



Ephesians 4:11-16
This Is Us

Rev. Brian North
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“Your Leadership Acceleration”

Pray. Today we wrap up the series we’ve been in for the past three weeks, looking at the four stated values of our denomination. Next week we begin a new series that will take us up to Advent. We’ll be in the first few chapters of Genesis, in a series titled “Everything Starts Here.” It’s been a decade since we spent time in those foundational chapters of the Bible, and they will lay good groundwork for Advent to take root in us in new ways and bear good fruit. So, it all connects together, and Genesis starts next week.

But today we come to the last of the four stated values of our denomination, and of our church. We are part of a denomination called A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, or ECO for short. Each of those words is intentional and meaningful, reflecting our Gospel-centered theology, our mission, and how we’re organized. The four values are: **The Complete Local** (acknowledging each church’s unique context), **A Livable Theology** (theology isn’t just for our brains, it’s meant to shape our living), **Our Mutual Spurring** (how we encourage and lovingly correct one another in following Jesus), and the fourth and final one, which we get to today: **Your Leadership Acceleration**.

Here’s how ECO explains **Your Leadership Acceleration**: “**The strength of our influence is how we together create vibrant systems for leader multiplication.**” This is demonstrated by:

- **Our competency-based approach that unleashes the potential of all God’s people.** (The “competency-based approach” is particularly focused on making sure pastoral leadership is solid, leading God’s people well.)
- **Our thoughtful attention to help women and men lead and thrive in all phases of life and ministry.**
- **Our intentional focus to equip congregations to deploy laity in exponential ways.**

There is a lot there, and to my ears it doesn't sound very churchy at first. It almost feels like something from a leadership seminar in the secular world. But read carefully: it's meant for "all God's people," to help them "thrive in all phases of life and ministry," and to "equip congregations." You won't find that on the mission and vision page of Amazon, Boeing, or the Lake Washington School District. We still might wonder, "Biblically speaking, where does this come from?" Anyone with me?

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul writes about all that God has done: chosen us, redeemed us, loved us, saved us, adopted us, called us, and more. **The chapters are filled with verbs about what God has done to bring people into relationship with him.** We often speak of our gratitude for what God has done for us, and we sing songs in that theme...but too often we focus on material blessings, much of which is the fruit of our own verbs: working, computing, teaching, serving, thinking, caring, loving, and so on. Non-Christians and atheists have a lot of those "blessings" in their lives, too.

Now, God does have a hand in all of that, and God put Adam in the garden and told him to work, so we do the same: It's not that we can't or shouldn't do stuff. But there are things we can't do that God has done that we are grateful for. For instance, we can't reveal God to ourselves. We can't redeem ourselves. We can't save ourselves. We can't adopt ourselves into God's family. We can't call ourselves into service in the church. We can't even get to church on Sundays on time! But God does do all those things, and he's done them for us! And I know we're Presbyterians, but someone ought to say, "Praise God!" So, the bulk of Ephesians 1 through 3 is about all that God has done for us that we could never do ourselves.

Then we come to chapter 4, where Paul begins to apply everything he has written. It's the same pattern as Romans, with the big transition from chapter 11 into chapter 12 that we looked at last week. And again, the hinge is a little word: "therefore." In Greek it's the very same word, *oun*, in Romans 12:1 and Ephesians 4:1, though the NIV translates it "therefore" in one and "then" in the other. So Paul writes, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." And now he's going to tell us

how to live in light of being a follower of Jesus. So, let's read **Ephesians 4:7 to 16**.

In verses 7 and 8, Paul says that “to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.” Notice the words “each one.” Not some of us. Not just the ordained. Each of us, women and men, young and old, longtime followers and newcomers, has received a measure of God's grace that shows up differently in each follower of Jesus. Together, all these gifts give us a depth and breadth of ministry talent and experience that is huge.

Verses 9 and 10 are an aside. Some translations even put them in parentheses. But look at the scope of what he writes. **First, Jesus “descended.”** Most likely, Paul is talking about the incarnation, which we celebrate at Christmas: Jesus isn't just another human like you and me. He comes from outside this world, God revealing himself to us. **Second, he “ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.”** The whole universe is under his dominion! All things, both seen and unseen, are under his authority. I don't care how “big” you think Jesus is, how much power or knowledge or authority you think he has. Whatever we *think* he has is not enough. This is beyond our ability to comprehend.

And in verse 11, we read that Jesus gave some people to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. If Paul stopped there, we would assume those are the people with the gifts, that they are called to do all the things in the church, and everyone else just rides their coattails and gets blessed by their ministry.

But he keeps going. **These leaders are given “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (verse 12).** Just to clarify: “The body of Christ” doesn't mean Jesus' physical body. It's a metaphor for the Church. So, what we see here is that the people in these roles serve by equipping the people to also be leaders by serving so that the church is built up. Serving and leading, essentially, are synonymous.

The whole point is that Christians would become mature, that we would “attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (verse 13). Jesus is the standard we measure ourselves against. Your maturity of faith isn’t measured against your pastor, your parents, your siblings, or your neighbors. It’s between you and Jesus, and he sets the standard. But notice Paul says at the start of 13 that we do this together: “until we all reach unity in the faith.” We’re in this together.

So what does this look like? There are a number of ways we do this, but: **For instance, take sermons, the place of equipping we all share every Sunday.** Sermons are not entertainment. I do hope they’re not boring, of course. One of Young Life’s mottos is, “It’s a sin to bore a kid with the gospel,” and I cling to that in my approach to preaching, even if I’ve not always lived up to the standard. With the middle and high school students now staying in the sanctuary, the pressure is on, because I’ve gotten wind that some of them think the sermons are boring. I take that as constructive feedback and a bit of a challenge, as will all of us who preach. But let’s do remember that a sermon isn’t just for entertainment, and it’s not just head knowledge. It is meant to equip God’s people for works of service, and also to bring God glory (which happens, hopefully, in the moment of preaching, but also in the fruit of the preaching as we all live out our faith each day). As the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, the chief end of humanity is to glorify God and enjoy God forever. I want preaching to spur us on in that.

When we are maturing like that, Paul writes, we will no longer be infants, “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching” (verse 14). There are a lot of seductive messages out there, both outside the church and inside it. Money, power, and influence are a common thread. Some leaders feed on people’s fears and drive them toward a belief and a set of values with promises of financial prosperity, influence, pleasure, or power. I’m amazed at how many people inside the church get pulled into values that don’t make them more like Jesus but shapes them increasingly into the image of the world’s values.

But Jesus is the one who has all the power and authority to shape us as God intended when he created us in his image. Paul just covered that in verses 9 and 10 in case we forgot. We are here to serve, so that the church would mature, be built up, and point people to him, because Jesus is the head. From him, Paul writes, the whole body is “joined and held together,” and “each part does its work” (verse 16). **Every part is important, and every part is equipped to serve and work together for the cause and mission of Jesus.**

So, this is where our value about your leadership acceleration comes from. It’s really about discipling people, with an end goal of service. ECO and our church exist to shape and equip people to be part of the body of Christ as Paul describes it: using their gifts to bless the church. That includes ministry to people outside the church, because we want to lead them to Jesus and into his body, the church.

This is what we want to train and equip you to do, and it’s a significant reason our denomination exists. It’s why I became a pastor. I want people to grow in faith and understanding of Jesus and be equipped to serve the body of Christ and the community around them, to mature/build up the church, all to the glory of God. I’m very grateful that I get to pastor this church, and I want Rose Hill to be all it can be. I want each of you to be all that God is calling you to be. We have been entrusted with the good news of Jesus, and I want more people to come to faith, and mature in the faith and be equipped to serve in the church.

And if you’re thinking, “I’m not sure I have anything to offer,” then we need to go back and read the passage more carefully. The gifts were apportioned by Jesus to each of us. You don’t have to manifest your gifts; you receive them. And the growth comes “from him.” Jesus does not send us out alone. He promises to be with us.

So how are we each doing this? How are we each serving so that the body of Christ is built up? Or are there competing values from an identity outside of Jesus, that are getting in the way? If your service is nonexistent or pretty minimal, I’d encourage you to pray about the message in these verses. Look at

how Jesus called, equipped, and sent the twelve disciples, and a larger group of followers as well, out into the world.

After his resurrection, he commissioned them to go and do ministry in his name, promising to be with them as they did. Are we living into that? And I know some of you serve several hours a week in the church. A number of you serve in 4 or 5 different roles on a monthly or even weekly basis. Thank you for serving. You help us to flourish as a church.

Here at Rose Hill, the pathway of growing disciples that we have laid out is connected to our vision of leading people toward Jesus where we live, work, and play. That language has a second meaning for how we make disciples here, not just where we do it. **“Live” is our worshipping life together.** Sunday morning is the foundational starting place for our relationships as we follow Jesus together. **“Work” is our spiritual growth ministries.** Things like microgroups, discipleship classes, and small groups. Along with Sunday mornings, that’s where much of our livable theology is formed. And: **“Play” is all the places where we serve.** In ministries within the church, in ministries out in the community, or in opportunities to serve that you come across on your own that are Jesus-centered and build up the church.

Maybe you’ve only matured in your faith to the point where you’re in the “live” stage. That’s a great start. No judgement here. The next step for you is spiritual growth, or “work” that leads to service. But maybe you’re on the path going in circles in that “work” stage, going to bible study after bible study, collecting head knowledge, but never maturing to a point of serving, or of very little service, and you’re not growing. It’s an easy place for Christians to get stuck in their development as a disciple of Jesus.

A mature Christian, as Paul writes about here, is one who serves. It’s what a Christian does, and it becomes a lifestyle and a joy to do. That’s why we associate it with “play” in our discipleship pathway. It’s not an obligation or a box to check by volunteering for some ministry event. The word “volunteer” never appears in Scripture. God calls and equips us to serve—and it’s a mindset, a lifestyle, a place of mature discipleship with our identity rooted in

Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve. With him as our model, we do the same, and that simply becomes part of who we are.

All of this is how we live into this value of developing leaders so that the body of Christ is built up, because leaders serve. **“Your Leadership Acceleration” is about discipling each of us to be a servant, to build up the church, so we live out these verses and so many others like them. When we do that together, we mature in faith, build up the church through service and together grow into him who is the head, Jesus Christ.** God has done what we could never do. We have to start there and recognize that. Our response then is one of gratitude in worship that leads to a growing faith that matures into service as God calls and equips us to join in the mission of leading people toward Jesus. Let’s pray...Amen.