

Living Word Small Group Study Guide

October 18-24, 2020

Sermon Series: A Method to Your Madness

Week Four: "Because You Can"

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week's Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday's sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

Suggested Opening Prayer:

Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.

Almighty God, grant that those who come to You to worship may present their bodies as living sacrifices, holy, and acceptable to You. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, make us strong to fulfill our ministry this day. We pray in the name of Christ, Amen.

Sermon Series Theme:

The ministry of the church is all about helping you be what you were created to be. There are ways to make that happen on purpose. Methodists are all about purposeful process.

This Week's Sermon Theme:

You have gifts given to you by God. Why should you use those gifts for the Kingdom? Because you can!

Sunday Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:11-13 (A group member should read the passage aloud).

For Group Discussion:

What does the text actually SAY?

The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.

What five specific spiritual gifts does Paul list up in verse 11? (4:11)

What was God's purpose in giving people these gifts? (4:12)

What is the goal of spiritual gifts, with regard to faith and knowledge of Jesus? (4:13a)

What is the ultimate measure of spiritual maturity? (4:13b)

What questions does the text raise for us?

The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Encourage participants to simply ask any questions they have about the passage. The questions below are only suggestions, representative

of the kinds of questions that might be asked. The goal is not necessarily to provide answers, but to ask questions of the text! Open discussion about the questions raised below, or by the class, is encouraged.

We might wonder about the specific differences implied between the roles of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher.

We might wonder if this is supposed to be an exhaustive list of spiritual gifts, or roles to be filled in the church.

We might also ask how doing works of service builds up the Body of Christ.

We also might ask what “unity of faith and knowledge of God’s Son” looks like. Does unity mean unanimity?

Similarly, we might ask what a mature, fully grown Christian is like.

Finally, we probably wonder if it is really possible to achieve “the fullness of Christ.”

Commentary on the text:

The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.

See also: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-11; 1 Corinthians 12:28-31; Ephesians 4:1-10; Ephesians 1:22; Ephesians 2:20; Ephesians 3:5

This week’s Scripture passage is one of several in which the apostle Paul gives a list of ways people are gifted by God to accomplish the work of God’s Kingdom. These are often called “spiritual gifts,” and similar lists from Paul can also be found in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-11, and 1 Corinthians 12:28-31. The list we have here in Ephesians, though, must be understood in light of the context of the preceding passage in Ephesians 4:1-10. The main emphasis of this part of Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus is on the unity that God calls the church to in Christ. Notice the phrases: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Thus, part of Paul’s purpose in describing these spiritual gifts in the letter to the Ephesians is to portray how Christ’s giving of these various gifts for ministry contributes to the unity of the church, as we see at the end of the passage in verse 13.

Verse 11 begins with the words “It was He who gave.” We should first notice that the pronoun “He” here explicitly refers to the exalted Christ, the One who “ascended on high.” It is Christ who is the “Giver” in this verse, and what Christ gives is, explicitly, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. It is important to recognize that unlike other spiritual gifts passages, which focus on the Holy Spirit’s giving of gifts to individuals, here, the focus is on Christ’s giving of *people*, with specific giftedness, to the church! The difference may seem small, but it is in fact crucial to the point Paul is making. Just as God gave Christ to be the “head over everything for the church” (see Ephesians 1:22), Christ now gives apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in order to carry out His purposes for the church. The language makes clear that this is far more than merely an “appointing” of people to fill necessary roles – the people *in* these roles are a gift from God to the church. Some modern translations do not always communicate this clearly, saying “it was He who gave some to be apostles, ...,” shifting the emphasis to be more aligned with the idea of the giving of spiritual gifts to individuals ...

but the literal Greek clearly says “it was He who gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.”

The first two of these groups – the apostles and prophets – have already been the subject of Paul’s letter in both 2:20 and 3:5. The word “apostles” refers to those who have been commissioned by God to take the gospel into the world and plant new churches, while “prophets” refers to those who were able to discern divine revelation and communicate God’s will and words to the people. In the earlier verses from 2:20 and 3:5, these roles seem to be viewed as norms from Israel’s past, even being called the foundation of Christ’s church. Scholars differ as to whether their identification as gifts in the present passage refers only to this historical time in the church’s past, or whether it is meant to indicate that these gifts still exist in the church at the time the letter was written. This is especially true because the last three gifts identified – evangelists, pastors, and teachers – seem to have taken on many of the same roles as the apostles and prophets before them. In the post-apostolic world, evangelists had become the primary church planters and missionaries (like the apostles), while pastors and teachers had the primary role of discerning and communicating the will of God (like the prophets of old), only now, this happened through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is also interesting that whereas apostles, prophets, and evangelists are spoken of individually, “pastors and teachers” seem to be grouped together, almost as if they were synonymous. Most scholars agree that the two roles were very closely related in the early Christian world. Typically, all pastors were also teachers, but not all teachers were also pastors. The actual Greek word that is translated “pastor” here is translated “shepherd” in every other biblical instance, and typically refers to an actual shepherd. While the word is also used metaphorically in the New Testament to speak of Jesus as leader of God’s people, this passage from Ephesians is the only place the word is used to refer to human church leaders in the New Testament! In the Old Testament, though, the Hebrew word suggests the exercise of leadership through nurture, care, and guidance, and that is the meaning intended here by Paul, as well. Teachers, on the other hand, are referenced frequently throughout the New Testament. They were responsible for preserving, transmitting, expounding, interpreting, and applying the gospel message among the people.

Verse 12 now goes on to describe God’s purpose in giving the church people capable of filling such roles – it is to “prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up.” Scholars also disagree as to how exactly this phrase should be punctuated, and whether there are three purposes given, or one purpose and an associated outcome. In the first case, the text would read “to prepare God’s people, to do works of service, and to build up the Body of Christ,” while in the second it would read “to prepare God’s people (specifically) for works of service, *with the result that* the Body of Christ is built up.” In any case, the reason God gives these persons to the church is for training in the Christian way of life, the ongoing edification of the body of believers, to lead them in the Christian way of service to others. The implication is that the transmission and interpretation of the gospel is an essential, and constructive, exercise that the leadership must attend to if the church is to be all the church is called to be.

This becomes even more clear when we read in verse 13 the ultimate goal – “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.” Let’s be perfectly clear - this is the goal of the church’s existence. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are to exercise these gifts both *until* and *so that* the whole

church reaches this goal. The picture here is of the whole church being led toward a completed maturity that is marked by a unified understanding of who Christ is and what Christ calls us to, as we saw Paul encourage the Ephesians to in 4:3-6. The unified church is called to no less than to be the physical manifestation of “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” on earth. To that end, God has given the church people to lead them there and has likewise given individuals the spiritual gifts necessary to do so.

Final Thoughts for Discussion:

The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.

Do you have a sense that God has gifted you in one of these specific roles – apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, or teacher?

If so, how are you using those gifts to “prepare God’s people”?

If not, how are you allowing those who have those gifts in the church to prepare *you*?

Unity in the faith does not have to mean unanimity of opinion, but rather, a common desire to follow the way of Christ into sacrificial service. How are you growing toward unity in the faith?

Who is helping you to grow in the knowledge of the Son of God?

Are you participating in the spiritual disciplines that help a growing Christian to mature by centering their lives on Christ?

Are you willing to learn more about how God has gifted you to help the church’s mission?

Suggested Closing Prayer:

Holy God, we give You thanks for the gifts You so generously pour out upon Your church. Specifically, we thank You for the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers who You have placed among us to help us to mature in Christian faith. We pray that through their efforts, we might attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.