

# Growing Together

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning. Once again, my name is Wes. I was here last week.

If you were here with us, it was great being with you. I'm excited to be back to bring God's word for us this morning. So if you want to open up in your Bibles or look in your bulletin at Ephesians chapter 4, we're going to be looking at verses 7 through 16 this week.

And if you were here last week, you heard me kind of give the caution that as we come to this passage, we need to be reminded that as in many of Paul's letters, he spent a lot of time building out for us the core truths of the gospel, the grace of Jesus given to us before he gets to these gospel therefore.

And so we're looking at a passage that has a lot of implications for how we should live, how we should interact with one another. But those how-tos are rooted in what Jesus alone has done for us in the gospel.

What we are striving to do in our efforts to love one another, in our efforts to paint a picture to the world of the unity that Jesus has already created by his sacrifice, is not efforts to save ourselves.

[ 1 : 12 ] It's not efforts to earn our salvation. If you're here this morning, and you're not sure where you stand in relation to this Christianity idea, you're here perhaps as a visitor, as a skeptic, we're so glad that you're here with us.

We're honored. I'm honored that you would even listen to what I have to say. This is not a how-to-earn-God's-love message for us this morning. This is a how-do-we-respond-to-God's-love-for-us-in-Christ.

And so I hope you're encouraged by that, and you're reminded of that as we go to this passage. I'm gonna read this for us as we begin Ephesians chapter 4, starting in verse 7. And then I would invite you to go to the throne of grace with me, that we would go together in prayer to ask God's blessing on our time together in his word.

And so let me read this for us as we begin our time together in God's word this morning, starting in verse 7. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Therefore it says, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men. In saying he ascended, what does it mean but that he also descended into the lower regions, the earth?

[ 2 : 20 ] He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

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.

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 and deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 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.

Let's pray together. Gracious Father, once again, we thank you for the chance to gather together in your name this morning, that you are a God who speaks, and in your speech and in your action, you have called a people to yourself, a people that was not a people, but by the blood of Jesus, you have claimed us as your own.

You have cleansed us. You have redeemed us. You have given us a new name. You call us your children. And so as we gather together as your family this morning, Father, you know where each of us is coming from.

[ 3 : 57 ] You know the burdens we carry. You know the particular ways that we come to this passage this morning, wondering about the grace of Jesus, reaching for that grace, or perhaps afraid of what that grace might mean in terms of the change that it can bring into our lives.

Father, would you draw us near to you by your spirit? Would you give us eyes to see and ears to hear? Would you help us see the sweet gifts of the risen and ascended Jesus given to your church this morning that we might pursue that unity that we saw last week, that we might pursue that love and service of one another because of your love and service to us?

Father, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. When I was in seminary, Kelly and I had a very unique housing situation.

We had a parent of a teacher in high school that had a country house on the state line. I was going to seminary in Charlotte in North Carolina.

My wife kind of got her dream job as an oncology nurse. Back in the town, we were from Spartanburg, South Carolina. So we were living in between these two cities and we were on this old farmhouse that was being rented to us at a very affordable rate.

[ 5 : 15 ] It was very kind of a Lord to provide that. And one of the things that came with this house was like, all right, we have all this land. What are we going to do? Well, there was this plot of land that was perfect for a garden. And so we had a garden and not only did we have this garden, but I had my Meemaw.

And if you can't tell by that name, Meemaw was just like a walking farmer's atlas. She knew how to plant everything and when to plant it. And so my Uncle Greg and my Meemaw helped me actually have a successful garden, which was a sweet thing to have.

And I kind of enjoyed that. It was a fun thing to have. It was fun to bring people tomatoes and things like that. But when we moved to Georgia, I was like, oh, so like I'm a gardener now. You know, like I can do this.

So we get to our house and it's a pretty similar place in terms of like, you know, the weather and the soil. There's not that much different from where we lived. But it is a neighborhood.

So I'm going to do the cool thing and do a raised bed garden. So I do everything kind of the same as I had done it before. Everything started to grow and it looked nice. But one thing was different about our first house in Georgia.

[ 6 : 20 ] And that was it had a lot of trees. It had a ton of trees. So many trees. Like when I think back on how many trees we had and now that we live in Colorado, I'm like, man, can a place have that many trees?

And it did. It had that many trees. And so one thing our garden lacked was the one thing it had to have. It just did not have much sunlight, right? And in my wisdom, my expertise as a gardener, I failed to see that until after I had built the raised bed garden and put in the time and effort.

And so even as things grew some, there was very little fruit that was yielded. And I just mentioned that story just to say, once again, it is essential that we have the light of Jesus shining on us.

That without that light shining on us, there is no hope for fruitfulness. And yet part of what Paul is doing in the passage we're looking at is he's saying that the light of Jesus is shining on you.

If you are in Christ and you have his spirit, that light is shining on you. And now we can begin to talk about some of the other things that go into growing and producing fruit in Christ.

[ 7 : 24 ] We can start to talk about some of the other gifts that King Jesus has given us in order to pursue each other and care for one another. And as we begin to move towards each other in Christ and serve each other, one of the things we have to recognize is that because Jesus is a generous king, a king who delights in giving his people good gifts because our father in heaven is a good father who delights in giving his people good gifts because he hasn't withheld the most precious gift from us.

He's already laid down his son's life for us. How can he withhold any gift for us now in Christ? That this community is a gifted community. It's a community that Jesus longs to see pursue each other by the gifts that he's given, that a community seeking unity in Christ actually has a diversity of gifts from King Jesus to pursue that unity.

And that's what we're gonna look at this morning. It's what I want us to be challenged by, but I want us to never lose sight of the light of Jesus that we need, that this is an overflow of the abundance of the grace of Jesus given to his people.

And I want us to begin looking at verses seven to 10 and to see this idea that the church of Jesus is a gifted church. Not it will be a gifted church, not maybe it could become a gifted church, but there is a diversity of gifts that Jesus has given his church.

And when we begin to embrace that, I think it actually changes the way that we move towards each other. If you look at the passage with me in verse seven, there's a distinct shift, isn't there? Especially if you have a Bible open, you can kind of look back at the passage we were looking at last week.

[ 8 : 59 ] This comes out of that famous statement of the unity of the gospel, like the one Lord, the one faith, the one baptism, the God and Father of all, who is ruler over all and through all and in all.

Up to this point that therefore, the walking worthy of the gospel and the push towards unity has been an invitation to see our oneness in Jesus. Notice that in verse seven, Paul now shifts to our individuality, doesn't he?

There's a but each one of us. Despite this call to unity, it doesn't mean that now who we are as individuals doesn't matter. This is not a call to kind of abandon all of our gifts and personalities.

Instead, Paul wants us to see that grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. That part of the plan of King Jesus and calling a people to himself is that that people would have a diversity of gifts.

And this is actually a really big idea in Paul's writing. In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, we can see in verses five and six that there's a variety of service, varieties of service, but the same Lord.

[ 10 : 09 ] There's a variety of activities, but it's the same God who empowers them all and everyone. In Romans 12, we can also go and see that the different measures of faith lead into a discussion of different functions of the members of the body.

Later in this passage, he's gonna use this metaphor that speaks to the different purposes of the body. This is a huge idea in Paul's understanding of the body of Christ. To be a member of this body is to be a member of a body that has a variety of gifts.

And where do those gifts come from? Paul says they come from the ascended Lord Jesus. And he gives us this image that comes from Psalm 68, right?

You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there. This image from the Psalms of a conquering king who having conquered, who having won victory, now has a host of captives and a host of gifts to give to his people.

The idea that in Jesus, our principal enemies, sin and death itself have been conquered. And now Jesus has ascended on high and sits at his father's right hand. And from that place of power, Paul wants us to see that part of his purpose in ascending is so like an ascended king who sits on his throne and now has authority granted to him.

[ 11 : 31 ] He gives good gifts. He gives good gifts. And there's a variety of gifts that can come out of that.

And yet one of the things I think we have to do is before we even get into some of the specific gifts that Paul mentions in this passage, we need to ask ourselves, do I believe this of the body of Christ?

When I come to church, am I thinking, all right, here I go. I'm headed to the place where there's a bunch of gifts of the risen ascended Lord Jesus at work, ready to serve me and my family and my children, ready to serve me and my neighbors, an opportunity for me now to serve uniquely as a child of God, right?

There's a diversity of gifts. There's a diversity of tools and it's actually a beautiful thing. A lot of people in Colorado love to bike. They love to ski. I will just raise my hand and confess, I too fall victim to those wonderful hobbies.

And there's a joke among those hobbies and it's funny because both of them kind of have the same joke and that's that the right number of skis or the right number of bikes is N plus one or N is the number you currently have.

[ 12 : 43 ] Now that's not necessarily a good thing, but it does speak to this idea, right? That when we get into something and we love something and we enjoy it, as we're drawn into that, we often just wanna have more and more things to enjoy, right?

And you think at first like, oh, if I just have a set of skis, I could ski down this mountain. You're like, no, no, no, no. What sort of conditions are we dealing with here? Are we looking at powder? Are we going back country, right? If we're riding a bike, are we riding a mountain bike to do road bike riding?

Heaven forbid that would happen, right? There's a variety of tools. There's a variety of things we would use to do certain things. When we went to Japan on this mission trip, I thought we wanted like a Japanese knife.

If you're a cook, if you like, you might know like Japan is one of the knife capitals, but honestly, I was overwhelmed with the types of knives and the shapes of knives. I was like, how can there be this many knives?

And yet I'm someone who loves that there's that many skis and that many bikes. And so there's so many hobbies and things we can get into where we're like, man, if I could just have more of these things. And I think there's something beautiful about that, right?

[ 13 : 44 ] That as we get into a craft, as we get into a hobby, we see the different ways that things can be enjoyed. And one of the things that I hope you're encouraged by is that Jesus actually looks at the church and says, there is almost an unending number of gifts and people that I can use in my kingdom.

You might be sitting here this morning and thinking about your personality and your giftings and thinking, well, I'm not that sort of person. You might have a vision of a very gregarious, outgoing person.

And you might think that in order to serve the church, Jesus is really looking for this type of person, this sort of relational ninja. You might be thinking about someone sitting next to you that you're like, I could never know as much as so and so about the Bible.

You might be thinking of someone here this morning. You're like, if I could pray like them, I mean. But I can't. I'm not that sort of prayer warrior. And it's not that these things aren't admirable things.

I mean, many of us should be aspiring to grow closer to the Lord in prayer. And yet one of the beautiful things about the body of Jesus is that we get to acknowledge that he's given us each different measures of faith and gifting and personality.

[ 14 : 55 ] And really the only kind of prerequisite for that is the prerequisite that's happened already in Ephesians, humble hearts that recognize their need for the grace of Jesus.

That if we come to the Lord Jesus in humility, confessing our sin, believing that his grace alone can redeem us and give us a new identity, God can work with humble people dependent on the grace of Jesus.

And not only does he work with them, but what Paul wants us to see is that he actually is intent on giving them gifts. Right? This should affect every aspect of our life as the body of Christ.

It means that on the days where we're perhaps worn down about the struggles at home and our parenting, I mean, I love the way that in our membership vows, we take vows as a community, don't we?

If you're here this morning as a visitor and you don't know what I'm talking about, one of the things that happens when someone joins our churches in our denomination is not only do they take vows about what they believe, but the congregation takes a vow of commitment to care for them and their children.

[ 16 : 08 ] It's a beautiful reflection of this New Testament idea that we are all called to the body of Christ and we all need the variety of gifts in order to love and serve each other and our children.

If you think about outreach, I hope we think about outreach as the body of Christ. It can be so discouraging, can't it, to think about evangelism and outreach.

And we might look at ourselves and say, well, I'm an introvert or I have this kind of personality or I have no interest in that biking and skiing that he's talking about. Is God calling me to reach all of the bikers and skiers in Colorado Springs?

No. I have a variety of theological reasons for saying that, not just this passage. Right? But the beauty is, is that Jesus invites us into a community where there's other people to help us love and serve our neighbors.

Right? That you might have the opportunity to get to know people where God has placed you and say, you know what? I don't know if I'm very gifted, but I know someone in my body of Jesus that actually could really serve you well right now.

[ 17 : 12 ] And I actually believe that that's part of what King Jesus wants us to do. In order for this to happen, I hope this is obvious to us, but I'll just mention it. It just, it can't happen unless we get to know each other.

Right? Like if I don't know the body sitting around me, if I'm not beginning to move towards the people around me and get to know who Jesus has called to my particular church, it'll be very hard for me to actually practically live out this idea of the gifting of Jesus.

And this is a place where, we're about to talk about elders in just a moment, but this is a place where you could perhaps go to the leadership of your church and ask some of these questions. If you're wrestling with something or you're struggling with something and you're wondering, well, how has the church gifted?

How has Jesus gifted this church that might actually speak to this area? This might be a great place to get to know your elders. And they might have a better idea, a better grasp on the ways that King Jesus has already gifted this church.

Oh, well, so-and-so is actually like this fantastic prayer warrior. And they would probably love to come alongside you in prayer. Let's start with going to Jesus in prayer. Because as we accept the giftings of Jesus, the fact that the body of Christ is always a gifted body because King Jesus loves to give gifts, that actually moves us to be an equipped body.

[ 18 : 23 ] And that's the second thing I want us to see in this passage. That as we begin to accept the idea that King Jesus gives gifts, it actually leads us to long to be an equipped body.

And it begins by seeing what gifts Paul mentions here. And this is actually, I'll just mention this. This is a passage I love to go to with college students to kind of explain the importance of the local church, why Jesus is calling them to the church.

Because this one, I think always, I've never mentioned this passage to a college student and not had some degree of surprise at this point. But I want you to ask the question, what gifts does Paul mention in this passage?

Let's look at verse 11, right? After talking about the risen, ascended Jesus, he says, and he gave. What did he give Paul? The apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers.

I just want to stop there and say, the first thing he names is probably not the thing you or I would name, right? Like if we were just like, hey, what sort of gifts does Jesus give the church? We'd probably be quick to run to spiritual gifts.

[ 19 : 27 ] We might run to some of the character qualities of Jesus, the fruit of the spirit. That would be, those are wonderful answers. But here, Paul goes to church offices. That's not my first thing.

I am in a church office. The way REF functions, I'm actually a teaching elder, ordained in the same way our local pastors ordained and then sent to the college campus. I am in a church office and I would never first answer, say, what gifts does Jesus give church offices?

Right? Here he's saying that Jesus has actually given specific roles to his people, specific offices to actually help them be equipped and encouraged and built up. The first we are actually seeing as we look at scripture together.

When we look at God's word together, we are seeing the gifts of that apostolic office, that specific office of people that were sent out in the early church, witnesses of Jesus, to give authoritative scripture.

We don't have time this morning for me to make the more kind of full-orbed argument for how that word apostle really speaks to that specific revelatory office, but I'm sure your elders would love to sit down and talk to you about that.

[ 20 : 41 ] So that's one thing that is mentioned here. Another thing that's mentioned is evangelists, church planters, those who have a special gift in planting and growing churches and doing evangelism and going to places and sharing the gospel.

I'll just admit, sometimes when people are like, what do you do? Why do you do it? How do we make sense of why you should even be doing what you're doing? Sometimes I'm like, you know, I struggle with that question too, just to be honest.

But sometimes, like, I do kind of point to this idea that even in the early church, there was this idea of the church sending out evangelists to places. Go to this place and spread the gospel. And there is the hope of, often of planting churches, but the idea of like going to the college campus, go beyond the college campus and preach the gospel and reach our covenant children and help equip them to reach and serve their classmates and bear witness to Jesus.

All right. The one I want us to focus on this morning just to be mindful of the most, I think, because it's so relevant in the local body of believers, is the shepherds and teachers. Jesus actually gifts his church with this office of shepherds and teachers because at the heart of the idea of church is this idea of the gathering and perfecting of the saints.

That's language that our confession uses to kind of summarize that the purpose of the church, this idea that King Jesus is drawing his people to himself. And as he draws his people to himself through the ministry of the word and prayer, he's then equipping them to serve one another and to serve the world around them to his glory.

[ 22 : 13 ] Just as we've confessed, right? It's getting back at that chief end of man to glorify God, to enjoy him forever. Jesus has gifted these offices to draw us together so that we might enjoy and delight in God and point others to that matchless glory, that worthy God and Savior.

And just, I want us to see just the weight of this call and this office and the role it has. In Acts chapter 20, I think it's a special place for us to go because we're in the book of Ephesians.

Paul is kind of saying his last words to the elders of Ephesus, right? The same people that he's writing to here. And notice the weight that he gives them to this office. And it's actually a place where he uses these words that we often use interchangeably like elder, pastor, even overseer, bishop.

Those words all appear in verb or noun form in this short kind of exhortation. But in Acts chapter 20, speaking to the Ephesian elders, Paul says this, now for Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

And then in verse 28, this is what he says, pay careful attention to yourself and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. It's that bishop word. To care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

[ 23 : 33 ] Right? From the early days of the church, King Jesus has been gifting people, calling them to this unique office to care for the flock of God.

To care for the flock that Jesus shed his blood for. And so I think there's a lot of application here for us as we see Paul in Ephesians 4 say, part of the giftings of Jesus are these offices is how do we encourage or support these offices?

In other words, are we availing ourselves of the gift of Jesus? Have you in recently or in the past year thought to yourself, well, you know, I'm trying to grow closer to Jesus.

I need to avail myself of the gift of the elders and deacons of this church. once again, I'll just raise my hand and say that's not something I normally go to.

When I sit down and ask students, like, how are you doing spiritually? When we kind of get into that, how do you evaluate that question? You know, how do you gauge that? What does it look like for you to actually be doing well spiritually?

[ 24 : 40 ] I don't think I've ever gotten the answer. You know what? Like, I'm really enjoying the body of Christ and especially the gifting of the offices that Jesus has given the church. I would love to have that answer sometime.

I'd be like, wow, that's really mature and not expected. Right? And one of the reasons I'm excited about being in this passage with you is Matthew continues his sabbatical, but you're getting closer to the time of him returning.

I'll just say that I think it's beautiful that your church is practicing a biblical pattern of rest and caring for the gifting of Jesus of this office. But I'll just also confess that as a pastor with lots of pastor friends, I have heard for many say that like sometimes coming back from sabbatical can be really hard.

What does it look like to reintegrate into the church? What does it look like for you as a congregation and for other elders to help Matthew reintegrate well? To maybe not be flooded on day one with all of the problems that you think need to be fixed right away, immediately from everything that happened while he was gone?

There's a lot of things that you can be praying about and thinking about. Well, if this is a gift of Jesus, how can I reflect that gifting in the way that I care for Matthew and the other elders here? But this is obviously a passage that speaks of the weight of what we're doing to the elders as well, right?

[ 25 : 54 ] What does it look like for you elders and deacons who are called to serve the church and the needs of the church and those who are on the outside or those who are in need of mercy, the leadership of the church, what does it look like for you to care for this flock?

There's a pastor, William Still, one of our seminary professors because he knew him personally, he called him Willie. I just thought that was so funny.

But William Still had this beautiful line about this idea that in order to feed the flock, we must be fed men. We must be feeding others out of that drawing, out of the grace that Jesus is offering to us ourselves.

Are you being fed from the hand of Jesus so you can turn as under shepherds to the flock and feed them and care for them as well? I just want to point out that the real authority of this entire model rests in King Jesus' authority, doesn't it?

That all of our authority is subservient to King Jesus who is the ascended leader and this is a beautiful passage to go and see that. But it's a challenging passage, right? It suggests that there are many gifts that Jesus has given the church and that it even includes some of these offices and people.

[ 27 : 11 ] I don't often quote our book of church order when I preach. In fact, I almost never do and it's probably a dangerous place to go at times just to get lost in headiness and ideas and church government.

But our BCO beautifully says, the head of the church is Christ and that all of these offices and gifts are subservient to Christ and his purposes. And so that the government of our church says that Jesus is the head of the church and that image even of Jesus being the head of the church comes from passages like this one where Paul says that even these giftings, what are they aimed at?

What does a gifted and equipped community aim for? And that's what we look at in the final part of our passage starting in verse 13, starting in verse 12 really, right?

It's an aim of growing into loving maturity. That a gifted church that believes that Jesus is calling it to be an equipped church is ultimately aiming to be a loving, mature church that grows into Christ.

And it starts in verse 13 with this aim, right? And I think this is so important for us to begin there because this is one of the key verses in a passage that once again is heavy on things we can be doing and thinking about and pursuing.

[ 28 : 27 ] This is one of the verses that I think gets us back to the grace of Jesus, right? Until we all attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.



To go back to verse 12 and ask this question, right? How long do we do these equipping things? What does it look like for us to be seeking to be equipped and submitting to the equipping work of those God has placed over us and for us to begin moving towards each other with the hope of speaking truth and love like it's a natural question to ask, well, how long do we do this?

What's the parameters, right? Here's the goal. The measure of the fullness, the stature of the fullness of Jesus himself. Now, if you are a follower of Jesus, I hope your immediate reaction to that is, oh, forever.

If your reaction to that verse is not, oh, forever, like we might need to go back to earlier parts of Ephesians once again and talk about what the gospel is. Right? This idea that none of us is able to save ourselves.

All of us are sinners in need of the grace that Jesus alone offers. Right? The measure of Jesus is perfection. It is his fullness and his holiness.

[ 29 : 40 ] In other words, Paul is saying this is the life of a Christian. This is not just something we do for a season. This is what it means to be a Christian. It's having been redeemed by the grace of Jesus the rest of our lives we are working together to grow into maturity, a maturity that we will not attain in this life.

That we will not attain until Jesus comes and makes all things new and every last bit of sin in the fall, every sadness, every tear is pushed back and cast into the lake of fire.

Until that happens, we all are in this process of growth and sanctification and drawing near to each other with the hope of speaking truth and love with the goal that we would grow into loving maturity.

In verse 14, right, is this image that Paul gives us of being anchored, of not being tossed about and blown about. I don't know if you've ever been out on a large lake or an ocean when a storm is coming.

It is a terrifying thing. One thing we experienced growing up in South Carolina, sometimes we'd go out in the intercoastal waterway, sometimes in our fairly small boat we'd venture out probably further than we should, is once that storm starts to blow in, if you thought your anchor was set and it was not, you're done.

[ 31 : 03 ] Like, it's getting dragged. It is a terrifying thing to try and get that anchor set once the waves get to a certain point, right? And one of the things that Paul wants us to see is that we do, we Christians have always, since the fall, lived in a world that is tossed to and fro, that there are doctrines that are at times of evil origin, there's human cunning and craftiness, there's deceitful schemes.

That is, and some of you might have read this, looked at this passage this morning and been like, oh man, that really feels like it hits right now. And our temptation sometimes is to be like, it's never been as bad as it is now. And notice that, Paul's saying it's pretty bad, isn't he, in the early church times.

That there are all sorts of forces and powers at work that would love to deceive us, that would love to blow us astray, that would love to blow us, to crash into one another in violence, in conflict.

That, in other words, this sort of loving maturity, this sort of growth isn't natural to us as fallen people, as sinners in need of God's grace. I laugh sometimes, you heard me talk about my failings, my lack of a green thumb earlier.

It's popular, especially, I think, among current generations to talk about things happening organically and authenticity is like a big thing right now, I think, for young people.

[ 32 : 31 ] And sometimes that word organic is thrown around. Like, I just like to let things just kind of happen and I'm like, man, do you know how hard it is to get stuff to actually grow that you want to grow? I mean, if we're talking about weeds, sure, let's just do organic stuff.

But sometimes organic is used as just kind of like lack of intentionality, let's just see what happens. And that's not the picture we get here, is it, of growth in Christ? It's a fight, it's a struggle.

There are things seeking to draw us away from the truth. And instead of being blown about what Paul longs for us to do, we see in verse 15 that that maturing love is a desire to speak truth in love.

to speak truth in love so that we can grow into Christ. In other words, one of my chief purposes as a follower of Jesus is to long to see those people around me in the body of Christ grow towards Jesus, to look more like him, to see more and more how his grace is offered to them, how his spirit is at work in them, that that is a calling of every believer so that we can actually work together.

And he gives us this image, doesn't he, in verse 16 of a body working together of joints and ligaments and this idea that regardless of those who might, some who might be called to this office to equip the saints, going back to verses 11 and 12, that at the end of the day, all of us in the body of Christ have an essential role to play to be a healthy, functioning body.

[ 34 : 00 ] And we might tend to look at certain parts of our body and say, well, this part's not very glorious, this part's not that important. It's all important. And sometimes it's just a simple one bone being out of place, right?

And we can be in great pain and we can realize how hard so many things in life are. One of the most hard things about our trip to Japan, one of our students dislocated her hip in Japan.

Wasn't on my bingo card. I was like, this cannot be happening. I've skied with students and biked with students a lot since we've moved to Colorado and I've never had this traumatic of an injury happen.

And just that joint being out of place and a small fracture on the femur head and it was bad. Overnight stay in a hospital in Japan. It was just a reminder, right?

Like just one little thing out of socket, just a few ligaments out of place and you could be in such pain and so debilitated. And part of the reason I share her story is while that was true of her physically, like she, she just loves Jesus.

[ 35 : 14 ] And so she got her crutches and she just crutched around Tokyo pursuing Japanese students, talking to them about the love of Jesus. At one point we were at a dinner and I just like walked by her table and overheard her talking about who the Holy Spirit is.

And just, I mentioned this last week, like there are just, there are no Christians almost in Japan. All of these students, except for two of them that we met with were just not Christians and yet she was pursuing them and she was not letting her physical malady prevent her from seeing that King Jesus was excited to work through her as well.

That there's a variety of giftings in the body and that he was going to make his name great and glorious even through her as she was hobbled and hurt. You are desperately needed not because there's anything lacking in Jesus but because King Jesus has chosen to work through his people because the body of Christ is his plan for the advancement of his kingdom and you, you can get it, right?

Like I get it. We look around at each other and we're like, I don't know Jesus. have you seen the ways that I continue to fail and struggle? Have you seen the conflict we're capable of? Like are you sure you want to hit yourself to this wagon?

Right? And yet that is what Jesus assures his people that he is going to do. It's actually, he says it's better for him to leave to his disciples because he's going to send his spirit to work among them.

[ 36 : 44 ] Jesus is doing something incredible among us as we draw near to him. And so I hope you're encouraged this morning by this idea that Jesus is at work among his people, that this vision of unity we talked about last week is actually going to be realized by the gifting and grace of Jesus worked out in the lives of individuals seeking to love one another and serve one another.

This can only be done by the gifting of Jesus. Would you pray with me? Gracious Father, once again, we just thank you that you are a good, good father and you love to give your people good gifts and too often perhaps we are prone to listen to the voice of the accuser and to deny your grace to us and to say to you, no father, not me, like Moses, like don't you want someone that can speak better?

And yet, you are a faithful king. you are faithful to work through the lives of your people. Your gifting is greater than our sin. Your grace is greater than our sin.

You are at work through humble, dependent, needy people by the grace of Jesus. Would you help us to love each other to your glory?

Would you help us to point one another to Jesus so that we might grow into this loving maturity, this fullness, the stature of Jesus? Would you help us to labor towards that as your people this morning we ask in Jesus' name.

[ 38 : 20 ] Amen.