I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our fall series Welcome Home, engaging the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, seeing how every believer has been given gifts to be put into service to build up the family of God.

II. Connecting With One Another

What is your earliest memory of something you enjoyed doing or were "made to do"?

III. Study the Text

a. Read Ephesians 4.1-6.

As we turn the page into chapter 4, Paul shifts his attention from what *God* has done to what *we* are called to do. Eugene Peterson's *The Message* relays this shift well: "In light of all this, here's what I want you to do."

It's been written, "Now the apostle moves from the new society to the new standards which are expected of it. So he turns from exposition to exhortation, from what God has done (in the indicative) to what we must be and do (in the imperative), from doctrine to duty, from the credenda… to the agenda, from mind stretching theology to its down-to-earth, concrete implications in everyday living."

What keywords do you see in the text that reveals this shift in thought?

Why is this shift in thought important for Paul? Why should it matter to us?

b. Paul refers to himself as "a prisoner for the Lord," which, in the original language, is a double entendre, communicating that he is both a prisoner *of* Christ and a prisoner *for* Christ.

Why do you think this was important for Paul to communicate this way?

c. Reread verses 2-3. Paul's instruction to be "completely humble" was profoundly countercultural. It's been written, "lowliness was much despised in the ancient world. The Greeks never used their word for humility in a context of approval, still less of admiration."

Why do you think this was? How is this similar to 21st century America?

Similar instruction is given in Philippians 2.1-11 (in fact, the same word is used in verse 3). What similarities or differences do you see in Paul's instruction to the Philippians?

d. In verses 2-3, Paul sets forth five qualities necessary for Christian unity within the family of God. Which of these five do you find yourself struggling with? How could you seek to develop these qualities in your own life?

e. Beginning in verse 4, Paul uses the word "one" seven times to assert the importance of Christian unity. A careful reading reveals dependence upon each person of the Trinity: *One Spirit* (verse 4), *one Lord* (verse 5), and *one God and Father of us all* (verse 6). *One hope* refers to our Christian calling, *one faith* and *one baptism* to our one Lord, and *one body* to our one Father.

How do you understand Paul's emphasis on Christian unity in the midst of church and denominational divisions?

f. Divisions are not only common in our day, but were in Paul's, as well (see 1st Corinthians 1.10-13 and 3.1-9) Still, in verse 3, Paul writes, "Make every effort to _keep_ the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." How could he encourage the Ephesians to "keep" the unity of the Spirit in the midst of such divisions? (Need a hint? See Ephesians 2.14-18)

g. Read Ephesians 4.7-10.

After emphasizing the importance of community, Paul engages individuality: "But to each one of us…" John Stott writes,

> He is, in fact, deliberately qualifying what he has just written about the church's unity. Although there is only one body, one faith and one family, this unity is not to be misconstrued as a lifeless of colourless uniformity. We are not to imagine that every Christian is an exact replica of every other, as if we had all been mass-produced in some celestial factory.

Why is this important for us to remember? To ask it in another way, what would the church look like if we had been "mass-produced in some celestial factory"?

Would that reflect God's desires for His family? Why or why not?

h. In verse 8, Paul quotes Psalm 68.18, reading it Christologically, through the lens of Jesus' incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension. Compare and contrast that verse with Paul's quotation of it in Ephesians 4.8. What similarities do you notice? What difference(s)?

What do you make of the difference(s)? (After discussing this, see an explanation at the bottom of the page)

i. Read Ephesians 4.11-13.

Though the original text did not include such punctuation, verses 8-10 function as a kind of parentheses, an explanation of Paul's thought in verse 7. His flow of argument, then, flows easily from verse 7 ("to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it") to verse 11 ("Christ himself gave…").

It is clear, then, that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers of verse 11 refer _not_ just to those in paid, occupational ministry, but also _to the whole church_! Indeed, that we are each given a calling, a vocation, from Christ!

How does this challenge our common assumptions and definitions of Christian ministry? What would the result be if we fully lived out the truth of Ephesians 4.11?

j. The typology in Ephesians 4.11 includes five specific callings. Read the definition and (time permitting!) the corresponding verses to get a fuller depiction of each:

Apostles _extend_ the gospel (found over 80 times in the New Testament)
(see Matthew 10.2, Luke 9.10, John 13.16, Acts 2.42, Romans 1.1, 1st Corinthians 12.28, 2nd Corinthians 11.13, Ephesians 2.20, Revelation 2.2)

Prophets _reveal_ God's will (nearly 150 times)
(Matthew 3.3, Matthew 5.17, Matthew 23.27, Luke 4.24, 1st Corinthians 12.28, 1st Corinthians 14.37, Ephesians 2.20, Hebrews 1.1, James 5.10)

The discrepancy between "receiving gifts" and "giving gifts" may not be as significant as it seems. While some scholars are comfortable with Paul altering his quotation to serve his purposes, it has been explained this way: "…we need to remember that after every conquest in the ancient world there was invariably both a receiving of tribute and a distributing of largesse. What conquerors took from their captives, they gave away to their own people."

Evangelists *recruit* people for God's Kingdom (used 3 times, "evangelism" over 50)
(Acts 21.8, 2nd Timothy 4.5, Matthew 11.5, Luke 4.43, Acts 14.7, Romans 1.15, 2nd Corinthians 10.16, Galatians 1.9, Ephesians 2.17, 1st Peter 1.25)

Shepherds *nurture* and *protect* God's people (18 times)
(Matthew 9.36, Luke 2.8, John 10.14, John 10.16, Hebrews 13.20, 1st Peter 2.25)

Teachers *understand* and *explain* God's truth (nearly 60 times)
(Matthew 10.24, Matthew 22.36, Luke 6.40, Luke 10.25, Luke 18.18, Luke 20.28, John 13.14, 2nd Timothy 1.11, James 3.1)

k. After reviewing the five specific callings above, which do you think God has given you? (Remember "to *each one of us* grace has been given"!)

In light of verse 12, how could your specific calling "equip God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up"? What is preventing you from using your gift this way?

l. Reread verse 13.

According to Paul, what happens if we *don't* use our gifts for works of service, building up the body of Christ?

m. Read Ephesians 4.14-16.

Paul here uses two metaphors to reveal the importance of living out our APEST calling. As Walter Liefeld notes, "We often grasp the meaning of an idea better when we are confronted with a contrast. Verse 14 provides just that, a picture of immature people who, in a change of metaphor, find themselves floundering in a sailing vessel, lurching back and forth, violently tossed about by wind an waves... The word for infants can mean minors or babies. It signifies the opposite of maturity."

Which gets your attention more? How does it prompt you to use your gifting?

IV. <u>Pray</u>

a. Thank God that His body is made up of many parts... That we are not all the same, but each reflect our own part of His family!

b. Ask God to help you see where His truth can change your life,

c. Lift up Good Shepherd as a whole: Congregation, Elders, Deacons, Staff, and Pastors, that we might each live into our APEST calling, and thus be built up into maturity.