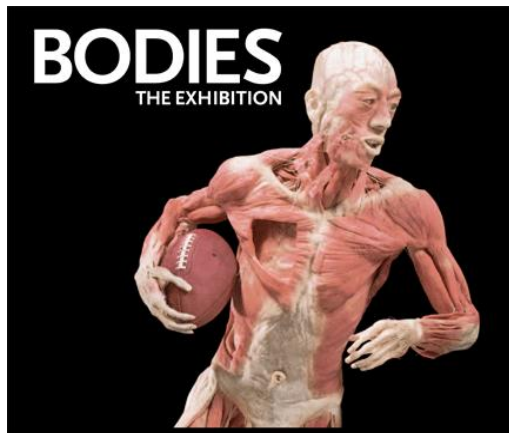


Organic Church

Part Two
Ephesians 4:7-16



While we were visiting my sister in Ohio, we all went to a science museum in Toledo which was hosting a special section called Bodies Revealed. The Bodies Exhibition travels around the U.S. and is a fascinating display of the wonder and intricacies of the human body. It also happens to be a good illustration for our sermon series, Organic Church. As we said last week, each believer is a living, spiritual entity, every local church is a living, spiritual entity and the kingdom of God throughout the world and throughout time is a living, spiritual entity. It is appropriate to refer to this as “organic church.” God has built organic building blocks

into each of these parts of his kingdom.

This morning we will be in Ephesians chapter four and they key verse that illustrates our theme is verses 15-16. *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*¹⁶ *From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.* Other translations have the word joint instead of ligament but the idea is the same—we the church are not only a living, spiritual entity, but we are a spiritual unity. Just as the human body is held together by joints and ligaments, so is the church. We each make up a part of the body with Christ as the head. Therefore, as we further examine the theme of Organic Church, we have to capture this organic principle of amazing diversity within perfect unity.

Let me remind you where we have been and explain where we are headed this morning. Here are the four building blocks of discipleship

1. Discipleship Ingredients—the Bible and the Holy Spirit
2. Discipleship Environment—the church and the family
3. Discipleship Process—to us and from us
Connect—Grow—Equip—Multiply
4. Discipleship Structure/Ministries—The Trellis of ministries that supports the Living Vine

Last Sunday we focused on number three—Discipleship Structures—and this morning we will focus on number two—the Discipleship Environment. This week we will zero in on the church and next week we will tackle the family.

Please turn to Ephesians chapter four.

⁷ *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.* ⁸ *This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.”^b*

⁹ *(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) 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, ¹² to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may 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.*

¹⁴ *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

So how is the church a key environment for making disciples? It begins in verse seven. *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.* This is an interesting verse because at face value it sounds like everyone gets a different amount of grace. On the one hand it is encouraging because “each one” gets grace. No believer is left out. But on the other hand, this grace is apportioned by Christ. God’s grace is divided up among all of us. But why would God have to apportion or divide his grace? Why would he have to hand it out in portions? The answer lies in the fact that the word for grace here actually is referring to spiritual gifts.

The original word for grace is *charis*, therefore the verse would read like this:

But to each one of us grace (charis) has been given as Christ apportioned it.
There is an equivalent thought in 1 Corinthians 12:11.

these [gifts]/(charisma) are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

The word for gift or spiritual gift is charisma. Therefore the grace in Ephesians four is equivalent to the charisma, or spiritual gifts, in 1 Corinthians twelve. In both cases, gifts are given to “each one” and in both cases, the gifts are “apportioned” according to the will of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

But to each one of us grace (charis) has been given as Christ apportioned it.

1 Corinthians 12:11

Each one *All these (charisma) are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.* of us has

been given grace—charisma—spiritual gifts and the Lord has determined which gifts that we receive. You have no say whatsoever in the spiritual gifts you have been given any more than you chose the color of your eyes (and don't you dare tell me that you have colored contacts, because you know that is not what I mean!) We don't have a choice as to which gifts we have but it is completely our choice as to what we do with our gifts.

Let's do a little exercise that I did many years ago, but most of you probably won't remember anyway. When I say "go" I want each of you to say your phone number aloud. I don't care if it's your home number or cell number—just choose one and say it out loud when I say GO. Are you ready? Go.

Now this time, when I say GO, I want you to name two of your spiritual gifts. Ready? GO. That time around you were all a lot more quiet. Now why do you think that was true? The obvious reason is that you each know your phone number a lot better than you know your spiritual gifts. This should not be. This is a good rule of thumb for all Christians. We should know our spiritual gifts as well as we know our phone number. But for the majority of us, that is probably not true.

When the topic of spiritual gifts arises, two of the most common questions are: What are the spiritual gifts? and How can I know what gifts I have been given? Paul listed five of the gifts in this chapter but there are over twenty listed in several places in Scripture, including 1 Corinthians, 1 Peter and Romans. The interesting thing to note is that there is not a single complete list anywhere in the New Testament. Some of the lists overlap quite a bit but you have to assemble them together from several sections of Scripture. I have put together a booklet called *Developing Your Divine Design* which is a short Bible study on spiritual gifts as well as a spiritual gift inventory that you can take to help you identify your spiritual gifts. Those are available in the literature rack in the foyer.

Now to the question of how to discover your spiritual gifts. First of all, the most exciting part about this discovery is the fact that you will find them. Discovering your spiritual gifts is not like looking for gold in California in the late 1800's. During the Gold Rush, you may or may not have found gold, but when you search for your spiritual gifts, you will be successful. You cannot possibly fail in this endeavor. I am not saying that it will happen all at once because it is a process, but the result is guaranteed.

The second this I will say is a warning—exercise great caution when using spiritual gift inventories. I won't go so far as to give the common disclaimer—Do not try this at home—but very close to that. I realize that I have just recommended a Bible study and spiritual gift inventory to you. Everyone can do the Bible study but here is the warning for the spiritual gifts inventory—DO NOT take this inventory unless you have already been actively serving in a church or parachurch ministry. If you have not been serving in a local body of Christ or in the larger body of Christ, DO NOT take this inventory.

Let me briefly explain the reason for this warning. Spiritual gift inventories measure your spiritual gifts and if you are not using your spiritual gifts, then the inventory is not going to do you much good and may lead you astray. Think of it like the creation of a budget. In order to create a family budget, most financial planners will tell you to track every expenditure you make

for a month or two so you can see where all of your money is going. Once you have that as a foundation, you can better make the necessary adjustments to your budget. But if you are a small child or you are in prison and you aren't really spending any money, then you won't be helped at all by this process. In the same way, if you are not using your spiritual gifts, you have no foundation in which to take the inventory.

The second problem with spiritual gift inventories is the fact that they tend to measure a person's interests and personality instead of spiritual gifts. This happens because the people who write the questions on the inventories have confused interests, personality and spiritual gifts. For example, you might have a serious interest in music and you might even be very gifted in music. You could very easily conclude that music is your spiritual gift. This makes about as much sense as saying that Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber also have the spiritual gift of music. You very well may have the spiritual gift of music—or more precisely you have another gift which utilizes music in its expression, but in order for, music to be your spiritual gift, you must be using, music to edify the body of Christ. You must be using your gift or you do not actually possess it. 1 Cor. 12 says that “the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” When we use our gifts, we are manifesting the Holy Spirit.

If you don't know your spiritual gifts as well as you know your phone number AND I am warning you against using spiritual gift inventories, how then can a Christian discover his or her spiritual gifts? The answer to this question is so easy you won't believe it. The way you determine which area of ministry in which you are gifted to serve is to...serve. Christian service is a little bit like a sport—you don't really know how gifted you might be until you try it. I might think I can play baseball but until I stand next to the plate and swing that hickory stick at a fastball, you will never know. You have to serve in order to know how God might want you to best serve.

For example, how did I know that I had the gift of preaching? How did I know that I was called into vocational ministry? I can tell you that it did not happen by taking a test! My call to ministry happened this way. I showed up for a 5AM men's study when I was 19 years old. Because of my commitment to that study, eventually, the pastor asked me to lead their youth ministry. That same year I signed up to be a camp counselor and did things which took me so far out of my comfort zone I thought I was on alien planet. When I was twenty and at a new college, I took the initiative and found a local Young Life ministry and asked if there was any way I could serve with them. When I was in my mid-twenties I said yes when the pastor asked me to preach a message at the Sunday evening service. It was a really bad sermon, by the way. Karen and I both said YES when the pastor asked us to teach a weekly children's church. I said yes when the pastor asked me to teach the adult Sunday School class. I said yes when the church asked me to serve as a deacon. Some of the best advice I have ever been given was shared by this same pastor. He said, “When you go to Seminary, find a local church and serve. Don't get caught up in academics only.” You are going to seminary with the purpose of serving so you better be busy serving while you are there.” I served in a wide variety of ways over the next four years until I was hired as a full-time pastor.

So how did I know that I was called to ministry? I didn't know anything until I began to serve. How did I discover my spiritual gifts? I didn't know anything until I began to serve—and neither will you. But this leads us to the larger reason for serving according to our spiritual gifts.

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, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may 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.

Verse eleven lists five spiritual gifts but like the other lists in the NT, this one is not meant to be exhaustive. Paul again highlights the fact that these gifts were given. Of course this is the nature of a gift, but we must remember that these were supernaturally given for the benefit of the body of Christ. We need to ask two questions about spiritual gifts from this section of chapter four: Where are we going? (and) How do we get there?

Where are we going? What is the ultimate purpose of each one being given grace in the form of spiritual gifts? We need to answer this question because if we don't, it's a bit like starting a business without a business plan. Let's say you see me walking through Walmart and you run over all excited and say, "Rich, guess what? I have decided to start my own business!" Naturally, my first question would be, "That's great—what kind of business are you starting?" And you reply, "Well, I've decided that what we need in this country is more manufacturing, so I am going to break into manufacturing." "OK," I say, "What do you plan to manufacture?" "A little frustrated with question, you say, "That's obvious, isn't it? I'm going to manufacture things that people will buy. It would be pretty dumb to manufacture things that people don't want to buy." More confused than ever, I ask, "So what kinds of things do you think people will buy?" "You turn your head and stroke your chin thinking aloud, "Ya know, everyone seems to want to buy ipods and ipads and ipens and ipillows and ipajamas, so maybe I'll manufacture electronics. Yeah, that's what I'll do!"

Needless to say, I wouldn't be in a hurry to invest in your business because you don't have a clue as to why the business exists. But the problem can be the same in the church. We are obviously not a business, but we can fail to understand the reason for our existence. The Coca-Cola company has one clear objective—make drinks laden with corn syrup and aspartame and sell as many as possible throughout the world. This is why they exist as a company. Most churches do not have the same level of clarity as to the reason for their existence.

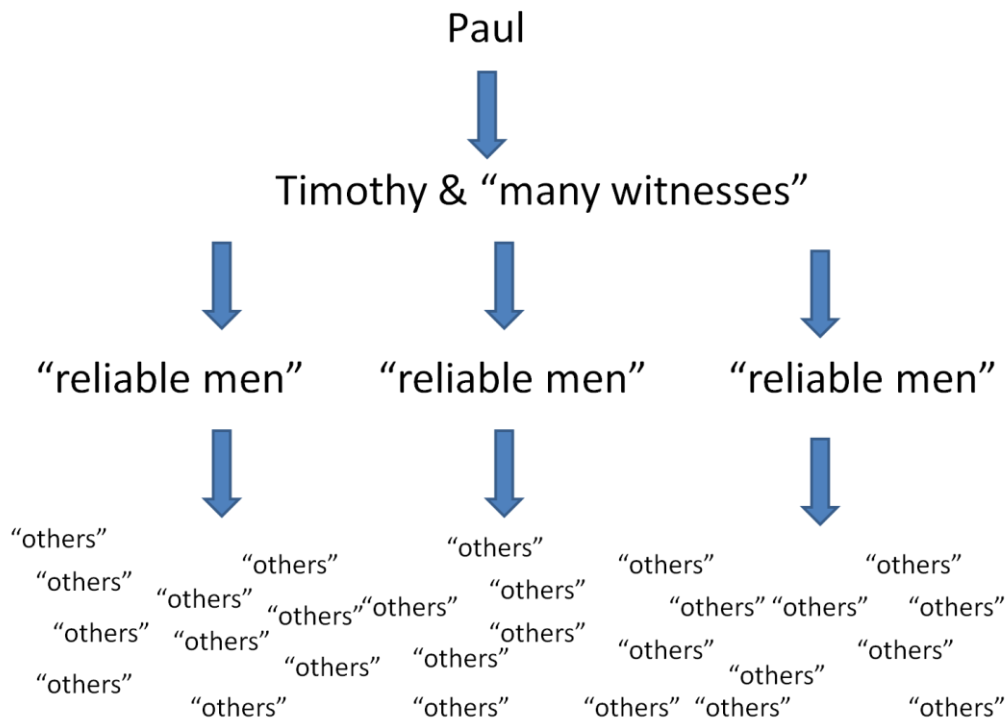
So where are we going as a church? What is our reason for existence? The answer lies in verses 12-13 *so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.* The reason we exist is to help one another grow into mature believers and maturity is defined for us—*attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.* It would take many sermons to flesh out the full meaning of maturity, for that is much of what we cover in sermons and other instruction. We are constantly asking the maturity question: what does God want us to do and how can we do it. A full definition of maturity would take months of sermons, but a simple definition, in addition to the one we have in verses 12-13 is as follows. Maturity is the process of modeling our whole lives after the character and priorities of Christ.

No one would argue with the first half of the definition; to model the character of Christ. If I asked you to quickly define what it means to be like Christ, most of the things you would list would be character qualities—love, kindness, gentleness, patience, holiness, etc. Of course these are all true of Jesus in infinite measure, but we tend to forget about the priorities of Christ. Why did Jesus come? To use the Coca-Cola illustration, what was Jesus’ business model—why did he come to earth as a man? Jesus’ priority is found in Luke 19:10. “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Jesus did not come to make us into nice people or give us good character. Obviously, once he redeems us from our lostness, the process of growth should make us into a nice person and improve our character, but that is not the reason he came.

The Discipleship Goal
 Making **more** disciples and making **better** disciples by nurturing **all** believers toward the stage of multiplication.

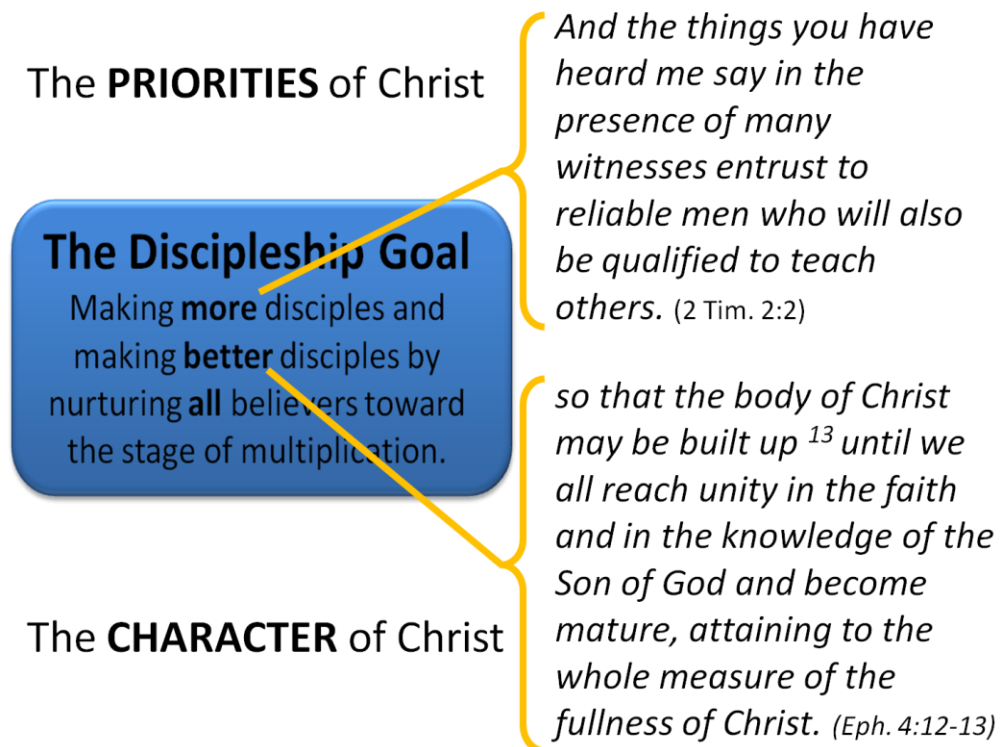
Allow me to illustrate the definition of maturity using The Discipleship Goal that I introduced last week. Someone approached me after the sermon last week and told me how much they liked this goal, that it really seemed to sum up the Biblical principles. I introduced it last week but did not go into any detail, so I will do so now.

The part about making more disciples was illustrated well by the passage of Scripture from last week, 2 Timothy 2:2. *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.* If you recall, if this is done well, it will result in the multiplication of new believers, like this diagram shows.



And now this morning’s passage illustrates the part about making better disciples. *...so that the body of Christ may be built up¹³ 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.*

Moreover, the 2 Timothy 2:2 passage demonstrates the **PRIORITIES** of Christ, who came to seek and to save the lost. If a church does not help to make more disciples through helping others become reconciled to Christ, then they are absolutely failing as a church. Then, the Eph. 4:12-13 passage illustrates the character of Christ—growth in maturity and Christ-likeness (see diagram below)



This is our discipleship goal. Remember a few minutes ago I asked the question, Where are we going? This is where we must travel together—making more disciples and making better disciples. Now let me briefly answer the second question, How do we get there? For this answer, we go back to verses 11-12.

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,* ¹² *to prepare God's people for works of service...*

One of the keys to this passage is the word *prepare*. The NASB and the ESV both use the word *equip*. I think that is a better translation so I will camp put on the word equip. The Dictionary of Biblical Languages defines the word **equip** in this way: *a preparation or training that fully qualifies.*¹ Therefore, the idea is that believers are to be prepared, trained and fully qualified for works of service. If everyone is equipped, or at least in the process of being equipped, then this is how we reach our discipleship goal. Equipping is the engine which drives discipleship forward.

But then the logical question is, **Who** does the equipping? Let me give you three answers to this question.

The **Traditional Answer**: The pastor does the work of the ministry and the congregation comes alongside and offers help. This has traditionally been the way the majority of churches have worked for decades or perhaps much longer. This one verse in Ephesians crushes the traditional answer to ministry by injecting the all important principle of equipping.

Therefore, we have come up with a second, and **Better Answer**: The pastor equips the congregation do to the work of the ministry. This came about because everyone focused on a smaller section of this passage: *and some to be **pastors** and teachers, to **equip** God's people for works of service.* The focus becomes lands on the pastor to do the equipping. I have heard this twenty times if I have heard it once. I heard it in seminary. I have heard it from denominational officials. I have heard it from other pastors—the job of the pastor is to equip the congregation to do the work of the ministry. This sounds pretty good doesn't it? It's a whole lot better than the traditional answer, but it still falls short. And the reason it falls short is because the entire emphasis in this passage is that 'each one' has been given gifts. It is wrong because it is not Biblical and it is wrong because it will never work. You cannot reach this discipleship goal, we cannot reach maturity with this as our model.

Based upon all we have studied in the past two weeks, here is the **Biblical Answer**: The pastor sets forth a Biblical vision so that every believer equips one another to do the work of the ministry.



Let me try to explain the implications of this principle of equipping using another story of our museum visit in Ohio. They had this “machine” called a Boyo which is basically like a gigantic, upside down yo-yo. The top part is a large flywheel which pulls a rope up and down, similar to the string on a yo-yo except you are the one holding on to the end of the rope. If you do it just right, when you pull down on the rope, it creates what is called potential energy in the flywheel at the top. This potential

energy is static energy—energy that is not in motion. Then the potential energy quickly turns into kinetic energy which pulls you into the air. This is a picture of Ethan being pulled up to the top of the Boyo.

Based upon what we have seen this morning in regard to our spiritual gifts, do you think we have more potential energy or kinetic energy. Clearly we possess an enormous amount of potential energy, but how do we turn that into kinetic energy? How do we release all of this potential? All that is needed is to serve. Serving is not just being busier than you already are. For some if you—in order to turn some of that potential energy into kinetic energy—you might be a little busier. You might have to take yourself out of your comfort zone in order to serve. We have got to serve or all we will ever have is lots of potential energy and little bits of kinetic energy. And all you need to do to get this moving is to say, “Yes, Lord, I am willing.”

Rich Maurer
July 3, 2011

^b Psalm 68:18

¹Swanson, James: *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Greek (New Testament)*.
electronic ed. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. DBLG 2938