

Getting it all together

Ephesians 4:1-16

Tom Riley

One of the greatest things about living in Madrid is being with family. The job of helping raise our granddaughters is phenomenal. Not only do I get to tell them my life stories (along with a few bad grandpa jokes), I get to live into their story. I'm seeing their lives open up before my very eyes.

Some of you know that before moving to Madrid my wife Anne was an elementary school principal, besides helping me in ministry. And I was a minister and church planter and worked as Director of Development and Outreach for Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee, USA. I also taught (and still teach online) the "Story" classes: "The Story of Israel," "The Story of Jesus," and "The Story of the Church." As required courses, we take every student (whether they are going to be doctors, lawyers, dentists, nurses, teachers, principals, engineers, accountants, or whatever) we take them through the entire Bible ... so they have at least a glimpse of the story of God—His Story!

My wife and our story as a couple actually started on that campus. I can tell you the occasion and the exact spot on campus where we met. Our life of ministry together has taken us from Tennessee, to Missouri, to Arizona, back to Tennessee, back to Arizona, back to TN and AZ for churches and schools and church planting ... and now this chapter in Madrid, Spain. The stories of our lives are important, and I believe they are God-breathed. (See Eph. 2:10.)

I was listening to two rabbis / scholars discussing the current situation in Israel this week, and they shared their stories of what they did in the moments following the missile bombardment by Hamas on Israel. The first described hearing about the news on the way to a religious celebration, with his children excited about the service and oblivious to what was happening in the world; and at the same time he knew he needed to go on to the celebration. He described the worship leader doing the most magnificent thing; as he circled the assembly with the Torah he finally sat on the ground and invited them all to sit on the ground and pass the Torah around reciting the words of the occasion reminding them of God's presence always (before, during and after calamity)!

The second described hearing the announcement while he and his family were in Jerusalem for the holy day. In the hotel they heard rocket blasts, then a siren ... and a loud speaker making an announcement ... something to the effect that they should leave their rooms and make their way to floor 0 and that they had 10 minutes to get there. They rushed out of their room and to the stairwell

(not using the elevators), and a mass of others people were doing the same thing. They went down from 9 to 8 to 7, but at floor 7 it stopped. There was a jam of people with nowhere to go ... all trying to get to floor 0 in 10 minutes. He exited the stairwell with his family and found another way to floor 0. And waited for the bombardment to end. He later discovered that the traffic jam in the stairwell was not accidental. The stairwell was actually the safest place for them to be. It was heavily reinforced to withstand bombardment. They didn't have to make it to floor 0 ... in reality; they just needed to make it to the stairwell. Though the two experiences were almost opposite of each other, they had a common lesson for the rabbis ... to lean into the story of God even when he doesn't seem present.

In our lesson today I want to bring some encouragement from the story of the Apostle Paul to his friends at Ephesus. As Brother Keith "Called Out the Called" two weeks ago (using the calling of Moses as his text), I want to piggy-back on that to emphasize that we are ALL called (and GIFTED) to do something! We are all ministers together in some capacity. Each one of us has some gift that Christ has given us for the benefit of each other! Together! Paul emphasizes that together the believers all became one in Christ, and as the body of Christ they were living in the story of God.

Paul's initial church planting mission to Ephesus was phenomenal! It involved,

- Paul finding some followers of John the baptizer and teaching them the way of Christ more fully including baptism and the Holy Spirit.
- Teaching boldly in the Jewish synagogue.
- Healing of many by touching the clothes or handkerchiefs that Paul touched.
- The whole city respecting God and the burning \$1,000,000 of magic books.
- Ephesus turned so strong to Christ that the silver idol makers lost business.
- After Demetrius stirred up a riot, the city clerk diffused it; and Paul left peacefully for Macedonia ... leaving Ephesus with a strong Christian presence.
- What a church plant!

Besides church planting, Paul was also raising money for the famine that had hit Israel. So, after some time in Macedonia and Greece, he took a ship back to Israel. The ship would need to make several stops as it crossed the Mediterranean. And one of those stops was at the port city of Miletus (about 30 miles from Ephesus). He sent word to the elders at Ephesus, and they traveled the 30 miles and met with him for prayer on the beach at Miletus. They begged him there not to return to Jerusalem, but the Spirit was leading him into danger and into imprisonment that would lead him to Rome as a prisoner ... eventually standing before Caesar. Read Acts 21:1, and see the affection between Paul and his spiritual children: *"When they had torn themselves away..."*

From prison Paul writes them a letter. I just have to imagine what it would have been like to be in a house church in Ephesus and a letter from our friend has just arrived. We gather around and listen with all our heart!

As he opens the letter in his typical manner, Paul's mind (guided by the Holy Spirit) catches on the notion of the glory of God and breaks into 12 verses of effusive praise! It's not poetic. It's not pretty. It's hard to translate. Hard to punctuate. But the old apostle, writing his friends from prison and

captured by the thought of God, lets loose with praise to the Father who chose us, the Son who redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit who sealed us... marking us as his. Like he chose Abraham, God has chosen us! Like he redeemed Israel out of Egypt, Jesus has redeemed us! Like he sealed the letters from God in apocalyptic writings, the Spirit has sealed us as belonging to God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (All working as One) with you as the focus of their attention. To bring you back into God's gracious arms! Mind blowing!

He has loved us so much ... it really is beyond our comprehension. But as Paul often does, this powerful **Indicative** of God's work leads to the **Imperative** of our response. Because of what God has done for us, here's our response: read Eph. 4:1-16. The Holy Spirit joins us together in peace. We are to let peace hold us together as one body with one Spirit.

This togetherness is enhanced by what Christ did when he returned to the Father. He did two things (Psa. 68:18): **(1)** he took prisoners captive, and **(2)** he gave gifts to people. The gifts are varied but for one purpose: **"to prepare God's people for the work of service"** (Eph. 4:12). Your giftedness is not just for yourself. It's for the body of Christ. As we are joined together, we serve together, we grow together, we ache together, and we celebrate together. With Christ as the head, the whole body is joined and held together as each part does its work. And this makes the whole body grow and be strengthened in love.

As Pastor Dixon reminded us, even though the Ministry Fair is past, you can still discover ways to be involved in the body of Christ here at IBC. You are gifted by Christ in ways that the body needs. Step up and say, "I can do this!" Nobody will revoke your "humble button!" Christ gave the gifts you have; use them for him in the body of Christ. The Father has chosen you. The Son has redeemed you. The Spirit has sealed you. Christ has gifted you.

Now, it's your turn.

Push in.

Don't wait to be asked.

Push in ... with your gift used for the service of God.

Used to the glory of God.