



RBC CONNECT GROUP STUDY FOR WEEK 16/8/20

Bible Reading: Ephesians 4:1-16

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." ⁹ (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work

BUV Flourishing Churches Devotions

Congregational Character Part 3 - Structure and Process

Recently both my wife and I have been receiving treatment for cancers. This is a very personal and extreme reminder that not all growth in our bodies is healthy. Some organic activity drains the body's energy and disrupts its intended structures and functioning.

This also applies in the Body of Christ, one of the Apostle Paul's favourite images of church (Rom 12:5; 1Cor 12:12ff; Eph 4:11ff; Col 1:18). Typically, Paul uses this image to teach the church's unity in Christ and functioning in faith and love. He emphasises the church's orderly structure and coordinated activity as determined by Christ and enabled by the Holy Spirit. The Body is both organic (alive in Christ) and organised (arranged by the Spirit).

A flourishing church will not simply be busy, with members all doing their own thing; it will be strategic - intentionally doing the right things in the right way - and will organise its structures and processes to enable its members to do those things efficiently and effectively. This is not introducing human managerial approaches into the church; but rather it is the church reflecting something of God, who is both orderly and intentional (eg 1Cor 12:11, 18, 28; 14:33). Healthy church structures and processes are an outworking of our Spirituality, for they reflect God and express relationship with God.

Paul's most developed discussion of this is found in Ephesians 4:1-16. He begins in vv1-10 with the relationship *with* and *in* God that is given to each and every Christian. Then in vv.11-16 he outlines the practice and purpose of this within the church. He refers to **three relationships that must be maintained if churches are to flourish.**

First, Paul notes that while every believer is part of the church (v7) and has a part to play in its life and growth (v16), **Christ has given some to lead and serve the Body** in various ways (v11) - apostles and prophets who lay foundations (Eph 2:20); evangelists who proclaim the Gospel (6:15) and pastors/teachers who equip God's people for works of service. Flourishing churches give attention to building on these apostolic and prophetic foundations (honouring God's Word), releasing and supporting those sent into mission, and allowing pastoral leaders to equip others to serve rather than being distracted by doing things that others can do.

The word translated 'equip' (*katartismos*) had a range of meaning including repairing (Matt 4:21), completing (1Thess 3:10) and training (Lk 6:40). In New Testament times it was used in medical texts to describe setting broken bones to knit and function properly. Given the physiological language in Ephesians 4, I think this is what Paul was referring to. Primarily through teaching, Pastoral leaders set their fellow believers in right relationship with God and one another, so that they can function in truth and love as God intends us to. As Israel Galindo writes, *'Leaders who are committed to empowering the members for ministry will create the structures and processes that will help the members to (discern and) respond to God's call and acquire the necessary ministry skills (and relational qualities) to actualize their spiritual gifts.'* [\[1\]](#)

This introduces the other two relationships that are key to flourishing churches - relationship with God and one another. Paul declares that each and **every believer has direct relationship with Christ**. We are all called to grow in our knowledge of Christ - not drifting along with the latest idea (v14), but sticking to the truth of the Faith laid down in Scripture (v13, 15), pressing into Christ in prayer (v15), and becoming more like Christ, individually and together, as **we reflect his nature and will by serving one another in love** (v16). Each and every member has a part to play in this growth in faith and love as we serve one another, and to the extent we all do that, our churches will be built up and flourish.

The structures we set up and processes we follow in our churches should support the three relationships Paul outlines in Ephesians 4 - **allowing leaders** to lay foundations, move into mission and equip others for faith and service; **encouraging believers** to develop their relationship with God; and **empowering members** to discern and respond to God's leading as they serve together in love and unity. To what extent is your church organised to flourish and grow as God intends it to?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Read Ephesians 4:1-16. What words does Paul use in this passage to describe a church that is flourishing? What actions does he identify as contributing to those things?
2. How does your church encourage you and others to grow in relationship with Christ? How have you grown in faith and love over the past few years?
3. In what ways do your church's structures and processes help or hinder members to use their gifts to contribute to its life and growth?
4. If you could change a few things about the way your church functions, what would you change?
5. Paul writes about the church growing into maturity marked by unity and Christlikeness. What are some practical steps that you and your fellow members could take to help your church to become more united and Christlike?

Blessings,

Rev David Devine, Head of Church Health & Capacity Building