



The Measure of Our Ministry

Ephesians 4:7-16
Week 8 | Feb 25, 2018

Summary: Last week we emphasized our unity in Christ. In humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance, we eagerly maintain the unity of the Spirit. We happily acknowledging the one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one Father God who unites us all. But after 4:6, Paul quickly supplements his thoughts on unity with reminders about diversity. In contrast to the “one” of 4:6, he says in 4:7 that “each one” has unique grace gifts to be used in serving the body. In contrast to the unity given by God that we simply *maintain*, now Paul says there is a unity to *attain*. **The goal is to measure up to Christ**, (“measure” appears three times in the text). We want to “reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” We’re like a child eager to grow taller, needing to “grow into our head.” And grace empowers this effort. **The grace to measure up is measured to us by Christ.** We receive grace, spiritual gifts, and the Holy Spirit himself, in accordance with the measure of Christ. Jesus bore the Spirit without limit or measure (John 3:34), and so do we collectively in the church. The question is, **how will we measure out our ministry?** Will we serve diligently and faithfully, or try to make do with half-measures? The text teaches that it takes the full measure of all of us to attain to the full measure of Christ. But if we grasp the truth of God, the gospel, and the significance of our role as the church—if we “truth in love”—ministering out of our gifts will not be a burden but a rewarding way of being.

Discussion:

1. Read Ephesians 4:7-16, along with Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, and 1 Peter 4:10-11.
2. Which spiritual gifts do you think you have? Which gifts do you see in other members of your group? See if your picture of yourself matches what others see in you.
3. What do you think about the more charismatic gifts? Do you believe these are still useful today? How would you feel if you saw them exercised more at Willowdale?
4. In Ephesians 4:11 Paul lists *people* as spiritual gifts, particularly leaders such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. In our church, which of these leadership functions are we strongest in? Where are we weakest? How could we get better?
5. To what degree do you think your leadership gifts (or other ministry gifts) might be underutilized in the church? What more do you think you have to offer?
6. If you have gifts that are on the sideline, what is the reason? Is it more a lack of equipping and opportunity on the church’s part, or more about your schedule and priorities? What is one way that God might be calling you deeper into ministry?

Discerning Your Spiritual Gifts

Many people are eager to discover their spiritual gifts, and the method of choice seems to be some kind of survey, self-assessment, or spiritual gifts inventory. You can find them online, and our church staff occasionally use them in leadership training seminars.

But these inventories should be used as one tool among many, and maybe not even the most important tool. Prayer, community, and experience will typically serve us all better.

Prayer: Ask God to lead you into the ministry where you'll be most useful and fruitful. Just place your life at his feet; your energies at his disposal. This is the first and most basic act of service: the worth and worship we ascribe to God in our submission to him. Like Paul taught in Romans 12:1, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

A heart submitted to God and a spirit eager to serve will always be put to good use in God's kingdom.

Community: We are so often blind to our own gifts or deluded about what they actually are, especially when we are young. We've all seen people who think they can sing, write, speak, or lead who really aren't equipped for the task. Typically these people just want to be valued or admired, and they think that a more public role in life or ministry will satisfy the desire. On the other hand, some people are actually made for more prominent roles but their fears or insecurities hold them back. John Piper tells the story of when he was a Wheaton College student, feeling a call to ministry and studying to be a professor or pastor, but being petrified of public speaking. He was once asked to pray in a chapel service and had to wrestle with God for a long time just to get to yes. But, of course, he became one of the most bold and fiery communicators of our generation. He just needed someone to draw him out.

On the other hand, I once knew a pastoral colleague who was a very wise counselor, but he didn't want to do it, because he perceived it as a weak role. He wanted to be a teacher and preacher—even though it was obvious to most that he just wasn't very gifted in it. So good friends can both steer us from disaster and steer us toward our actual callings in life. If you're uncertain about your ministry role, get feedback from the wisest, godliest people you know (and who also know you).

Experience: As the saying goes, experience is the best teacher. There's nothing like trying on a role to discover if it fits you. Simply jumping in where there's a pressing need is a great way to get started; that demonstrates a humility and eagerness to serve that God values and honors. After all, ministry is not first about finding what you enjoy, but finding how God uses you to serve others. So rather than seeking your right fit, just seek to be the right person: a willing servant-leader, ready to help where needed. The upside is not only honoring God and helping others, but often God will providentially use your service to guide you toward a person, ministry, or networking connection that will take you where he wants you to go.

So, take a spiritual gifts inventory if you get a chance. If nothing else, it will help you to learn more about all of the spiritual gifts so that you'll be wiser and better informed. But don't make ministry into an individual sport, or spiritual gifts assessment into a narcissistic exercise in self-discovery. Rather, be in community with God and others, and let the wisdom of the group—along with your fruitfulness in actually serving others—to give you real-world insight into what you're made to do and be.

