

THE BIG IDEA: The gifting does the lifting.

The Take-Off

You'll remember that last week we said that Paul was going to be turning a corner from theoretical to practical. We talked about washing your car and your dad's car and that the difference between a choice and a chore is ownership.

Today, Paul's going to start outlining God's plan for the church and our part in that plan, and it's going to be critical that we remember that we are OWNERS in the process or else this will feel like a chore and not a choice. Today, God uses Paul to unveil his plan for growing up his church!

1. No child left behind

- a. All it takes is saying that one phrase and we can split the room into a debate over the current educational system of the country
- b. But this isn't about teaching toward a test to make sure that schools still get funding or anything like that
- c. It's about understanding that every one of us matter to God
- d. His plan was never to give grace to a few, but to give grace to all
- e. It's so easy to read right past those first 4 words - "But to each one"
- f. God never shows up to a party and realizes he left someone out! He has a plan that includes everyone, and a gift for everyone
- g. Grace.
- h. This isn't the first time the believers in Ephesus (or us) have heard about the gift of grace:
 - Ephesians 1:6 - God gives grace freely
 - Ephesians 1:7 - God is rich in grace
 - Ephesians 2:5 - God's grace makes us alive
 - Ephesians 2:7 - God's grace was seen in Jesus
 - Ephesians 2:8 - We're saved by grace
 - Ephesians 3:2 - We're given God's grace for others
- i. So it's critical that we remember that God is not willing to leave any of his children behind when it comes to growing us into ONE body
- j. Do we fail in this area? Absolutely. We don't always love each other well and we don't always make it easy for others to love us.
- k. We often fight to stay left behind, but we all have a Father who isn't willing to leave us there
- l. As much as we cheer Liam Neeson at the end of Taken for finding his daughter, how much more is our Dad looking for each one of us when we lose our way?
- m. Unity in the body is a big task, "but to each one" of us, God gives grace for the journey

2. Riding on the crazy elevator

- a. I love the next few verses, not just because they sound like a crazy elevator with lots of ups and downs, but because they show the character behind the God who gives grace
- b. He isn't a King sitting on a throne throwing out gifts to peasants
- c. He is a humble Savior who came down to hand deliver gifts to prisoners
- d. If you want to spend some time studying commentaries, you'll find the most common debate over all the "ascending" and "descending" is whether or not Jesus ever went into hell
- e. Maybe he did, maybe he didn't
- f. But what we know for sure is that he rode an elevator of humility lower than he ever had to in order to raise his followers out of a kingdom of darkness and into his kingdom of light
- g. That's my God! We read it last week in Psalm 18:35 - he stoops down to make us great
- h. He does it by giving gifts that raise us to higher places, and you won't believe what those gifts look like...

3. You're sitting next to a gift

- a. So here's the part that can get crazy
- b. We love the fact that God gives gifts (because who doesn't love to get gifts!), but guess who the gifts are?

- c. Yep. You're sitting next to one.
- d. Verse 11 tells us that the gifts God gave would use the gifts they were given to develop the gifts in the body
- e. We were given the gift of grace so we could be gifts of growth
- f. Are we really letting this sink in?? EACH ONE OF US IS A GIFT THAT HELPS EACH ONE OF US GROW.
- g. Some of us will have ministry leadership positions, but all of us will have gifts that we can use to help the body grow to "the whole measure of the fullness of God" (Ephesians 4:13)
- h. How do use those gifts once we've discovered them? Just like Jesus - in humility and service to raise those around us to a higher level
- i. Just like our God, we stoop down to make men great
- j. That's the purpose of the gifts that each of us have
- k. The Big Idea says it simply: **the gifting does the lifting!**
- l. When your gift is being used and my gift is being used, the whole body is built up (Ephesians 4:12)

4. Alright means we're ALL right

- a. As we start to bring this one to a close, let me point out one word that is so obvious most churches miss it
- b. The way we know we're succeeding is when - as verse 13 says - ALL of us reach full maturity
- c. As we've already talked about, this isn't always what we experience, but it doesn't make it less of a goal - for Paul or for us
- d. When it comes to the body, anything less than ALL is an indication that something isn't alright
- e. I've got a picture to help illustrate this.
- f. Now, if this were real, we wouldn't be celebrating how great that one arm is. We'd be at the doctor figuring out what was wrong with the boy's body to make this happen.
- g. I've got 3 kids, and if 2 of them win nobel prizes and one blows up an airport (I know, weird analogy but stay with me), I'm not going to let the bombing wash because I had a 66.7% success rate.
- h. Percentages work in baseball and business, but in a family, the only number that matters is 100, because if my gifts lift you and your lift me, then 100% participation means 100% elevation.
- i. The body suffers if everyone isn't discovering their gifts, developing their gifts, and using their gifts to serve.
- j. Admittedly, it can be a little tricky at times, sort of like walking on a tightrope.
- k. Paul knew that, and we've got to know it, too.

The Landing

So where do we go with this? How does it work itself out in a church family?

It means that we've got to be intentional about knowing what our gifts are and knowing where we can use them

Over the last 4 months or so, a lot of people in leadership from the top down here at The Gathering have been working to put together some structure that will help us do just that

I'm going to have some volunteers hand out a brochure that summarizes a lot of that work, because this step is how our church family is going to live out the "humility in service to raise others up" truths we've seen in Ephesians 4

While they pass them out, let me share another verse with you that helped me a ton this week, and may help you, too
Growing a body - putting in place systems and structure - can really bring out my inner child who is a bit rebellious, easily bored and easily distracted

My inner child just wants to have fun...all the time, and that means stuff like this can feel hard.

But this week I read Proverbs 24:27 in my quiet time and had a pretty big "aha!" moment.

It isn't enough to build a great building if no one can find it or get to it.

It also isn't God's plan for a few to build something and then invite the many to come see it.

God's plan is that we make the way easy for people to come and be a part of building something great together.

No spectators, because that doesn't allow your gifting to do the lifting.

What you have in your hands now is a glimpse at the property, so to speak, that we've been clearing so that all of us can build a house for God.

It shows the structure, the people who are leading and who are in place for the sole purpose of helping ALL OF US discover and develop our gifts so that we can use them to serve the family.