

*UNEDITED DRAFT*

So we are continuing our series “Engage” today. In this series we are hearing Jesus call to get off the sidelines and get into the game. Being a follower of Christ is not a spectator sport. The Bible tells us there’s no such thing as an armchair Christian. Following Jesus is something active and it involves doing. One of Satan’s biggest lies is this: If you know the right things and do the right rituals, then you are a good Christian. So if I know certain things about the Bible and about God, and if I do the right rituals like going to church, baptize my kids and say an occasional prayer, then I am good with God. This is a lie. This is not what it means to be a follower of Jesus in a growing relationship with him.

Jesus himself challenged us last week to not just hear his words and know the right things, but to put his word into practice. Sitting in these rows once a week is not the end, but the beginning to a week of being a follower of Jesus. This is the easy part where we learn what Jesus teaches. Monday through Saturday is the hard part where you actually have to take this truth of God and do it, live it, practice it in your daily life.

We also learned last week that there is a key ingredient to help us close the gap between knowing and doing. What is a key faith-growing catalyst that greatly helps us to not just know God’s word but to do it, live it and practice it? Close Christian relationships. Knowing one another, living life together, and taking opportunities to encourage one another with the truth of God. You see we are family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. In a healthy family, the family members look out for one another, hold each other accountable, stick up for one another, help one another. If we are truly going to engage as followers of Christ, then we need to spend time together frequently, not just in these rows once or twice a week, but in our homes as well. So I challenged you last week to get together with other Good Shepherd members. Invite someone to your house or go out to dinner and then ask one simple question: What can I pray for for you? I gave you two weeks to complete the assignment. One week is already done, so if you don’t have plans yet, get on the phone this afternoon and start calling people. I’m serious. This is important. If we don’t know each other or spend time together, we can’t walk together and encourage one another, and we won’t be able to help one another close that gap between simply knowing God’s Word to putting it into practice.

So today we continue our engage series. What is another key faith-catalyst that will help us get off the sidelines and get on the playing field in the kingdom of God?

There is a lot to talk about in the verses we’re looking at today, and a number of worthy teaching we could focus on in this rich section of Scripture. But we don’t have time to look at it all, so I’m going to choose to focus on just one teaching in this portion of Scripture.

Ephesians 4:1-7 Unity in the Body of Christ

**4 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.**

So Paul is writing this from prison. He's in prison because he was talking about Jesus. And the overarching encouragement he gives the believers is: live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Remember how last week we said that Jesus isn't satisfied if we merely hear his word. He wants us to put it into practice. Paul writes the same thing here. You have been called to Christ. You are his follower. He has forgiven your sin. He has given you eternal life. You are a dearly loved child of God. That is what you have already been called to by God's incredible grace and mercy. But don't just know it. Now live that way! Live your life such that your daily words and actions line up with who you are. God has given you a new identity when he called you into his kingdom. Now live your life in a way that is equal to that calling.

But what does that look like? He says:

**2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.**

You know, live like Jesus lived. When you highly respect someone, you start to imitate them, don't you? In fact we have a saying: "Imitation is the highest form of flattery." So if you want to flatter Jesus, that is, praise him for who he is and what he's done for you, then imitate him. What was Jesus like? He was humble and gentle. He was the Son of God! He had every right to proud and forceful. He had every right to demand that all bow before him and force everyone to obey his every order. But he was humble and gentle. Paul says that a life worthy of the calling you received will be humble and gentle.

"Be patient, bearing with one another in love." Those words presuppose that when we deal with one another as fellow believers, we're sometimes going to annoy each other. But we will deal with each other as Jesus did with us: in patience and love

**3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.**

How important it is to be united. If you read the first 3 chapters of Ephesians, you'll learn how Jesus created unity between the believer and God. Apart from us and our good works... or more accurately, in spite of us and our sin which makes us dead to God, God showed us his grace by sending Jesus to be our perfect Savior. By faith in him, you have unity with the Father. Now God's will is that there be unity among us. Division in the church severely damages the reputation of Jesus, and keeps faith from growing and the church from reaching more lost.

Then he stresses the unity we have.

**4 There is one body** [the body of Christ is the church, and it is one.] **and one Spirit** [the Holy Spirit who creates faith in us... he is one and he is in each of us.]— **just as you were called to one hope when you were called** [we share the hope of eternal life]— **5 one Lord** [Jesus Christ], **one faith** [there is only one faith that saves], **one baptism** [all of us received the same water baptism which connects us to Christ]; **6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.** [One God unites all of us who believe in him.]

BUT... as we read on, we'll find there is something different. We aren't all carbon copies of each other. We are different in very important ways, and how we leverage our differences will determine how healthy our church will be. And the health of our church will affect our growth in faith and our ability to reach others with the good news of Jesus. So listen to this next part carefully!

**7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.** [So now we pick up on the differences. Grace (undeserved kindness) has been given to each of us. But not in the same way, in the same measure, or for the same specific purpose. A special grace has been given to each as Christ has apportioned it. In his wisdom he has given it in a special way to each of us as he has given us spiritual gifts.

## **Ephesians 4:11-16**

**11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,** [so he gave some to be spiritual leaders in the church... for what purpose? This is huge. Why are their pastors and teachers and other leaders in the church? What is their primary purpose? What are they to do?

Some people have a non-Biblical view of the purpose of a called worker. Some people think that the members stand on the sidelines while the called workers (pastors and teachers) do the work of the church. The members cheer on the pastor and teachers, while the pastor and teachers run the plays and try to score the touchdowns for the kingdom of God. (I'm not saying *you* have this point of view, or even that this is the prevailing viewpoint at Good Shepherd. I'm saying some people see things this way.)

Some of this thinking stems from a consumer view of the church. A consumer is one who tries to get the most for self for the least amount of money. The consumer says, "How can I give the least to get the most?" That mentality doesn't work in the kingdom of God... just like it doesn't work in a family. How would your family work if the mom had a consumer mentality and said, "I'm going to do the least and try to get the most from the people in this household." That family wouldn't last. Neither does the family of God.

But Christian thinking says, "Where am I needed? What can I do? How can I give?"

So if the role of leadership is not to do all the work, what is it?

Jesus gave some to be preachers and teacher and leaders...

**12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up**

To the church members that are saying where am I needed and what can I do? The pastors, teachers and spiritual leaders are saying, let me help you to serve. prepare God's people for works of service. What I picture when I read this is the role of a coach. A coach equips the players, teaches the players, gives the players a game plan, motivates the players. This is how the spiritual leaders in the church are described in these verse. Their primary role is to prepare God's people for works of service.

So let's imagine for a moment that the spiritual leaders are thoroughly equipping God's people. And God's people are playing hard and everyone is off the sideline and in the game, and everyone is working, and everyone knows their function and role and is executing well. What is the consequence?

The body of Christ is built up and we keep at this...

**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.**

So we get to work for the kingdom, each and every one of us, with your spiritual leaders equipping you and preparing you. As we keep on doing this is, we grow closer in the faith, our unity grows. Our knowledge of Jesus grows, our faith grows and we mature in the faith. We keep at this until we attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

And when we are one and mature in our faith...

**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 men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into 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.**

So, Christ is the head. We, the church, are the body of Christ. As we all work hard in the kingdom of God, putting God's Word into practice, living a life worthy of the calling we have received in Christ Jesus, being humble and gentle and loving one another, as we speak God truth in

love, we grow up together. Our faith grows. Our knowledge of Christ grows. Our walk with Christ grows. We become a stronger body.

So note how interdependent we as followers of Jesus are. First of all, Jesus is our head. You can't get very far without your head, can you? And we are together the body. Individually, we are members of the body. Separate a part of the body from the rest of the body and it becomes dead and useless. If a part of the body becomes weak, or doesn't function, the rest of the body suffers. But when every unique part of the body is fulfilling its purpose and its function, then you have a healthy, strong body.

The church is like that. We have one head, Jesus Christ. We all are members of the body, and every unique member needs to be fully functioning and engaged in God's kingdom for us to have a healthy body.

Imagine a big toe that say, "I won't join the rest of the body because the other body parts are hypocrites. I'll be attached to Jesus, but not the rest of the body." That means you're telling Jesus that it's healthy to have a head and attached to it is a big toe and nothing else. A lone Christian is not healthy or complete. Jesus says.

Or imagine your left lung says, "I'm too busy with other endeavors outside the body. I don't have time to waste inhaling and exhaling for the benefit of the rest of the body. Maybe the left thigh can pick up some of the slack for me." No, the left lung does what only the left lung can do and the other body parts can't pick up the slack for it. So also in the body of Christ when someone is too busy, the rest of the body suffers because of it. We need each and every one of you active and working in the church, the body of Christ. Otherwise the rest of us will suffer. We won't be as strong. We won't grow in faith as much. We won't be as mature. And we won't reach as many people for Jesus.

Or imagine your knee cap become envious of the job that the heart does. The knee cap says "The heart is so important and so cool! I'm going to strive to do what heart does." That's not good for the body either. The knee cap has a unique function that only it can do. In fact, if your heart decided to relocate to the bend in your knee and fill the knee cap's function, you'd die the first time you kneeled down. God gave you a unique position and unique abilities and resources. Thrive with the gifts God gave you and do them to the best of your ability and the body of Christ will thrive with you.

In all of this the role of the pastor and spiritual leaders is to equip you. So if you're a knee cap and you want to know how to be the very best version of a kneecap you can be, your spiritual leaders will help you. Or if you are a left foot, what does the rest the body need that left foot to do so the rest of the body will be blessed. Let me show you how, and where and when and what so you can do the most to build up the body of Christ.

At this point, there are usually people thinking. "Okay, I see why I need to be serving and involved. I want to volunteer. But I don't know what my gifts are. What part of the body am I!?"

Here are some thoughts:

- 1) Think about what you're good at. What natural abilities do you have? What do you love to do? What are your hobbies? How do you like to help others? What do you do that seems to make the time fly? What gives you satisfaction when you do it? The answers to those questions will help you determine your spiritual gifts.
- 2) Still not sure? Volunteer in different areas and see what works. Listen to the feedback of others. If you're serving well, people will notice. Sometimes you need to ask directly.

- 3) What do you notice that could be better? If you come to church and it strikes you that we could do this better, or that could look better, or why don't we...? Since you notice how it could be, that's probably a gift you have. You should be part of the solution. And you'll enjoy being part of the solution if you get involved.

So... our series is called "engage." What are we talking about here? Volunteering and serving, especially in the church. Using your gifts for the good of others makes the church of Jesus stronger and helps it to grow.

I would absolutely love it if everyone would get involved doing something. And I don't want this to be guilt-based, but joy-based. Jesus already gave me his all. He forgave my sins and made me a child of God. So how can I serve in his body, the church? It's a joyful thing to go to work with Jesus and serve others in love.

So what's your challenge this week? If you're not already volunteering or serving in the church in some way, decide that you will get involved. And again, I want to keep it simple. So... send me a quick e-mail this week and tell me what you enjoy doing and/or where you think you have some gifts. That's it. Send a quick e-mail to [church@goodshepherdomaha.com](mailto:church@goodshepherdomaha.com) (it's on the back of your bulletin) and tell me what you enjoy doing and what you think your gifts might be. Or quick jot it down on the back of the service folder and hand it to me. I'll compile the responses and work with our Member Ministry Directors, Ben Leibl and Dave Danford and we'll be in touch.

God bless us as we "engage!" Amen.