# SERMON SERIES: LET’S SEE SOME I.D.

**“Job Descriptions”**

## *Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16*

We’re in the process of learning what our identity in Christ is really all about. Using the letter of Ephesians, we’ve been uncovering who we are as followers of Jesus. Throughout this series we’ve noted that our world is curious—and desperate—to see what Jesus really looks like. And they will see Jesus—in one form or another—in and through us. So it’s imperative that we know what our true identity is, and how that identity shapes us for service and witness in the world.

We’ve covered a lot of “identity markers” so far that help to define who we are in Jesus. **ASK: What are some of those identity markers we’ve talked about? [We are…HOLY / ADOPTED / GOD’S MASTERPIECE / UNITED WITH ONE ANOTHER / UNITED WITH JESUS / DWELLING PLACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. We have…HOLY SPIRIT / INHERITANCE / EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING / FORGIVENESS & REDEMPTION].**

This morning’s Scripture reading is found in Ephesians 4. We’re going to be looking at verses 1-6 and 11-16 as we discover that our Christian identity comes with a job description.

***When we accept a new job there’s a job description to accompany it. The job description tells us what roles, functions, and productivity is expected of us in that job. Some job descriptions are fairly short and uncomplicated; others are extremely detailed and specific.***

In one sense the whole New Testament is our job description. It gives us instructions for how we are to live, work, and play as new creations in Jesus Christ. In some places the description becomes a bit more detailed. Take Ephesians 4:1-6, for example: *Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. 2Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love. 3Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. 4For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. 5There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.*

One aspect of our job description is that we in the church are to **WORK DILIGENTLY AT BEING UNIFIED**. Paul told the church at Ephesus they were to get along with each other. Sounds pretty basic and obvious, doesn’t it? Because Jesus has broken down the barriers that separate people—and because he has brought all these different people together into one new group—there was naturally going to be some differences of opinion, conflicting viewpoints, and disagreements. ***Put more than two people together and those things happen because we’re human. Paul knew it wasn’t easy to put Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, rich Christians and poor Christians, free Christians and slave Christians, into the church and have everything always run smoothly.*** Notice the things Paul instructed the church to work toward.

We are to …*lead a life worthy of your calling…* Here once again is a reference to the identity marker that we have been called and chosen by God. We are to…*be humble and gentle,* and to exhibit patience with each other by recognizing that we all have our faults and failings. ***The Catholic theologian and saint, Thomas à Kempis, said*** ***“Try to be patient in bearing with the defects and infirmities of others, whatever they may be. Remember that you also have many failings which others must bear. If you cannot make yourself what you would like to be, how can you expect to have anyone else exactly as you would like them?”***

Paul went on to encourage the church to *3Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.*  (There’s yet another reference to peace). We’ve all been brought together in this thing called “church” from countless places and experiences. We’re of different colors and perspectives and influences. As we’ve already noted, Jesus destroyed all the barriers that we try to put up between people. We’re not to reconstruct those barriers by saying “This person can’t join in” or “That group isn’t welcome.” It is the unity in our diversity that marks the church as a unique entity in our world.

As followers of Jesus, our job description tells us to seek the peace and unity of the body over our own preferences. ***How many of us know of churches who have split or been torn apart because of a lack of unity? I’ve known congregations polarized by worship services, congregations that cared little about helping the poor, and people who sought comfort and control instead of the mission of the church.*** ***This makes for dysfunctional and toxic expressions of the faith.*** Since we are part of God’s family—and since every family squabbles from time to time—we sometimes disagree with one another in the church, amen. Disagreements happen because we are all unique creations, bringing varying gifts, creativity, vision, and insight into the church. But the church is supposed to be the one place where disagreements—when they happen—are tempered with love and grace.

We aren’t supposed to demand our own way all the time nor control what does or does not happen. That’s how the world operates. We’re not supposed to try and avenge a wrong done to us. Followers of Christ are called to humility, patience, and grace. Scripture reminds us, *3Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves* (Philippians 2:3). One of our greatest and most important job descriptions in the church is to work diligently at maintaining unity in Christ.

Let’s pick up in verse 11: *11Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. 12Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. 13This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.*

God has designated certain roles and responsibilities in order for the church to function properly. Those named here--apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers*—*are leadership roles. God places these leaders in the church to fulfill different tasks and responsibilities.

However, these five roles are not to be done by one single person. That’s impossible if you really think about it. A leader may have two—maybe even three—of these roles. But no leader has them all. The church requires all of them in order to function in a healthy and biblical sense, and they come—not in the form of one man or woman—but in teams of leaders. And they exist for one very specific purpose: Verse 12: *Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.*

Did you catch that? **ASK: According to the Word of God, what is the responsibility of the apostle?** *To equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.* **ASK: What is the responsibility of the prophet?** *To equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.* **ASK: What is the responsibility of the evangelist?** *To equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.* **ASK: What is the responsibility of the pastor/shepherd?** *To equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.* **ASK: What is the responsibility of the teacher?** *To equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.*

I repeat that because it’s crucially important in our day of entertain-me churches and “that’s-what-we-pay-the-pastor-for” attitudes. Clergy are not hired to “do ministry” on behalf of the congregation, but to prepare the people to do ministry. My job in the church is not to do your job in the church! My job is to train and equip YOU to carry out God’s work.

And why am I to equip you to do the work of ministry? Paul lays it out in verse 16: *As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.* Our new identity in Christ comes with the job description of **HELPING ONE ANOTHER GROW.**

Did you know that when you function in your Spirit-given giftedness--and when you fulfill the tasks for which God has called you--you are helping others in the church to grow? Betcha some of us didn’t know that. And the converse is just as true: when we don’t operate in our Spirit-given giftedness--and when we do not fulfill the tasks for which God has called us--we are hindering the growth of others.

***Let’s give a demonstration to see how this plays out. I need three volunteers to come forward and help me visualize this. Let’s imagine that God has gifted #1 with the ability to visit with others, offer comfort, speak in uplifting ways, and offer the presence of peace and joy.***

***Let’s imagine that God has gifted #2 with the ability to engage people in discussions about faith, to be able to go to different places and strike up friendships that lead to spiritual conversations.***

***And let’s imagine that God has gifted #3 with the ability to teach and proclaim the truths of God in ways that people can understand and respond to.***

***Now according to a millennia-and-a-half of church practice, the pastor is expected and assumed to be the one to do all these things. [MOVE #s 1-3 BACK, STEP IN FRONT OF THEM].* ASK: How does this approach help people in the church to grow?** (It doesn’t. The pastor is doing things he/she is not naturally gifted at doing; those who are gifted in those areas do not get to use their gifts as God intends; fewer people receive spiritual contact from a single person).

***The biblical model we see in Ephesians 4 structures the church this way:* *[STEP IN LINE BESIDE #s 1-3]. We know that #1 is excellent at visiting others, talking to them, and brightening their day. So in the biblical model, #1***  ***goes to visit those in need. [SEND #1 to sit with someone in the congregation].***

***We know #2 has the giftedness to make new friends easily and start up spiritual conversations. So in the Ephesians model, #2 goes to places in the community where the unchurched and de-churched hang out. [SEND #2 to sit on the front pew].***

***And we know that #3 is gifted to teach and explain God’s Word so that people can respond to it. So in the biblical model #3***  ***serves as a teacher in the church [SEND #3 to sit on a different pew].***

**ASK: How does this approach help others in the church to grow?** (The pastor is doing things he/she is naturally gifted at doing; those who are gifted in specific areas get to exercise their gifts as God intends; more people receive spiritual contact).

***[CALL FOR SEVERAL MORE PEOPLE COME FORWARD; PUT SOME WITH #1, SOME WITH #2, AND SOME WITH #3].*** As each of these servants exercise their spiritual giftedness and engage in the ministry God has given them, more and more people are touched, helped, and drawn into the kingdom. Those persons in turn learn to develop their spiritual gifts and are released to engage in the ministry God has given to them. In this way we help each other to grow and mature more fully as followers of Christ. ***[SEND EVERYONE BACK TO THEIR SEATS].***

When you and I function in our spiritual giftedness, we are helping others in the church to grow. We are contributing to the health and vitality of the body of Christ. Everyone of us is to use what God has given us in order to be obedient to him, and to aid others in their journeys of faith.

I invite you to bow your heads and offer up your hearts to God in prayer:

*Heavenly Father, we are overwhelmed by your redemption, salvation, and adoption of us. You have said that we are new creations—that the old has gone away and something—someONE—new stands in its place. We are that new someone! And we desire to take our job description seriously, just as we would take our earthly job descriptions seriously. Through your Holy Spirit, grant us humility and surrender in those moments when we neglect the unity of the body. Gently lead us in the ways of unity for the sake of your gospel and your mission in the world.*

*We also pray in boldness and trust for new opportunities to use our giftedness to help others grow in their faith and witness. Do not let us shy away from exercising the gifts you have so generously bestowed; do not let us raise excuses about our ability or availability. You have given us all that we need. Your Holy Spirit dwells within us, guiding us to greater heights of holiness and greater depths of sacrifice and surrender. Use us, our Father, that in our unity and maturity the world may be witness to the reality of your presence and power. In the name of Jesus Christ, with whom we are united. Amen.*