

## Ephesians 4:1-16: Equip to Make Disciples

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Tommy Meador / General Adult

Connecting Faith to Life / Ephesians 4:1–16

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### Introduction

- Every Connect to Northwood Class - I share my story of discipleship - a sophomore at Mercer University - Bob - a young pastor intentionally invested in my life. Weekly meetings, prayer, Bible study, in his home, gave me first opportunity to preach - life direction changed because someone invested in me personally.
- Ever since - my goal has been to do for others what was done for me. We take discipleship seriously in our church. Over the last decade, many of you have seen significant spiritual growth in your life because you got involved in a discipleship group. Many of you are now disciple makers - investing in others.
- Jesus' last words to the church is our mission: "Go into all the world and make disciples."
- Talking about four priorities of our church: Encountering God, Experience Community, Equip Disciples, Engage the World
- Discipleship isn't a program of the church, it's the mission that drives the church. It should be the mission that drives your life - make disciples in your home, in your work place, in your church.
- [Ephesians 4:1-16](#) - A helpful passage to help us understand the nature of discipleship. From this text, three dimensions of discipleship I want you to understand as you strive to be a growing disciple of Jesus who makes disciples.

## Understand the aim of discipleship.

- vs. 1 - Paul urges to believers to *walk worthy* of the calling... Live in such a way that reflects that you've been brought into the family of God.
- In some ways, seems like an impossible task - how can you walk worthy of what Jesus has done for you? At it's core, discipleship is learning how to walk worthy of the salvation you've received.
- What are we aiming for to help you walk worthy of the calling?
- **A disciple grows in the knowledge of God.** You won't live well for God if you don't know God. For the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul explained doctrine to the church at Ephesus before he shifts to writing about how to live out our faith.
- Knowing God at Northwood: Systematic study of God's Word LCGs, Discipleship Groups, Equip Groups - all designed to take you deep into doctrine.
- Are you joining us in our pursuit to know God?
- **A disciple grows in the mission of God.** Walking worthy of the Gospel means doing what God has called us to do - growing as disciples who make disciples - [Matthew 28:18-20](#). The church is NOT an academy. The church is NOT a social club. The church is a training ground for disciple makers. (More on that next week.)
- **A disciple grows in the character of God.** This is what Paul is concerned about in the opening verses of this chapter. Growing in Christlike character keeps us unified in the mission of God.
- Reality is we don't think about Christlike character enough. Churches are often really good about providing opportunities to learn the Bible or opportunities to serve evangelistically. However, we don't challenge ourselves enough to live out the character of Christ.

- Different lists of character qualities we need to develop (e.g., [Philippians 4:8-9](#), Fruit of the Spirit in [Galatians 5:22-23](#), Or [1 Peter 2:5-8](#)). Think about the character qualities in this passage:
  - Humility = Think of others before I think of myself. You're not the most important person in the room. Jesus is. Live like it.
  - Gentleness = being tender in the way you treat others. Guarding your words because you want to build people up.
  - Patience = enduring with people when it's easier to walk away. Patience is bearing with each others, flaws and all.
  - These are all ways that Jesus treats us.
- To grow in character I must reject
  - Self-centeredness - You've seen how churches hurt when everyone is more focused on preferences and own agendas rather than the mission.
  - Harshness - You've felt the sting of the words of Christians who maybe even spoke truth but in hurtful way.
  - Impatience - "Why can't you get it? Why can't you change?" Make demands instead of help.
- The pursuit of Christlike character helps us to live as who we are: one.
  - One body - common existence.
  - One Spirit - Spirit drew us all to the Father.
  - One hope - all hoping for the return of Christ.
  - One Lord - Jesus
  - One faith - Embrace truth
  - One baptism - Gone through waters symbolizing our death to sin and life in Christ.

- One God and Father - We are adopted by the Father
- Notice Trinity.

## Understand the process of discipleship.

- “Grace was given to each of us...” NOT talking about saving grace but ministry grace.
- Quote from [Ps. 68:18](#). Context: a parade in ancient times for a conquering king. King paraded the streets displaying his bounty - marching his captured enemies before the people. To honor the king, people give gifts.
- God is our conquering king - we give Him gifts of our praise and devotion.
- Paul sees Christ as fulfillment of [Ps. 68](#). Wording is a bit different. Paul is quoting and explaining - Christ has conquered - He receives our gifts of praise and devotion (1:18), but He also gives gifts... Why does the King give gifts?
- vs. 9 - Jesus is unlike any other King. He is the Ultimate Giver. Jesus is the King who descended - came to a broken world, conquered sin and death by dying in our place, rose again, and ascended to the right hand of the Father. He has authority to give gifts, and HE is worthy of us using the gifts He has given us for His glory.
- Spiritual gifts - several passages in NT talk about spiritual gifts. We are all spiritually gifted. [1 Cor. 12](#) - body functions properly when each member uses his/her spiritual gift well.
- But... in this passage Paul focuses on leadership gifts. Apostles and prophets - the twelve, prophets of OT, NT prophets that didn't function in the same way as OT.

- Evangelists, pastors and teachers (close connection). Those who have these gifts have responsibility to equip saints for the work of the ministry.
- Here's how God grows disciples:
- **The Spirit works.** ([Philippians 2:12-13](#) - Work out your salvation with fear and trembling - God at work in you.) The Spirit causes growth as we submit to Him.
- **Leaders equip.** Everyone does the work of the ministry, and you need godly leaders who keep the mission central and trains you to use the giftedness God has given you for His glory.
- **People intentionally invest.** It doesn't just happen by you showing up. You have to take a step towards discipleship by pursuing relationships that push you toward Christlikeness. It takes time and commitment. No one grows overnight. It's a process of learning, putting sin to death, and developing Christlike character. It's not giving up on people, but patiently enduring with each other and helping each other back up when we fall.
- **Disciples stay teachable.** You're self-aware. (E.g., Disciple's Wheel.) Do you know where you are in your spiritual growth? What steps are you willing to take? You're willing to put yourself in the position of learner - have your assumptions challenged, being willing to be corrected, etc.

## Understand the results of discipleship.

- **Discipleship results in maturity.** When we put ourselves in disciple making relationships, the end result is maturity - you mature as you are equipped for the WORK of the ministry. A mature follower of Jesus is one who knows God, lives on His mission, and exudes the character of Christ.
- **Discipleship results in a healthy church.** Look at what happens when you are equipped for ministry: - body is built up, unity is achieved

(working together for Gospel), grow in maturity (vs. 13, 16) - Many dying churches in our city. Perhaps because they've lost their passion for the mission of God? We're trying to help churches live again by infusing discipleship back into their culture.

- If we take our eyes off the mission, we'll be on the path to a slow death.
- **Discipleship results in convinced disciples.** NOT tossed around (Stable) - (vs. 14) Why? Because we know the Word and we're living the Word. In shifting culture, extremely important that we stand firm on the Word and we're not tossed about from one philosophy or teaching to the next.
- **Discipleship results in loving disciples.** Speak the truth in love (vs.15) - Immature people often speak truth without love and just sound like jerks. OR try to love everyone without speaking the truth. BUT more you are equipped, the more you want people to know the truth and experience REAL love.
- AMAZING to think what God can do through a unified church that makes disciples. HEARTBREAKING to think of what might happen if we take our eyes off the mission.
- Two questions:
  - **Who is helping you follow Jesus?**
  - **Who are you helping follow Jesus?**
  - NOT who do you have the occasional spiritual conversation with, but who are you learning from? Who is helping you to grow in the way you study the Bible? Pray? Share the Gospel?
  - NOT who are you encouraging in the faith from time to time, but who are you teaching how to study the Bible, who are you teaching how to pray? Who are you teaching how to share the Gospel?

- Don't walk out of this room without answering those two questions, and if you can't answer those questions, you are likely not involved in disciple-making.
- Take a step towards discipleship. Let us help you get into a group. Make the commitment and see what God does.
- Taking a step towards discipleship always starts with a step towards Jesus. You only become a disciple or disciple maker because of what Jesus has done. There was a time when it was in no way possible for you to walk worthy of the Gospel because you lived contrary to the Gospel. You were dead in sin, separated from God, and instead of growing in Christ, you were running from Christ.
- But Jesus came for you. He came to this broken world, lived the life we could not live, died the death that we deserve, and rose in victory over sin and death.
- You can begin a relationship with Him by repenting of your sins and surrendering your life to Him. When you trust Jesus as the Lord and Savior of your life He will give you a new identity, a new family, and a new mission. Embrace Jesus today.