

## Growing With Others – Ephesians 4.11-16

<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> 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 so that it builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4.11-16, ESV).<sup>1</sup>

### Memory Verse – Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ – Ephesians 4.15

In the gospels we read how Jesus selected twelve disciples, they were not perfect by any means, but they were His disciples. We know from scripture one of them Judas Iscariot would betray Him, yet He still spent three years of His life teaching them, showing them how to share the gospel and minister to the people.

This, we could say, was the first small group. Jesus gives us a great example of how to take a few people and work with them. Even though they are not like you, or know as much as you, or can even do the same things as you. None of this is important, what is important is as Solomon writes, “Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27.17, NASB95).<sup>2</sup> We must be about sharpening each other in the ways of God and His Word.

This is what small groups are about, this is what it means to come together and grow with others. Yes, we can and must have personal private time with God. But, if we only have private time then we will only have one point of view about everything, and that is not good for us, or anyone else. We must have other inputs in our lives. Of course, we can go online and watch videos and listen to others, but again there are personal interactions which are lacking and we can also be very selective to the things we hear or want to hear.

Jesus, when He walked with the disciples, did not just tell them what they wanted to hear but what they needed to hear. In Matthew Jesus asked the disciples “who they say I Am” (16.15, NCV), and Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” (16.16, NCV). Now Peter is probably feeling pretty good with this answer, and Christ confirmed he was correct and that only God in Heaven could have revealed that answer to him. Wow, Peter is feeling pretty good.

But then Jesus begins telling the disciples how He will go to Jerusalem and suffer and be put to death at the hands of the Jewish elders, leading priest and teachers of the law, and rise in three days. Peter, riding the high of his correct answer, pulls Jesus aside like he is all that and a bag of chips, as says, “God save you from those things, Lord! Those things will never happen to You!” (16.21-22, NCV).

Peter went from hero to zero in a matter of minutes, he had no idea what he was talking about, but Jesus understood the group, that this was a teaching moment and not a time to cast one out, or rebuke him for his stupidity. He recognized that just as God revealed to Peter the first answer, that Satan was behind this response and rebuked him saying, “Go away from me, Satan! You are not helping me! You don’t care about the things of God, but only about the things people think are important” (Matthew 16.23, NCV).<sup>3</sup>

By himself Peter would not have understood his error, but in the presence of others he was corrected, protected and shown the error of his ways. This correction was important for him, he might not have known it at that very moment but time would show him later how Christ’s love, compassion, and vision was valuable for Peter and all the disciples.

Likewise, being in a small group, Bible study, Sunday School class, or whatever we want to call our groups does not really matter. What matters is that we are part of one, learning with others so that we can grow together, serve together, love together, help each other in times of need, or whatever else a group would

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Eph 4:11–16). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>2</sup> *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. (1995). (Pr 27:17). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> *The Everyday Bible: New Century Version*. (2005). (Mt 16:23). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

do that will show the love, compassion and vision of Christ to a lost and dying world.

In our scripture today, we see Paul writing to the church at Ephesus encouraging them about different aspects of ministry within the church. He says in verse eleven, “and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers” (Ephesians 4.11, ESV).<sup>4</sup> This is not an all-inclusive list, but gives us five main areas or functions we can find within the church. Not everyone will have these abilities, nor should they.

Apostles are those who have seen Christ and have had been a witness of His resurrection (Acts 1.21-22). Paul writes, “Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (I Corinthians 15.7-9, NRSV).<sup>5</sup> therefore, by this definition there would be none in the church today.

Prophet, in the New Testament, is one who proclaims inspired utterances on behalf of God. This does not mean they predict the future or future events. It could refer to someone who preaches the Word of God. Evangelists is someone who announce the gospel with great clarity, also a preacher of the Word of God. However, someone preaching the Word, does not always make a great evangelist.

Shepherds and Teachers or Pastors and Teachers this can be one and the same person. In many cases this is the local pastor of a church, however, a pastor is someone who watches over the congregation, taking care of them, ministering to their needs, and yes, preaching the Word of God. Not all pastors make good teachers and not all teachers make good pastors. A teacher is someone who teaches the Word of God, so others can grow from it; each of the other leaders mentioned above should be able to do this, but their ability varies based on delivery, style and technique.

However, each one of these areas are all designed to do the same thing in the end, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,<sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,<sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Ephesians 4.12-14, ESV).<sup>6</sup>

Right about now everyone is wondering what all this has to do with small groups; well, we need to find the fit, the place where we can come into the small group, to help each other. Because this is why we are called to come together, to equip each other for the work of the ministry. We can only do this if we will come together in a small group, get to know each other, our ins and outs, our lives, and we grow together.

## Application

1. Are you part of a small group in your local church? If so what kind of group is it? If not, why?
2. What is your role in your small group? If you do not have a role in the group, why not?
3. Deeper Thinking: Read Acts 2.42-47 – Did the early church have small groups? Where did they meet? Did they have any other type of meeting? How did these meeting effect the church growth? You can use scripture or other illustrations to back up your discussion.
4. Commit to learning Ephesians 4.15 and Witnessing to someone about what God has done for you.

## Prayer

Oh Lord my God, I thank You for this new year. What a start we have had, a wonderful worship service Sunday, great fellowship and a time of Communion remembering Your Son’s sacrifice. Lord as I consider my roll in small groups and their importance within our church, help me to be an example by being available to teach and lead in a group. By participating in a small group and showing others what fellowship within a small group is all about. Lord use these small groups to expand Your kingdom; helping me to boldly serve You each and every day sharing Your gospel. Give me confidence and a fearless heart so others will hear and know who You are. This I pray in Jesus Christ’s Name, Amen.

<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Eph 4:11). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. (1989). (1 Co 15:7-9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Eph 4:12-14). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.