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## EPHESIANS 4:11-16

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we're grateful for your church all around the world. Whether it's up at Lake Champion or the church in Puerto Rico, the church down in Mexico, in Houston. We know, Lord, that you're working in those people's lives today and so we lift them up and we share with them. We thank you for the power that your church has because it carries the banner of who you are and the relationship we share with you. I pray that you would use the church mightily in these days. Not just down in those areas, but right here in our town and people would experience who you are because we're being the church that you called us to be. Now Lord, we're going to open your word because we know that you speak through it. So we're asking you to teach us from it and guide our thinking, our beliefs, things that we're pondering in our hearts. Use your word to help us today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Last week I started a two-week part (so this is the second part) about church membership, what it is and what it's all about. Last week we talked about church membership, that it's not something that you're on an official list, it's something that's in your heart. Some people when you talk about church membership are afraid to fill out an application. Do I get put on a list? Is there a list of rules that I have to abide by to still be a church member? We don't see any of that in scripture. What we're talking about though, even though we don't do those things, create the list, we don't want that to appear as though we don't value church membership. Because it's taught in the scriptures (as we saw last week) about committing yourself. Commitment and involvement in the church. It's really a powerful dynamic when you're part of a church and you're committed to that church.

So you have to decide in yourself are you a member. So in your own heart, are you a member of this church? Are you committed? Are you involved in this church? That's a decision we each make ourselves.

I'm really glad that I'm a part of this church. Good things happen in my life because I'm connected here. It was last week or a couple weeks ago that I talked to Jack and Linda about their vacation, and my wife and I decided we're going to go on that vacation that you guys went on. So I have a vacation idea from church.

I was feeling really stressed out a few weeks ago, so at the end of the service I went up for prayer myself to ask someone to pray for me because of the stress that I was experiencing in my life at that point. I needed some help with my heater, so Frank helps me with my heater. There's a lot of connectedness, benefits that happen in the church, but for me it's much bigger than that.

My wife was sick for nine months years ago. We were raising five teenagers and my wife was sick for nine months in bed. The church rallied around us and became that support system for us that we really needed. When we were raising our teenagers we needed help. I'm so grateful for those other people in the life of the church that came alongside of us and cared for our young people and helped guide them in the right direction.

Sometimes people will call the church and ask for money. People do that. They just call up churches and ask for help because they can't afford to pay their rent. Sometimes we help people. But most of the time I say to people, "What you need is to get involved in a church. Because it's not about money. You don't just need money. You need support. You need connectedness." It's in the midst of that connectedness that good things happen.

God designed us to live in community. He designed us to be this church that is a fascinating place, this spiritual supernatural thing that we get connected to. When we're connected to it then amazing things happen in our lives and then through us to bless a lot of other people. That's what we're talking about. When we talk about church membership, it's not like this official organization thing as much as it's a supernatural connectedness that we experience that's powerful that affects each of us in a very personal way.

Stand with me as we read a passage of scriptures just in honor of God's word. This is a passage about the church that I'd like you to understand and know about it. It's one of the classic passages about the church and what it is. Paul is writing to the Ephesians to encourage them and tell them about the church.

He says these words starting in Ephesians 4:11 – *So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip (remember this is the inverted triangle we talked about – pastors are at the bottom along with these other people and they have a job to do and that is to equip) his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 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.*

*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. 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. 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.*

You may be seated.

I long for people to experience what I experience in the church. You have to understand, I experience what I experience in this church not because I'm a pastor. I experience it because I'm a member, because I've committed myself to this church and my friends are here, the relationships I enjoy. I'm praying for people and they're praying for me. I know what's going on in my life and they're concerned about that. I'm concerned about other people, what's going on

in their lives. Yes, I'm a pastor, but I'm a member. And it's that membership that connects me to other people. I long for other people to have that.

So I want to give you three challenges today so you can do more than just see it going on, but you can be a part of it. You can experience it for yourself. I long for you to be able to experience that connectedness. So three challenges I want to share with you today to draw you into that connectedness so you can experience what I experience and what many people experience as they're being part of the church.

The first challenge I'm going to share with you comes from Galatians 5:13 where it says this: *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.* The first challenge I want to suggest to you is that you look for ways to serve.

In the previous passage in Ephesians 4, it says that the pastors, apostles, and prophets, all these people are designed to equip the church for works of service. The idea is that when service takes place the church is being what it needs to be. So our goal here is to serve together. When you serve with other people and you're not there, you're missed. There's a connectedness that takes place in the midst of that.

We all have this responsibility to serve. You can't say, "Well I don't have the gift of cleaning toilets. I don't have the gift of picking up trash." We don't happen to do those two things here for the most part because the school takes care of those things, but we don't want to have anything outside of our realm of what we do. We look for ways to serve, to connect. We're servants. There's this general sense of service. We're looking for things that need to be done and doing them.

When you serve, you're more like Christ, who was a servant. When you serve then you get to be part of miracles in people's lives and you get to see those things. Sometimes the service is things we do here on Sunday, but sometimes the service is opening your home, maybe for a small group or maybe just inviting some folks over. Maybe the service that you do is leading a small group or calling someone who isn't here. Or driving someone to the doctor. Those are acts of service. When you serve with others, you work with them, you grow close to them. There are blessings that come as a result of that. When you serve, God does something in you, not just through you.

Last week as we were leaving, I saw two preschool children out here carrying the signs we put on the floor and putting them away. Obviously their parents are teaching them about service and what the church is about. I think that's really valuable.

So the first challenge I want to share with you is look for ways to serve. See what needs to be done and do it. That's general service.

The second kind of challenge I want to give you comes from this passage in 1 Peter 4. It says this: *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.*

You are a grace dispenser and God has given you some grace. He wants to dispense in other people and He does it in the form of people sharing with others and using what He calls spiritual gifts. So my second challenge to you is a more specific way of serving. So generally serving, but now specifically serving, use your spiritual gift. You have one. If you're a Christian God has given you one. You don't know what it is? Start serving and you'll start using it and you'll see what it is.

To illustrate that, I like the story of the church dinner. The church dinner is taking place. It's a special event plan where the young people were going to serve the adults. The young people really took this on as a challenge. They were going to have a special time where they're serving the adults. So they get everything really special and make it look cool. They all got dressed up. They were pouring the water and serving the food, and taking care of the program and making it just a special time for everyone.

James was one of the people helping in this. He's sixteen years old. He was getting really into it. He was wearing a suit and he was like the maître-d, kind of greeting people and then serving with other people. James at one point was carrying this tray that had four plates on it of food to one table. As he's carrying it there was a PA plug between the tables. He didn't see it and he tripped over it and he fell. When he fell, he fell on the food and the food went everywhere and it really was a big mess. What happened in the next few moments illustrates what we're talking about and what the church is all about.

Someone with the gift of mercy rushed over to James and said, "Are you okay? How can I help you?" Another person with a gift of service headed straight for the mop and the dustpan and the broom to clean up the mess. Another person with a gift of exhortation says to the guy at the PA table, "You need to get a cover for that cord because it's a hazard." Another person with a gift of leadership says, "Let's delay the program about ten minutes as we get things straightened up here." Another person with the gift of teaching might suggest there's ways to hold the tray differently so you can see where you're going when you're walking along the path. The person with the gift of faith is over on the side praying, "Lord, would you please work here in a special way to help James not feel so embarrassed about all this?" Another person with the gift of giving pulls out his wallet later, pulls James aside, and says, "Here, let me help pay for your suit to get cleaned."

Do you see what happens when we serve? You start using the giftedness that you have and God uses that. I love that picture because it's just a picture of the church in action. That's the kind of thing the church does and the way that it works. There's a place for everyone at Calvary Chapel Living Hope. When you come and become a member, that is you say, "This is my church, this where I'm going to serve," you don't sign up somewhere if you're wondering. It is something in your heart. This is where I'm going to serve and you're looking around and you're saying, "What am I going to do?" What happens then is our church changes as God brings people in and the personality of this body of Christ starts to adjust based on the people that God has brought us. So the second challenge I share with you is use your spiritual gift. Whatever that is, use it.

The third challenge I want to share with you has to do with money. Now there's a tendency sometimes for people to be defensive, like hold their money really close to their chest when we

start talking about this. I think that happens because of what Jesus says in Luke 12:34 – *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*. So I think there's a little natural defensiveness about this.

Frankly I think there's a lot of churches that do a lot of talking about money. We don't. So you're going to get your dose here for this a little bit as we talk about money directly. Because we are a discipleship church. We are trying to help people grow in their personal faith and money is a very important part of that.

Jesus talked about money more than any other subject. In fact He talked about money and then He talked about faith and prayer combined. Why did He do that? I think because money has this ability to derail us or concern us in a huge way.

Now I want you to understand something about Calvary Chapel. We don't do donor development. We do discipleship. Stewardship is about developing disciples, not about developing donors. Here's an important truth you want to consider. It's impossible to become a fully developing follower of Jesus without also becoming a fully developing steward of your financial resources. It's one of those areas that we need Christ in our lives. So as Christians we need to know what the Bible has to say about the subject of finances.

So what I want to do is I want to lay this out for you in four kinds of givers. There's four ways that you can give and you can figure out where you are today. I'll challenge you to kind of move to the next level.

The first kind of giver is the person who is an occasional giver. This is a very strategic person. When you come to the place where you give some money, people will usually give money when they come to the church they attend on a Sunday or they'll give money when there's a need presented or when they have extra money. These are people who are occasional givers. They're making a statement that's really important. They're making the statement that "I value this church and want to contribute to what God is doing here." We are very grateful for people who are occasional givers. It's a very important thing that happens inside of us when we say I'm contributing. I'm not just taking; I'm giving financially as well.

The second group of people are regular givers. They're making a statement as well. Their statement is "giving is important to me and I want to make it a systematic part of my life." These people give regularly. Some people give based on a pay period or give monthly or whatever. Often they're using some system to do that, whether it's a website or automatic debit or something. So it's an automatic part of their giving. The reason they do that is because it's part of their identity. What they're doing is making a statement about who they are and that's a really valuable statement that happens.

Something happens in your heart when you move from an occasional giver to a regular giver because it does something about your identity. It says this is who I am. I am somebody who gives like this. That's the second kind of giver.

The third kind of giver is someone who tithes, making a statement, “I’m trusting God with my finances and want to be obedient to Him.”

Now there’s some debate about whether tithing is just for the Old Testament where it was initiated and taught and developed, or it’s for the New Testament since we don’t have a lot of talk about tithing in the New Testament. We have a little, but not a lot. It’s a really good question. Is it part of the law? Some of the law we don’t sacrifice animals today. That’s part of the law that kind of went aside. Does that mean we don’t have sacrifices today? No. It doesn’t mean we don’t have sacrifices today because Romans 12 tells us that we do have sacrifices. We are to *present our bodies as a living sacrifice*. So it used to be sacrifices of animals, but now it’s raised to the next level. We sacrifice ourselves. So continually in the law we see the kind of thing where you’re here in one place and you’re moving to the next level. Now that you are in the New Testament era, the grace era, however you want to describe what Jesus was teaching when He moved us to this new place in our understanding.

But let’s go back into the Old Testament. I want to show you a passage about tithing just so you can see what the Bible has to say about it. In Malachi 3 it says – *Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. “But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”*

This is the only place in the whole Bible that God says, “Test me.” Only place. *Test me in this*. Then He says He will pour out these floodgates. What a blessing. So much blessing. If you are considering this, I would encourage you to test God. “Lord, I’m going to tithe. I’m going to give 10% of my income for four months. I want to see what you’re going to do,” and just watch God work in the midst of that. But it’s a good question whether this is something just for the Old Testament or is this something also for the New Testament as well. So I want to address that question and help you understand the difference between Old Testament and New Testament and how it even affects this area of giving.

In the Old Testament Jesus said, “*You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*” What Jesus is saying is this: In the Old Testament there are Ten Commandments. One of those commandments is do not commit adultery. That is the law. That’s obedience. But now what He’s saying is I’m taking you to a new level. I’m taking you to something else. Now we’re talking about grace. Grace is bigger than the law.

So Paul is going to develop that whole idea of grace more so that we understand it. Because with grace we do more than that. He’s saying it’s not just about actually committing the act of adultery; it’s about something inside of your heart that’s really important. So again here, Jesus is taking the law and moving to the next level to help us understand how to apply it now that we’re in this age of the church, or this grace age, or however you want to imagine that.

That verse was in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus also says in the Sermon on the Mount – *You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.* That happens to be in the Ten Commandments as well. So Jesus is looking at the law and He's describing to them the difference between living under the law and living the way I'm going to teach you now. He says you live under the law and you can't murder. *But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.* What do anger and murder have in common? Revenge. He's saying now it's about your heart. We're going to move to the next level here. It's not about just committing the act. It's about something inside of your heart and God wants you to be able to move to that next level.

Well He also has things to say about tithing. So let's see what that says. In Matthew 23:23 it says – *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!* So He's addressing the religious leaders of the time who were very interested in behavior, not so much about the heart. Jesus was bringing a whole message about the heart. He wanted them to understand. *You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin.* See what they would do is they were so diligent, anything that comes to them, even the spices they were growing in their garden, they would take a tenth of it and make sure it went to God because that was the rule. They were really into that.

*But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.* Those are things inside of your heart. Notice what He says here. *You should have practiced the latter* (that is the justice, mercy, and faithfulness – you should be moving and doing these things because that's what God wants for us), *without neglecting the former.* He doesn't move away from tithing. He encourages it there. But he doesn't want people to get stuck in just looking at rules because the most important thing when it comes to giving or the law is that it's in your heart. What's coming from your heart is the most important thing.

So if you look at three levels already we've talked about, we've got occasional givers, we've got regular givers, we've got tithers. Do you know what the next one is? The next one is extravagant givers. These are people that are giving sacrificially. So the statement is "I sacrificially want to give and be used mightily by God for His work."

Let me give you an example of an extravagant gift. Westerly Road Church (now is called Stonebridge Church) in Princeton was getting ready to move from Westerly Road where they were and over to a new location where they are now. That's why they changed their name to Stonebridge Church. While they were making the move and doing the building project and all of those things, they got a gift of 20 million dollars. That was just from one donor. A lot of people were giving toward their projects and so on, but they got a gift for 20 million dollars. I don't even know what that looks like. That's an extravagant gift.

Just imagine what God could do in the mission of Calvary Chapel Living Hope with some extravagant gifts. Just imagine! We've got so many ideas about building into children, discipling people, raising the next generation for the kingdom. Just imagine what could happen with extravagant gifts.

Jesus talked about extravagant gifts, and it's not the amount of money. Look at this story. *Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their*

*money into the temple treasury. So He's watching people put their money into the offering. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."*

What defines an extravagant gift? It has to do with sacrifice. I want to challenge you. The third challenge I want to suggest to you is that you move to the next level in your giving, wherever that is. It's between you and the Lord. That God might use you in some way in your finances and do something in your heart in regards to finances. Keep this in mind. You don't give to a church. You give through a church to the Lord's work.

Now we desire at Calvary Chapel to model an attitude of generosity. When visitors come, we give them a gift. Every year I have a bunch of t-shirts made. We just give them away. We don't charge for the t-shirts. We have the devotions for children. We give those. We don't charge for those things. The whole idea here is that we want to create an attitude of generosity, even when we're caring for people who are struggling under the storm or the devastation that exists there. We're generous. We have this attitude of generosity. Why? It's because of this teaching again where it says – *Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

I just suggest you take a look at these three challenges for your own life as you're a member at Calvary Chapel Living Hope. You look for ways to serve, you use your spiritual gift, you move to the next level in your giving, and you watch God work. Because what God does is He takes whatever we do, our service, our time, our talents, and He multiplies them to be something very powerful. That's what He calls a church. That's a supernatural thing that He does and we grow together as our efforts are put together to do what God wants us to do.

I like the story of the pastor who got a phone call at the office. A man on the line says, "Hey, I'd like to join your church. I'd like to become a church member. But I don't want somebody bothering me about attending every week or going to a small group or serving or giving." The pastor said to him, "Well congratulations. I commend you for your desire to join a church because joining a church will help you greatly. But I think you might have the wrong one. Let me give you an address of a church across town that will be helpful for you." The guy said, "Oh thank you very much," wrote down the address, drove over to the church, and found the church all boarded up and ready for demolition. Why? Because a church is made of people. People who are committed, who are growing.

God designed the church. He said, "I will build my church." He invites us to become members of His church and that membership is in our hearts. Commitment and involvement are expressions of that membership. I welcome you to take that step of committing yourself to Calvary Chapel Living Hope. It's a powerful thing in our lives when we do that. That's why I like this statement: "Life is a journey. Let's walk it together."

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I just thank you for this church and the blessing that it is to me and to so many people. I pray that you would continue to expand our vision, continue to bring people to this church who will mold its vision and mission. We want to be responsive to you, Lord. Cause us to be effective. Protect this church from division, from error. We ask that we would serve you wholeheartedly in everything that we do. We dedicate this church to you now and we dedicate our lives to you as well. In Jesus' name, amen.