

## “Social Assisting”

Ephesians 4:1-16

*Series: Made For More Week 4. Made to DO More*

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One week of social distancing is taking its toll.

- People are starting to believe toilet paper grows on trees
- Others are going on vacation...in their homes
- Some are even going on a wine tour – this is for a limited time only since bars and liquor stores are closed.
- One person said, “This is the first time in history I can save humanity by doing nothing, sitting on the couch and watching TV”

I don’t have to tell you how serious this pandemic is. I don’t need to remind you how essential it is for all of us to wash hands, stay home and stop the spread of the disease. With no vaccine, social distancing is the best solution to slow it down.

But today, I would like to take this precious time to offer you encouragement and hope. Ephesians chapter 4 is an incredible job description for the church – for each individual believer and for the church as a whole. It tells us who we should be and what we should do especially in a time of crisis like this. Paul is going through a crisis himself. He is stuck inside – either in a prison or under house arrest in Rome. He is the original social distancer. But while he practices social distancing he tells us how to do social assisting.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Ephesians 4:1

Paul starts with the right attitude. He is not a prisoner of Caesar but of Christ. We are not a prisoner of CoVid19 but of Christ. Next Paul “urges” us – the word means “to encourage, to comfort and to challenge.” In a difficult time he encourages and challenges us to live a life that matches the calling Jesus gives us. The rest of the world may be anxious, panicking, fearful. Jesus calls us to stand up and be His body in the world. What does He call us to do? To assist others. How?

**Be Gentle** Paul writes,

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:2-3

Notice the first thing he tells us is how to relate to each other. He lists five qualities: humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and love which together promote unity. This time of self-quarantining is like a social experiment: how long can we be confined in close quarters with one another before we step on each other’s toes and get on each other’s nerves? Usually we look

forward to getting together as a family. But the problem with all this togetherness is...all this togetherness. There will be blow ups online and in the grocery stores. I think I've heard more car horns blow in the last week than ever before...and there are no cars on the roads!

Now more than ever, we who are followers of Jesus are called to live a life of gentleness, humility, patience, forbearance, and love. In Paul's day, these virtues were considered meek and weak. Actually, the reverse is true. True gentleness, humility and patience, according to the Bible, require great strength. What do all these qualities have in common? Setting aside selfishness. Letting go of what I want to assist others. Seeing the situation from the other person's point of view. And above all, remembering that we love and forgive and care because God first loved, forgave and cared for us in Christ. Being gentle takes so much strength you and I can't make it happen on our own. That's why Paul says, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit" – the Spirit gives us humility, gentleness, patience and love. Make every effort to be filled by the Spirit. Make every effort to be gentle. You'll have plenty of chances to practice in the next weeks.

**Be Giving** Paul continues in verse 7:

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." Ephesians 4:7-8

In Ephesians chapter 2 Paul speaks about *saving* grace (2:5, 8-9). Here he talks about *servicing* grace. Jesus gives gifts to each one of us so we can assist and serve others. Paul mentions a few gifts:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. Ephesians 4:11-12

Notice that every person is equipped for works of service. Every person in the Body of Christ is needed just like every organ in the body of you is needed. We've been hearing in graphic detail how the coronavirus attacks organs of your body. If one part is in trouble you feel sick. Two parts you go to ER. Three parts you're in ICU. You know where this leads.

I don't want the Body of Christ to be sick. How do we prevent it? By making sure all the parts are doing their part. It is wrong for the leaders to say, "We can do it, you can help." Yes Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers but our job is to prepare the people to serve in the world. "You can do it, we can help." Here are two ways you can give:

**Financial Gifts.** I know this is a very hard time for our economy and for your household budget. Some of you are out of work. Some live paycheck to paycheck. It is important to keep paying our staff at Woodside and supporting our missions which are struggling to stay open – missions which help the homeless, hungry, hurting, the addicted here and around the world. I paid my entire pledge for 2020 because I believe in what God is doing through this church. I am not asking you to do that but I do ask you to mail in your gifts or go online and give – either through our website or through your bank. Set up recurring gifts. Let's build up the Body of Christ.

**Spiritual Gifts** What are your spiritual gifts - caring, serving, leading, teaching, writing, singing, organizing, fixing? Your spiritual gift is usually the thing which makes your heart sing when you use it. What you may not know is where to use it. Because of social distancing, you have an unparalleled opportunity to use your gift beyond the building of the Church. Offer to help a neighbor by getting them groceries. Lead a Growth Group or start a microgroup on Zoom. One Woman's group met on Zoom. My guy's microgroup met on Zoom. I will post the microgroup format on our website and you can do it online with two or three friends. My niece Linnea in Minnesota is singing a different praise song every day on Facebook. Share the Encouraging Messages I'm posting each day. Write your own Christ-filled messages and share them on Facebook. Give your financial and spiritual gifts.

**Be Growing.** Why should we be gentle and giving? That's the way to help the Body of Christ keep growing up. Paul writes,

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. Ephesians 4:13

There is one door frame in my house that has never been painted. On it are lines which measure the growth of my children. I can still see the point where my son passed me by. Maturity is not the measure of how tall you are, old you are, knowledgeable you are. In this passage, Paul there is only one measurement for the church: Jesus. Do we look and act like Jesus? We all know someone who is immature. They act selfish, self-centered, throw temper tantrums, shout or sulk when they don't get their way. It's not pleasant to be around. If a church focuses inward, it's immature. The more it focuses outward on assisting others, the more it grows up. The mark of maturity is the ability to think of others, serve others, assist others, rather than yourself.

An immature church can easily be deceived. Paul writes,

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. Ephesians 4:14

I am disgusted by the number of scammers who are using the coronavirus to deceive people and steal from them. There are also cunning and crafty people who want to lead the church astray. The one way to combat this is to speak the truth in love.

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. Ephesians 4:15

That's a powerful combination. Some tell the truth without love. Some are so loving they never tell you the truth you need to hear. When we tell each other God's truth with love we help each other grow up and, together, we become more like Jesus, the Head of the body.

Woodside, I want to tell you some truth with love: you are growing more and more like Jesus every day. This week, when many of you could have hunkered down at home, when you could have just bought groceries for your family, you ventured out and purchased supplies to make meals for the children of Trenton. I was overwhelmed by the response. These Weekend Youth Nutrition Bags will be distributed through the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen. It was easy,

fun and is feeding needy kids. Many asked us – will you keep doing this? Yes! Let's keep thinking of ways we can do social assistancing. Paul ends this passage with this hope:

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. Ephesians 4:15-16

I will always remember this past week for a different reason than the coronavirus. Our newest grandchild Eloise Jane Hogleund was born to Peter and Jackie. We give thanks for this beautiful gift of God. Thank you for all your prayers and good wishes. Many are commenting about Ellie's big cheeks. It's one of the famous Hogleund family features. Like all newborns, her head is very large in proportion to her body. Over time, through nourishment, growing, taking first steps, falling and getting up again, and a thousand other activities her body will grow up to match her head. She will be mature. Let's be the body that grows up to match the head: Jesus Christ.