



Discipleship Values



Last year, as we studied 1 Corinthians, we briefly looked at the topic of spiritual gifts. This week, we revisit this topic as part of looking at 'Discipleship Values'. The church is made up of different people and it is God's plan for there to be unity in that diversity. At the same time, the Spirit has equipped us with diverse gifts, to both build up the body of Christ and for the church to reflect the Kingdom of God in our world.

ICEBREAKER: The church is made of lots of different types of people, with different personalities and backgrounds. e.g. There are peacemakers and trouble-makers, gate-keepers and disrupters/ visionaries, truth-speakers and diplomats, people-carers and idea-thinkers, disciplers and evangelists.

- Do you fit into any of these descriptions? If not, how would you describe yourself? Why is there a potential for conflict when different types of people are actively involved in a church?

READ: EPHESIANS 4:11-16

Many of us are oblivious to the tendons and ligaments in our bodies until we experience an injury. When we try to attempt basic tasks like walking, we may experience excruciating pain. We then realise the importance of ligaments in holding our body together, making it possible for different parts of our bodies to work together.

In Eph 4:16, we read: From him (ie Christ), the whole body (of Christ, ie the church), is joined (together) and held (or knit) together by every supporting ligament (with the result that the body of Christ) grows and builds itself up in love, (inasmuch) as each part does its work.

In Ps 139:13-14, the Psalmist described God's workmanship in making us, in terms of 'knitting' us together in our mother's womb. Our bodies are wonderfully complex – but are designed to function in the way God both planned and intended. In the same way, the church – as the body of Christ – is also "his workmanship" which is created for good works which God intended us to do. (Eph 2:10) We do those good works in the context of being "joined together" and "held together", growing and building each other up in love. (4:16)

- To what extent is 'Christian unity' a gracious gift of God and to what extent is it a discipline that we exercise?

In 1 Cor 12, Paul used the imagery of a physical body, to illustrate the inter-dependence and contribution of each person in the church – regardless of whether that contribution is visible and praiseworthy, or hidden and unsightly. In Eph 4, Paul again used this imagery, but with a different emphasis. He highlighted that we each have a role to play in promoting unity, fostering a sense of togetherness and community, demonstrating love, promoting growth and generally 'building up' and encouraging each other.

- How would you rate your commitment to the body of Christ, especially at SBC, including active involvement in things like hospitality, discipling younger believers and seekers, encouraging others in their walk with God, etc? What things make it hard for you to be actively involved, either in formal ministries or by, informally, developing friendships with others?

1.....3.....5
 Not really a priority/ Occasionally make time for others Intentionally set aside
 I'm too busy when I get a chance time to encourage others

There are three key passages in the New Testament that list various spiritual gifts: Rom 12:6-8, 1 Cor 12:8-10,28 and Eph 4:11.

Read 1 Cor 12:3-11. In 1 Cor 12, we read that the Spirit has given different people different gifts, so we each have different ways of working and serving God. Some of these gifts are pretty ordinary and some are more miraculous. Later in the chapter, Paul uses the 'body' analogy, to teach that we need to work together like a healthy body. We all have different parts to play, so we need to honour each other.

- In 1 Cor 12:7, what do we learn about the gifts? And what do we learn about is supposed to be achieved by their use?

- What five gifts are listed in Eph 4:11? Reading back over today's passage, make a list of all the intended outcomes, when people use their gifts in a way that honours God?

In his commentary on Ephesians, Foulkes makes the following comments on Eph 4:11:

"Paul goes on to speak of the specific gifts that (God) has given. The *gifts* are the people. All, in their particular ministries, are God's gift to the church. ... The church may appoint people to different work and functions, but unless they have the gifts of the Spirit, and therefore are themselves the gifts of Christ to his church, their appointment is valueless. The expression also 'serves well to remind ministers that the gifts of the Spirit are not for the enrichment of oneself but for the enrichment of the Church' (Allan)."¹

- Some people are born teachers. Others are just naturally more caring and empathetic towards others. What is the difference between 'innate' and/ or learned skills versus 'spiritual' or spirit-endowed gifts?

Over the last 20 years, different writers such as Alan Hirsch and Mike Frost have challenged the church to consider Eph 4:11 as a model of church leadership. The 'APEST' leadership model incorporates people with the five gifts mentioned in this verse: apostles (A), prophets (P), evangelists (E), shepherds/ pastors (S) and teachers (T). Traditionally, the model of leadership in Protestant churches has either been based on a bishop-priest-deacon model or a person holding a pastor-teacher role or, in Reformed churches, a person in a teacher-elder role. The role of pastor/ teacher though is primarily for the nurture and care of those **within the church**. However, all of us are also called **to go 'out' into all the world**. The church also needs to have a prophetic voice, both to itself and to the world.

Alan Hirsch explains this model:

"Because each function/ calling contributes something to the Body that the others do not, they mutually enrich each other. They are not to be sundered apart, as we have tended to do in church history. In other words,

- the church *always* needs to experience itself as *sent* (A), the prime agent to God's ongoing mission in the world.
- The church should always attend to God and his concerns (P),
- The church should always share the story and invite people into living relationship (E),
- The church should always maintain and develop healthy community (S),
- The church should always be rich in knowledge, wisdom, and understanding (T).

All are needed in every time and in every place."²

- What do you think of this model? And what do you think of Hirsch's explanation of the role of people with these gifts? Are these five particular gifts just intended for people in leadership roles or can anyone in our church use these gifts? Think of some examples of people you know, who use these gifts in our church.
- How do each of these five gifts contribute to:
 - The IN aspect: community life in the church
 - The OUT aspect: reaching out towards the community, and
 - The UP aspect: developing our relationship with God

REFLECT, SHARE AND PRAY FOR EACH OTHER (including some homework ☺):

- Write down the names of people in your group. Over the next week, prayerfully consider what gifts you see in yourself and in each person in your group. Don't discuss it with others or do this exercise rashly. Each day, pray for each person on your list, to be faithful and diligent in using their gifts. In coming weeks, spend some time working around the group and share your answers.
- Pray for each other, that God will help you not only discover your spiritual gifts, but also help you to find a way to diligently use them, both in our church and for the benefit of the wider church.

¹ Foulkes, F. *Ephesians: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 10). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. (1989) p123-124.

² Hirsch, A. *Biblical Foundations for a 5Q Future*. (2016) <https://5qcentral.com/>