

SESSION 3

We Support One Another

GETTING STARTED

DISCUSS: When has being part of a group helped you accomplish something big?

RECAP (PAGE 79): In 1624, the English poet John Donne wrote, “No man is an island, entire of itself.” An interconnectedness exists between us all. No one survives and thrives without assistance from others, not even in the church. However, when we examine the behaviors and attitudes of most Americans, it looks more like a sea of islands.

Western culture in the twenty-first century surely stands out as the most radically individualistic culture in human history. It seems like every person makes every decision with one thing and one thing alone in mind: *What’s best for me?* Too often we give little consideration to how our lives and choices impact other people.

When we come to Christ, we don’t come to Him alone; we’re joined with other believers in His church. Our individual lives and relationship with Christ aren’t just about *me*; they are about *we*. We must leave individualism at the door when joining Christ’s church. Why? Because God saves us not only for our own benefit but also to bless and support others—especially fellow Christians.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): To introduce the topic of spiritual gifts in an engaging way, play a game. In advance, purchase a small gift for someone in your group (a gift card, for example). Wrap the gift in wrapping paper, but then also wrap the gift in several layers of plastic wrap. Pass the gift around your group and encourage members to try to unravel the plastic wrap. Set a timer to go off every five seconds, and instruct everyone to pass the gift to the next person once the timer sounds. The person who successfully frees the gift from the plastic wrap gets to keep it. Explain that in today’s Scripture passage, the apostle Paul discussed another kind of gift: spiritual gifts God gives His children.

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Point** on page 80. Invite group members to fill in the blanks.

THE POINT: God gives the church spiritual GIFTS to accomplish His WORK.

STUDY THE BIBLE

GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT: Although Paul referred to the work of the Holy Spirit in many of his letters, he highlighted spiritual gifts in Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12–14; and Ephesians 4. In these letters Paul especially noted the gifts provided by the Holy Spirit to enable the ministry of God’s people. While the lists of spiritual gifts differed a little in each book, the main purpose of the gifts was to support ministry for the “common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7).

RECAP (PAGE 80): Many Americans think about church almost exclusively in terms of *their* spiritual needs and what services the church might provide to *them*. These expectations lead them to search for a church with the most palatable preaching, most enjoyable music, and most relevant programs. In contrast to our culture’s individualism, the Bible teaches that believers share a great responsibility for one another. So rather than approaching church for my spiritual needs alone, the gospel expands my value system to include how I might support the growth of others too.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 4:1-7 on page 80.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 80: **My calling is to use my God-given spiritual gifts for the UNITY of the church.**

RECAP (PAGE 80): Paul began in verse 1 by urging us “to live worthy of the calling you have received.” Then in verses 2-6 he explained what that life looks like. Paul’s explanation addresses our responsibility toward others. We can’t separate living a life worthy of the gospel from our connection with other believers. But our sinful human nature is drawn to selfishness, so how can we break from an individualist mind-set and consider others? The answer is found in God’s grace. “Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (v. 7). At salvation, Jesus saved us by His grace to unite us with God, and He continues to give us grace to unite us with His people. As we depend on God, His Holy Spirit works through us to support other believers. And the Holy Spirit works through other believers to help and support us. God equips us to accomplish His work!

DISCUSS: How should we understand Paul’s emphasis of “one” in these verses? [*ALTERNATE: What are some ways division can be harmful to a church?*]

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 4:11-13 on pages 80–81.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 81: **Some people are gifted to EQUIP the church for ministry.**

RECAP (PAGE 81): God has given various gifts to church members, but He has especially gifted some people to lead and equip the church for ministry. The leaders God has given the church are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The apostles included Paul and the Twelve who walked closely with Jesus—all of whom Jesus personally called and sent out. These men led the early church and authored much of the New Testament. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers also build up the body of Christ through their varying gifts. They proclaim the Word of God to us and explain what it means to live for Christ. They teach us how to obey God’s commands. They model boldness in sharing the gospel. These gifted leaders help us to grow spiritually.

DISCUSS: What are some ways you have been equipped by the church? [*ALTERNATE: What are some ways you would like to help “build up” the body of Christ?*]

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 4:14-16 on page 81.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 81: **All spiritual gifts are used to help believers GROW in Christ, in unity, and in love.**

RECAP (PAGE 81): God gives every believer His grace in the form of spiritual gifts. Both Paul and Peter recorded lists of various spiritual gifts that are manifested in God’s people (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11,27-31; and 1 Peter 4:11). Some believers are gifted to serve in leadership roles, for example. Others are gifted to demonstrate greater acts of mercy, service, and generosity, while others have a greater inner sense of faith, wisdom, and discernment. Regardless of the specific gifts we possess, God has given all spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ.

DO: Instruct group members to complete the activity, **The Body of Christ**, on page 81, on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

The Body of Christ: Who do you see in your church fulfilling each of the following descriptions?

Equipping others for ministry: _____

Building up the body: _____

Unifying the body around the truth of Jesus: _____

Growing the body to look like Jesus: _____

DISCUSS: What are some obstacles that prevent us from supporting each other as Paul described in these verses? *[ALTERNATE: How does the metaphor of the church as a body help you understand God’s intention for the church?]*

DISCUSS: What steps can we take as a group to accomplish God’s work within this church?

LIVE IT OUT

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item #10**, the “**Grace**” poster. Invite group members to complete the acrostic on the poster with descriptions of different ways they’ve benefited from God’s grace. An example has been provided.



SAY: “How will you live out the truth that God has given you spiritual gifts for His service?”

GUIDE: Direct group members to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 82. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer lives this week.

- ▶ **Reflect.** Consider the contrast between some of the cultural expectations of church with the biblical expectations studied in this session. Confess and turn from any misconceptions about life in the church. Ask God to unite your heart with His regarding His church.
- ▶ **Discover.** If you're not sure what your spiritual gifts are or how you can be of service in the church, ask other believers to help you. Many times people see our strengths before we do. Discuss with a church leader your desire to serve.
- ▶ **Serve.** If you've identified your spiritual gifts, look for opportunities to exercise them in your life and in your church. Invest your time, passions, and strengths in building up others in the church.

GUIDE: Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 82) to guide their discussion. Encourage group members to spend time each day in God's Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 83–86).

PRAY: Close your Bible study time with prayer.

DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

[VERSES 1-2]: Paul urged his readers to “live worthy of the calling” they had received from the Lord. All Christians are called to serve Christ. Paul made no sharp distinction between clergy and laity here. “Live” captures the idea of a lifelong relationship with Christ. A Christian should live, think, and act in a way that is “worthy” of Christ.

[VERSE 3]: Paul had already addressed the unity between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians (Ephesians 2:11-18). He encouraged his readers to make “every effort” to manifest this new-found unity in Christ. The relation of church members should be marked by “the bond of peace.” The Greek word rendered “peace” reflects the Hebrew term *shalom*—not the mere absence of conflict; peace in Christ brings us the deeper, richer experience of reconciliation.

[VERSES 4-6]: Paul accented Christian unity by using the word “one” several times to reinforce his point. The church is “one body,” the body of Christ. A key ingredient in Christian unity is God's Spirit. Our decisions and actions should reflect the guidance of God's Spirit. Christians are “called to one hope,” a foretaste or anticipation of our fuller encounter with God at death or the end of time. Saying Christians have “one Lord” and “one faith,” the apostle pointed to the lordship of Christ and trust and commitment in claiming Jesus as Lord. Reference to “one baptism” again highlighted the unity believers should experience by their common commitment to Jesus. Paul reaffirmed common Jewish belief in “one God and Father of all” who is “above all and through all and in all.” God isn't limited to any one space or location.

[VERSE 7]: Paul then shifted to the topic of spiritual gifts. All Christians have experienced God’s grace that was “given to each one of us.” All Christians have at least one spiritual gift and should exercise that gift wisely and creatively to God’s glory. The spiritual gifts are distributed “according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” Christians can’t pick and choose the gift they would like to have.

[VERSE 11]: Paul continued discussing spiritual gifts by identifying some of the leadership positions in the first-century church. He named four (or possibly five) types of leaders.

[VERSES 12-13]: Here Paul began to address the purpose for these spiritual gifts—to equip “the saints for the work of ministry.” The word translated “ministry” is also the root for our word *deacon* and refers to service or ministry in general. The ministry of Christians should result in the building up of the body of Christ, the church. Spiritual gifts, exercised wisely, will move the church toward “unity in the faith.”

[VERSE 14]: Paul hoped his readers would “no longer be little children” in their faith. Paul warned his readers that as infantile Christians they were susceptible to “every wind of teaching.” The more believers were grounded in the written Word of God and sound Christian instruction, they would be protected from theological heresies from false teachers who were cunning or crafty, using “techniques of deceit.” Paul’s concern wasn’t academic achievement but spiritual maturity.

[VERSES 15-16]: The phrase “speaking the truth in love” balances two key ethical principles. Paul wanted honesty to be tempered by Christian love. Growth toward maturity ultimately comes from Christ. The “whole body” is Paul’s image for the church as a whole. Paul used a medical term, ligament, to illustrate the way a human body is linked together. Paul’s main concern was the “growth of the body.”



EXTRA!

Free additional ideas for your group are available at

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