

“Being the Church: The Church in Action”

Ephesians 4:1-16

Connect:

Sunday this week is Father’s Day. Down through history there have been some amazing fathers. Off the top of your head who would you consider as great fathers described in the Bible?

How about **Noah**? He clung to God in spite of evil all around him. He was far from perfect but he was humble and protective of his family and diligently completed the work God assigned to him. Lessons from Noah’s life: God will bless those who follow him and faithfully obey him. Obedience is a marathon and not a sprint; it means a lifetime of faithful devotion. Even the most faithful fathers have weaknesses and can fall into sin.

Did **Abraham** come to mind? Can you imagine being told by God that you would father an entire nation?! Talk about an overwhelming thought! He became a leader of tremendous faith and passed one of the most difficult tests a father could face – being asked by God to sacrifice his son Isaac on a stone altar. He did fall short on a few occasions, relying on himself rather than on God. Lessons from Abraham: God wants to use us in spite of our shortcomings. He will even rescue and support us when we don’t measure up. Genuine faith pleases God.

Is **Moses** on your list? Although he was a larger-than-life character who led approximately 2 million Israelites out of slavery in Egypt (at age 80!), he was also a father to two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. He shows us who are fathers today that overwhelming tasks can be achieved when we stay close to God. Lessons from Moses’ life: With God all things are possible. Sometimes we must delegate to others to be a good leader. None of us can do it by ourselves. No one can follow God’s rules perfectly – we are all in need of a savior. No exceptions there.

Prepare:

We have finished the first three chapters of Ephesians, which Pastor Jay calls “the indicative.” This is what God has provided for us in Christ. What now? The next three chapters spell out “the imperative” portion of Ephesians. Obedience is the response to what we have been shown in the love of God through Christ. There are two kinds of obedience: transactional and relational. We rest in our gratefulness and thankfulness to God because we trust that he knows what is best. Not because we are paying God back for all he has provided but because we love him. Paul is telling us the truth in love here. He is encouraging us in life-giving obedience. This is how our belief turns into action.

Let’s read Ephesians 4:1-16.

[1] I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, [3] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

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[4] There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call: [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. [7] But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

[8] Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." [9] (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? [10] He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

[11] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

[14] so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. [15] Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

[16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:1-16, ESV)

Paul is addressing the health of the church and the calling of the Christian. For us today these are the answers to how we go about having a church that meets God's expectations. In verse 14 Pastor Jay points out that there is a "so that." This a resultative clause: what follows after a number of prerequisites have been fulfilled. This is God's vision for a healthy functioning church.

Let's start with verses 1-11. Paul mentions for the second time that he is a prisoner for Christ. Why does he do this? The bigger purpose is to work toward bringing the Jews and Gentiles together as the church. Now he is saying you as the church (which I have given up my freedom to establish) need to carry the torch forward to establish the church, even if it means giving up freedom (or eventually even your life in Paul's case). Paul has major street cred.

He is trying to call us to unity as he has in the first three chapters of the letter. Where does this start? It begins with the Holy Spirit – this togetherness is not optional for the church, it is a mandatory "square one" that creates unity for the glory of Jesus. To oppose this unity is rebellion against God's intent – it is sin plain and simple. Every Christian who comes to faith is responsible for creating and maintaining this unity. It is not just the job of the Pastor or the paid staff of the church, but rather the number one priority focus of every single one of us at NBC. We can't be passive or apathetic about it. Even though many of us are inclined to look out for number one (it's the American way, isn't it?!), we must take a different approach in the church.

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The steps we take in this effort are:

1. **Be humble.** As Pastor Jay says, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.” When you talk to a humble person they make you feel like you are the most important person in the room.
2. **Be merciful.** Don’t give people what they deserve, but rather what you would wish to be given in similar circumstances. We should strive never to be harsh with anyone.
3. **Be patient.** When someone says something that we feel is totally off base, don’t jump down their throat and explain why they are wrong. Instead say to yourself, “Isn’t amazing that people with such different perspectives can worship God side-by-side on any given Sunday!” As Klyne Snodgrass (American author, professor and theologian) says, “...patience is the exercise of a largeness of the soul that can endure annoyances and difficulties over a period of time.”
4. **Bear with one another in love** (aka “put up with one another”). It is not all about us. It is about our unity as the church – many people coming from different perspectives. Even when you don’t like a person or agree with them.

Kevin DeYoung put together a grid which show how we speak the truth in love from different perspectives. We can’t just walk away from those who think differently from us. We can’t take our ball and go home and may be look for another church (just because we are ticked off). This was not an option for the Ephesians – theirs was likely the only church in town. The solution is not to be selfish and disengage but to press into unity. If another brother disagrees with you about wearing masks or the merits of systemic racism, hold tight to the gospel essentials and let your different viewpoints on current issue illustrate the unity of the Spirit. Agree to disagree and remain brothers in unity. If we surround ourselves only with people who think exactly like us, how are we any different than the unsaved world? An “echo chamber” approach is not what the church is all about.

DeYoung looks at the church and the differences we have within our walls in terms of four different teams of people:

1. **Contrite:** “Look at the church’s complicity in past and present evils. We have been blind to injustice, prejudice, racism, sexism, and abuse. What the world needs is to see a church owning its sins and working, in brokenness, to make up for them and overcome them.”
2. **Compassionate:** “Look at the many people hurting and grieving in our midst and in the world. Now is the time to listen and learn. Now is the time to weep with those who weep. What the world needs is a church that demonstrates the love of Christ.”
3. **Careful:** “Look at the moral confusion and intellectual carelessness that marks our time. Let’s pay attention to our language and our definitions. What the world needs is a church that will draw upon the best of its theological tradition and lead the way in understanding the challenges of our day.”
4. **Courageous:** “Look at the church’s compromise with (if not outright capitulation to) the spirit of the age. Now is the time for a trumpet blast, not for backing down. What the world needs is a church that will admonish the wayward, warn against danger, and stand as a bulwark for truth, no matter how unpopular.”

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While we will have people of all four types in our midst, regardless of where we fall in the team construct, our approach needs to be unwavering on the non-negotiables and understanding of differing viewpoints when it comes to issues such as wearing masks, Black Lives Matter and systemic racism.

Study and Discuss:

Look at the next section of the chapter. God has called ALL of us to participate. It is not just about the paid Staff or the pastors. While many people might complain that “the church is just about asking for my money, time and service,” Jesus equips us to serve for the good of the church. Some people look at the church as a place they go to obtain a product or service – much like going to CostCo to stock up on snacks, energy drinks and TP. If the church doesn’t provide what I need, I’m out of here! But the consumer approach to church or the country club approach to church are both totally off base. The consumer church sees the church as a provider of goods and service. The country club church mentality thinks, “I have come, paid my dues, now the church owes me a set of services: quid pro quo.”

The familiar 80/20 rule is that 20% of the people do 80% of the work. Paul would instead advocate a 100/100 rule for the church in which everyone does all of the work and no one sits back and just watches. This is the kind of church body God blesses. This is the kind of church God wants North to be – a serving church.

Response:

Find a place where you can serve. Try northbiblechurch.com/serve. This site explains what opportunities exist at NBC to make this place a more welcoming, unified, God-pleasing local church. It doesn’t mean everyone will go off to seminary night classes and then spend hours in the catacombs at NBC every week. It is all about small steps. Just like getting into shape and losing weight; there is no substitute for eating right and exercising day by day. Consider taking that first small step toward obeying the voice of God as spelled out here in Ephesians 4 to build and maintain unity.

Pray:

“God help us to recognize all that you have done for us, that we are in two-way relationship with you. You challenge us to follow a risen Savior who is the ultimate servant. May we as a church be marked by unity and live the gospel out loud. The aim is that anyone looking in would be amazed that so diverse a group of individuals could get along so well and love each other so genuinely.”