

Ephesians 4:7-16  
What A Difference A Comma Makes

### Background

Today, we're beginning a new series on Spiritual Gifts. There are three primary passages about spiritual gifts and they're in: 1Cor. Romans, & Ephesians. Spiritual gifts are special abilities distributed by the Holy Spirit to every believer according to God's grace and design for the common good for the body of Christ. Today we're looking at the Ephesians passage. In chapter 4:1-6 the focus is about unity in the body of Christ. This is followed by our passage about diversity in vs. 7-16. Interestingly, this is 1 long sentence in the Greek.

### Message

*I thought I believed it.* I thought I believed in the great Reformed tenet of the priesthood of all believers. And then my husband Scott and I were called to be the co-organizing pastors of Crossroads, a new church in the Philly area. There was no session, no core, not even a group of interested seekers. We were called to a church with no one! I very quickly realized that it was impossible for me to create and do all the things that needed to be done to develop a brand new fellowship. Where should I even start—what program ministries were essential? That's when I began to rethink my role as an ordained pastor. I realized that I had bought into the corporate model where I was the religious professional. I thought that I was the minister—called to minister to the people. I began to question the whole concept of ordained ministry.

Our passage from Ephesians this morning was important to my exploration. As I mentioned it's one of the key passages that teach about spiritual gifts. We see that grace and gifts are related. "But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift." Charis, the Greek word for grace, is related to Charismata the word for gifts. The point is that spiritual gifts are indeed gifts from God. They're not based on human accomplishments just as grace is not earned. We also note the word "EACH." Each baptized believer has been given spiritual gifts. No Exceptions. Over the last 20 years I have led countless seminars and classes on discovering your spiritual gifts and finding your niche in ministry. Invariably, someone comes thinking that they don't have any gifts. That they're gonna be embarrassed because God passed them up. And you know what—everyone I mean everyone has discovered at least one spiritual gift that God has given them. Now, it's not always the one that they were hoping for. I call this the wannabe factor. Gifts are God-given for a ministry that is God-given. We can only receive and then use them. We don't get to choose! I have always wished that I could sing well—but David knows to turn my mic off before the hymn! God has made me and you uniquely. Eugene Peterson in his book, *Run with the Horses*, writes about God's creative genius. "God, never fatigued and unable

to maintain the rigors of creativity, never resorts to mass-producing copies. Each life is a fresh canvass on which God uses lines and colors, shades of lights, and textures and proportions that God has never used before.” We are unique. We are special. We matter to the body of Christ.

WE ALL MATTER. We all are ministers. In Ephesians we see an incomplete list of spiritual gifts. In fact even if you combined all the lists in scripture it would be incomplete. The lists are meant to be descriptive, not exhaustive. Ephesians gives us the leader gifts: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, & teacher. Again these are gifts, not offices. No one, including ordained clergy possesses all of these gifts. Although I am in the role of interim pastor here at HPPC, I don't have the spiritual gift of pastor/ shepherding. My gift is apostle—the gift that relates to starting new churches or new ministries.

A few years ago, my big aha moment with Ephesians is the 2 functions of these leadership gifts: (1) to equip the saints for the work of ministry and (2) build up the body of Christ. Instead of being called to be the minister, the Spirit revealed that I was called to equip the ministers (the people) for ministry. I did not possess all of the spiritual gifts needed in the new church, but the Spirit would lead folks to the newly forming community of faith. I was called to help them discover their gifts and train and equip them to minister in the name of Jesus. As our fellowship grew so did the ministry of the saints! It was amazing to see what God could do with many ministers—the ministry multiplied--we were living out the priesthood of all believers! In the same way, one of the first things that Scott did with the new Latah Valley church was to help the core group discover their spiritual gifts for ministry—and the ministry is growing.

More and more folks are understanding the importance of empowering the laity for ministry. I think this new emphasis is in part based on a new understanding of the scripture. I'm talking about a comma. In the old 1946 RSV and in the old KJV of the bible Verse 12 had a comma—so starting with verse 11 it read, “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. That comma separated the saints (believers) from the ministry. Newer versions like the NRSV in your pew has omitted the comma thereby joining the saints (believers) with the work of ministry. And so it reads that the leaders are to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Who said grammar doesn't matter!

My understanding of what it meant to be a pastor/leader in the church changed. I'm called to listen, observe, encourage and equip folks to discover their passion, their gifts and their style for ministry. And then I give them permission to GO!--to get excited, to dream of new ministries or to shape and be part of existing ministries. Who are we to stop the work of the Holy Spirit?! At HPPC we don't just encourage lay involvement—we equip people to find the ministry to which God is leading them and then to lead it. In some ways we are working ourselves out of a job. I remember three folks who attended a spiritual gifts discovery

retreat that I led at our last new church plant. The next year I encouraged them to lead part of the retreat with me. By the time we left, they were leading the entire retreat. I worked myself out of a job. More equipping awaited me though—and now here I am at HPPC.

This series of spiritual gifts is timely for 2 reasons. We are in the 40 days after Easter, the time that Jesus spent with the early Christians, training them in the meaning of the resurrection—teaching them what it means to be believers of a Risen Lord—equipping them to be followers. We are also in a time of leadership transition here at HPPC. Today Brad is beginning ministry with us. Later this month you as a congregation will be voting on whether to call Betsey Moe as your associate pastor. My last day will be June 1<sup>st</sup> and although I will be sad to say good-bye, I look forward to the time when I'll be joining Scott and our boys at Latah Valley. Although Ken remains constant through it all, it is a good time in the life of HPPC to reflect on what pastoral leadership means. Are you calling Brad to minister to senior adults or with them? Are you calling a new associate pastor to do the ministry or equip you to minister?

Peterson, along with Marva Dawn also wrote a book called *The Unnecessary Pastor*. He says that “Congregations get their ideas of what makes a pastor from the culture, not from the Scriptures: they want a winner; they want their needs met; they want to be part of something zesty and glamorous. They want a pastor they can follow so they won't have to bother with following Jesus anymore.”

But pastors need to point folks to Christ. They need to get out of the way. I now see pastoral leadership more like a coach. A good coach has the ability to draw out the God-given gifts in the athlete. She helps the athlete discover and develop both the gifts and the passion for playing. But the athletes are the players. The coaches are on the sidelines—encouraging and guiding. I think we as ordained clergy need to get out of the way more. We need to really release the people.

Marva Dawn tells a story about a beautiful example of preparing someone for ministry at a concert she attended. Pepe Romero, one of the world's most famous classical guitarists played a duo concerto with Alexander Dunn, one of his students. Before the concert began, she writes, I had barely enough time to skim the descriptions of the two men's backgrounds, without looking at their pictures. Throughout their performance I had the two of them reversed in my mind because Alexander (the student) played the first part, and Pepe kept looking over at him with an expression that seemed to say, “Wow! I wish I could do that!” It was Pepe, the teacher, affirming his student's skills and letting him shine. Only when Pepe played some encores after the concerto did I realize who he was and what an amazing guitarist he is. The concert taught me a stupendous lesson in the way Pepe joyfully and fearlessly let the other person shine. Oh that we would be evokers and equippers like that! Oh that we could

draw out the nets in other people so that they could find their greatest Joy in doing the work of their ministry!

What I want for you beloved disciples at HPPC is to know that you matter to God. You matter so much that each of you has been gifted. You have been given grace and a spiritual gift that will bring you joy. When you serve Christ out of your gift you will experience joy—not burden or obligation. For then you will enjoy being the person that God has uniquely made you to be. Our job as leaders in the church is not to be the minister, but our ministry is to equip and encourage you in the ministry that God has called you to—the ministry that only you can fulfill. The ministry that God had planned for you is waiting.

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