

# OUR BODY LIFE

**SERIES: PBC DNA: WHY WE DO  
WHAT WE DO**



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Ephesians 4:11-16  
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*Ephesians 4:11-16*

We live in an amazing time of the world. The technology that our world is creating is unbelievable. I recently came across a company that makes robots that you can assemble as kind of engineering toys.

It is always a fascination to create something that operates like a human. Artificial intelligence, voice assistants, and robots. But there's something about robots in particular. To create a machine that has a body like a human, -- that's incredible.

Think of how complex our bodies are. There are so many different kinds of things that our bodies do. So much involved in creating a replica for a body. Language. Movement. Emotion. Response. Learning. Strength. Fluidity.

How do we assemble something like that? How do you create a body?

This is the second week of our series on "Why We Do What We Do" at PBC. We've called it "PBC DNA" because these are some of the values and themes that have shaped us as a church over the years and that we hope will continue to shape us.

Like DNA, these values aren't immediately obvious. They aren't listed on our website as the five pillars of our church. We don't print them in our bulletin every week. But they are a part of who we are and have guided our practice for seven decades.

There would have been many metaphors available in the first century that could have been used to describe the church. The church could have been thought of like a guild of artisans who band together for mutual economic and professional support. The could have been thought of as a sect of people who break off from an established group. Or as a school of thought. Or a nation. Or a new ethnic category.

But those are not the primary metaphors that the Scripture uses to describe the church. The dominant metaphor for the community of Jesus followers is that of a human body. A body, in all its complexities and inter-dependencies and beauty. This morning we will talk about Our Body Life.

So many of the metaphors in the Bible are universal examples that never change throughout history or culture. That is one of the amazing things about the Bible. People have always known what a body is. Unless technology takes a dark turn, we'll continue to know what it is like to live as a physical body.

So as we think about what a church ought to look like, this morning we'll turn to Ephesians 4. The verses in this chapter, probably more than any other biblical passage, have guided us as we have tried to be faithful to the biblical description of what a church ought to be.

Theologians call this particular topic "ecclesiology." That's the formal study of how a church should operate. In the past, we've called this "body life." And that continues to be as good a term as I can find. Our ecclesiology at PBC is body life—to operate according to the metaphor of a human body.

This passage has been our model of a church. It guided us in the early days when we were cautious about even using the word church and called ourselves Peninsula Bible Fellowship. Seventy years later, it continues to guide us.

This morning we will be focusing more on what we are like as a community. It's a bit of an internal look at us as a church. In later messages, we'll see how these internal characteristics point us outward as well. But this morning starts with what's going on within our community.

We'll start by reading the Ephesians 4:11-16 passage as a whole. Then I'll make four observations about how this directs us in the way that we understand being a church.

## Ephesians 4:11-16:

**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, 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.**

As we look at this passage in detail, we'll be asking four broad questions. Who are we? What do we do? How do we do it? Why are we doing it? We'll discover the different roles we fill; we'll see our responsibility as the church, understand how relationships hold us together, and see the result of being a healthy church.

By God's grace, this passage will continue to guide us well as we follow after Jesus together.

### Who are we?

The above passage begins by describing four or five different kinds of people.

"he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers" (v. 11).

Because of the grammar, there is some debate over whether the last two words describe one role in two different ways or two distinct roles. For our purposes, let's consider that these are four different roles. The big idea here is that we are gifted differently to contribute in different ways.

Apostles launch new endeavors. They are the church planters, the entrepreneurs, the ones who pioneer new ministries. They carry the Gospel and implement ideas in new ways to expand the kingdom and reach new areas or demographics. While there may not be apostles today like there were in the New Testament, we still need people who act in this way. We need apostolic people who launch new ideas and take risks.

Prophets are those individuals who operate outside of the institution. They keep people accountable. They challenge the status quo, reminding people of God's revealed Word. There is always a tendency for a group of people to drift and become locked into their way of doing things. Prophets disrupt that with God's fresh perspective. These people aren't always popular, but we need them.

Evangelists are always looking outside to welcome newcomers. They see the person standing in the corner. They look at a room full of people and wonder why it isn't more full. They drive past people on the street and wonder why they aren't connected to the truth of the Gospel. And they do something about it. They help to keep an external perspective.

Finally, we have pastors and teachers. This is probably the role we're most familiar with. Especially here at PBC, we're most comfortable with this. These people take care of the community. They feed and guide and meet the needs of people within the group. They are aware of spiritual needs, emotional needs, and physical needs.

Think about a church like a living room. The apostle built that room. The evangelist invited people into that room. The pastor-teacher is serving food in that room. And the prophet is asking why the room is so small and whether we should re-paint the walls.

We need all those people for a functioning community. Everyone contributes in different ways.

Notice the way this passage is phrased. Other passages of the Bible speak of God giving different kinds of gifts or abilities to different people. You might be given the gift of compassion or given the gift of hospitality. But here the individuals themselves are given as gifts to the community. I am given to you as a pastor/teacher. You are given to me as an evangelist or a prophet.

You are a gift to this community. Your contribution is critical to this whole thing working like it is supposed to.

You will see this theme recur regularly this morning. The way that we tend to think of church as consisting of staff and lay people. Or pastors, elders, deacons, and the rest of you. Or leaders and everyone else. That's not the way the New Testament ever describes the church.

We are not defined by our positions or our titles. We all have some unique capability, and we all have something to contribute to the whole. Each one of us is given as a gift to this community.

What that means for you is a component of being a part of this church—that you have a responsibility to find your role. Then give yourself to others.

I remember a conversation I had with a friend in college. She was expressing that the Christian community she was a part of was always emphasizing talking to strangers and meeting new people. She was an introvert and didn't particularly like those things. She always felt a little out of place.

But as I talked to her I saw something more. She described how she would often sit in the back of the room during gatherings and have long, meaningful conversations with one person the whole time. She felt like a failure because she wasn't meeting everyone. But in reality, she was doing something critical. A community of prophets would all just annoy each other. A community full of apostles would always be starting things and never sticking around. A community of pastor-teachers would grow inward-looking: insular and stale.

We all need each other. We need different gifts. If you feel out of place because your gifts seem to be different from the people around you, then we especially need you. If you feel you bring something different to PBC and you're not sure whether you belong, please give yourself to us. We need you more than anything.

Every organization tends to elevate certain gifts over others. If you feel you don't fit, that's because we're skewed in some direction, and we need you to balance us. Finding your role and giving yourself is sometimes difficult and vulnerable. All the more reason to do it. We each have a different part to play. We are each of us a gift to the whole.

## **What do we do?**

If all of that is true—that we each have a different role to play—then what are we doing with those roles? That's who we are. But what do we do? This Ephesians 4:11-16 passage makes that clear.

“to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (v. 11)

All of those people who are gifted to the church—apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors—are working toward the same goal. But it's a curious thing. They aren't actually “doing ministry.” They are equipping the saints so that they can do ministry.

If you've been at PBC for a while, you may have heard people use the term “ministry of the saints.” This is where that phrase comes from. At first, it's a bit confusing, because you may not feel like a saint. Some of us have associations of Catholic statues with halos when we think of saints. But in the Bible, this term describes the redeemed people of God. If we know Jesus, then we have been made holy. That makes us the saints.

The leadership of the church is not doing the work of the ministry. It is not up to the pastors and elders and supposed leaders of the church to do ministry. It is all of us doing ministry. The unique calling of leaders is not to do all the ministry and run all the programs. It is to equip all of us to do the ministry together.

So the leadership has the task of equipping the body for ministry. But there's also the sense that we all equip each other. We all have a role to contribute, and our roles work together to equip and accomplish God's work in the world.

Sometimes we can think of the church programmatically. We offer you programs for yourself, your children, and the community. You pick and choose the programs you like and criticize the ones that you don't like. If our programs are not good enough, you pick up and head off to a church with better ones.

That's a terrible view of the church. It is all of us that together do the work of God in the world. We all do the work of ministry. And we all make it possible for each of us to do it more effectively.

How are you equipping others for ministry? As part of this community, you share that responsibility. Equip others for ministry.

There are many ways that we equip each other. We teach the Word of God. We counsel each other. We manage spreadsheets of volunteers. We train leaders and correct false thinking and teach our kids and pray together and plan events and schedule rooms. This community is a dynamic body of relationships, ministry, equipping, and love.

When people visit a new church, they tend to evaluate the church by the 75 minutes or so that we call the “worship service.” After all, that's the first thing that you experience about a church.

But here's a little secret. We work hard to make this time meaningful. We want to craft a gathering that draws our attention toward God and helps us to follow Jesus. But our worship service is not the best thing about PBC. This is not where all of our energy is applied as a church. This time is important, but it's not the most important.

The best stuff that happens here is what happens every day, spread throughout little interactions between people within the church and within the community. It is the meal brought to new parents. It is the prayers for someone in the hospital. It is the discipleship over coffee of one student to another. It is the conversation about Jesus in the elevator. It is the husband laying his life down for his wife. It is the parent taking their child on a mission trip.

If you visit a church and the best thing they do is to put together a fabulous worship service, there is something missing. This is just the family gathered around the dinner table. But this time doesn't define the family. It is the relationships and sacrifice and partnership and love.

The church is not a service you attend. The church is a community of saints that come together to be equipped to do the work of God in the world. We gather in the worship of Jesus so we can follow him wherever he leads each of us individually and as a group.

We all do the ministry. We all equip each other. How are you called in that way?

The great part about being a community like this is that we can recognize seasons of life. There are times when you have more to contribute. There are times when you need more help. Seasons of emotional plenty and seasons of emotional need. You don't have to produce and achieve around here. Because we're a community, we can support each other through different seasons. It's okay if you are in a place where you are limited. Seasons don't last forever. There will come a time when you have enough to give.

Find your role. Give yourself. Equip others for ministry.

How do we do it?

We're starting to get a picture of the church. We have different roles. We each contribute to equipping each other for the work of ministry. But how do we do this? What does it look like?

One simple word: relationships. The ministry of this church is centered on relationships. Not programs. Not events. Not leaders or vision statements or brand management or catchy slogans. We are as strong or as weak as the relationships in this room and on this campus.

This is how our passage describes it.

“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” (v 16).

Think for a moment about a tree. What part of the tree makes sure that the roots draw water? What part tells the branches to spread out? What part makes sure that the trunk becomes strong enough to support the weight of the whole? Where is the microchip in that tree controlling all of the various parts?

There isn't one. Each part of the tree is guided by some internal sense of doing its part for the whole. And the tree is held together, not by some master gardener that manipulates each part, but each part holds the whole together.

It is the same way with a human body. We sometimes think of our brain as a kind of command central for the body. It is the computer up here telling the machine what to do. But that is bad biology and bad theology. The truth is that the body holds itself together. Each cell does what it needs to for the sake of the whole.

This is the real brilliance of the way the New Testament describes the church. No one member is responsible for the whole. There is no one behind the curtains making sure that all of the pieces are fitting together just right, pulling strings to look like a united whole.

We simply fit together. When each part is working properly, the body is healthy. And the body grows.

Think about an arch. It's one of the most beautiful and complicated architectural structures. The arch can't stand without all of its members contributing to the whole. Read this definition from Wikipedia:

“An arch is held in place by the weight of all of its members, making construction problematic.”<sup>1</sup>

Isn't that a great way to describe a healthy church? A church is held in place by the relationships of all of its members, making construction problematic.

Problematic indeed! How do you manage a wide diversity of relationships? Different personalities? Gifts? Contributions? Convictions? How do we trust that our relationships are healthy enough to hold us together?

We have to rely on the Spirit to be at work among us. And we have to believe that what is important here is the relationships that we are building, developing, and repairing. This is what the church is about. Welcoming people into the kingdom and being a family together. You don't make it all happen. None of us is responsible for the whole thing. Each of us does our part. And doing our part means loving the people well that are in our circle.

Who are your people? You hold this church together by loving the people in your circle. Some of those are peers. Some of those are people you are learning from. Some of them are people you are teaching. You hold us together through connections with the individual people that God has called you to love. Love your people.

This is especially important for us to remember as we finish up our multi-year building project. No one is more excited than I am to have some updated meeting spaces. I am thrilled about how God might use this physical space for his spiritual purposes.

But we have to remember: we have not upgraded our church. We have not remodeled the church. We have made some needed improvements to the physical buildings that we use to gather and meet. But the focus has always been and must remain on relationships. The building serves the relationships.

Honestly, that was easier to remember when our building was odd and problematic. With a new space, we have to remind ourselves that relationships are primary. We are the church. You are the church. You do not go to church. You don't attend PBC. You are PBC. We are the church, and we are held together by every joint when each part is working properly.

The church is first and foremost about relationships.

## **The result**

We are getting close. We understand who we are: different people playing different roles. We understand what we do: we equip each other for the work of

ministry. We understand how we do it: by focusing on relationships. We all hold this thing together.

But that is not the whole story. There actually is someone making everything work. And that person happens to be the point of all of this. Why are we supposed to do all this? What is the result of being a healthy church?

Look again at our passage:

“unity in the knowledge of the Son of God”

“attain...mature...to the measure of the...  
fullness of Christ”

“grow up in every way into him who is the head,  
into Christ”

Unity. Maturity. Growing up. Notice that all of these results have a common reference point. Everything has to do with the Son of God, the fullness of Christ, Him who is the head. The body is supposed to be a body so that we can grow in connection with the head. All of what we do has to do with Jesus.

We have a unity that is centered on him. We are mature in the sense that we have some measure of Christ's fullness. We grow up into him.

I heard someone say recently that they want a little bit of God. They want enough religion to get them through the week. Give them some comfort. Check that box in their lives. That is not what a church is about. We are not about a taste of the divine or a God-shot to get you through the week.

We are a community that wants be filled with the fullness of Jesus in everything we do.

Do you like English muffins? I do. Lightly toasted and right when they come out of the oven, you put butter on it so that it melts and goes everywhere. The butter goes into every nook and cranny. For some reason, I associated those words: “nook and cranny” especially with butter melting into English muffins.

The fullness of Christ means that he fills us completely. He gets everywhere. Every part of our soul. Every part of our emotional life and physical life. Every crevice is filled with Christ. Each one of us individually and the community as a whole. The far-off corners of our church are filled with Christ.

There is no more room for petty divisions, for personal agendas, for ulterior motives, for carefully nurtured bitterness or individual kingdoms of influence. Christ fills all those spaces. That's what maturity looks like.

As we become the church, we are filled with Christ. Christ in us. That is the "why." Be filled with Christ.

In our house, we buy concentrated hand soap. Every few weeks we put some of that soap concentrate into hand soap dispensers around the house, mixed with some water. The church is like that container of hand soap concentrate. We are filled with the concentrated presence of Jesus Christ in here. We are "Jesus concentrate."

Then we go out, and that fullness spills out to the rest of the world. We are unified. We are mature. We are full of Christ. And we spill into the world and spread Jesus everywhere we go.

If you watch Jesus in the New Testament, you notice that something happens when people encounter him: their lives are changed. Encountering Jesus changes lives. So as we go out into the world, the world encounters Jesus, and their lives are changed.

Addictions are broken. Relationships are restored. Suffering is alleviated. Pain is redeemed. Career is given new purpose. The family becomes reimagined. Life takes on an eternal perspective. And people become part of this mysterious and beautiful body of Christ.

And the process starts all over again. We find our role; we equip each other, we focus on relationships, we are filled with Christ, we spill over into the world. And the body grows.

We live as a body. Jesus fills us. And the world sees him. That's the picture of the church.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to build a body. The body is so complex and amazing. Our technology is getting closer. Closer than we were a decade ago. But I am not convinced that we will ever be able to reproduce the many facets of the human body.

Only God can assemble a body. Only God can build his church. We are a body.

Who are we? Different people with different roles. What do we do? We equip each other for the work of ministry. How do we do it? Through relationships? Why do we do it? For the result of maturity in the fullness of Jesus Christ.

All of this is impossible on our own. We cannot manufacture a body. But this is what God does among us. It is problematic to construct. But it is a beautiful thing.

I can say that personally, it is a huge privilege to be part of a body like this. I have experienced so much as part of this body. I have contributed to it in the way that God has given me as a gift. And I've been served and equipped by others. I have been cared for in my many moments of weakness. I have built and developed and fractured and repaired relationships in this place. And I have seen the presence of Christ here. It is not always what I expect. And it does not always come easily.

But if you plug yourself in here, if you find your role and give yourself, if you equip others and do the work of ministry, if you focus on relationships, then you will be filled with the fullness of Christ. That is what happens here. That is what happens among the people of God.

Be a part of this body. Give yourself. Be filled with Christ.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "Arch," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Arch&oldid=820196919> (accessed December 19, 2017).