

“Getting in S.H.A.P.E. for Ministry”  
Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

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Here’s the church, here’s the steeple, open it up and here’s all the people. Do you remember that childhood jingle? It’s the people part of that trilogy that I want to talk about today.

For the past two years, we have worked diligently casting a vision, building a staff and raising the funds for the future of this great congregation. We believe God is calling us to touch hearts and transform lives for the glory of God and the good of the world. Now we must do one more thing to transform that dream into reality. We must build a team. Let me explain what I mean.

Christianity is no spectator sport. You are not invited to watch a game on Sunday and call in your opinions on Monday. You are invited to come out of the pews and play the game. If this church realizes its God-given potential in this first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it will be the direct result of members becoming ministers, a crowd becoming committed, an audience becoming an army for the Lord. Just to think about it makes my spine tingle with excitement.

According to national statistics, about 10% of church members do the church work and about 50% are content to be consumers. The other 40% do not engage in ministry because they either are not asked or they do not know how. I’ve been crunching a few numbers around here lately. It looks like we have about 13% of our members engaged in ministry, a little better than the national average. I assume we, like other churches, have 50% who are content to watch. But it’s that other 37% that I want to talk to specifically and directly and intentionally this morning. What would happen if 2000 new people were to enlist in the ministry of this church?

So in this great volunteer state of Tennessee, I am on a recruiting mission for people who are interested and willing and wanting to play on God’s team for the good of the world. I ask you rather directly and straight forwardly, are you willing to join this team?

**ARE YOU WILLING TO JOIN THE TEAM?**

Paul said in Ephesians, *“I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”* And let there be no confusion about it. There are certain qualities necessary for those who would be ministers throughout the congregation.

Be humble and gentle, says Paul. When I travel from place to place and people discover I serve as a pastor in Brentwood, Tennessee, they immediately say, “Do you have a lot of “Stars” in your church?” I respond by saying, “No, we have a

church full of servants. There is a direct difference between stars and servants. A “Star” is a big name; a servant is a big person. A “Star” is big on ego; a servant is big on eagerness to help. A “Star” is big on image; a servant is big on involvement with others.

Be humble and gentle. Humility is the ability to know ourselves as God knows us. The word humble comes from the root word humus. Be down to earth versus putting on airs. Humble people neither exaggerate their goodness or their guilt. Just be who God has called you to be and always set your standard of life against the example of Christ who calls you into partnership of ministry with Him. Be gentle. Gentleness is the ability to place each thought and each motive under the control of God.

Be patient and loving, says Paul. Patience is the ability to idle your motor when you feel like stripping your gears. It is the ability to take a step back. Love was such a unique Christian concept that they coined a new word for it in the first Century. They called it Agape – the single-minded determination to seek another’s highest good no matter what. Patiently, loving people are long-suffering people. They persevere to the end.

Having watched a few horse races over the years, I’ve made a discovery. High strung horses that jump first from the gate are seldom first to the finish line in the race. Winners are usually those who have some mud slung in their faces. They have some bumps, grinds, and hits on the backstretch, but somehow manage to hang in there so that when the finish line comes into focus they can charge to the front and win. Paul says that’s the kind of person we are looking for to be a minister in the church. Be patient and loving.

Be unified and peaceful. Once upon a time a group of birds got together and thought they would build a church. The starlings insisted on a lot of educational space for their ever increasing population while the parrot felt they only needed a small room for dialogue. The canary wanted to sing the great hymns of the church but the humming birds thought they should stick to the same old tunes so everyone could hum along. The ducks thought everyone should be baptized by immersion. The owl said he would only attend if they had night services. The dove wanted to have peace marches and the hawk seemed content just to have chicken suppers. They called Mr. Rooster to be their pastor, elected Bob White as treasurer, and asked Mr. Chicken to chair the board. After a few weeks you could hear the raven crying, “Nevermore, nevermore. We’ve just got a church for the birds!”

Why are we here? We are here to glorify God and make disciples of Jesus Christ. Sometimes it is good to be reminded that we have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God who is Father of us all, who is over all, through all and in all. Are you willing to join the team?

## ARE YOU IN S.H.A.P.E. FOR MINISTRY?

Verse 7 *“To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.”* The Psalmist said, *“I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”* What God made you to be determines what he intends for you to do. You are something special. You are the only one-of-a-kind. No one else is exactly like you. God has made you unique. You are uniquely shaped for ministry.

Discover your spiritual gifts. He gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. That is Paul’s short list. There are about 30, spiritual gifts entrusted to the Church. When walking together these gifted people form the body of Christ on earth and function perfectly together.

Brian Bauknight says there are sufficient spiritual gifts in every community of believers to do what God is calling that community to do in this particular moment of time. I like to think of the spiritual gift as something like the sweet spot on a baseball bat or a tennis racket or on a golf club. Mark McGuire, that great home run hitter, said, *“When I feel the ball hit right on the sweet spot, a home run is right around the corner.”* A spiritual gift is much like a sweet spot.

Have you ever done something for others that made you feel so good you couldn’t wait to do it again? If you have done that, you have discovered your spiritual gift. God has made you in such a way, created you with such a design, that you have a particular gift to share for the good of the whole. We are wise to discover our spiritual gifts. And when we play the game according to our spiritual gifts, there is an excitement about what we do, an eagerness about it, and we can hardly wait to try again because we want to feel the goodness of what God has entrusted to us. Have you discovered your spiritual gifts?

Follow your heart. What do you feel passionate about? Where is your heart? There is a group of people in this church who feel passionately about a ministry to young adults, which has been a long neglected ministry in this church. God is going to honor their passion. It is going to happen in the weeks and months that are yet to come. Where is your heart and what do you feel deeply about?

William Booth said the secret of the Salvation Army success was that *“God has had all there was of me. There have been men with greater brains than I, even with greater opportunities, but from the day I got the poor of London on my heart, and caught the vision of what Jesus Christ could do with me and them, on that day I made up my mind that God should have all of William Booth there was. And if there is anything of power in the Salvation Army, it is because God has had all the adoration of my heart, all the power of my will, and all the influence of my life.”* Serve the Lord with all your heart. What gets deep into your soul and stirs you with such passion that you can’t wait to see it become a reality? That is God’s calling for you. What is your S.H.A.P.E. for ministry? What are your spiritual gifts? Where are your passions? Where does your heart lie? *“Love the Lord with all your heart,”* says the Bible.

Use your abilities for the good of God. Sometimes I lay awake at night, asking the Lord to give me the wisdom to tap the talent, awaken the abilities, and spread the knowledge represented in this congregation. With the abilities in this Sanctuary today, can you imagine what could be done for the good of the world if we got motivated in a particular direction?

We should never be struggling for musicians to start new worship services, looking for teachers to staff Sunday school classes, wanting for people to rock babies, longing for mentors to help young mothers, wishing for people to staff shelters, hiring more people to keep up buildings, leaving anyone stranded in need of assistance, letting any young person grow up without a role model, allowing any family to be ignorant about finances, neglect anyone going through grief or divorce, permit some physical need to go unmet. When you think about the ministry of all members, no need should go unmet in a congregation like this.

If this church alone were to turn loose on a single neighborhood in Nashville, we might just be able to economically, medically, socially, educationally, and spiritually turn a little corner of God's earth around. Do you realize what might happen if the tremendous talent and abilities that are represented in these pews were turned loose for the world? Christianity is not a spectator sport; it's a participant game and I'm appealing to you today to play the game. Use your abilities for the glory of God and the good of others. What is your S.H.A.P.E for ministry?

Understand your personality. When God made you and God made me, he made us all different. Some of us are extroverts, others are introverts. Some of us love routines. Others of us can't stand the same old thing. Some of us are thinkers. Others of us are feelers. There is nothing right or wrong about it. God loves variety. Therefore, he has made us with a variety of personalities.

Think about it. Jesus took an accountant by the name of Matthew, a banker by the name of Judas, an impulsive extrovert by the name of Peter, an introvert by the name of Andrew, a deep thinker by the name of Thomas, a young dreamer by the name of Phillip, a couple of ambitious entrepreneurs by the name of James and John, along with a handful of people we hardly remember and managed to change the world. You say to me, that's far-out and weird. I just say, read history. Isn't that what happened? What might happen, if the people of God were to turn loose for good in the world? What might God do with the likes of you? What is your S.H.A.P.E. for ministry?

What experiences are you bringing to the table? Do you ever wish you could live life backwards? I do. If I only knew then what I know now, I might have done things differently. Some of you know what it is to wade through a divorce, deal with the death of child, lose a job, move to a new place, doubt God, have family who hates you, battle the black dog of depression, deal with an aging parent. You have been there and done that. Don't let your troubles go to waste. The best thing you can do with the pain in your life is to turn it into a ministry for someone

else. That is the Christian way to deal with your hurts and troubles. It's what the Cross represents. Take the worst thing that could possibly happen to you and let it become a tool by which you minister to others.

In my first pastorate, a young mother accidentally backed over and killed her two-year-old daughter. There were no words that I could say to comfort that mother. I had all the degrees but I could not enter her world. The pain was too deep, the grief was too troubling, the sorrow and the guilt were too awful. And then something happened that ought never to happen. About two years later another mother in that little community did exactly the same thing. She accidentally backed over and killed her child. I will never forget the day I wrapped that mother in my arms. In her grief I said to her, "I cannot begin to understand what you have experienced today, but I know someone who knows exactly what you feel and I want to bring her to you." That's exactly what I did. Have you taken your troubles and transformed them into tools of ministry for somebody else? That is what I believe Paul meant when he said, "*In all things God is working for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose.*"

Napoleon once pointed to a map of China and said, "There lies a sleeping giant. If it ever wakes up, it will be unstoppable." Every once in a while, I wake up in middle of the night and say, "Here lies a sleeping giant. If God ever wakes us up, we will become unstoppable in terms of doing good and justice and mercy for the sake of the world." Here's the church, here's the steeple, and I ask you today, are you going to be one of the people?

Amen.