

(Ephesians 4:1-16) "Out of Christ's Ministering Abilities"

This portion of Ephesians is revealing to us the gifts that God gives us as a church so that we might walk in balance, in equilibrium with the call – so that we might bear witness in word and deed to God's eternal purpose in Jesus to put everything that is out of place in the world back into its proper place.

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

1. (7-10) Paul is expressing that Jesus has given each of those who are found in Christ by faith a portion of Jesus' ministering abilities. Reflect on Jesus' ministry while he was on earth. What were those ministering abilities?

He taught – he preached – he revealed the character of God – he called people to repent and enter the kingdom of heaven.

He healed – cast out demons – broke the power of evil over people's lives.

He loved, comforted, had compassion, mercy.

He broke down barriers of classism, racism, sexism – moved against systems of injustice.

He was present with the lonely, offered generous and gracious hospitality to sinners and tax collectors.

2. Are all of these meant to be the ongoing work of the church – the body of Christ – here and now? Why or why not?

It may be helpful here to reflect on the 3 categories of gifts that Robert Clinton coined.

Love gifts make manifest the love of God in practical ways. (eg. Administration, helps, mercy, hospitality, giving...)

Word gifts clarify the nature action and purposes of God. (eg. Teaching, encouragement, leadership, shepherding, evangelism...)

Power gifts are those that demonstrate the power, presence, and purposes of God. (eg. Tongues, interpretation of tongues, intercession, faith, discernment of spirits, healing, words of knowledge and power...)

I would suspect that you would have universal agreement that the first two categories are the ongoing work of the church. There would I think be a difference of perspective on the power gifts – some will have theological

convictions that would not allow for them – others will have had a bad experience with them – still others would just not have a worldview that allows for such supernatural expression.

Don't try and resolve this at this time – we will be exploring this more in depth when we specifically look at power gifts in a few weeks time. It will be helpful however for you to get a sense of where your group is at on this for your future conversations.

3. *Read Psalm 68* Paul uses an image from Psalm 68 to speak of Jesus as King descending to the battlefield to take on our enemies, victorious he parades behind him the defeated army and the spoils of war, and ascending his throne he lavishes upon his people gifts from the spoil. How does this psalm and the imagery help us to see and understand the work of Jesus on our behalf?

Paul is using this imagery to refer to the work of Jesus – King Jesus descended to take on our enemies – our oppressors – he took on death, sin, hell, Satan – binding them captive upon the cross – he then ascended – sat down upon his throne – and lavished gifts upon his people so that they might walk in step with the new reality his victory over our enemies has brought about.

4. One of the best places we can uncover the gifts we have been given is in the context of a group of people who know and love us. What do you personally believe is the gift that God has given you in Jesus? How could your group support you in your exercise of that gift?

Depending on the comfort level of your group this could be a really wonderful exercise. I would foresee it taking this shape.

1. *A person says I think this is my gift – and the rest of the members can affirm that they see that in this individual.*
2. *Others may say I'm not sure what gift I have been given – and the others can help them see what they see from the outside.*

It may help here to specifically name the gifts from question 2 so that there is a list to reflect upon. It would be important to note however that the lists are not exhaustive – even the new testament ones – they are instead illustrative. It would also be important to note that these are different than natural talents and learned abilities – all of these gifts are supernatural in that they would not be yours unless they had been given to you.

5. (11-12) These are roles within the early church that were given the task of bringing the apostolic faith to different people in different ways. Their purpose was to “equip the saints” – equipping had the general sense of being restored to the condition we should be in. In what ways does the reading, studying, teaching, and preaching of the scriptures do this work? How can we as individuals and as a community come more under the equipping of the word of God?

This is more of a personal reflection question that should invite some understanding of how each of you have been equipped through your engagement with scripture over the course of your life.

Here would be some themes that may come up – or may spark further conversation.

It gives us a picture of what renewed humanity looks like in Jesus.

It gives us a picture of what God intended the world to look like and the shape of our future hope.

It confronts sin in us that we might repent and believe and so grab a hold of the Spirit's work of ongoing sanctification.

It reveals God's love for us in Jesus which is a healing, shaping, transforming love.

6. We are equipped – brought back into the condition we should be in – not just for our own sake but for the work of ministry. How might God be calling you to use your gifts for the sake of others? How can your small group support you in that?

Again this is a personal reflection question but it is intended to shape your group as a place of mutual accountability and spurring one another on to love and good works so as a leader it would be helpful to guide the conversation in that direction.