

God's Purpose for Our Many Gifts

Ephesians 4:7-13

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⁸This is why it says:

"When he ascended on high,
he led captives in his train
and gave gifts to men."

⁹(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Introduction

In an issue of the *Wall Street Journal* (26/03/04), there was an article called 'The Dysfunctional Family House'. It was about the Ledbetter family who liked to spend time at home together but not in the same room. They built a 1,200 square-meter house with special rooms for studying and sewing, separate living areas for each kid, and a master bedroom away from the living areas. There's also the escape room, a place where Mr. Ledbetter says "any family member can go to get away from the rest of us." Since moving in, he says his 7- and 11-year-old daughters fight less because their new house gives them many ways to avoid each other.

Even now that is how most homes operate. We all have our own rooms and claim that it is our room and our space; it is personalized and customized to keep others in the family out. Our personal space becomes self contained and self sustaining under the same room, designed to offer seclusion and privacy from other family members. We are all living under the same roof and sharing the same house, but we are living independent lives; we are in the same house but living in isolation. For the most part, that is how most families function; **everyone does their own thing, everyone has their own schedule, and everyone has their own space. They live separate lives in the same home, focused on their interests, pursuing their own delights, and spending time doing their own thing.**

Pause for a moment and think about what a way to live this is. You do your own thing and I do my own thing. We live in a culture of fractured families who share nothing in common except for the fact that we live at the same address. What an unhappy way to live, and what an unhappy family to be brought up in; where no one shares what's important to you, and nor do you share what's important to others; it's the reason why families are fractured, and the reason why most families are unhappy families.

In fact, if you think about it, as a son or daughter what brings you the greatest joy and delight in your family is when your mum and dad take an interest in the things that you treasure. E.g. my son loves art and music. When I take an interest in his art and music, those are the moments when we experience joy and delight, when we are united around that which we treasure, and when that treasure fills our vision and attention. What brings your mum and dad the greatest joy and delight comes when you, as a son or daughter, take an interest in the things they treasure. E.g. my dad loves his plants. When I take an interest in his plants, those

are moments where we experience joy and delight, when we are united around that which we treasure, and when that treasure fills our vision and attention.

The same holds true in every area of life; from political organizations, to music concerts, clubs people join, causes people rally to, and art that people share. *When people share a treasure it brings them together because that which they treasure is greater than they are, and in being brought together, it also brings them greater joy and delight because they are sharing it with others.* That's why when you get together with people who share your interest or passion it brings you even greater joy and delight. E.g. watching a football game with your mates is more exciting than sitting in a room watching it by yourself, and enjoying a magnificent dinner in a Michelin star restaurant is more enjoyable when you have someone sharing it with you. No one enjoys yum cha by themselves; the more people who are in it with you the greater delight you experience.

Paul says that the same holds true for us as God's family, as a church. An unhappy family, or fractured church, is a church where everyone lives their own lives, is doing their own thing, nothing is shared, and they have nothing in common. **So what brings us the greatest joy and delight as a church will only come about when we are united around our shared treasure**, when we are united around the gospel as our supreme treasure, when we are united around Jesus and His redeeming love as our shared treasure, when He fills and consumes our lives, vision, and attention, when we are filled with Him, and when we are satisfied with Him. A happy church, a united church, a healthy church, and a loving church, all depends on whether, as Paul prays (ch.3), Jesus dwells in our hearts, whether we are being rooted and grounded in His love, whether He is filling our lives, and whether He is **our** supreme treasure.

What Paul is doing in ch.4 is telling us how to grow a supremely happy church, how to grow a united church, and how to build a supremely happy family around Jesus and His redeeming work, to His praise and our joy.

And so as you come to v.7, the first thing I want you to notice is that the surpassing riches of Jesus, His immeasurable grace, His abundant mercy, and His incomparable love, doesn't end at the cross; it doesn't just end with forgiveness, and it doesn't just finish with you being adopted into God's new family. The riches of Jesus, overflowing grace, and incomparable mercy continues in the church in v.7.

⁷But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

God doesn't just save you into this adopted family; He doesn't just call you to a supremely happy family and an infinitely great and loving Father. Now that you are His son or daughter He gives you a gift. When parents adopt a child, they bring him home, they want to give him a happy home, a family, a loving mum and dad, and they proceed to shower him with gifts that will last a lifetime to experience and enjoy. There's the first gift, but there's also more to enjoy and experience. Well, here in God's adopted family, this is your first gift as an adopted son and daughter. It's a gift that has been given to us to help us make Jesus our shared treasure as a family, to fill this place with Jesus and His redeeming work, bringing us all to be filled with Jesus, and to be satisfied in Him and complete in Him, v.13. It is the goal and purpose of the gifts.

Jesus has Given You a Gift

And so you read in v.7 that each one of you has been given grace by Jesus Himself, and given grace as Christ apportioned it. Not only did He save you, but in His grace He has also given you a grace gift (v.8). Paul is not speaking of saving grace; here he speaks of **servicing** grace, which is a grace gift to serve, a grace gift to minister, and a grace gift to enjoy as you use it to serve.

Every Christian has been given serving grace, a grace gift from the Lord Jesus Himself. Yes, you have been given a grace gift from God: *7But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.* And Paul explains it this way as he reminds them of what the gospel has accomplished in vv.8-9. *8This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."* The Lord Jesus, who ascended in victory in His resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of God, is Lord over all, and from there He dispenses His gifts to His people.

In the Greek speaking world, a victorious king or general would bring the defeated armies back as captives in his train. He would also distribute gifts or spoils of war to his people. The image there is that the victorious Jesus in saving us, freeing us, redeeming us, and adopting us, has also given us gifts.

This passage in Ephesians is telling you that Jesus has given you a grace gift to serve His people; to help make this adopted family a supremely happy place. No one gets left out in His family. We are saved, forgiven, redeemed, and adopted as His son or daughter, and then a gift is placed in your hands to be unpacked, unwrapped, enjoyed and shared in this family; to be used and shared to help others make Jesus our shared treasure, and to bring us to fullness in Jesus. So read this with soberness, for what a privilege it is, but also read it with joy and anticipation at what God has called you to, given you, and prepared you for: *v.7 but to each one of us grace has been given as Jesus apportions.* This verse tells me that here at GracePoint across our congregations there are at least 170 men and women to whom Jesus has uniquely and specially gifted.

Four Grace Gifts to Prepare God's People to Use Their Gifts in Ministry – vv.11-12

But Paul only goes on to speak of four grace gifts given to the church. He only focuses on four gifts. You'll find them in v.11. Obviously there are more than four gifts in the life of the church, but here he only focuses on four for a reason. His purpose is not to give us a list of all the grace gifts available in the church; **his purpose is to show us how these four gifts are used to prepare others to use their grace gifts. His purpose is to show us how these four gifts are used to prepare others to unpack and unwrap the gifts God has given them.**

So you read that it is to this adopted family, and having saved and redeemed us, that He gave *v.11 the apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors who are also teachers to prepare God's people for works of service/ministry – the pastor is the teacher, the pastor pastors by teaching – there is 'and' there in the Greek text.*

The apostles and prophets are foundational gifts that were given only to the early church as they established the church before the writing of the New Testament, which is the teaching of the apostles.

Ephesians 2:20. ¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

An Apostle was someone who in the New Testament was uniquely commissioned by the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1), and sent out by Him to fulfill a specific mission, to establish the first churches. A Prophet was someone who was a channel of divine revelation, who conveyed God's revelation before the writing of the New Testament.

But there are another set of gifts given to every generation of God's people, which every adopted family needs. They are given to evangelists and pastors, who are teachers.

Today's evangelists are the **obstetricians** in the church. They are gifted in making the gospel plain and relevant to the lost, and they are gifted in bringing people into God's family. They are the ones who are able to bring the truth of the gospel, and proclaim it in the power of the Spirit, so that men and women respond to that message in repentance and faith. Everyone is called to witness and share Christ, but some have a special gift in leading people to Jesus.

Then there are the **pediatricians**, those who are pastors/teachers. They are gifted at shepherding or looking after the family, and they do it as they teach the word of God; they carry a shepherd's staff. They do this by sometimes speaking a kind word, or with a gentle prod to get members of the family moving, and sometimes by taking a stand to protect the family. As new believers are saved and gathered into this new family, community, and the church, they'll need a shepherd (that's what 'pastor' means); a shepherd who will look after and nurture them by feeding them the word of God, who will teach them the word of God. Elders are also shepherds or pastors of the flock (1 Peter 5). The role of the elder in Titus 1:9 is to hold firm to the gospel, teach and encourage others by it, and refute those who oppose it.

Not only do your pastors serve in this capacity, but so do your elders and community group leaders. They have been given gifts that Jesus has given to some for His church, which is His family, to prepare us for ministry. ¹¹*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for the works of service/ministry.*

God has given gifted evangelists, pastors/teachers (elders/shepherds) to His church, and to His adopted family, **to prepare** each of them for works of service or ministry ('service' and 'ministry' are the same words). The role of the evangelists and pastor/teacher/elder is to **prepare** God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up.

NOTE: The word 'prepare' that is used here is the same word that is used in the gospels for fixing nets. It means to put something together in such a way that it can be used, and **to bring things to a state of readiness**. That was Paul's ministry as an apostle, that is the ministry of the evangelists, and that is the ministry of a pastor/teacher. From an elder, to a Sunday School teacher, to a community group leader, to an Extreme leader, and to a discipler; if that is what God has given you, the gift to pastor and teach, then you have been given this gift to bring the children of God, and **the people of God, to a state of readiness so that they are able to do their personal work of ministry**, to bring them to a place where they can use their gifts to serve, and to bring them to a place that every believer is called to, which is for works of service!

Notice that the word ‘ministry’ or ‘service’ is not used to describe the work of the pastor or the community leader or the elders of the church. It is used to describe the work of all the people of God, of all God’s people, and of those who have been adopted into God’s family. **Ministry is the privileged calling of the people of God**; we’re all in ministry because God has called us all to ministry, and has gifted us for ministry. God’s design is that all His people minister.

Note that the New Testament description of a pastor/teacher is not someone who does all the ministry. It is not someone who squashes all ideas, initiatives, and ministries that people come up with at church. Understand the role of the pastor/teacher: I’m here, as a pastor/teacher, to help you and encourage you to discover, develop, and exercise your gifts for ministry. E.g. you may have a passion to serve in some way or capacity, or you have a great idea to help build this church, so you come to me. My role and gift is to help you make it a reality by equipping you with God’s word, to do that so that others might be served by you, and so that we might be built up as a church, to the praise of Jesus and to our joy in Him.

In fact, this passage tells me and you very clearly that our teaching and training, our exposition of the Bible, and our applying of the Bible in community groups, for whatever purpose, is to enable you to be a ministering people, to equip through the word to be a servant people, and to prepare and equip to serve each other, so that the body of Jesus might be built up.

So the work of the pastor/teacher is really to be the supplies division. If you do not have a supplies division your army cannot advance; if there are no supplies coming from behind, it means that your army will starve at the front. The pastor/teacher feeds their people for the work of serving Jesus, and makes Jesus the treasure for their people; they are filling them with Jesus! The work of the minister/pastor/teacher is really to be the coach; they are equipping you, strengthening you, watching you to help you improve, and bringing out the best in you on the field. The pastor/teacher is feeding you for the work of serving Jesus, and making Jesus our supreme treasure as a church, because that is the ultimate goal of the gifts, to have this place built up into, and growing to be, a place that is filled with Jesus!

The Goal and Purpose of the Gifts – v.12-13

As you read on in vv.12-13, Paul tells us what the purpose or goal of these gifts are, and that is to build up into and grow, to be filled with Jesus!

*¹²to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up
¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

That is the supreme goal of the gifts. It is the supreme goal of my gift as a pastor/teacher, and your gift as it is unpacked and used. **It’s all to build up the body of Christ**, which Paul unpacks for us in v.13. This is the goal of ministry, the purpose of the gifts, and the goal of the gifts. I keep doing what I do as a pastor/teacher in equipping you, and you keep doing what you do as God’s people being equipped and using your gifts to serve others, **so that the body of Christ may be built up**, and this is what it means to be built up, ¹³*until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

You notice two things in v.13. **Firstly**, *that we might reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of Jesus (Son of God)*; that we might be united in our trust in and knowledge of Jesus. Paul's saying that **the goal of every gift is to bring others to make Jesus our shared treasure (unity) and to grasp the treasure we have in Jesus more and more (knowledge of Jesus)**. That's the whole point of unity. No one unites over what they don't consider praiseworthy or great, and no one wants to gather around something worthless; be it a cause, club, or activity. **People unite around what they consider a treasure, and what is great and praiseworthy.**

In this family, and in this community, Jesus is the supreme treasure. So Paul says that God has given you gifts to serve that purpose; your works of service and your gifts have been given to you **so that** you can help others make Jesus our shared treasure, and to help others grasp the treasure we have in Jesus more and more. That's the goal of ministry that most glorifies God, and most brings you and others joy, because He's getting the highest praise in our lives and the lives of others in the church as they make Him our shared treasure. We're being brought to the greatest joy possible in Jesus, in whom is riches forevermore, manifold wisdom, incomparable love, and immeasurable grace.

Secondly, *that we might attain the whole measure of the fullness of Jesus*; that we might be filled up with Jesus, and made mature in Jesus to the full (*the whole measure*). It is like a cup that's cleaned out and has water poured into it until it is brought to the top; the goal of the gifts, your works of service, your ministry, and what God has uniquely given you here in this family to be used, **is to bring others to fullness in Jesus, each with his/her gift bringing more and more of Jesus to dwell in the lives of the people around you. It is what Paul has prayed in ch.3:14-21.** We are serving to make Paul's prayer a reality by using our gifts to help others make Jesus and His redeeming work our supreme treasure in life; to have Jesus dwelling in our hearts as the supreme object of our affections, with our lives grounded in His redeeming love, and our lives comprehending His love, so that we might be filled with the fullness of God, so that nothing but Jesus fills our lives and vision.

The ultimate purpose of all gifts and works of service/ministry **is to bring about a supremely happy family, and that can only happen when we are united around a supreme treasure that is greater than any of us, better than anything we desire, and higher than any of our personal preferences.** So Paul says that Jesus has given you gifts that function to bring about a supremely happy family in making Him that supreme treasure in our lives as a church family. We will be brought together to maturity and unity only when Jesus is at the centre as our treasure, *as we are knowing Him, trusting Him, growing up into Him, and being filled with Him.* Compare this to ch.2, which reminds us that it is only as we are drawing closer to Jesus, and becoming like Jesus, that we are brought together. So the more He fills us, the more we will be brought to maturity and unity in Him as our treasure.

In fact, it's not only happy families that work like this, but it is also how life works; **what unites people, and what brings people together, is also what brings them the greatest happiness, joy, and delight.** In life, it is always our treasures that bring us together, it is our treasures that make us gather, and it is shared greatness that makes us get together to bring us joy and delight. E.g. there are lots of concerts at Sydney Olympic Park but not everyone goes, only those who consider Big Bang or Taylor Swift their treasure will go. There is a great band or singer so you go, and only those who also consider them great go. Or when there's a

football game on, the Rabbit supporters will sit with their own kind. And also grand finals at someone's house, only those who consider the game their treasure will gather there.

Guess what? Not only does it magnify and praise that which we treasure when we gather around it, for that's why people get together to hear their bands and support their sporting teams, but it also brings enjoyment and delight to be gathered with others to magnify that which we treasure; it's brings us delight.

And so here Paul is saying the same thing. **The gifts serve to make Jesus our shared treasure, to bring us to unity in the faith and in the knowledge of Jesus, so that we might be filled with Jesus.** They are given to help us know Jesus more and more together, and to be filled with Jesus more and more, because the more He is filling your life and my life, and the more you know Him and I know Him, then the closer you and I will be. And as a result, He will get more praise and we will get more joy because we always gather around that which is our greatest treasure. **If we're not loving, treasuring, trusting, and living for the same thing in this family, then we'll be a divided and unhappy family.**

And if Jesus is not our greatest treasure in this family, then Jesus is not getting the praise He deserves. But the more He is our shared treasure then the greater our unity will be, the greater praise He gets, and the greater our joy and delight as a family. The most incredible thing about this passage is that **it is the gifts you have that either makes or breaks the family.**

Jesus has given you the privilege of being given a gift to make His family a supremely happy place in Him; for what better gift could you be given than a chance to magnify, and promote, and point to, and elevate that which is a treasure in your own life? E.g. my son Josh loves Lego; it is a treasure in his life. His ideal job would be to design Lego, to build Lego, and to get other people interested in Lego. It brings him joy doing that at home when he builds something, and even greater joy when we share it with him. What you love and consider a treasure is what you promote. It brings you joy, and even greater joy, when others share it. It's the same for the believer. If Jesus is a treasure of surpassing riches, then there is no greater job in the universe than to be given a part to play, a specific job, a gift, and a skill to help others make Jesus our treasure. It doesn't just bring me joy in doing it, but it gives me even greater joy when others share it with me.

The goal or purpose of every ministry, every work of service, every gift and skill, every program and activity in this church, and **everything we do, must be to help others be filled with Jesus, to help others make Jesus our shared treasure, and to help others comprehend Jesus and His redeeming love more and more,** because as others are doing that in your life, and as you are doing that in their life, we are being brought together and united around Jesus, our supreme treasure, to His greatest praise and our greatest joy. But it'll take you and me both using the gifts Jesus has given us to make it happen.

Implications

- 1) Everyone is a minister of the gospel here at GracePoint because everyone is not just an adopted son or daughter, but also a gifted son or daughter! Not only are you gifted to serve, but you are given to serve. Church is about doing life together as an adopted family to the praise of Jesus and our joy. It is not a game that you watch. If your view of church is that you come and watch the game and then go home, then you've got it

wrong. That is not just unbiblical, but it's also dishonoring to Jesus and the church He has died to bring together.

If your view of church is to come and be served then you've come to the wrong church. Our commitment is to push you, prod you, challenge you, call you, and equip you to unpack and use what God has given you, for the praise of Jesus in this church and the joy of His people. You may be asking why this church is always calling you to do stuff, to join activities, to go to things, to meet up with others, and to be committed to community groups; it is because Jesus calls you to serve and help make Him a treasure for others, using the gifts He has given you.

Each of you has a spiritual gift that is given so that you can play a part in the life of the gathering; there is **a building block** that you hold, that when laid, will build this church, there is **a piece of the jigsaw** that you have, that when put in place, will build this church, and there is **an ingredient** that God has given you, that when mixed in, will build this church. And in some measure, **the happiness of the people of God, and the praise Jesus receives, depends on you being willing to be equipped, and whether you will use that gift Jesus has given you here at GracePoint.** Work at being equipped, and work at discovering what God has given you to serve His people here at GracePoint. What skills and abilities can you use to help us make Jesus our shared treasure?

- 2) When you serve, **remember that the goal is helping others make Jesus our shared treasure, to His praise and our shared joy.** Seeing ministry and serving as a task that is an end goal in itself is not why we do what we do. That's the reason why people lose momentum in their serving at church, and the reason why they have no joy in using their gifts, because they end up doing something for the sake of doing that thing. **The goal of every gift, service, and ministry, is to help others make Jesus our shared treasure, to help others trust Him and know Him more and more, and to help others grasp His redeeming love more and more, to His praise and our shared joy.**

We do what we do because Jesus and His redeeming love is precious to us and we want others to share it; so we serve to make it happen: from welcoming, to running the sound desk, to Prayer and Praise nights, to community groups, to cleaning the building, to emailing people, to teaching Sunday school, to uploading the sermons, to social activities like kayaking and bushwalking, to preaching, and to working out how many paper cups we need to buy; **everything we do as a service and ministry are God-given gifts to help others make Jesus our shared treasure, to His praise and our shared joy.**