

I. Introduction

- A. Today we are diving into one of the most important, most valuable, most clarifying passages in all of Scripture. It is today's paragraph from the Bible that gives us—the church, the pastors and leaders of the church, and all of us—our clear marching orders.
- B. Let's read that paragraph:
 - 1. *7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." 9 (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) 11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:7-16, NKJV).*
- C. A long paragraph, and very complex—but, we can untangle it right? Let me jump right to the middle—in verse 12, the Bible tells us WHY God gave pastors and other leaders to the church.
- D. Their job is “the equipping of the saints.” Saints raise your hand. Every believer is a saint, and our job as church pastors and leaders is to equip you.
- E. Equip you to do what?
- F. Equipping the saints “for the work of ministry.” Who does the work of ministry? The saints. Who are the saints? Every child of God.

II. Introductions

- A. I want to pause here and introduce some people you probably already know, but I'd like to make sure you know them—these are some of the lead equippers in our church, and they have taken on new roles.
- B. Please welcome Todd Skinner, Brenda Aman, and Tim Hawkins.
 - 1. Todd Skinner has been our Young Adults Pastor for several years now, and that has changed. He has done amazing stuff with our young adults—creating communities and equipping leaders—and now he's bringing those skills into our larger body. Todd's new title is Lead Pastor for Ministries—and that covers a huge variety of ministries that we have at NCR.
 - a) I am super blessed and excited to have Todd as my right hand man, and we're already seeing tremendous results from his leadership.
 - 2. Brenda Aman has served on staff for 3 years. She has been a women's ministry director in the past, and is one of the anchors of our church staff. Brenda has a tremendous ability to organize, to get things done, and to do both with a whole lot of love and grace. Brenda's new role is Lead Director of Operations. She oversees our facilities, finances, calendar, budget, information technologies, human resources, and all other operations (as well as keeping George in line☺).
 - a) Together, Todd and Brenda are the key leaders and equippers of our church leadership, and I wanted you to know that their leadership is an extension of my leadership, and I am humbled to be working alongside them.
 - 3. I also wanted you to know that effective the beginning of this month, this little guy over here named Tim Hawkins, officially became the Worship Pastor of Neighborhood Church. Tim is here to multiply teams to help us sing praise to God. He has a proven ability to rise up leaders, and to create a space for the people of God to sing praise to His name.
- C. The main thing I want to get across is that God is blessing our church with really great people to do really great things for Christ and His kingdom.
- D. I'd like to take a moment and pray over these leaders as they enter the fall season in their new roles, and I invite you to pray with me.
 - 1. Lord God, in the mighty name of Jesus, I praise You for rising up Todd, Brenda, and Tim as servants of Jesus here at Neighborhood Church. I pray that Your power and Spirit would be upon them to equip the saints for the work of ministry. I pray that they may do their work with joy, with effectiveness, power, liberty, and tremendous fruit.
 - 2. Lord, we recognize that we are in a great battle, and the evil one would love to trip us up. So I pray for Your supernatural protection on each of us. I pray most of all that through our collective efforts, lost people will be found and found people will grow deep and mighty in Christ, and for His glory in this world and the next. I commit Todd, Brenda, and Tim to You right now. In Jesus name, Amen.

III. Back to our text

- A. It's a long, complex paragraph that has only 2 sentences...
- B. The first sentence in Greek has 55 words (vv. 7-10).

- C. The second sentence has 124 words (vv. 11-14).
- D. The main verb in each sentence is the same. It's the verb GAVE. The big idea here is that God GAVE you something really important and good.
- E. What's that? Two gifts:
 - 1. First, God gave you grace—that's how verse 7 starts. God gave you grace.
 - 2. Second, God gave you church leaders to equip you to use that grace in your daily life. That's how verse 11 starts.
- F. I think the best way to understand this place in the Bible is to break it down into four core principles of church life.

IV. Four Convictions for a Strong Church

- A. Jesus already won the victory.
 - 1. Everything a church does is seen as an extension of Jesus Christ. After He died and rose again, He ascended to heaven. That's where Jesus is, right now, today, in His physical body, which has now been upgraded to a glorified edition.
 - 2. Since the physical body of Jesus is in heaven, He has left His metaphorical body on earth. And that's us.
 - a) His mission has become our mission.
 - b) His battle has become our battle.
 - c) His passion needs to be our passion.
 - 3. But before we go running around like kids in a super-hero cape with battery-powered light sabers, we need to stop and remember something.
 - 4. Whatever mission we are on for Jesus, we need to remember that Jesus has already won the victory. That's basically the point of verses 8-10. This is one of those places where the New Testament part of the Bible is quoting the Old Testament Part of the Bible.
 - 5. Specifically, it's quoting Psalm 68. That is a psalm about a Warrior King, triumphing over his enemies, and ascending to his throne, high on his holy hill.
 - 6. Jesus started His mission in heaven, as God the Son, co-equal with the Father and the Spirit.
 - 7. He descended to earth, and became human without ceasing to be God—the God-man, born of the Virgin Mary. He descended even farther, to the Cross, into death, into the grave, and even into the underworld.
 - 8. This is kind of controversial, and Christians have differing views on what this paragraph means.
 - 9. Here's how I see it: after He died on the Cross, they buried His body in a cave-tomb, and rolled the stone in front to seal Him in. His body was in the grave. But His soul and spirit were still alive. Where?
 - 10. He went to the place where every true believer before the Cross was waiting for Him. This is called "the lower parts of the earth."
 - 11. While He was there, He gathered up all the pre-Cross followers of God—David, Samuel, Ruth, Esther—and lined them up for a parade.
 - 12. He also went over near the nasty side of the underworld, and found what 1 Pet 3:9 calls "the spirits in prison" and did some holy trash talking. He proclaimed, "Hey you evil demons—guess what? I win. You lose. See you later."
 - 13. With that victorious proclamation, Jesus blasted up from His grave, up past the wall of demons determined to keep Him in the grave, and He led a parade—a triumphal procession of His own people on a glorious flight to heaven.
 - 14. Verse 11 says "He ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things."
 - 15. What does this mean? It means that Jesus already won the battle of the ages. He already crushed the head of Satan—He'll take care of the tail at the final judgment.
 - 16. The victory is won. Christ has triumphed. Christ is victorious. Christ has overcome.
 - 17. We don't fight FOR victory—the victory is won.
 - 18. We fight FROM a position of victory, taking our stand on the victorious proclamation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a) Whatever battle you are in, Jesus has already won the victory.
 - b) Whatever evil has come against you, Jesus has already won the victory.
 - c) Whatever bad news is ruining your day...
 - d) Whatever headlines are making you depressed...
 - e) Whatever skeletons from your past attack you and pin you down...
 - f) Whatever mountains stand between you and your dreams...
 - 19. You've got to get it as a core principle deep inside your heart, that Jesus has already won the victory. He is the Triumphant Lord, the Master and Commander of the Universe.
 - 20. Our job then as a CHURCH is to proclaim His victory, and live out His victory until the whole world knows.
 - 21. That's why I believe the church is the hope of the world. The church is the hope of America. If the church falls, our nation falls. It's that simple.
- B. Every believer in Jesus is a minister.
 - 1. Verse 12 says that the saints do the work of ministry. Saints is another term for every child of God.

2. You are supposed to do the work of ministry.
 3. Are you doing the work of ministry?
 4. No great harm has ever happened to the body of Christ, than the tragic idea that pastors and paid professionals are supposed to do the work of ministry. Clergy does ministry and everybody else watches.
 5. No way. God has gifted YOU. God has given grace to YOU. God has called you UP from the reserves to ACTIVE DUTY.
 - a) You are the minister to visit the sick.
 - b) You are the minister to pray for the wounded.
 - c) You are the minister to instruct in God's ways and wisdom.
 - d) You are the minister to incarnate Christ's love in your workplace, and classroom, and block.
 6. What if you saw yourself as the pastor of the place you work or go to school or on your block? Not being superior or lording it over people. But serving. Helping. Loving. Guiding. Teaching. Ministering.
 7. I am so proud of our Stephen's Ministers, our Celebrate Recovery Leaders, our Marriage Mentors, our Small Group leaders, AWANA leaders, Nursery workers, High school and Jr. High leaders—Missions leaders.
 8. Worship team and meals and coffee and...
 9. I'm so proud of the people in our church who said, let's start a Tuesday night meeting, read one chapter of the Bible a day, and come together and talk about it.
 10. I am so proud of every person who prays and ushers and greets and don't get mad at me if I missed you because there's so much that happens here—but you are making happen what's supposed to happen: the completion of the church.
 11. A while back, I gave a message called Cruise Ship or Battleship. I talked about how too many church people treat the church as a cruise ship:
 - a) Entertain me. Make me feel good. Make me laugh. Feed me till I bust. Give me games to play, shows to watch, food to eat, and a place to sleep. And if I don't like it, I'm going to complain. Cruise ship...
 - b) Have you ever treated church that way? As if you get to be passive, and you pay some professionals—called pastors—to be active?
 12. No. A better analogy is the battleship. We are on a mission. We are in a war. We may get wounded, and we take care of our own. But we do not fear, because the victory is won—we're just mopping up.
 - a) On a cruise ship, we exist for ourselves and our own comfort and pleasure.
 - b) But on a battleship, we exist for the people we are rescuing—lost people. People who don't really know what Jesus did. We're putting ourselves in discomfort and even in harm's way for the sake of a lost and dying world that desperately needs a Savior.
 - c) When we get wounded, yes we need a hospital and time to heal.
 - d) But when we get healed, we get back in the thick of the war.
 13. One of my favorite couples in the world is Dave and Becky Thompson. Dave is a surgeon. Becky is a nurse. Over 30 years ago, they went to Africa and started a hospital in the middle of the jungle.
 14. I've been there. It's amazing. AIDS clinic. Eye clinic. Neonatal intensive care unit. Nursing school. Midwife school. Surgeon school. In the middle of the jungle in a poor African nation, an eleven hour drive from the nearest big city.
 15. Do you think Dave and Becky see the church as a cruise ship or a battleship?
 16. Here's a guy who could be wealthy as a surgeon in the US. But he's laboring away in a jungle hospital for the cause of the gospel among the world's poorest people.
 17. Battleship.
 18. And guess what. Now that the Thompsons are in their sixties, they decided that their hospital can run just fine without them, so they're packing up after 30+ years, and going to... retire?
 19. No. To Egypt, that has just gone through tremendous upheaval, where they don't know the language, where they don't know the culture, where they don't know the streets and alleys—they're going to Egypt to train surgeons there to serve the poorest of the poor in the name of Jesus.
 20. Battleship. Don't be a soft Christian.
 21. God probably did not call you to Africa or Egypt or anywhere else. That's okay.
 - a) But He did call you to this place.
 - b) And He did call you to do the work of ministry.
 - c) And He did not call you to sit passively by and expect other people to do it.
 - d) He gifted you. He gave grace to you. He invested spiritual capital into you. Now use it.
 22. Every follower of Jesus is a minister.
- c. Every leader is an equipper.
1. Jesus gave His church five (maybe four) kinds of leaders:
 - a) Apostles—church planters, and super leaders.
 - b) Prophets—those who preach and proclaim God's inspired truth.
 - c) Evangelists—people with a unique ability to connect with lost people and not drive them away.

- d) Pastors—shepherds of the flock.
- e) Teachers (goes with pastors)—those who communicate Scriptures in life-transforming power.
- 2. These leaders are gifts from Jesus to you. Gifts. Gifts from Jesus to you. And what is their job?
- 3. See that word equipping there in v. 11? It means to make you complete. A finished product. Outfitted for the expedition. No gaps on the line.
- 4. Our Jr. Pee Wee football team had a bye this week, so no score to report.
- 5. But I can talk a little about our practices. We drill the same fundamentals over and over again. Blocking. Tackling. Taking a handoff. Hitting the hole.
- 6. A big one for our team is to not run the ball backwards. We've lost a lot of yards that way.
- 7. That's the same here at church. Drill the fundamentals. Drill the fundamentals.
 - a) This is the Bible—and who we are and who God is and how we must live before Him.
 - b) This is sin—and its terrible consequences.
 - c) This is the Savior—and His love.
 - d) This is the Cross—and its horrible agony.
 - e) This is the atoning work of Christ—and its great exchange of our sins for Christ's righteousness.
 - f) This is Salvation—and its incomparable glory.
 - g) This is the Gospel—and its amazingly free good news.
 - h) This is the mission—to complete the body of Christ—to complete the church so that every person who wills to be saved does get saved in our generation.
- 8. Drill the fundamentals. Close the gaps. Equip the saints.
- 9. Today, out on the lawn, you'll see our ministry fair. The ministries of our church are represented and we have two goals for you:
 - a) That you would SERVE... and/or
 - b) That you would BE SERVED...
- 10. Please take some time, and browse those tables. Talk to our leaders and get involved. This is your opportunity. We're a big church; don't get lost in the shuffle. Shift today from the cruise ship mentality to the battleship mentality.
 - a) Jesus already won the victory.
 - b) Every believer is a minister.
 - c) Every leader is an equipper.
- 11. There's one more conviction—and I'll say it really fast:
- D. Maturity inside the church creates powerful mission outside the church.
 - 1. Verse 13 says that we should be mature people.
 - 2. Verse 14 says that we should no longer be children.
 - 3. Our church is surrounded by 100,000 people who don't know their spiritual right from their spiritual left.
 - 4. The Neighborhood Church Battalion has been sent here by God to touch their lives with the gospel of grace and the message of Jesus.
 - 5. But we can't do that if we're a bunch of babies.
 - 6. So grow up. Grow deep. Grow strong.
 - 7. Maturity inside the church creates powerful mission outside the church.
 - 8. Immaturity inside the church creates dysfunction that smells rotten to an on-looking world.

V. Conclusion

- A. I believe in the church. I believe in the growth of the body: quality and quantity both. I believe in growing mature. I believe in growing numerically. I believe the church is the hope of the world. And I believe God has me and you together here at Neighborhood Church of Redding for such a time as this.
- B. Let us equip you. And if we can't equip you, please find a church that can equip you.
- C. Let us equip you. Let us mobilize you.
- D. God gave this church to Redding. God gave pastors to this church. God gave grace to you.
- E. Now what will you give to God and to this city?