

## *“The Family of God” continues*

### **Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians**

Ephesians 3:1-21

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**Jeff:** Our merciful God, we thank You and praise You. You are God above heaven and earth, the Creator. Through Your Son the Lord Jesus Christ You created and You redeemed. And we’re thankful to be here. We’re thankful to be in Your presence. We’re thankful to be Your people. We’re thankful to be in Christ, having received in Him all of the blessings in the spiritual places, having received our justification, our sanctification, our adoption—all of the blessings that flow from our union and communion with Christ are ours in Him. And we delight in that.

Father, we take special delight in it in difficult days, in hard days, because we know that the future has been brought forward into the present, that we might enjoy the future age, the age to come in this present evil age. And its oppressiveness is bearable in Christ. So Father, we take our stand upon Your word, for indeed it is for our comfort and consolation. And it is for our instruction, for our benefit. And it is that we might be formed according to the cruciform life that is in Christ. So we give ourselves to You this morning, asking that You’ll bless us in Him abundantly.

Father, we also pray especially for Molly and Vivian today, asking that Your hand would be upon them, that You would be giving the doctors wisdom as they try and discern what the problems are. We pray for extra grace to be given to the parents as they have to weather these difficult times. And we certainly pray for Kevin and his wife. Father, we do pray for Kevin. We ask that Your hand would be upon him as well as he recovers.

We certainly pray for Genelle. And we pray for a full recovery for her. We’re thankful for the delivery of a healthy baby. But we pray for Mom and ask that You will mend her body. Father, bless our time together now. We ask it in Jesus’ blessed name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen.

**Jeff:** Okay. So today we are in Ephesians chapter 3. And if you’ll remember I’ve said to you that this is an overview. Or at least I wrote this as an overview. And so we’ll go as far as you want to go when we look at the text. But again we’re going to look at 3:1-21 because that’s the way I wrote it. But I’ll be glad to stop along the way. Well, let me read to you the word of God. This is the infallible, inerrant, authoritative word of the living God. Give your attention to it.

*“For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, (assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.) When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

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*“Of this gospel I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given to me by the working of His power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.*

*“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

*“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen.”* This is the word of the Lord.

**Brave Men:** Thanks be to God.

**Jeff:** Okay. So today, or maybe over the course of several days, I want us to think about these topics as we think about chapter 3. I want us to think about just some introductory points. And this will be in some ways a refresher to you. But I also want us to think about ministry and the different aspects of ministry as it comes from this chapter. Ministry is a gift to us. It connects us, it strengthens us and it bears fruit among us. I think that’s the focus or the general thrust of chapter 3. But first of all some introductory points that I think are important to us.

First of all I want you to remember where we are when we think about the book of Ephesians. When you think about the book of Ephesians you think about it and divide it up into two large sections. You think about chapters 1-3, and then you think about chapters 4-6.

Now when you think about those two sections, those two sections are dominated by one particular aspect of grammar in the first part, and then another particular aspect of grammar in the second part. That first part is the *indicative*. In other words, the tenses in the main are in the indicative sense—in other words, what God has done, what is accomplished, what is now the state of things. That’s the indicative. It tells you what is.

And then the latter half of the book—4, 5 and 6—is dominated by the imperative. In other words Paul is commanding us. He’s telling us what we must do as a result of what God has done.

Think about it. Divide the book up according to the covenant statement that God often uses in the Old Testament and is often repeated in the New. *“I will be your God and you will be My people.”* In other words, the indicative tells us how God is our God. This is what He’s done for us as our God. And then the imperative tells us how we may be His

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people. As a result of who He is and what He has done on our behalf, this is how we are to behave. So there’s the covenant principle. And that’s the way the book of Ephesians is divided up.

And I think that when you think about the gospel there’s a gospel grammar here. And what I mean by that is this. You never, ever want to start the gospel with the imperatives. If you start the gospel with the imperatives what do you have? Somebody is glad to tell you that you have legalism.

However, the interesting thing is that if you only preach the indicatives and leave off the imperatives, what do you have? You have antinomianism. You have a Christian who is against the law.

Now why is that important to hold those two things together? Well you see, it comes out of what we said the last couple of times we talked together. If we talk about salvation as being in union with Jesus Christ, one of the things that we realize is that there is a twofold grace of God in that union—a *duplex gratia Dei*. Those benefits can be summed up in two ways: *forensic* and *transformative*, or renovative.

And those benefits that are divided up into these two categories are basically forensic, being justification and adoption, and the transformative being what? Well, one of those is sanctification. And when you think about sanctification in terms of the *duplex gratia Dei*, or the twofold union with Christ, one of the things that you realize is that you can’t say, “Well, I’m united to Christ and I’ve received the forensic benefits. But I haven’t had that second movement of grace in my heart,” or “I haven’t had the Spirit give me the gift of sanctification yet,” or any number of ways you can put it. It’s all wrong.

And it’s all wrong because if you possess the forensic you possess the transformative. In other words, if you have the indicatives of God, then you have the gifts to fulfill the transformative. You cannot have one without the other, okay? So there’s a gospel grammar here. When you only do the indicatives, then you have antinomianism. But if you flip them around and do the imperatives first, then you have legalism, okay?

Ephesians 2:11 is the only imperative that is in the first half of the book. And I felt compelled to tell you this because there is one imperative in the first section. But the only imperative that you find in the first section of the book is an injunction to remember what God has done for you—that sort of thing. So there is an imperative there, but it’s interesting how it’s set up.

The indicatives therefore tell me one very important thing. They tell me that I’m secure. Why? Why is that important? Well, we’ve been thinking about this epistle in light of that security, that element of security. And when we think about the indicative—what God has done for us, how we are secure in Christ as a result of what He has done for us—the answer becomes obvious. This is how I’m secure.

Now let me ask you a question. And this is an important thing. When you think about the topic that I raised—the topic of ministry,—all of a sudden we think in terms of imperative.

**Tom Hansz:** Yeah.

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**Jeff:** This is the ministry that you have been given. What are you going to do with it? Right? And all of a sudden, when you think that way, you think imperative. What am I going to do?

And yet this chapter on ministry, remember, is in the indicative section. This ministry is not about what you do. It’s not about imperatives. It’s not about what God is calling you to do. This section is about indicatives. This section on the ministry is about what God has done, what God has given.

Now that hopefully changes your whole understanding of this chapter. Hopefully you can come at this chapter and ask yourself, in sort of one of those ways in which you take a sigh of relief and say, “Oh, I’m glad something’s not being asked of me as we talk about ministry.” Yes, let’s talk about what God has done. So then I can step on board with that. I think it’s a very powerful thing.

Now if you think about this when you think about it in terms of the indicatives, it gives you that freedom to understand what it is that God has done and the role that He has placed you in. And then you can take the imperatives in their stride.

So let’s think together about ministry as a gift to us. But before I go into that section let me ask if there are any questions, any thoughts you want to bounce off of me, or observations you’ve made from the text you want to share? Yes, Ted?

**Ted:** I think the natural course is to go with the imperative.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** Okay, what am I supposed to do, God? And what they don’t do is, they don’t stop and think about the indicatives—who God is and what He’s done.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** And they think it’s quite simple. They would say, “Let’s not make this complicated. I believe that Jesus died for me. God loves me. And now let’s get on with the inheritance.” I just think that the Christian society doesn’t take the indicatives very seriously.

**Jeff:** Yeah. I remember listening to Sinclair Ferguson once, and he was talking about this. He talked a number of times about the experience of having been invited to a very large youth rally. And he was starting the talks by telling the students what God has done. He wanted to situate the gospel on a right foundation.

And after the second talk the leadership took him in behind the doors and said to him how frustrated they were about having called them to speak to the student body, because they had met together twice and he hadn’t told them to do a single thing. And he said that it was indicative—no pun intended!—it was indicative to me (*laughter*) that these folks did not understand what I was doing, and therefore perhaps didn’t understand the gospel. But the only way we can talk about doing without enslaving ourselves to some sort of legalism is to talk about what God has done for us. And that kind of made a powerful impression.

**Tom:** I’m wondering if our motto that we’ve used here before, “our ministry is who we are where we are,” is a good way to explain this. Do you think it is?

**Jeff:** I think that a good way to put that in the indicative would be “our ministry is what we’ve been given by Whom we’ve been given it.” (*Laughter*) But I know what you

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mean. You’re talking about what is. You’re talking about the idea of this is who I am; this is what I do. And I wouldn’t be this were it not for the fact that God has given this to me.

**Tom:** Thank you.

**Jeff:** Yeah; you bet. Anybody else?

**Sig Tragard:** Did they let Sinclair Ferguson speak the third time?

**Jeff:** Well, it sounded to me like he was young at the time. But they were a little younger. And I think his words to them were “you hang on to your seats and I’m going to tell you that God is going to tell you to do more than you’re able to do.” *(Laughter)* Something to that effect, you know. He’s a quiet man, but he has a way of really getting to them. *(Laughter)* I’ve experienced that myself. Anything else? Okay.

All right. Let’s think about *ministry as a gift*. I want you to notice that there’s an inclusio here in this text. An inclusio is basically when you have a word or a phrase or an idea that comes at the beginning, and then it comes at the end. And it really ropes off a section of text.

Oftentimes the roping off has something in the middle. And in the middle section there is the point; therein lies the point. However, one of the interesting things is that whenever you have an inclusio you can also have a chasm.

Let me show you an inclusio so you have the idea. Go with me to Matthew chapter 5 for just a minute. And in Matthew chapter 5 look at something very familiar—the Beatitudes. And notice that the first Beatitude is “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” That’s in the present tense.

Then go with me to the eighth Beatitude which is in verse 10. And you’ll notice that it says, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs*” what? “*Is the kingdom of heaven.*” There’s the present tense.

But now notice that the six Beatitudes that come between are in what? They’re all in the future tense—“*They shall be, they shall inherit,*” and so on. So what you have is, you have the present tense functioning as an inclusio for the entire list of Beatitudes.

Now the question is what about that Beatitude that comes after? But that’s for another class. And I think, if memory serves me correctly, we did go through the Sermon on the Mount. Isn’t that right? So you tell me. Why is the Beatitude at the end? No, I’m just kidding.

**Sig:** It’s on our website.

**Jeff:** Yeah, right. Okay. We’ll have to erase that so I can do that again sometime. *(Laughter)*

So there is an inclusio here in our text, and it’s this. Notice this. He talks about the stewardship of God’s grace “*that was given to me for you.*” And then he talks in verse 7 about “*the gift of God’s grace which was given to me by the working of His power.*” And so this idea of the gift of God’s grace, the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me, that functions as the inclusio. In other words, that is how Paul is roping off this set of verses.

He wants us to understand what? Well, I’ve been telling you about the indicatives. This stewardship, this gift of God’s grace, was what? Given to me, Paul says. It’s not something that I took up. It’s not something that I discovered.

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In fact, let me just give you a useful piece of information. Oftentimes we go about things the wrong way, especially when it comes to spiritual gifts or exercising a ministry within the church. One of the things that we have a tendency to do is that we have a tendency to feel like we actively ought to be engaged in sort of establishing what it is that we want our ministry to be or what our giftedness is. And it seems to me that when you look at the Bible there’s a certain element of discovery that goes along with practicing a spiritual gift or getting involved in a ministry. And that discovery comes from allowing those natural tendencies, those natural shaping influences of the Spirit to move you in directions of interest and desire.

And so for instance, when you look at the list of gifts that are in Romans chapter 12, verses 3-8, there’s leadership, there’s teaching, there’s exhortation, there’s giving. There are all kinds of things that are listed there and in other chapters too—1 Corinthians chapter 12, and so on. But one of the things that I think is just true part and parcel, not only of some of the other gifts that we oftentimes think of as preeminent, but also for instance the gift of giving. In my mind that illustrates what the principle here is. In other words, you have this desire within yourself to give. You want to give; you’re a giver, right? We talk in that sort of way.

Now the giver understands that he’s got the gift of giving, and so he gives. And like Paul says, he gives with liberality.

Now I want you to think about that for just a minute. When we talk about this idea of the passivity of discovery and implementation, the giver cultivates but he doesn’t do the inceptive work. He doesn’t do the work of bringing about the gift itself. That is given to him. He may cultivate it. But he doesn’t plant the seed of being a giver in his own person. God does that.

And so that to me is the idea behind the other gifts. For instance, when you have the teaching gift what happens, at least in my experience, is that I had to do a few things. And some people said, “Hey, you might want to do this or try this, and give you an opportunity to do this or that.” And then people just begin to give opportunities because they say, “Hey, the Lord may have blessed you this way,” or something like that.

It’s the same kind of thing if you’re a leader. You have a natural disposition to lead, not because of who you are. Maybe that’s the case. But it’s because the Lord has blessed you with the gift of leadership. And people just naturally follow you. You’re a leader, you know. You can’t get them to stop following you. That’s just the way God has made it with you, and so on. So this is a stewardship of God’s grace.

Now that idea of stewardship is a really important thing. You know what it means to be a steward. But when we think about that whole idea of stewardship, we think about two words. We think about an *oikonomon*. An *oikonomon* is two words. So the *oikos* group is *house*. And *nomos* means *law*. This is the law keeper in the house, someone who oversees the house, someone who is overseeing a house which is not theirs.

And so when you think about a steward, you think about somebody who is overseeing the gifts that God has given in the spiritual house of their own body which doesn’t belong to them. It’s been bought at a price. It’s the Lord’s; that’s the idea.

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So we’re overseeing that which is not ours. We’ve been given gifts that are not our own doing. They are things that God has given to us. And so when we think about ministry as a gift, we think of this. This is Paul. And so these are given to me; I’m a steward of them.

From another perspective these verbs are passive. Notice this. This was a mystery what? *“Made known to me.”* In other words Paul is a teacher. He’s the proclaimer of the gospel. He did not say, “I’ve made this great discovery!”, right? “And so I’m going to go out and teach it.” No! He had a mystery made known to him, given to him. And he had been given the gift of proclamation so that he would go out and teach. And so he did.

Notice verse 7. *“I was made a minister.”* Again, notice the passivity of the verb. This was given to him.

Now I know what you’re going to say. You’re going to say, “When I think about my own ministry it’s different from Paul,” right? “That’s Paul, not me.”

Look at Ephesians 4:7 when it comes to the imperative section. Notice what Paul says. He uses the exact same phraseology. *“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”*

See, you can’t say, “Well, this is the apostle Paul. The apostle Paul, come on! He was different!” Well, he was different. But not so different that you fall outside of the realm of being included in this particular section—that there has been a ministry given to you that you must exercise. And I think that idea of the grace given to each one of us is a powerful idea, so that we are equipped for ministry. And we’ll talk about that when we come to chapter 4. But there’s an equipping for ministry that happens because of this gift.

And so what you have to begin to ask yourself at this point, in preparation for what is to come in the imperative section, is if God has given this to me, how am I using it? How am I implementing it? How am I exercising it for His glory and for the well-being of others? Let me stop there and ask what questions or thoughts you might have. I realize that’s a lot. Tom?

**Sig:** He only gets one per session; I don’t know if I should give him this one.  
(Laughter)

**Tom:** Was Paul’s ministry a 501-C3?

**Jeff:** Oh, that’s a loaded question. (Laughter) Wow, Tom! That is a question that I would not have expected from you. Tom has gotten the ball bat out of the closet.

(Laughter) Go ahead, Tom.

**Tom:** I only point that out because we tend to have the wrong vision of the ministry.

**Jeff:** Okay.

**Tom:** And the wrong definition. And we don’t think of it in terms of personal direction of what Christ calls us by God.

**Jeff:** Okay. So you’re not slamming the governmental aspect of that. (Laughter) This is something different.

**Tom:** It’s the way they’re organized.

**Jeff:** Okay. I thought you were going to the enslavement of the government. Never mind. (Laughter) Okay. Anybody else?

**Sig:** You don’t want to answer that question?

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**Tom:** Move on.

**Jeff:** You mean the direction of the ministry? Sometimes we think about it in terms of the direction of the ministry rather than in terms of God’s leading. Well, it’s a healthy balance, isn’t it? I mean, really. And you know this, Tom. You’re a businessman so you know this. And that is that in many ways sometimes we get through our lives. Okay, I’ll just say it. I never thought I’d be where I am right now in my life, right?

**Brave Man:** Amen.

**Jeff:** If you would have asked me 25 years ago, “Where do you think you’ll be?”, I would have been able to tell you. And it wouldn’t be where I am in life right now. And so God certainly has His way with us, and I’m happy for that. But man makes his plans and God is the One who directs his steps. And that’s just a biblical principle.

So planning is good. But you have to have balance, and an attitude that says that God in His providence can change my direction at any given moment.

**Sig:** Amen.

**Brave Man:** It’s obvious, looking at a lot of the text of Paul that we can see his ministry, right? He’s talking about what has been given to him. And there’s no sense with me that I want to argue with him about his lack of discernment, right? But when I look at my life I try and identify what my ministry is. And it’s like trying on shirts; I can’t tell what size they are. I just keep trying them on and asking if they fit. Or I rely on those around me and their ability to affirm me. Wouldn’t you say that there’s a kind of a conjunction of these two ideas—this inward burden and outward affirmation that has to appear?

**Jeff:** Yeah. I can’t remember if I have it in here or not. But I think you’re right. I think that when you go in the spiritual gifts direction and you start taking a spiritual gifts test, that’s where you go off the rails. I think there are a number of things that you can do to discover how God has gifted you. And obviously some of the things I’m going to say may be contested. But these are the things that I think have been most helpful.

I think that first of all you have to ask what your own desires are. Obviously there’s a part of the Christian church that wants to say that affections and emotions and desires have to be downplayed and actually maybe even severed from us. Actually I’m not of that mindset or ilk. I think that the unitary dispositional complex that we are is mind, will and affections. And so affections are a very important part of who we are as people. Therefore I have to not only think the right thing, but I ought to feel strongly about the right thing and so will it.

So I think that affections or desires are an important part of discovering what God has gifted me to do. If I have a strong desire to lead, then maybe I’m the worst leader in the world, right? That could be.

You know, as I went up through seminary, this is one of the things that’s close to me because I see it, right? But I’ve watched a number of my own peers. And now that I’m a little older I’ve watched a number of younger men come into the church and say, “I am a preacher.” And they get up for their first time. And you want to put your arm around them and say, “Oh, brother!” (*Laughter*) I don’t know what you are, but you are not a



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preacher.” *(Laughter)* And so oftentimes desires are right on. But sometimes we’re misled by our desires.

So desires are important. I’ll never forget. Early on after my conversion my church put me into a ministry. And I hated it. And I finally went to my minister. And I was talking to him about spiritual giftedness and stuff. And I was just asking him. How do I recognize them?

You know, I was fighting with the idea because I thought to myself, maybe I’m unfaithful. Maybe I need to be bringing my own desires in line with what it is that they ask me to do, and so on. And my minister is the one who said this to me. He said, “Jeff, when you’re involved in a ministry, if you absolutely hate it, you’re probably not gifted in that area.”

And I said, “I quit.” *(Laughter)* He looked at me and I said, “I want to change.” And so I thought that advice was really helpful.

But I think secondly is the idea that you say. And that is, what do other people say about what I’m doing? And you know, I think that is actually crucial. How do other people respond?

Now you know how it goes, right? I mean, let me go back to the preaching example for just a minute. I have been in presbytery meetings where some guys are just too nice. And so they’ll say to a guy after he’s preached one of the worst sermons that you could possibly hear in your life, they’ll say, “Well that’s—Well, let’s do this.” *(Laughter)* Right? “Let’s do this.” They’ll say, “Instead of making this your first exam, let’s make that what’s called a specimen for improvement.” *(Laughter)* In other words, let’s get you some more training. And let’s get you back here, and let’s see what the Lord will do.

So they make it a specimen for improvement. He doesn’t fail. He goes and he takes a preaching class.

Now listen. One of my older seminary professors told me one time that seminaries don’t make preachers. They just help what God has done. They sub-develop and cultivate what God has already given, right?—that idea; very wise.

Now let’s say that this guy who is not gifted to preach goes back. And he takes some preaching courses. We’ll all they are is public speaking courses to that man. And he takes those public speaking courses and he comes back to presbytery. And this time he doesn’t shake while he’s up there. You know, his voice is a little more modulated, rather than just kind of like this monotone thing, and so on.

And this is what some men who are just too nice will say. “Well that was a real improvement.”

Well, I want to stand up all the time and say, “If you give a chimp a cookie he will pull the lever,” you know? *(Laughter)* I mean, you know, that kind of thing, right? This man is not gifted to preach. He’s able to go and take a public speaking course and learn and do a little better. But he’s not gifted to preach.

And I always want to say this. Would you want to sit under his ministry Lord’s Day by Lord’s Day by Lord’s Day? And if you say no to that, then I think there’s sort of an intuitiveness that we ought to have that says that this man is not gifted to preach.

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But that’s the idea. This is why I would get back to you and say to you that this is why there has to be honest assessment. For instance, you don’t just listen to everybody around you. You listen to the most trusted people around you. And those aren’t the yes people. You listen to the people who have given you both positive and negative criticism. And I think that’s oftentimes the most helpful.

And I think those two things are really crucial. It’s also looking at the Scriptures and seeing what the spiritual gifts are and how they would benefit the church, and so on. I think those things are vital.

I may have something later on; I don’t remember. I was thinking that there was something where I had a list of five or six things. Yes?

**Jim Hamilton:** I think that Christ may have intimated what Paul is expressing here.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Jim:** He started off being happy that Stephen was being killed and going after the Christians. And here he is the most humble of all people. The humility is important to be who he is.

**Jeff:** Yes, absolutely. And he even says that to timothy in his second letter to him where he talks about the servant of God. And he’s obviously patterning his comments after the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. The suffering servant or the servant of God is kind and gentle and those kinds of things. And he certainly is the—

**Bishop Rodgers:** Two comments. Just because there’s a need for something in the body of Christ it’s not necessarily your right to fill it.

**Jeff:** Yes; that’s right.

**Bishop:** And my other comment is that just trying things out and seeing what the results are, I mean if you’re in charge and nobody is behind you, you probably don’t have a leader. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Yeah. I just had a conversation with a guy who asked me about the need in the church. And I said, “Whoa, whoa, whoa! Let’s not start there. Let’s start with do you have a desire to do this?—not what the need is.”

**Brave Man:** Amen.

**Jeff:** Because God will fill the need in His own time. And that may not be you.

Maybe you guys aren’t movie watchers. But when I was younger I enjoyed the “Young Guns” movies. Has anybody seen those? Remember “Young guns 2,” where Dave Ritterbbach was the leader of the Billy the Kid gang? And so he says, “All right, buddy, ride!” Then he goes taking off and nobody follows him. *(Laughter)* I always thought that was funny. *(Laughter)*

Or how about “Tombstone?”—Johnny Ringo. “I was just kidding.”

“Oh, I wasn’t.” Don’t you love that? *(Laughter)* And they keep on going. Hey, the bishop did that. I want you to know that Bishop promoted that. *(Laughter)* All right. Anyway, any more?

**Sig:** Nope.

**Jeff:** All right. Keep yourselves quiet. *(Laughter)* All right. Anyway, that’s just a challenge question. And let’s move on to this.

## *“The Family of God” continues*

*Ministry connects us.* Verses 8-13—how Paul administered His gifts. So if you look in 8-13 I want you to notice some things. Oh, I do have it; yeah! Notice how he discovers and puts his gifts into practice: Verse 8: to preach. Verse 9: to bring to light. Verse 10: the wisdom of God.

Just take a look at these verses. Look at this. *“To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me”* to what? *“To preach.”* And then verse 9: *“and to bring to light for everyone.”* And then verse 10: *“so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known.”*

Now here’s what I want you to notice. This is the thing that’s crucial. Notice that he says wherein the sphere of activity is. It’s in the church, right? Paul is a churchman. He’s connected to the body of Christ. When Christ said to Paul, *“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”*, he asks that because Saul was persecuting His body the church. And so when Saul comes in and becomes Paul and is given the gift of apostleship, what does he say? Jesus sends to Ananias and He says, *“He will know what it means to suffer for My sake.”* In other words, as part of the body, he will know what it means to suffer for My sake.

But notice. Paul also understands in this passage that the mystery revealed to him, and how he was made a minister, well that was all taking place in the church.

Now in the church has effects outside the church. You know, here’s something. I want you to think about this for just a minute. You know, you probably have not had this experience, but maybe you have. But have you ever had that experience where you have this meeting? It’s either a political meeting or it’s a business meeting, a financial meeting, something like that? And there are difficulties, right? And so, you know, this guy at the meeting says, *“Hey, I invited somebody that will help us.”*

And maybe these businessmen are all sitting around. And they say, *“We know this guy is well connected. Who did you invite to help us?”*

*“Well, I asked my minister to come and pray.”* And everybody goes, *“I thought real help was coming,”* right? *“I thought real help was going to come. Thanks, okay. Tell your minister that it’s really great to see him.”* You know, that sort of thing.

And when you look at Jeremiah, here he is. His country is falling apart around his ears. And the most important place in Israel or in Judah at this point is where the word of God is coming from. It’s coming from Jeremiah. And it’s a despised Word.

And so the point is that sometimes we don’t always recognize the blessing of God’s gifts not only to His church but to the world around. And the world around certainly doesn’t recognize the blessing of those gifts.

But Paul says, *“Look! This mystery was made known to me, that I might make it known to the Gentiles.”* But he practices it in the church. It’s in verse 10. It’s through the church that this ministry comes about.

And so it’s this whole idea of practicing your gifts. I talk about discovery here. And so here are the guidelines. And I’ll give them to you quickly now. We’ll stop here and then we can return to them next time if you’d like.

First of all, *what do you enjoy? Does it glorify God?* That’s a good one. Does it glorify God? I mean, you know, let’s face it. You may have somebody who says, *“Boy, I really*

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enjoy this.” For instance, did you ever have that person that comes up to you and says, “My gift is criticism?” (*Laughter*) I wish I were kidding. But they say, “My gift is the gift of criticism. And I can tell you everything that you’re doing wrong.”

I’ll never forget this. I came out preaching one time. And this couple took me aside. I’d never met them. I didn’t know them from anyone else in the world. They walked up to me and they said, “We want you to know that we really appreciated that. But we wanted to tell you a couple things that you did wrong.” (*Laughter*)

And I thought to myself, “Hi. My name’s Jeff.” (*Laughter*) Crazy! Anyway, there are some things that I just don’t think that glorify God.

*Does it serve others?* That’s another guideline. Does it serve others?

*Have I sought counsel? Is there a place for me?* This is important. There may not be a place for you. At the moment there may not be a place. You have to wait and exercise patience. And should I say it like this? And support; you have to be supportive of the people who are in—not their money, but supportive of them. I think those are some good guidelines for discerning spiritual giftedness.

Well, unless you have any questions, if anybody has a question or a comment or something you’d like to share, I’ll probably just wrap it up here. And then we’ll come back to it the next time. No? Okay, then let’s pray together.

Father, thank You for this day, for the time You’ve given, for the blessing that You are in our lives. Father, thank You for the ministry that You gave to Paul, but not only to Paul but to each one of us. And Father, we pray that You’ll bless us and help us in our search for our giftedness, and the ability to put it into practice. But Lord, for those who are serving in ways that they’ve been happily serving for years, and receiving confirmation in the exercise of that ministry, we pray that would continue and that you would bless them and strengthen them. Cause them to rejoice in perhaps a long ministry that is sometimes not fruitful and sometimes discouraging. Give them joy and give them the blessing of understanding that not everyone sees the fruit of harvest. But some have the joy of planting and some the joy of watering. And Lord, we pray and ask that You’ll bless us all in Christ’s name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen. (*Applause*)