

**Ephesians 4:1-16**  
**Week 7**  
**“Expectations vs Reality”**  
**5/2/21**

### **Introduction**

Tim. Pastor. Sup. **Ephesians 4:1-16. Ministry Center Spotlight. PRAY.**

Here’s where I want to start us today. Here’s a principle that is true about life and will help us greatly for the rest of this sermon: **Our ability to enjoy, appreciate, or love something depends greatly on our expectations of it.**

**Lindsay + The Whig.** For example, a few weeks ago Lindsay and I went back to visit my family in Columbia for the weekend. During our three years there, one of our favorite date spots was a dive bar called the Whig. If you’ve never been it’s this basement bar right across from the statehouse in downtown Columbia. It’s grungy, there’s like 8 tables in it, but the food is incredible. The last time we had been there was March 6th, 2020. Then Harper was born, then Covid shut them down, then we moved here. And we were finally, over a year later going to get to go back. Now I knew from talking to friends that though their menu was the same, a few of their items were just a little bit different - different food suppliers, you know how that works. So I had the proper expectations going into it. Except Lindsay didn’t know this fact. So we go. She gets the burger she’s been craving for a year → **And** it just doesn’t live up to the hype in her head. **Still a great burger, but Lindsay’s ability to appreciate, enjoy, or (if I can say it) love that burger was greatly affected by her expectations of it.** Her expectations and reality didn’t line up.

**Our ability to enjoy, appreciate, or love something depends greatly on our expectations of it.**

Here’s why this matters for us today: We’ve come to the turning point in the book of Ephesians. We’re moving out of chapters 1-3 where Paul has been emphasizing and teaching the church at Ephesus about their identity in Christ, what the gospel is, what Christ has done for them. And we’re moving into chapters 4-6 which are **“Gospel identity applied.”** The next 3 chapters get extremely practical for how we should live in light of what Christ has done for us.

**And he’s going to start by addressing how we should live within a local church.**

**All of us have expectations and assumptions about the church.**

- Some of these expectations we are aware of and some we’re not.
- Some we are willing to voice, and some we’re not.
- Some of these expectations are Biblical and wise, and some are shaped by church culture or our own preferences and frankly wrong.

**Let me give you some examples. Expectations like:**

- These people are Christians so they’re never going to hurt me.
- Relationships should come naturally and instantly, I should automatically just belong.
- It should never be difficult to be a part of this church, and only ever life-giving and uplifting.
- My pastor should always agree with me and only say things that validate me and my opinions.
- They need to play songs that align perfectly with my worship preference in style and lyrics. It’s gotta move me emotionally in just the right away.

And I think for many of us, it’s these unhelpful and unBiblical expectations that we let get in the way of us enjoying, appreciating and valuing the tangible church we actually see right in front of us. When we come in with faulty expectations, we can find ourselves very confused, or disappointed or frustrated that those expectations aren’t met.

**And so we do one of a couple of things:**

- We leave and go find a church that we think will meet those expectations.
- We try to force the church we’re in to better meet our expectations.

- Or we just let things be and grow internally bitter and resentful at all the ways the church isn't meeting our desires.

**But ironically the one thing we often neglect to do is examine the validity of those expectations in the first place.**

We neglect to take a step back and go "Is the problem with this church or these churches? Or is some of the problem in what I'm expecting a church to be?" Are my expectations valid? Biblical? Healthy? Wise?

**So the nice version of what I want to do today** - I want us to look together at Ephesians 4:1-16, where Paul outlines what a healthy, mature church should look like, and I want to use the picture Paul paints of a healthy church to **push back on four specific faulty expectations we have when it comes to church.**

And it's my hope that we would learn to **embrace reality over our false expectations** so that we could more fully embrace what it is God has for us in the gift of the church, the bride of Christ.

**The straight forward version is** → I'm trying to get out ahead of some of y'all being mad at me or mad at our church in 6 months because of faulty expectations that we or I didn't live up to. And I want to give you instead a compelling picture of what the church is called to be so you can embrace and appreciate and love it.

### Verse 1

So let's get into it together. We'll start in **verse 1**.

**1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,**

In other words → **Jesus died for you, you're a Christian, so live like it.**

Then he address what this means to live as a Christian within the church:

### Expectation #1 - Unity

**2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

I find what Paul says in verse 3 so fascinating - he says we should be **3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

Now we talked about this at the end of chapter 2 - that **Christ Himself has brought us peace** with each other. In His flesh Jesus broke down the dividing wall of hostility, He has made the two one. **Peace isn't something we make happen in the Church.** Christ has brought us peace.

And now in light of the peace Christ has brought us, Paul urges the church to maintain it. Maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Which leads to expectation #1.

**Expectation #1: Everyone in the church should just get along.**

One of the expectations we have when it comes to church is that we should show up and all just be best friends, get along instantly, never get on each other's nerves, never hurt each other → One big happy family forever.

What happens when we have this expectation is that we don't know how to handle conflict. We think conflict is the enemy. We think the absence of conflict = a healthy church.

**Premarital Counseling.** I've been counseling engaged couples for a number of years now, and I see this time and time again with a lot of couples I've worked with. **They think conflict is bad.** That if they have conflict that means they have an unhealthy relationship. To which I try to tell them - Maybe. Depends how you're fighting, how much you're fighting, what you're fighting about. But conflict is not the enemy. Conflict is not the ultimate evil to be avoided in your relationship.

**In fact, conflict is often a necessity to actually develop true and flourishing unity. Conflict breeds intimacy, whereas avoidance leads to more disunity.**

We are a bunch of sinners trying to be a family together. We have different personalities, we have different wirings, different backgrounds, different viewpoints of the world and then you add on top of that our three enemies - the world, the flesh, and the devil → It's a recipe for conflict.

Which is why Paul urges the church to be eager to maintain unity. If unity just happened, we wouldn't have to work to maintain it. We wouldn't need eagerness, or you could also translate the word as **diligence**, to maintain the unity we have in the Spirit. That leads to reality #1:

#### **Reality #1: Unity takes work.**

This takes work. It means having hard conversations you don't want to have. It means forgiving when you don't want to forgive. It means saying hard things in love you don't want to say because you're more committed to long term unity than you are their or your temporary comfort.

**B.** Let me give you an example of this....I got a call two weeks ago from someone in our church. I had made some decisions the week prior that he had interpreted a certain way and felt like I was cutting his legs out from under him, and he felt like I was getting in the way of him fully serving our church in his role, all of that. And so he called me and he said, "Hey man, I didn't want to call you about this, but I knew if I didn't address it it was going to lead to bitterness. Will you help me understand these decisions, because I trust you and I'm on team Citizens." And it was a hard conversation, but it led to a rich fruit of unity between us.

Paul tells us what this is going to take in verse 2 - humility. Gentleness. Patience. Bearing with one another in love. This requires a work of the Spirit.

#### **Expectation #2 - Sameness**

**Let's keep going...**

**7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.**

So Paul in verses 1-6 talks about our unity → One Lord, One Spirit, One faith, One Father → We're called to be one body and one family, then he says → **BUT**...hold up. We're called to be in this thing together, but that doesn't mean we're all called to be a part of it in the **exact same way**.

There are different gifts given to each one of us.

What we're aiming for is **unity not uniformity**. We want to be unified, but not all the same.

**8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."**

Paul is quoting **Psalm 68:18**. He's likening Jesus to an Old Testament king where after conquering and defeating an enemy, they would plunder that city and bring back a whole bunch of gifts for their people. Paul is saying that Jesus has won the ultimate victory through his life, death, and resurrection, and is now distributing to His people the "spoils of war" → Gifts for them to enjoy and use!

The gifts of grace. Spiritual gifts. Gifts like serving, teaching, giving, hospitality, leadership, administration. A variety of gifts for a variety of roles of service within the church.

**Football Team.** Think about a football team. There are different positions on the team because the team needs different gifts, talents, abilities to succeed. If you have a football team full of QBs (which is a very important position), that's not a very good football team. The QB shouldn't play linebacker. Left tackle doesn't need to play RB. Football team has one goal → win the game. Different people play different roles to accomplish that purpose.

Our church has one goal → To be a Jesus-centered Family on Mission with Him. - but **Jesus in His grace has given us different gifts and roles to play in achieving that goal.**

Which leads to expectation #2...

**Expectation #2: My priorities should be everyone's priorities.**

Now wait a minute, I thought we were talking about gifts?

Let me explain: Our gifts within the church often dictate our passions which then often dictate our priorities.

- So if you're gifted in knowledge and teaching and wisdom, often your passion is going to lie in theology and theological training and knowledge-based discipleship, which then means that is going to be what you prioritize within the local church.
- If you're gifted in hospitality and evangelism, often your passion is going to lie in serving those around you, in reaching the lost in your community, which then means that is going to be what you prioritize within the local church.

**Poll right now - what are your priorities in a local church.**

- I want a place where my kids can be discipled and taught about Jesus.
- I want a place that creates a worship environment where God is glorified.
- I want a church that operates like a family, and I can belong and be known.
- I want a church that preaches the deep truths of Scripture.

And none of these are bad desires. I would argue all of them are good things to want and good things to aim for. There are so many things the Bible calls us to care deeply about as Christians and as a church.

The problem becomes when we elevate our priorities within that to the ultimate, and begin to look down on others who we don't feel prioritize our priorities in the same way. The problem is that we grow bitter and prideful when our cause is not sufficiently championed as we want it to be.

We begin to think things like:

- "Well this church is unhealthy because they don't seem to care at all about this (fill in the blank)."
- "Well the leadership doesn't know what they're doing cause they're not emphasizing this thing enough, or putting enough money towards that."

But here's the reality...

**Reality #2: God gives different people different gifts.**

There are specific things the Bible tells us as a church to care about:

- James 1:27 - Orphans and widows.
- Colossians 4:2 - Prayer
- 2 Timothy 4 - The preaching of the Word of God
- Romans 10 - The sending of missionaries to the nations
- Acts 2 - Taking care of each other as a family

The list goes on and on. And we all, as followers of Jesus, **have to care about these things.** You're not allowed to be apathetic towards orphans as a follower of Jesus.

You're not allowed to not care about taking the gospel to the nations as a follower of Jesus.

**But God, in His kindness and grace gives unique and specific deeper burdens, passions, and corresponding gifts to folks for the blessing of our church.**

Which means all of us are called to care for orphans, some of us are called to adopt.

All of us should care about having a praying church, some of us are called to lead that forward.

All of us should care about having a hospitable church, some of us are called to lead the way in that through their specific gifts.

Not looking down on others whose care for that thing is different, but helping own that so our church as a whole gets built up. **Linebackers and quarterbacks both want to win the game, they just have to play their role and support and cheer on the other one when it's their turn.**

People sitting next to you have different passions and different gifts. People in your CG have different passions and different gifts → That's a great thing. We need to view this as a gift from God.

**9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)**

Paul goes into an aside here. Scholars differ on what it means. Best guess is it's talking about his incarnation. Descending to take on flesh. Not the purpose of this sermon, so let's keep going:

### **Expectation #3 - Ministry**

**11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,**

Paul then goes on to mention some specific gifts within the church, specifically outlining 5 leadership roles God gives the church for the good of the Church as a whole. Now, we could talk for hours about what the role of each of these should be in the local church, but I think Paul's point is what all of these roles are given to the church for, which comes in verse 12:

**12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,**

The purpose of all the gifts, and these leadership roles within the church, is to **equip the saints for the work of ministry.** Which leads us to our third expectation and reality:

**Expectation #3: Ministry is something church leaders do.**

If I can continue the football analogy from earlier, I think there can be a temptation that if church is a sport, those in leadership are the athletes. Which would mean every Sunday is like a game. You guys show up, pay your offering price of admission to watch me and Jacob and whoever else is leading do our thing, while you guys enjoy (or don't enjoy it), cheer us on (or sit there and stare), and then the rest of the week you go about your life as normal until you show up next week.

And because of that, there are plenty of churches that try each Sunday to put on the best possible show they can. But behind all of that is the belief that church is mainly something pastors do, and I watch or attend or consume. But that's not what the Bible says is reality....

### **Reality #3: Ministry is something we all do.**

Look at vs 11-12 again - **11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,**

Not to **do the work of ministry**, BUT to equip the saints, God's people, the Church for the work of ministry.

**If anything, that means my job is not to do ministry.** My job is not to play. It's to be more like the coach. **If I'm stepping into my responsibilities as a pastor, that means I do less ministry, and you all do more ministry.** More caring for each other's needs, more counseling one another from the Scriptures, more preaching God's truths to each other in CG, more evangelizing your neighbors, coworkers, friends, family.

If our church is functioning Biblically, that means way less me doing those things, way more me equipping you all to do those things.

This actually impacts how we think about **what we do here on Sundays**. Our goal when we gather together is not to entertain you or impress you, it's to **equip you**. To teach you the Scriptures, to remind you of God's truth and the gospel through song, readings, and prayer, to exalt Christ and point you to Him - and then send you back into the world (which is what we do in our benediction) equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the work of ministry the other 6 days and 22 hours you have not in this building.

### **Expectation #4 - Growth**

Ministry is something we all do. Which leads us to our last point. V 13:

**13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.**

I want you to notice the phrasing of these verses:

- Until we **all** attain to the unity
- **We** are to grow up
- **The whole** body
- **Every** joint
- **Each** part

So that → **The body builds itself up in love.**

The goal of your life with Christ is maturity. That you would be rooted and grounded in the love of Christ - not tossed to and fro by false teaching, bad doctrine, temptations of the world. But that you would be mature, be rooted, stand firm.

However, a short-sighted view of this goal leads to our 4th and final expectation:

**Expectation #4: My growth is other people's responsibility.**

We are drawn into a consumerist mindset towards church not just by the professionalization of ministry → ministry is something pastors do, but also by a self-serving view of church. We filter our participation in a church or a CG through questions like: "Who can pour into me? Who can help me grow? Who can disciple me? Who can mentor me? I'm supposed to grow into maturity as a Christian, who is gonna help me?"

Listen, these in and of themselves are NOT BAD QUESTIONS. I would argue they are some questions you should be asking. But you can't stop there.

These questions are only part of the reality Paul paints in v 13-16:

**Reality #4: Everybody growing is everybody's job.**

Our church should be a place where you are discipled **and** you disciple.

A place where you receive care **and** give care.

A place where you mature and grow in your knowledge of God **and** you help others mature and grow in the knowledge of God.

Which means what you're learning, how Christ is shaping you and forming you shouldn't just end with you. Remember → Grace comes to you and goes through you.

This impacts how you show up to a **Sunday Gathering**, not just when you're serving but when you're attending → I'm not here just for me. Which means you're showing up early, eyes up, looking for someone new to welcome, a church member to encourage. You're ready to worship and engage - even if it feels like the sermon isn't directly applicable to you. You care that others around are growing too. (Side note - this also affects whether you decide to show up to a gathering or not as well.)

This impacts how you show up to **Community Group** → Eyes up, ready to engage. That means if a question is asked in the Scripture and Sermon discussion time, that question isn't just for you to ponder, it's for you to say out loud what you're thinking in hopes it encourages the person across the room from you. Engage the heart time is not just a space for you to confess and lament and be reminded of the gospel, so you sit quietly and just wait your turn. It's a chance for you to own the health of the men or women sitting around you and say → How can I build them up? How can I encourage them in the gospel?

This impacts how you live life throughout the week in **relation to church family** → "Nobody's texted me. Nobody's asked to hang out. No one's pursuing me or trying to encourage me." Switches to I'm going to take the initiative. Who can I encourage? Who can I pray for? Who can I invite in and create space for....etc.

### **"Own It"**

Really, if I could summarize all of this, it would mean having an **"own it"** mentality when it comes to our church.

- I'm going to own the unity of this church family. I'm going to fight for it, struggle for it, even when it's hard or uncomfortable.

- I'm going to own my gifts and passions and priorities, help our church grow in that, and own my own pride that makes me want to grow bitter at others who don't have the same passions or gifts or priorities as me.
- I'm going to own the ministry of this church. Serve + see how I can make things better. Celebrate 100% serving. That's awesome - "entrepreneurial mindset"
- I'm going to own the spiritual health of those around me. I'm going to be just as committed to their maturity in Christ and sanctification as I am my own maturity and sanctification.

**Prayer Team.** A really tangible and beautiful example of this is our new Prayer Team. The team that leads our pre-gathering prayer, that is in the back after every sermon ready to pray for you.

- Some members in our church saw a need within our church body and saw how that need aligned with their specific gifts and burdens and priorities.
- Instead of growing bitter - "This church doesn't care about prayer." They owned the ministry of the church. They approached me with some tangible ideas they wanted to help implement.
- They owned the praying health of our church. Recruited volunteers, set up the systems, and now we're rocking and rolling.

That's owning it. This is my church. This is my family. This is the bride of Christ. How can I own the growth and maturity of those around me and step into ministry with my gifts.

**Don't let the fictional church in your mind keep you from the tangible church right in front of you.** (Don't let the tangible church on the podcast, 300 miles away)

### **Gospel Conclusion**

That's a big ask. So let me leave you with the good news of the gospel that is good news for the ways we fail at this and our encouragement and power to keep going. Look back at vs 15, let's reflect on Christ together, Paul writes:

**15 - Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.**

This whole thing is about Christ. Christ is the head of the Church. He rules and reigns over it. Church is about Him, His praise and His glory.

It's not about us and our needs, it's not about our preferences being met, it's not about our comfort, it's not about our ease, it's about Christ.

He's the point! Christ who laid down His life, sacrificed Himself, gave up His body and blood, and rose again → FOR THE CHURCH. We're talking about the bride of King Jesus.

And so may we learn, by the power of the Spirit and the grace of Christ, to put aside our faulty expectations, to live in reality, and to pursue His glory as we learn to live as the people of God together.

**Communion. Pray.**