature is not eradicated, but we receive the spiritual power to break its hold on us. Therefore, Paul writes *that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts (4:17-18).* The word *Gentiles* refers to those who do not know God. The word *futility* (*MATAOITETI*) means vanity or empty. It refers to a life with no real meaning or purpose. *Darkened in their understanding* and *ignorance* refers to people who are morally blind and who have no absolute right and wrong as moral guides. It is the lifestyle that is totally self-centered and thinks only of appeasing its carnal desires. According to 2 Corinthians 4:4, why is a person's mind *darkened* apart from God?

From darkness of mind, people go to *hardening of their hearts* (Eph. 4:18). The Greek word translated *hardening* (*POROSIS*) denotes a hardening of the skin or the creating of a callous by constant contact with a foreign substance. The influence of the world causes hearts to become calloused or insensitive to God's truth.

The result of darkness of mind and hardness of heart is recklessness of behavior, so that they lose *all sensitivity*, and give *themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more* (4:19). The word translated *sensuality* (*ASELGEIA*) means vice that knows no restraint and flaunts itself. In America there is a rapid move toward *sensuality* and *every kind of impurity*, and the result is pornography, premarital sex, homosexuality, AIDS, abortion, drugs, and crime. In the midst of all this, there are those who want to rid our government, schools, and culture of every vestige of Christian influence. However, as Christians we need to remember what truth found in Proverbs 14:34?

This means the prosperity and power of a nation depend on its righteousness. The verb *exalts* (Heb, *rum*) means that the people's condition is elevated. On the other hand, sin will bring disgrace to a nation. Many of our problems as a nation are results of a culture that condones *sensuality* and *impurity*. As believers we can become so calloused by our exposure to sin in magazines, movies, and the media that we no longer recognize it as evil.

In contrast to nonbelievers, Paul writes: *You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus* (Eph. 4:20-21). The point is that we are no longer guided by a mind that is darkened, a heart that is hardened, and a lifestyle that is reckless. How does 1 John 5:20 express *the truth that is in Jesus*?

To grow spiritually Paul says to *put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires* (Eph. 4:22). This means we must completely discard our old way of life. The phrase *put off* pictures taking off old clothes. Can you imagine someone going into a fine clothing store and asking to try on a new suit, but refusing to take off the old clothes he has on? The new suit would never fit, and the same is true in the Christian life. If we don't *put off* the old way of life, Christ just won't fit.

This requires us *to be made new in the attitude of your minds* (4:23). The verb *be made* is present tense, indicating continuous action. This echoes what command found in Romans 12:2?

This renewing of attitudes is done by reading and studying the Word of God and by asking the Holy Spirit to empower us to live it. The Word tells us how to live and the Holy Spirit empowers us to do it.

Finally, we are *to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness* (Eph. 4:24). *Righteousness* refers to our dealings with people and *holiness* refers to our lifestyle before God.

What things in your life do you need to put off, and what things do you need to put on to grow spiritually? When will you begin?
