

Pastor Kyle Mercer
APEST, Maturity, and Unity

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Series: The Church and the Home
Ephesians 4:1-16

**BIG IDEA – WE NEED TO MOVE FROM BEING SELFISH TO
SERVANT-HEARTED**

Okay. If it's not immediately obvious, we take God's Word seriously, but we don't take ourselves seriously. We love to laugh at ourselves and with each other. If you don't know this, we love kids. We love families. We have over 400 kids next door every weekend, and it's kids' ministry, not childcare. It's lots of gospel and lots of Goldfish. We love it.

Now, if you ever walk into that kids' building... Some of you have never been in that kids' building because you don't have kids, and that's fine. But if you walked into that kids' building, what you'd see on the wall is... It says, "Meet Jesus and make friends." I love that, because what would you want with our kids?

What could be better than all of the kids in our church going, "Man, when I was in kids' ministry, I met Jesus. I became a Christian. I made some of my best friends. I grew up with them, and there was nothing better than being a part of this local church." It's like, "Amen."

But I want to add one more thing. If I could sneak in there at night, and if I could take a Sharpie and write one more thing on "Meet Jesus and make friends," I would say, "And have a ton of fun while you're doing it." That's what we want to have them do. That's why we're doing Kids Week, guys.

Let me tell you about Kids Week. Can I talk to Mom and Dad for just a second? Where are Mom and Dad? They're all over here. Mom...Dad, I want to talk to you about Kids Week. Why would we do this? It takes a lot of energy. It takes a lot of work. We have

to partner with different organizations. Our staff is there every night. Why are we doing this? Because (I mean this) we want to resource you.

We know we can't replace you. Mom and Dad, we don't want to replace you. We can't. You're the primary disciplers of your kids, but you're not the sole disciplers of your kids. So, we want to come alongside you. Here's why we're telling you... I'm telling you two months in advance. Seriously. Why do we move it to the beginning of August? Because we think, for the most part, summer vacations have ended and school has not yet started.

Here's why this is important. We want kids to taste mission and adventure as a part of the Christian life from an early age. I don't know whose fault it is. Mom and Dad, it might be your fault. It might be just middle school ministries and high school ministries.

I don't know what happened, but a lot of kids who grew up in Christian homes think Christianity is about what they don't do. "I don't smoke, drink, or chew or hang with those who do." That's what they think. They think it's about what they can't watch and where they can't go and what they can't do. We want to flip the script and say, "Actually, it's about what we get to do."

This week, Kids Week, is about serving the city as families in Jesus' name. We're going to spend four nights serving and one night celebrating. If you can't make all of it, could you make some of it? Let's take a moment. Let's pray for the kids and the families. It's hard. It has always been hard to be a parent, but it's very hard to be a parent in the twenty-first century with all of the pressures and pains and problems. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for our kids. It's such a joy to have hundreds of kids next door. We thank you for all of the parents. We thank you for all of the volunteers who serve in kids' ministry. We thank you for Johnson and his team who tirelessly organize leaders, volunteers, curriculum, food, drink, fun, exercises for them to do, and worship songs to really not do childcare but to do ministry to our kids next door.

I pray that this week would be a blessing to families in our church and a blessing to our city and, maybe even especially, a blessing to parents who are trying to say, "I need some other parents." They'll meet them at Kids Week. "I want to meet my kids' friends." They'll meet them at Kids Week. "I want to do more together. I don't want to just go on vacation and watch TV together. I want to do something else." I pray that this could be a blessing to them as well. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Okay. It has been said that if you went and talked to a fish... It's a metaphor. I know fish don't talk. But if you could talk to a fish and you said to the fish, "Hey, what's

water?" the fish would be like, "I don't know what you're talking about." A fish doesn't know what water is because he or she has been in water all their life.

What water is to a fish culture is to a human. So, what I want to do for a moment is talk about the two main values of our culture, because they're invisible to us. If you'll type to Ephesians 4, Paul confronts the two values of our culture. There are many values. I'm just trying to pick up the two I think are the biggest.

All right. Do you want to know the number-one value in our culture? *Consumerism*. Consumerism says, "The more I have in my hands the happier I'll be in my heart." We live in the age of Amazon, and you can have anything you want at your door in two days if you have Prime. And let's just admit it. We all have Prime. All of us. In fact, when we order something, sometimes it'll say, "If you order in the next 7 minutes and 12 seconds, you can have this tomorrow." You're like, "Yeah. I don't want to wait two days."

How about all...? I mean, I can't even name them all...Netflix, Paramount, Peacock, HBO Max that just became Max, Amazon Prime Video. Have you ever had someone tell you, "You've got to watch this show," and then you click on it and are like, "There are seven seasons"? It's all about consuming.

I've told you before I spent 10 years on a college campus. I love college students, and I believe in the next generation, but when I think of a young college male, I normally think of this picture of somebody with their headphones on, eating Doritos while watching something on their phone. It's like, "Gross."

Here's why: your life is not meant to be about consuming, primarily. This is from the garden. It's to be about contributing, cultivating, and creating. Consuming leaves you with temporary satisfaction. Contributing, cultivating, and creating is what brings meaning, fulfillment, and purpose to your life. The first value Paul is going to confront today is consumerism, because no church can exist where there are more consumers than contributors, more takers than givers.

The second value is *individualism*. You go, "What's wrong with that?" I mean, that's actually one of the great discoveries of the Western civilization...the individual as the locus of responsibility. "We need your vote." You know, "You need to do what you need to do." We think that's great. But what has happened, for most of us, is our lives have collapsed into a small package, which is ourselves.

They say the number-one way people think about themselves, especially if they're under 40, is expressive individualism, which is, "Can I take the Enneagram? Can I figure out who I am, and then can I express that in the way I color my hair or filter my Instagram post?" My whole life is about trying to figure out who I am and then letting

everybody else know that with the clothes I wear and the car I drive and the neighborhood I live in.

Paul is going to say if we are going to be a strong church (and that's what Paul wants us to be: a strong, unified church), we have to move from consuming to contributing and from "me" to "we." Do you know they say it takes 10 years for the average married couple to move from "me" to "we"? You have to be married a decade, on average, before you start thinking more about "we" and less about "me."

Well, Paul is going to help us today. Here's what Paul is going to say. I'm going to give you the whole sermon and the whole text in a sentence, and then we're going to spend the rest of the time walking through it. Here's what Paul is going to say. If we're going to get along... That's slang for be unified.

If we're going to get along, we need to be godly, we need to be gifted, and we need to grow up. That's the whole message. I'll show you this from the text, but if we're going to get along and be unified, we need to be godly, we need to be gifted (you'll understand more what that means as we go through the text), and we need to grow up. I'll show you this.

Go with me to verse 1. Here's what Paul says: ***"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord..."*** That's the second time Paul tells us he's in prison. ***"...urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called..."*** Now, I want to stop for a second because this is really helpful, especially for parents, but for anybody. For leaders, for bosses, for friends, this is good.

I want us to see that Paul is making a massive transition. In fact, if you feel comfortable, in your Bible you can even write a line. This is the boundary marker in the book of Ephesians where everything changes. For three chapters Paul just told you *who*. That's it. I told you this week one. You don't remember. That's okay. In the first three chapters there's not one command. It's all about who we are in Christ and what we have in Christ and what Christ has done for us.

Then in chapter 4, we move into this language of *walking*. Here's what I want us to notice. This is such a key. For some of you, this is all you need. You're like, "Kyle, I've got it. I'm going to go home." This is it. This is what you need. Paul spends three chapters encouraging people and praying for them before he challenges them or asks them to do anything.

How could that transform your marriage? How could that transform your parenting? I mean, think about a dad who has a good relationship with his daughter. It's a lot of relationship. By the way, usually, the more rules in a house, the less relationship. The more laws in a house, the less love, usually.

Imagine a dad, and he has a really great relationship with his daughter. He has had a great relationship with his daughter for 15 years. He prays with her and prays for her and tells her, "Hey, I've been praying for you." Maybe the thing he says he and her mom have been praying for for 15 years is her spouse. So, when she brings home a guy Dad doesn't think is that great, she's probably going to be a lot more likely to listen.

"Don't you know I have the best in mind for you? Don't you know I love you? Haven't we prayed together, and Mom and I have been praying for 15 years for your spouse? Would you listen to me?" The answer is probably, "Yes." I had a guy in my life in my last church, and he used to do that to me. He used to walk up to me and say, "I'm praying for your marriage." I was like, "What are you praying?"

Seriously. He'd walk up to me and say, "I'm praying for your college ministry." Then sometimes he'd say, "And I've got a thought or two. I want to tell you about it." I was like, *Man, I know this guy loves me. I really believe he was praying for me.* "Yeah. While you were praying, what did you feel?"

Too many of us lead with challenge. We lead with law. We lead with rules, and we don't lean into relationship and prayer. Paul spends two chapters praying and a total of almost three chapters encouraging before he tells what to do. This is the key transition from *wealth* to *walk*. Some of you like outlines for the book of Ephesians. The best outline, I think, is *wealth, walk, warfare*.

The first three chapters are our wealth in Christ. I won't revisit all that. He's transitioning now from *wealth* to *walk*. Here's why this is important. Most Christians in America grew up in a church where this was the message they heard. Maybe it wasn't necessarily the message the pastor or the youth group or the college guy meant to send, but this is the message most people hear in church: "God is good. You're bad. Try harder. See you next week."

"God is good, but you're bad. Try harder. See you next week." Well, that's not the message of the gospel. What we're finding out here is because of our wealth in Christ, because of all that Christ did for us, we're to walk. That's just a word for living a certain way.

01 WE ARE NOT UNIFIED BECAUSE WE DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS

The first thing Paul is going to do... This week is all on unity. Next week is all on purity. Paul is going to talk about getting along. Paul is going to talk about being

unified. Here, I'll show you. Let's go to the first three verses. You have to see this for yourself. Let's go back to verse 1. We'll see it all.

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk..." Again, we're moving from wealth to walking. That word is going to come up again and again in the next couple of chapters. **"...in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called..."** So, we don't walk to *earn* God's favor; we walk because we already *have* God's favor. We live not *for* God's approval but *out of* God already approving us.

Look at this. Here's where it's not going to be that exciting for you guys and for me. He tells us what we need to do. Verse 2: **"...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love..."** Then here's the purpose. Here's where we're going to focus. **"...eager..."** Are you excited about this? Do you want to do this? **"...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."**

Paul writes to the early church, and we believe the church at its birth is the church at its best. So, this is the early church. We want to return to the book of Acts, and we want to be like the first Christians. We want to be like the pure church of early on. Do you see in verse 3 Paul says, "Hey, guys, listen. Hold on, first church. I want you guys to be unified"? Do you know what this means? They weren't unified.

Do you know (this is hard to believe, I know) that Christians used to fight? I know. It's hard to believe. Churches used to have factions and friction. See, here's what you need to do. First, if we're going to have unity, if we're going to get along, if we're going to have peace, which the Bible talks about, we have to have right expectations for our lives.

Here's the first right expectation. By the way, part of the way you grow as a leader and mature as a person is... After you have your basic skills, you have to have two things: *perspective* and *expectation*. If you can send your kids off to college and give them perspective and expectation, they're going to be so far ahead of whoever is in second place.

Part of what I'm trying to give you is... You need the right expectation for your life, and here's the right expectation. Unfortunately, fighting, friction, faction, disunity, and division are normal. It's sinful, it's wrong, it needs to be repented of, and we need to grow, but it's normal.

This is really important, because every once in a while... This happens, right? This probably has happened to most of us. You get married, and then all of a sudden you start having all of these fights. Then everyone thinks, "I married the wrong person." Then they go to counseling or talk to a friend or talk to an older couple, and the older

couple says, "Hey, let me tell you something really quick. What you're experiencing is normal," and everyone goes, "Oh, thank God."

Or you have your kids, and you love your kids, but they get on your nerves. You feel bad that you don't like your own kids sometimes. Then every mom and dad goes, "Don't tell anyone, but it's normal." We need to have the right expectations for our lives. He says, "I want you to keep unity."

See, the sad thing about churches is they're often divided. How many churches do we know like this? I'm not thinking of any one church. In how many churches is it the committee on committees versus the committee on the finances? Right? In how many churches the elder team can't get together or the board doesn't like itself or the deacons are fighting with the pastoral staff? I hate to tell you... I don't know a lot of things, but I know the church world pretty well. That's pretty normal.

My favorite professor in seminary was my counseling professor. He was a great guy and taught me so many things. He was an empty nester. Almost every weekend he'd come to us and say, "Hey, guys, listen." We'd have class on Thursday, and he'd be like, "Hey, guys, listen." It was kind of like an adventure. He said, "Guys, this week... I can't tell you what church it is. This week, I'm flying to New Jersey to meet with an elder team to help them."

He worked for a peacemaking ministry that helped churches. He'd be like, "All right, guys. Just so you know, this week I'll be heading to Nebraska. There's a small church, and there are five powerful families that are at each other's throats in the church." Unfortunately, that's very normal too. So, he and his team would fly out to try to make peace.

Let's be honest. So many families... It's easy to talk about the church, but how about you? How many families are divided and experiencing disunity? Here's the best definition for *division*. Break the word apart...*di-vision*. What is division? Two visions.

A home is divided that has two visions for how to raise the kids, two visions for how they should be educated, two visions (this is very common) for how they should be disciplined, two visions for how the finances should work, two visions (this is very common because we no longer have traditional roles, which is fine) for what the wife does and what the husband does. Then the thing couples fight about the most...two visions for how to use their time off.

What is unity? Well, unity is not uniformity. You've probably heard this before, but it's worth saying one more time before we see how we get unity. Unity is not uniformity. Uniformity happens in high control environments. Not all uniformity is bad. The military has to have uniformity.

It's like, "All right. Everybody, same haircut. Everybody, same outfit. When you start out, everybody, same status. Everybody, exact same schedule. Everybody, exact same meals." Do you know where else you find uniformity? Prison. It's like, "Okay. Everybody wear the same clothes. Everybody eat the same meal." Do you know where else you find uniformity? Cults.

The bad thing about a cult is you don't know you're in it until it's too late. You're drinking the Kool-Aid. You're like, "This isn't what I thought." In a cult, everybody believes the same thing about everything. You'll have versions of churches sometimes that are cult-like in how they feel. They're usually very small, and everybody is acting exactly like the senior pastor. They all talk the exact same way, and they believe everything about... Not the main things but everything about every secondary and tertiary issue.

So, how do we stay unified? By the way, did you notice it says "Maintain unity"? We don't *make* unity. God did that at the cross. We're to *maintain* it. It's actually actual in the spiritual world, and it should be aspirational for us. There's an objective nature to unity, but there's a subjective experience that we're often not experiencing.

02 WE ARE NOT UNIFIED BECAUSE WE ARE NOT GODLY

Okay. I need to show you this. This is the main thing. You can see it in verse 2. In verse 2, we're told how to have unity. It says, "***...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love...***" This is the part you're not going to like. The way to have unity is you need to be more godly.

Now, I know what you're thinking, and this is what I'm thinking. I would love to get up here... Some of you know me better than others. My temperament and my personality is to be unbelievably practical and want to be helpful and want to give tools and steps. That's just my personality.

So, what I want to do, but I can't from this text, is I want to get up here and go, "Guys, I've got it. I found it. It's in the Bible. I have to give you the three hacks to being unified. I found it, guys. There are these four steps that if you would do them in every marriage, your marriage would move from a 4 to an 8."

Paul doesn't tell us what we need to do; he tells us who we need to be. There's a real reason why. You'll see this anywhere now that I tell you this. Bad systems will work with godly people. Okay systems will work with godly people. Just follow the story for a second here.

I have a mentor friend. He's like Yoda. He's in his 70s. What he does right now is he travels around and helps churches do succession. This is very applicable to many of you in business too. Basically, the Baby Boomers are retiring, so there's a mass redistribution of wealth, leadership, property, and money.

What he's doing... This is really applicable to what we're talking about here. He will fly around... He already did his succession plan, so he helps other pastors. What he told me... This is fascinating. He goes, "Kyle, I've done 12 or 14 of these now." He said, "Every person has a different succession plan, and I found out which succession plans work. It's the one that has two godly people involved in it."

There's always an older senior pastor moving out and a younger senior pastor coming in. People go, "How does it have to work? Do they have to overlap? Should the senior pastor leave because he can't be there anymore because the new guy needs to be here or should the senior pastor stay and support? Should the senior pastor stay and just be quiet and be out of the way?" It doesn't matter if they're both godly. There is no system that works with ungodly people.

So, I want to free you up. Some of you are trying to figure out how to do your family. It's like, "Be godly." You're like, "Well, do we do the devotionals? Do we do the dinner? Do we do something in the morning? How do we spend our weekend?" Look. I'm all about systems and structures and all that. I'm telling you, it's not as important as being godly.

Okay. Here are the four things. What he's telling us is the reason your marriage... This is not what you want to hear, but it's what you need to hear. The reason your marriage is having division is because you're not godly. I know you'd like to think it's your spouse, and maybe she's not godly either, but let her worry about that, or let him worry about that.

This is actually a very interesting thing. The reason we want to blame other people (this is just helpful to know) is if I can blame my wife, then *she* needs to change. It's like, "What a relief. I don't need to change." But if I'm the one who's the problem, then *I'm* the one who needs to change. So, let me give you the four.

First, *humility*. You knew I was going to talk about it. This is actually the word *lowly*. This is an interesting word, because back in that culture... Paul is the first person we know of to use this word positively. The average Greek guy or gal didn't think being lowly was a good attribute. They used it for the weak and naïve.

Let's be honest. Why is there so much conflict? It's normally because of pride and because somebody wants to be right. I recently heard a definition of *pride* and thought, "That's really interesting." Someone said a prideful person is someone who

has not met God yet. If you stand and stare at the cross and you see what your sin did to your Savior and you realize the ground is level at the cross, it humbles you.

Here's what humble people do. Humble people can handle not getting their way all the time. It has been said that you don't really get to know somebody until you tell them "No." Have you ever done that? You have a friendship or someone works for you or...who knows. You tell someone, "No," and it's like... It's almost like, "There you are. I never met you before. I met a persona of what you're like when everything is going well, but as soon as you didn't get your way and I told you 'No,' there you are."

The question you're going to have to ask in relationships is "Do I want to be right or do I want to be forgiven? Do I want to be right or do I want to seek to understand and be understood? Do I want to be right or do I want to try to find a third way?" Let's be honest. Sometimes we just want to be right.

Secondly, *gentleness*. Gentleness is not weakness. Gentleness is also talked about as meekness. It's strength under control. Gentleness tells us to avoid two things that ruin relationships. The first is being domineering and the second is being nice. Gentleness (I'll explain this in a minute) is not being nice. Gentleness is all about... It's strength under control.

Gentleness is often knowing timing, tone, and tact. I know that when I'm going to talk to somebody... Every husband knows there are certain times that are better to talk to his wife about something than others. It's like, "Okay. I just came home and the kids are crazy. This might not be the right time to ask this question."

We know timing is important. Tone is important. Here's what I mean by *tone*. You have to get to the place... I don't know how this works. I don't know if it's spiritual or if it's psychological. Unless people are naïve, they can tell if you have an agenda. I mean, I've had... I'm not saying I've had to confront any more people than you've had to confront, but I've had to confront and challenge a lot of people in my life.

I don't like doing it. I don't have the natural personality to do it. So, what I have to normally do is I have to talk myself into it. I have to say, "I want the best for this person. I don't think I'm better than them. I'm not patronizing them." By the way, here's how you know you're ready to talk to somebody: you're not looking forward to it. If you're like, "I can't wait to tell her," calm down. You are not ready. Some wives... "When he gets home, I'm going to just give it to him."

There's timing, there's tone, and there's tact. I was really telling you more about tact than timing. Tact is more how you go about doing it. Often, it's helpful to ask a question. My favorite question to ask when trying to have peace with somebody is

"Help me understand." But I have to really want to understand. This can't be, "Help me understand, but that's a clever way for me to catch you."

It's "Help me understand why you've been late to every Community Group over the last six months. I really want to understand. I know life is hard, and I know life is busy. I'm not trying to embarrass you. I pulled you aside to ask you this privately." But gentleness is also not being nice. That's the other extreme. We know gentleness isn't being domineering, but gentleness is not being nice.

I've read the whole Bible. The word *nice* is not in it. *Nice* means to smile and not have a spine. *Nice* means to be passive and weak. The Bible gives us words like *gentle* and *kind*. Here's how you know you are having a wrong understanding of gentleness. This often happens a lot with women. They're like, "I don't want to say anything."

Well, if you're becoming resentful and bitter, and you're starting to have a fantasy life of exactly what you would say, and you're starting to have this fantasy life where you have these arguments and you win, you realize, "There's something I haven't said that I need to say." What I have seen is in a lot of marriages, one of the spouses... Normally, the husband is more domineering and the wife has a wrong idea of what gentleness is, so she's quiet and puts up with a lot, is passive-aggressive, and is resentful.

We have to be humble. We have to be gentle. We have to be *patient*. What is that about? Some of you go, "I can't wait to have patience." (Some of you will get that on the way home.) Patience basically says, "Every good thing in life takes time." You have to really believe that. With all of these you have to go, "God was this with me." "Jesus is gentle and lowly with me. That's how my Savior is."

You have to go, "Wait a second. God was so patient with me." When you look back on your life... I think most of us can do this. We can look back on our life and go, "I cannot believe that for years and years I struggled with that besetting sin. In fact, I can't believe I still struggle with it. In fact, I can't believe that all I've done is trade bigger sins for littler sins that are easier to hide."

If you ever try to make genuine progress in your own life, it will lead you to being patient with other people. If you ever try to lose 10 or 15 pounds, you will be patient with every person trying to lose weight. If you've ever had a season, whether it was a few weeks, a few months, or a few years, where your marriage was a 4 out of 10 and you were trying but it wasn't working, you'll be very patient with people.

By the way, this is advice I got from a pastor years ago: you will never regret going too slowly with someone. To clarify that, unless somebody is in danger, obviously.

But when you're dealing with somebody, you'll never regret taking your time and going slowly, because all good things in life take time.

So, we have to be humble, we have to be gentle, and we have to be patient. These are not the virtues we normally think of. These are the softer virtues of the Christian life. And we have to *bear with one another*. That's different than bearing each other's burdens. That's also a biblical command. That's one of the "one anothers." Like, I bear your burdens and you bear my burdens.

This says we actually have to bear with one another. Here's what this means: I have to put up with you, and you have to put up with me. I don't know who has the harder job. Bearing with one another is an interesting idea, because we're never told to bear with sin. Here's what you do. This is a helpful principle. This, I think, really does work in marriages, but it will lead to a lot of conversations.

In marriages, you're supposed to forgive sin and forbear strangeness. I'm a fairly strange person. I really am. My wife (pray for her) has had to put up with all of my strangeness for 13 years. Most recently (I mean, I've struggled with this for years), I talk super loudly all the time everywhere. My wife will look at me and go, "What would be the nicest way to tell you you're yelling right now?"

Now, if I were trying to yell and be loud to annoy her, and I was just trying to be rude and arrogant, that would be a sin. If it's something I'm not aware I'm doing...it's not against the Scriptures, but it's just annoying and awkward... Here's the problem in marriage. Sometimes you wrestle because you don't know, "Is this sin or is this strangeness? Is this something that needs to be forgiven or something we need to forbear?" Here's what he's saying, guys. The reason we're not as united and unified is, first and foremost, because we're not godly.

03 WE ARE NOT UNIFIED BECAUSE WE DON'T APPRECIATE HOW PEOPLE ARE ORIENTED IN THE WORLD

The second is we're not gifted. We're not embracing the gifts God has given us. Let's look at this really quickly. Verse 4: ***"There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."***

He's basically saying, "Guys, God is unified. It's time to get unified. It's time to start thinking about the oneness of God and how God is three persons. Different roles, different responsibilities, but they're united in their mission." Look at verse 7. ***"But grace was given to each one of us..."*** This is really interesting.

He says, "Hey, guys, this is what happened to all of us...one hope, one faith, one Lord, one baptism." Then he goes, "Hold on, hold on. But let's stop talking about all of us for a second. To each one of us was given grace." Okay. What kind of grace? Look.

"...according to the measure of Christ's gift." So, the grace of God comes to us, and it comes to us personally. Okay. What kind of grace?

Verse 8: **"Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.'"** He's quoting Psalm 68. **"(In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)"**

Now that's a confusing passage. You might go, "What does it mean?" We have 2,000 years of Christians talking about this. It means one of three things. Really quickly, the descending and ascending either means his incarnation, when God became a man and then went back up to heaven. That's one idea.

The other idea is that somehow, after the cross, he went to hell and then went to heaven. The other idea is that somehow at Pentecost (this is more metaphorically speaking), he came down and gave gifts at Pentecost and then went back up to heaven through the Holy Spirit.

It doesn't matter which one of those three it is because the same principle is true. Here's what he's saying. He's using this Roman warfare analogy that's out of Psalm 68. Back then, a king would go to an area, and he would take over. He'd go to war against a village or a nation or a town or a city, and that town or city often had captives. Today we would call them *prisoners of warfare*.

He would go and rescue the town, and he would free the captives, and then he would give the gifts, the spoils from that war, back to the captives. What he's basically saying is... Here's the big idea: Christ set you free, and when he set you free, he gave you gifts.

Now, is it spiritual gifts? Yes. Okay. By the way, there are five spiritual gift lists in the New Testament. They're all different. None of them are extensive. None of them are exhaustive. We all get a different gift set. But this is what I want you to look at. This is where we're going to spend the rest of our time.

Look at the gifts he says. Here are the gifts. You have to read the Bible in order. Okay. He gives gifts. Well, what are the gifts? Here they are. **"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers..."** This is what we're going to talk about for the rest of the time, and I'm really excited.

This is what is referred to as *APEST*. "Kyle, how did you get that?" It's just *apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher...APEST*. How do we think about how the local church should function? There are many different models people will give, and these are biblical. People say, "Well, there are elders, and there are deacons, and then there are the members of the church." Great.

I want to talk for a while, for the rest of the time we have today, about this idea of *APEST*, because I think the church will only be unified, will only get along and grow up, if this fivefold ministry is functioning in the church. Now look. When you read "*APEST*," you tend to think offices, and that's fine. We'll talk about that for a minute.

You think, "Weren't these biblical offices? The 'apostle Paul.'" Yes, but the word *apostle* means one who's sent. Yes, there were twelve unique apostles. That was an office. "What about prophets? Isn't that an office?" Yes. Moses was a prophet. Elijah and Elisha were prophets. Daniel writes his prophecy. The New Testament starts out with a great prophet, John the Baptist.

You might say, "Isn't an evangelist an office? Isn't that a certain..." Yeah, there was Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, and he was kind of this evangelist. "Is shepherd an office?" You know, you can go through this. I would say it's an office in the Old Testament and the New Testament, but today, what he's saying is these are types of people God gives to churches.

In the Old Testament and New Testament they are offices. Today they're orientations. I know I'm taking a word the culture uses to talk about sexuality. What I mean by that is it's a way you see and understand the world. I want each of us to hear this. I'm talking to all of you. I need you to find out, hopefully right now as I'm speaking, which one of these you are. Sometimes you're a little bit of a mixture.

How can you use your gift orientation to serve the church, serve the city, and serve your family? What has happened in most churches is what they call the *exile of the APE*. There are no apostles, there are no prophets, and there are no evangelists. The church is "*ST*." That's hard to say. Therefore, it's stuck.

Think about it. I'm not picking on churches. I love churches. I think it takes all types of churches to reach all types of people. But why is the average church in America...? They're almost all the exact same. Why? Because they're led by very nice shepherd teachers. I want to talk to you about each of these.

First, the *apostle*. I want to give you a thought for each of these. The apostle is the pioneer. Some of you are pioneers. You start businesses. You can start things. The apostle basically takes the church to new places to reach new people to embrace new

ideas. Apostles are very hard to keep in your church. They're a little grumpy, and they're always like, "Why aren't we going there?"

They're always like, "Guys, what are we doing?" They always want the bigger mission budget. "We're only giving 11 percent away to missions? We should be giving 25 percent away. Guys, I know we went to Mumbai and London. It's not enough. There are more lost people. Do you know how many people don't have a Bible and no believer in their own language?"

Here's what the apostle always thinks about. The apostle thinks about tomorrow. That's it. "What's next? What's new? Where are we going?" I have met guys like this. I've met pastors like this who function in the apostle gifts. I know a guy. He plants a church, it gets to a couple hundred people, and he goes, "I'm bored. Can we get a shepherd teacher to lead this thing? I've got to go." I'm serious.

The apostle focuses on tomorrow. Without the apostle, the church is stuck and stagnant. You can thank the Lord because... I have a little bit of apostle in me, but Dave, one of our pastors, is an apostle. You can call him "Apostle Dave" from now on if you want to.

I mean, we're getting into this building, and do you know what we're thinking already? "What's next?" William Wilberforce, who abolished slavery... Do you know what he said the night he abolished slavery? It took him decades. The night it was announced, he looked at his best friend and said, "What are we going to abolish next?" That's the apostle.

Next we need the *prophet*. Thank God for the prophet. If the apostle thinks about tomorrow, the prophet thinks about today. The prophet forthtells and foretells. Nowadays it's forthtelling. In the Old Testament and New Testament it was foretelling. "Hey, this is what's going to happen."

We need the prophet, first of all, because the prophet is that which confronts the church and the culture. Man, do we need that. The prophet is the one who gets up and goes, "Guys, what the heck are they doing with Pride Month? Jesus gets a day at Christmas and Pride gets a month? What did we do? We took one of the seven deadly sins and celebrated it. What's going on?"

They come to the church and say, "What are you doing with this casual stuff you guys are doing? Life is not about the academics and activities of your kids. Come on." The prophet also... Hear me, because I have some of this in me. The prophet is also, sometimes in the Old Testament, the only person who is hopeful. During COVID, they were like, "Stop it. Stop whining about everything. Stop being so isolated. Stop

thinking the world has ended. We're going to get through this." That's what the prophet did during COVID.

The prophet thinks about today. The prophet analyzes Scripture and culture and says, "What's going on?" The prophet challenges the apostle. The apostle says, "We've got to go to this new place," and the prophet says, "Are you sure it's where God wants us to go?" Without the prophet, the church becomes carnal and has nothing to say to the culture.

Then you have to have the *evangelist*. The evangelist is the recruiter. Some of you are the recruiter. The evangelist feels more comfortable with non-Christians than he or she does with Christians. They're always inviting people. Here's how you think about it. If the apostle thinks about tomorrow and the prophet thinks about today, guess what the evangelist thinks about: forever.

You meet these evangelists. They're like, "Heaven and hell are right there, and anyone could die at any moment." If the apostle says, "We've got to go to new places," and then the prophet says, "Is that where God wants us to go?" the evangelist goes, "Are we actually going to reach new people?"

The evangelist comes to a church and goes, "I don't care how big your church is. I don't care how fast growing it is. Is it growing by transfer growth? Are people transferring from other cities? Are people transferring from other churches? Or are people transferring from the kingdom of darkness?"

Without the evangelist we have no baptisms. Guys, American evangelicalism struggles to reach anybody who doesn't have their last name. We're doing an okay job, as American evangelicals, trying to reach our kids. We are doing a horrible job at reaching anyone who does not have our last name.

Shepherds. The shepherd is the defender and the caregiver. Like I told you, if the apostle is looking at tomorrow and the prophet is looking at today and the evangelist is looking at forever, do you know what the shepherd looks at? The past. We have a lot of shepherds on our staff. A lot of our elders... That would be their gift orientation.

The shepherd always wants to talk to you about your past. So, you come in and they say, "Tell me, man. How long have you been struggling with that? Does this go back to your parents?" You know, "You don't like your job? How long have you not liked your job? Tell me the story. Tell me about your kids. What's going on with them? How long has this been going on?" They're shepherding.

Here's why this is so important. If you just have the apostle and the prophet and the evangelist, you feel like you're in the military. We need those voices. They're like,

"Dude, why aren't you going somewhere else and doing something else?" It's like, "I'm trying." And the prophet is confronting you. "Dude, you're weak and passive. Step up." It's like, "I'm trying." The evangelist is like, "Dude, could you share the gospel with, like, one person this year?"

We all need the shepherd. The shepherd kind of comes to us. We have a couple of these on our staff. Pastor Jordan (we just hired him) is our pastor of care. He's the guy who comes around and goes, "Guys, there are 10 marriages in our church that are not doing well. Like, not, not doing well."

Yeah, we need to plant more churches. Yeah, we need to go, but, guys, we've got to put together a system to care for the health and the people God is already bringing around. We need to take care of the fruit God is giving us." And we say, "Thank you. Good reminder."

Then there's the *teacher*. If the apostle looks at tomorrow and the prophet looks at today and the evangelist looks at forever and the shepherd looks at the past, the teacher just looks at the Bible. The teacher just looks at redemptive history...that's what we call it...from Genesis to Revelation. The teacher says, "Guys, we've got to talk about these things." The teacher says, "I want to systematically walk you through the Bible, and I want to take complex things and make them simple." Without the teacher, the church is shallow.

So, I need you to think about who you are. You might have multiple of those. The church is weaker if all of those aren't present. I will tell you the healthiest Community Group is probably going to be a Community Group where those five things are present. Sometimes that's why it takes 15 or 20 people in a group for it to really...

It's like, "Okay. We need the apostle who's going to ask us where we're going next, and we need the shepherd because our lives are going to fall apart, and we need the teacher because we want to know the Bible better, and we need the evangelist so we can reach somebody for Jesus this year, and we need the prophet because I'm often willing to compromise, and we need that one guy or gal in the group who's going to call us out on that. Even though we hate it sometimes, we need all that."

04 WE ARE NOT UNIFIED BECAUSE WE HAVEN'T GROWN UP

Here's why. Look at what happens. If you have this, this is what you get. Here's what Paul is telling us. I told you this is the main message. If you will be godly, and if you will be gifted... And the gifts are exactly what they are. They're gifts. If you will

embrace your gifts and you will be godly, guess what happens: everybody gets to grow up.

That's what he says. I don't know how else to explain this passage. Look at verse 12. **"...to equip the saints..."** That means to fix what is broken. It's powerful. It means to put back in place that which is out of joint, which is most of our lives. It takes all five of these types of people to put it back in place.

"...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith..." There's unity again. **"...and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ..."** Here's what he's saying. When all of these gifts are functioning, we will grow up. Do you know we need to grow up?

We live in a culture right now where there is a real lack of grown-ups. Do you know the number-one word that was created in 2016 was the word *adulting*? It was usually by these young people in their 20s and 30s, and it went viral through hashtag tweets. It would be something like this: "Paid my first mortgage payment. #adulting." "Did laundry on a Saturday. #adulting."

It's funny, but it's like, "Oh, 'adulting' is a persona you put on for a few minutes to do something before you take it off to go be consumeristic and selfish again." Here's what growing up means. When you grow up, there's a transition from toys to tools. This is what growing up is. You'll meet a 40-year-old guy who's still a boy, and his whole life is about toys, not tools.

You know you grow up when you go from "me" to "we." You know you grow up when you go from rights to responsibilities. You know you grow up when you go from "now" to "later." The definition of a 2-year-old is about themselves, everything they want is now, and all they want is toys. That's great if you're 2, but not if you're 22.

He's saying we have to grow up, and we need this. Look at the final word he says. Here's how we grow up. One last time he says it. Verse 15: **"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow..."** Then it kind of takes over. **"...so that it builds itself up in love."**

Here's the final thing: you have to be able to speak the truth in love. I don't have time to get into this, but it's okay because he expands on this, and I'm going to talk next week about the power of words and all this. Here's what I want you to know: we need the full *APEST* talking to the full *APEST*. In other words, here's what happens.

Say a marriage is falling apart. Every once in a while it needs the apostle. It needs the apostle to come over and go, "Dude, your marriage cannot stay in the same place." Then it also needs the shepherd. "Let's meet. Can you meet for the next six weeks? I'd love to have you over. My wife and I have had the same problem. Get over to our house, and we're going to do this." It needs the teacher. "Hey, hold on, man. Maybe there are five things from the Bible about marriage you don't know."

See, when you're in trouble, you need to talk to somebody different than you. If you're an apostle, you don't need to go to some other apostle. Like, "Yeah, just keep working harder." A lot of times, you need to go over to the shepherd. "Dude, calm down. You're going new places, but your family needs you." Then there's a whole other type of person. It's like, "Dude, you're lazy, and this whole work-life balance for you is a joke. It's a lot of life and not a lot of work."

We need the whole APEST, and here's why: because when we're all functioning... If you'll embrace it, your *A*, your *P*, your *E*, your *S*, your *T*... When the church is acting like that, we can more clearly see Christ, because he, more than anybody else, embodied all five of those.

He was the great apostle. He was the apostle who looked at his Father and the Holy Spirit and said, "Guys, I'll be back. I have to go. I have to go to a new place, and I have to reach some new people." He was the prophet who came down and said, "I'm not just going to give you the Word of God; I'm going to *be* the Word of God. You've heard that it was said, but I say to you..." He explained and expounded the whole Old Testament and showed us how it pointed to himself.

He's the great evangelist who says early on, "Come and see." He's the evangelist who, when he's busy and tired, finds time to do evangelism to a woman at the well. He's the great shepherd, the good shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep, and he's the great teacher that, to this day, the most famous message and sermon ever preached is still his Sermon on the Mount.

So, guys, I want to take a moment. Bow your heads and close your eyes with me for just a second. I want to give us a chance to ask...*Where do you have to be more godly?* He says, "Speak the truth in love." Do you know who you need to have a hard conversation with? Yourself. Not your spouse, not your kids...yourself. You need to have an honest, hard conversation with yourself. Could you grow in one of those areas?

Could you say, "Jesus, help me see that you're humble so I'll be humble. Help me see you're gentle so I'll be gentle"? If we're going to get along and grow up, we need to be godly and gifted. Would you embrace your gifts? We need you to use your gifts. Would you say, "Lord, will you show me? Use my spouse. Use my kids. Use my friends.

Use my Community Group. Show me what my gifts are." It's going to take the diversity of gifts for the maturity of the church.

Lord, would you let our church be a church that is not a high-control environment (that's uniformity) but is an environment of grace and peace and Spirit-led unity in the midst of diversity where different types of people and gift sets are unleashed to reach and disciple more people and to grow the church. That's the great vision. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.