

Build Up.

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- [0 : 00] Well, we're carrying on this morning thinking about our vision as a church family. We spent a couple of years even in God's Word thinking, what is it?
- What is God's vision for His church in all times and places? And we've come to see that it can be summed up like this. Gather in, build up, reach out, send out.
- Gather in to know and to worship Him. That's what we thought about last Sunday and how we can make the most of being together on Sunday to meet with God and the most of other times, different times, to know Him better.
- Secondly, build up the church in faith and service. That's what we're on today. And then in the next couple of weeks, reach out with the good news of Christ and send out people to other places to be doing that work.
- Gather in, build up, reach out, send out. Now, as we zoom in on that second call of God to His church to build up the body of Christ, I want to give you a little quiz.
- [1 : 17] Okay, don't worry. It's not a hard one. Some of you are like, uni hasn't even started yet. Okay, it's not tricky. Okay, it's multiple choice. I'm just going to read out a few statements and either in your head or maybe you can write down whether you think these are true, false, or you're not sure.
- Okay, you ready? Number one, a healthy church is easy to be part of. True, false, not sure.
- Two, the things that unite us as Christians are bigger than our differences. Number three, God has given us different gifts, so I only have to do what I'm good at.
- What do you think? Number four, ministry is done by the ministers. Number five, the church wouldn't survive without volunteers.
- Number six, spiritual growth is an individual thing. Seven, the church is built up as we speak the truth in love to one another.
- [2 : 37] And finally, number eight, no one would notice if you left. True, false, not sure.
- Well, with the first part of our time, I'm just going to talk through our quiz because actually those statements basically guide us through our passage this morning in Ephesians 4. And then, like last time, we're going to ask, so what?
- And press into the four aims of that vision that flow out of this passage and God's call for us to build up the body. Okay, God calls us to build up the body of Christ.
- If you're a Christian, you are a bodybuilder. You're a bodybuilder, and this is your gym. And you are here today to be trained, equipped to, verse 12, build up the body of Christ.
- And I had a weird request the other week. Joe Teech, JT, has just started with us as a ministry trainee. We spent a great night in his flat having some food and chatting. And just as I was getting ready to leave, he said, I just have one question.
- [3 : 49] And he looked really nervous. And that made me nervous. And he said, I've got a bench and some weights in the car.

Do you think I could bring them into church or I can do some exercise while I'm in doing work? And I was relieved because it was an easy question. But not the question I was expecting.

I can't remember quite what I said. But if I could go back, I would have liked to have said, brother, you'll be doing enough bodybuilding as it is. Because that is what being part of a church is, building up the body of Christ.

There's nothing wrong with lifting weights too, of course. But this morning, I'm your bodybuilding trainer. So let me walk you through what bodybuilding involves in God's church.

And let me first break the illusion that it's going to be easier than the gym. I wonder what you put for that first statement. A healthy church is easy to be part of.

[4 : 53] Just look down at verses 1 to 3 with me. 1 to 3. Paul writes, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Paul says in a healthy church where people live in line with God's calling, it's hard. It takes patience, humility, because being part of a family like this, it does not come naturally to us.

In fact, it only comes to us supernaturally. See, that God has united us. It's the unity of the Spirit. But if we think then that that means unity will come easy, no, says Paul.

You need to be eager to maintain it. Strive, fight, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Friends, if we could never stretch or break the unity of the Spirit, why would he need to say that?

[6 : 13] Relationships in a healthy church take a lot of upkeep. I wonder, do you expect church to be easy? Or when it gets hard and you do need patience or to bear with a brother or sister, do you think it's a red flag and things are taking a bad turn?

Paul says being part of a healthy church takes real effort. Do the heavy lifting. And the body will stick together. Forget to train and it will break down.

The key to that is what you put for the second statement. The things that unite us as Christians are bigger than our differences. Have a look there at verses 4 to 6. There is one body and one spirit.

Just as you recall to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One God and Father of all. One. There's lots of really important words there in our faith, aren't there?

But the most important word in those verses is that little word, one. He repeats it seven times. The Hebrew number of completeness.

[7 : 28] A perfect oneness. And I wonder, as you look around this room, what strikes you about the people here? We're all in different ages and stages, aren't we?

From different places. We speak different languages. Men and women. Young and old. But the thing that Paul wants us to notice isn't how different we all are, but what we have in common.

The fact that we're all part of one church body. And have one Holy Spirit living in us. That we share one hope in our one Lord Jesus Christ.

That we hold one faith. We let out one baptism. We worship one God and Father. That's a lot of really big ones, isn't it?

Brothers and sisters, staying united as a body is hard work, but it's easier when we remember or don't forget that the things that unite us as Christians are bigger than our differences.

[8 : 31] You might think differently about the person sitting next to you about what you've read in the news this week. You might have voted differently in the election. One of you might drill oil for a living.

One of you might be an environmental campaigner. One of you might be an environmental campaigner. But you are one in Christ. One in Christ. And when we remember that and live like it, our differences will only serve to shine a spotlight on what it is that holds us together.

Now, our next statement moves us on to the next part of our passage. God has given us different gifts, so I only have to do what I am good at.

I wonder what you put for that one. True, God has given us different gifts. Verse 7. Look, grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

But does that therefore mean that I only have to do what I'm good at? Look down at verse 11. He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ.

[9 : 40] The gifts that he's speaking about there are people, so the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor, teachers, who are given to equip all God's people for what?

The work of ministry, which is building up the body of Christ. And brothers and sisters, that could involve all kinds of things, couldn't it?

It might involve things that you're really good at, but building up the church involves a lot of things that isn't everyone's comfort zone. But everyone can pour a cup of tea and coffee, can't they?

Everyone can welcome someone who's new. That's part of the ministry of the church, building up the body. And nothing does that more than something as basic as speaking.

Just turn over, have a look at verse 15, where he says this, Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.

[10 : 49] Friends, if you can speak, you can speak the truth in love. And that might not be our gift. But Paul doesn't say, does he?

When the minister speaks the truth in love, you will grow up in every way. He says, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way. God has given you gifts.

But that doesn't mean that you only get to do what you think you're good at. God is training you for an all-round bodybuilding ministry.

Which possibly changes our answer to number five. I wonder what you put. Number five, ministry is done by the ministers. Have another look at verse 12.

Who's doing the ministry? He says, there are shepherds and teachers given to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

[11 : 50] Paul says, Christ has given you ministers to train you to do ministry. So, as much as I am here to serve you, and I am, that service doesn't look so much like being a chef or a waiter, bringing you meals to consume.

Though sometimes it will. It looks more like being a chef who trains you how to chop vegetables and cook a meal. And you also get fed on the job.

Brothers and sisters, if you come to church as a consumer only, expecting to be served, and when you leave saying, there wasn't really much there for me today.

I'm going to tune in to the online service later and see what I get there. Well, you're missing the reason why Christ has given you ministers, which is to equip you to serve others.

Right? To leave you saying, I feel more ready to live for Christ this week. And prepared to share something with him. I learned how to cook something so that I can go and feed someone else.

[12 : 59] The reality is, brothers and sisters, that 200 of you have vastly more opportunity for ministry than me and Donald have between us.

Think how much bodybuilding could happen in a week if we all came to church to train for the work of ministry. Which brings us to our next statement, the church wouldn't survive without volunteers.

I wonder what you got. Some of you know what's coming. Some of you think you know what's coming. If you take that statement to mean church takes all of us, that's true.

But the Bible, from cover to cover, nowhere, uses the word volunteer. It uses the word member.

Being a volunteer is something you do in your spare time. You give up a few hours to help a charity, and then you've done your bit. Being a member is being part of a thing.

[14 : 06] Being a joint or a ligament or a limb of a body. And it would be a pretty unhealthy body, wouldn't it, that relied on its joints, giving up some of its free time to help it work. That's called arthritis.

The body slows down, becomes painful when its joints think of themselves as volunteers. The same is true in the church. The church is not a charity that relies on people volunteering to keep it running.

It's a body that if you're a Christian, you are inseparably part of. Building up the body of Christ isn't something for you to do in your spare time.

You've got your work, your hobbies, your rest, and your church is your kind of good contribution for the week. This far and no further. If Bon Accord is your church, being part of this body is who you are, not something you do.

Just like we live out our identity as Christians when we gather in for worship, we're living out our identity as Christians when we build up the body of Christ.

[15 : 19] So let me be brave and put it out there and say that there are no volunteers in a church. There are no volunteers.

There are members. And when we live as members of the body, then the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it's equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

On to number six then. And the final part of our passage, spiritual growth is an individual thing.

Let's just have a look at verse 13. Got work of ministry, building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.

Each of us needs to grow spiritually, but it's not something we do individually. Paul says none of us reach maturity until we all reach maturity.

[16 : 29] And that there is not one believer in our church family that God does not wish to be fully united with his body and fully conformed to his Son. So you might think, I don't need a life group.

I'm sorted. I've made it. I'm mature. But if that's true, well, the people in your life group definitely need you. Verse 13 says that in the church, no one gets left behind.

If spiritual growth is just something that you do yourself, how are we all going to reach maturity? Building up the body involves being committed to each other's spiritual growth.

And number seven is absolutely true. The church is built up as we speak the truth in love to one another. And we've touched on this, but it bears repeating.

The truth of God's word shared in love is the water that makes hearts grow. And Paul says that we all get to do that watering.

[17 : 34] And we all need to, or there won't be enough water for everyone to grow and thrive. We often read this as if he's saying we have to say really hard things in a loving way, but the truth can be other things, can't it?

The Bible has words of comfort and encouragement and help as well as challenging words and hard words. And he's saying speak all that truth into each other's lives because you love each other.

You might wonder when was the last time that you opened your Bible and shared a word of encouragement with somebody because you love them. That's how the garden grows.

And finally, number eight, no one would notice if you left. Verse 16 says, the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it's equipped.

When each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. No one is spare in the church of Christ.

[18 : 44] No one is spare. Every member has a part to play in building up the body and helping it grow. Whoever you are, you would be missed if you left. Now, if you got eight out of eight at the start, well done, but the important thing is that we've got eight out of eight as we go from here because your answers to those questions are either going to help you to be a bodybuilder or they're going to hold you back.

And the rest of our time as we come into a close, we're just going to press in, press in with those answers to four kind of payouts, four aims off the back of this passage and our vision.

As God calls us to build up the church in faith and service, we aim, then, to keep Christ central in all that we do as the head who unites and grows the body, to give every member a vision for their own spiritual growth and belonging to the body, to equip every member to help others in their spiritual growth and discipleship, and to identify and train leaders and workers for all areas of church life, but particularly for word ministry.

So four aims, four questions this morning as we go. Firstly, how can I keep Christ as head? Right, the body only grows when it's united with the head.

But as strange as it sounds, it's possible for Christ not to be central, even in the church, like ours. We assume him, we take him for granted, and then we actually make church about something else.

[20 : 27] And of course we say Christ is central to all that we do, but just think, in a minute, we're all going to stand up and get a cup of coffee and talk, and what are we going to talk about?

We're over lunch. Who's going to ask the person sitting next to them, so how do you keep Christ central in your life? How's that going?

Even though Paul says Christ is the head from which the whole body grows. I wonder, are you a decapitated Christian? Have you lost your head?

Or does your whole life grow out from him? Are you abiding in him? Do you get your life from him like a vine gives life to a branch? Is Christ actually central to our church?

Or just theoretically? One of my top ten moments, I think, as your minister was one morning, just before Little Lambs, I saw a toddler group on a Friday morning, and a couple of the ladies were setting the room up for Little Lambs, and as they were doing that, they were talking about one of the questions from life group study on the Wednesday in Colossians.

[21 : 45] What did your group say for this? What did you think of that? And it stuck with me because it was so natural for these women to be talking about Christ just as they went about their service.

Christ was being kept central even in the setup for Little Lambs. Friends, we can keep Christ central in our head by keeping him the focus in the way that we pray and prepare, set up, pack down in our ordinary conversations, in our teamwork as members of his body.

You think about it, our hands, they need the head to work together, don't they? For two hands to work together, they're sending signals into the brain and the brain's sending signals out.

A hand that isn't connected to the head can't work with another hand. Can't work at all. So let's look to Christ, our head, even in the most seemingly mundane or normal bits of church life.

Right? When your cleaning team is on, are you going to ask the person scrubbing the floor next to you, what are you learning in the Bible? Tell me about that. Or you miss someone at church on a Sunday, are you going to give them a call and say, we really missed you?

[22 : 56] How can I pray for you? From him, the body will grow as it builds itself up in love. Second question then, how can I own God's vision for my spiritual growth and belonging to the body?

I hope this morning can be part of that. You take your quiz answers home and work back through them in Ephesians 4, right, to make sure that we've taken in what God's vision for us really is.

What does God say he wants for me in my church? It's the kind of sermon, isn't it, that we might be tempted to sit and say, I'm really glad that that person is here to hear that this morning, right, they really need to hear about growing in their faith and becoming a mature Christian, right?

Maybe you think, it's not for me, I've been a Christian for long enough, I've kind of nailed this, and this is for the younger than you Christians to get their heads around, but brothers and sisters, we measure our progress in the Christian life not by comparing ourselves with each other, but by comparing ourselves with Christ the head, we are growing up into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so the question is, are you as united with his body and as conformed to his likeness as you possibly could be?

And if the answer is no, then you still have growing to do. I wonder, when was the last time that you were aware that you were making progress as a Christian?

[24 : 37] When were you last aware that prayer started coming easier to you than it had in the past? Or you saw something that you'd never really seen before about God in Scripture, or maybe you found it that you could forgive someone in a way that you know that you wouldn't have been able to in the past?

When was your last growth spurt? When was the last time you changed from the inside out? God says here in black and white that his vision is for our growth.

So do you share God's ambition for you? Have you owned his vision for your life? Is that your personal goal, to be like his son and be one with his body?

It should be. How does that life goal shape then how you organize your week and spend your time? Do you know? Do you know where your growth edge is just now?

Where in your life is sin exploiting or exposing weakness in your faith or your life or character that you need to grow in?

[25 : 47] What relationships with people here are being tested or do you need to put effort into in a way that's going to bring you closer to the body and closer to the head? How can you own God's vision for your own spiritual growth?

And thirdly, how can I help others in their spiritual growth and discipleship? Right back to our rubbernecking. We are really glad that other people are here to hear this, aren't we? We're really glad.

It's important we apply this to ourselves first, but it's also true, isn't it, that if there's no believer in our church that God does not want to be fully one with his body and fully conformed to his son, well, that includes everyone else who's not you.

And he's given us each other to help the whole body build itself up in love. And again, the temptation is perhaps to think, well, that's for those other people.

Right? The elders, the pastoral care team, the ministers to do. But brothers and sisters, Christ has sent you ministers to equip you to do this. And if you don't know how, well, that's our fault.

[26 : 58] But I think you do. It's speaking the truth in love. And again, I'm going to talk up life group because that's the easiest, most obvious way for us to speak the truth in love to one another.

Bible's open, few questions, and we all get the chance to speak the truth of God's word into each other's lives because we love each other. It's a simple opportunity to be helping each other grow, watering each other's hearts with his word.

But it's not just those organized times, is it? Do you know there's as many opportunities to speak the truth in love as there are people in this room? With the people that you're close to, that you spend time with, is your conversation peppered with the Bible's encouragement and challenge and wisdom and truth?

Or is there a younger Christian that you could invite to spend time with you and open the Bible together and talk about a growth edge, how the Bible speaks to that challenge or that struggle in their life and pray?

Are there young parents you could help to see how to raise their children in the Lord? Are there people in midlife working hard who you could help to see how to honor the Lord in their work?

[28 : 14] Or are there all the saints who you could help to keep pressing on, clinging to the Lord in their old age? Friends, there are people here who need you involved in their life in a way that helps them to take a step closer to Jesus.

and if you don't know what you have to offer, you're holding it in your hands, speaking the truth of God's word in love to another person.

And finally, how can I be part of training leaders in the church? Christ gives leaders, particularly pastor, teachers, to equip his people for building his church. So we need people to do that.

And we can all be part of that. If you lead a team in the church, always be looking out for someone to replace you. Right? Who is showing the character, the godliness, the skills to come alongside and take over from you next?

We need people to lead. And as we think about future ministers, pray for them, love them, include them. It takes a village to raise a child.

[29 : 26] It takes a church to raise a minister. We all have a part to play in shaping the future ministry of the church in the way that we treat and speak to and pray for ministers in training.

And we're going to hear a lot more about that over the next year as JT and as Ben settle in. But I hope this morning that I've left you with more questions.

Of course, I haven't said everything. But I hope we're thinking about those questions and thinking about our quiz. Because, Christian, you are a bodybuilder.

You're in training. You need the gym. So take these questions with you. Talk about them over coffee. Pray about them when you get home. And let's be about building up the body of Christ in faith and love and service.

we're not done yet. We're not done, says Paul, until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, full maturity to the measure of Christ's fullness.

[30 : 36] Brothers and sisters, let's keep going. Let's pray for that together now. Let's pray. Father, we praise you and thank you for your grace to us in uniting us with your Son and uniting us together as his body.

Father, we acknowledge that none of us has a right to be here. Lord, we would not love you unless you had first loved us. And we would not have come unless you had brought us.

But how we thank you, Lord, that you have brought us with all our flaws and failings to your Son who has washed us clean and made us part of his body on earth.

Father, thank you for each and every person who's part of our congregation. Lord, thank you for the part that each one plays in building up the body. Lord, each one is precious to ye and a joint and a ligament that serves to help the body grow and build itself up in love.

So, Lord, help us to strive for that together. Lord, help us to own that vision for ourselves. Father, we pray that for those of us who are unsure or timid, that you would give us great boldness because of the gospel of Jesus.

[32 : 00] Father, for those of us who are not sure how we contribute, Lord, would you make that clear to us? And Father, for those who as yet don't know you, would you knit them in, we pray, to the fabric of this church through faith in your Son, Lord, continue to build up your body and this church we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.