

United In Christ

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Date: 17 May 2026

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[0 : 00] This is a sermon from King's Church West Lothian. We've been in the book of Ephesians for the past wee while now, and we're at Ephesians 4.

And like a terrible leader that I can be, I have forgotten to put the verses up on the screen. So if you have your Bible or your phone with you, I'm going to suggest you open Ephesians 4, verses 1-16, because it will help you a lot over the next 25 or so minutes.

So I'll give you a second to do that, and then we'll kick off our message for today. So Ephesians 4, the kind of first big chunk.

Now, I'm sure I've had someone come up to me and say, can I tell you something? And I wonder if, like me, you've ever used the phrase, I'm all ears, like I'm ready to listen. I want you to imagine for a minute that rather than being a normally formed human, in fact, someone else sitting in this room is, in fact, all ears.

I mean, what would that be like? That would be, I mean, the response of the band earlier when they spotted this image from my tablet here was like, what? Like, I mean, it looks quite cute here because AI has done a nice job of making this, keeping at least a face for them so they didn't look totally weird.

[1 : 34] But there would be an awful lot of wax involved if you were all ears. There would also be an awful lot of noise involved if you were all ears because you would be able to, well, speaking would be a challenge, but listening probably wouldn't be.

But it wouldn't be right. All ears doesn't quite work. After three chapters in Ephesians where we've been hearing all these amazing truths about who you are in Christ, we face a sort of pivot in the text.

And Paul is keen that we kind of do the so what of all that good news. You've been hearing things like that you're chosen in Christ, that you're adopted in Christ, you're redeemed in Christ, you've been filled with the Spirit.

We've been made one in Christ. There's so many good things, amazing, life-changing things that you and me have discovered to be true of us in Christ. And now when we hit Ephesians 4, there's quite a pivot where Paul says, as prisoners, and we'll read through it fully in a second, but as a prisoner of the Lord, I urge you, live a life worthy of the calling you've received.

He's now saying all these good things, they're really, really amazing, and they're foundational truths of who you are. And what are you going to do about it? What's that going to look like?

[2 : 51] And his big argument is it won't look like this. His big argument is it looks like a whole healthy body where loads of different parts that have different functions work together, becoming more and more in the likeness of Christ.

And a key kind of image in this text that we're about to look at is that of the body, of you and me together as the church, being a healthy whole body with different parts growing into maturity.

Not all ears or all hands or all feet or toes or hearts or all lung. All of those would be really odd. But one body made up of many parts designed to grow in maturity and support one another.

Let's have a look at the text then together. And Ephesians 4, 1 to 16. As a prisoner for the Lord then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you've received.

All that stuff. The calling you've been chosen, adopted, redeemed, filled with the Spirit. Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love.

[4 : 06] Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called.

One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Who is over all and through all and in all. But to each of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

That's why it says, when he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people. What does he ascended mean?

Except he also descended to the lowly earthly regions. He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe. So, Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip his people for the works of service.

So that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach the unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature.

[5 : 15] So, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then, we'll no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here or there by every wind of teaching, by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

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.

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.

There are four big ideas in this meaty chapter and they are all really about the body. Verse 3, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Why? Because there's one body, verse 4, all the way down to this picture of the body of Christ growing into maturity, being held together by Jesus, building itself up in love, serving itself and looking after itself, each part doing its work.

[6 : 37] It's a really beautiful picture. The opposite of our all ears. It's a picture of diversity and health and growth and maturity. And we're going to look at a few things in that.

We're going to look at the fact that we are one body. We're going to look at that we're called to keep unity. We're going to look at the different graces that we are given and what it looks like to grow in a healthy way.

And it helps if my notes haven't printed off upside down. So give me a second. Oh my goodness. Right. There we go. New printer. Right. So we're going to look at those four things.

Us being one body, being called to keep unity, different graces being given and being designed to grow. We are one body.

There is one body, verse 4, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one baptism, one God. Father, all do you think he wants us to get the number one here? Seven different, eight different times the number one is in one single verse of the Bible.

[7 : 40] And I would say it's a preaching series rather than just seven repeat phrases because it's the most brilliant, brilliant truth. There are many different parts, many different people.

But he wants us to know and the Lord wants us to know that we are one in Christ. And you've got seven at least different reasons there. One spirit saves you.

One hope drew your gaze. One Lord leads you. One faith makes you right with God by grace. One baptism demonstrated your giving of yourself to him and your dying to sin and rising to new life.

One God, our Father, your Father, my Father, who's over all. Verse 4. One is an important number. We're not an association. We're not a kind of golf club or even just a really good community group. We might be that. But spiritually, we are called to be one.

[8 : 47] And later, you know, verse 16, 15, around there, we're referred to as the very body of Christ. How precious is that body? And yet it's used as the phrase for us.

I think God wants us to know that though we're many, we're one. We're one in him. Jesus has done this great work of saving you when you put your trust in him and putting you into a family.

And that family has more in common with the human body than it does with any other kind of picture, really. And I'm interested that there's this verse here.

Verse 3. Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit. I mean, unlike the human body, I mean, my fingers don't really have to make much effort to stay connected. You know, fortunately, I'm sure I'd be capable of losing them.

Otherwise, just leaving them behind somewhere. But parts of our body stay together. On the other hand, as the people of God, we wouldn't be told to make every effort to maintain the unity and to keep the unity of the spirit unless we actually had to put that effort in.

[9 : 56] Unlike the human body, you and I, we are definitely brought together, not of our own work, by the work of the Holy Spirit and of God in us and saving us.

But he puts us together, but we're commanded here, make every effort. Like, keep putting the effort in to maintain that unity, to maintain the bond of peace where you can give and receive freely, communicate well with each other, enjoy one another.

Not because we're the same age or preference or political leaning or we like even the same style of worship, but because we're one in Christ.

Those seven different ways. The spirit, the hope, the Lord himself, the faith that he's given us, the baptism that demonstrated what he's done in us and that we share a father.

He is our dad. Therefore, you are each other's brothers and sisters. So we've already touched on this a little bit, but then you see make every effort.

[10:59] And there's some great, I find really challenging. If you know me, you'll know exactly why I find these challenging because they take work, they take effort. But we're told to keep the unity and keep that, sorry, make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.

And Paul really helpfully gives us in verse two, four ways we can do that. And I think these are beautiful and horribly challenging at the same time. I won't ask you to put your hand up for which one you find most challenging.

But these are kind of nuts and bolts of Christian community where we work against sometimes our kind of fallen human tendencies to put ourselves first or to not be gentle or to be impatient or to give up on one another.

But in fact, to do these four things. I wonder, as I go through these very quickly, just sense what the Holy Spirit might be drawing you towards.

He doesn't condemn us. He leads us into all truth. And what might he be leading you into as one that he's saying, come on, I'm working with you on this. Work with me some more. Gentleness, humility, patience and bearing with one another in love.

[12:19] It's the long version. Again, a massive amount in one verse. Gentleness here. The picture that came to mind when I was thinking about this was not weakness.

It was not, you know, gentleness isn't actually to not be able to be strong. It's not just not quite having it in you. In fact, gentleness is strength under control. It's not a call to become kind of not able to do anything, not able to serve God.

Like the body needs strength. It absolutely does. But the picture that came to mind was the one of my kids who regularly think they've beaten me at wrestling. You know, they're five and they're nine. I'm not yet that weak. I'm only 44. You know, but they're regularly like, yeah, we did it. You think, well, you kind of did. But actually, you know, I know I could absolutely beat them.

I never have. I never have actually beaten them, just for the record. I'm being recorded. But also, I know that I could physically kind of overcome them. And, you know, there's a great Bluey episode where the dad has to learn to not be too strong.

[13:24] If any of you are into Bluey. And I love it because it reminds me of the times I get that wrong with my own kids. I think I tickled a little bit too hard or I didn't listen well enough. But that's what we're called to.

The strength under control. Not to be weak and not able to do anything, but to use our strength towards one another in the right way and the right amount.

Used for the good of the whole body. Humility also is not about being nothing.

More is about not clinging to the thing you probably could. If you think of Philippians 2 where Jesus, you know, being in very nature God. He doesn't consider equality with God something to be grasped.

He doesn't need to grasp it. He is God. And yet, what does he do? He humbles himself to death on the cross. Our model of humility is Jesus reigning over all of us, rightfully so.

[14:23] Choosing to empty himself and become nothing. To meet us lost people. So that he might bring his strength to us. And it's a beautiful, beautiful thing, the humility of Jesus.

He isn't without worth. To be humble isn't to be without worth. But it is to say, I'm part of something bigger and I'm going to play my part.

It might not be all I could do. It's not nothing either. But it's what the Lord has called me to. I'm going to be submitted to him under his guidance in community. And I'm going to treat other people as he wants me to.

I'm not everything. I'm not nothing. But I'm something in the kingdom. The thing God wants me to be. I don't know.

If I asked you to guess, you might know this if you know me. But patience. Patience is hard. Not everyone sees things the way we might. Not everyone does things the way we might want to. [15:21] Or in our precise way we'd have them. But patience is the one where we say no to irritation when we work alongside one another. And we say yes to going at the speed of someone else.

And we say, I'm going to be with you in this rather than running ahead and dragging you along. Bearing with one another in love. I think this is the one that probably builds the church like no other. Maybe a summary of the other ones really. It's so essential. How on earth can a body of humans have many parts unless we bear with one another?

And we need to. Because sometimes I'm difficult. Sometimes each of us is difficult. But we have a spirit at work in us. Helping us to do these things. We're not producing this fruit in our own strength. We're producing it working with the Holy Spirit. It says, if we're a body as we are, he loves it when we're growing in humility, patience, forbearance.

[16:28] And all of these things. He is building his church. And he does it when we allow his spirit to grow the fruit in us.

And we work with him on it. I love these four. I think they're so helpful and so challenging. I suspect there's something in these four. And it's one verse for each of us where the spirit says, come on, let's work on this.

Now, we all might need to work on some of those. We're all called to be one body. I don't know if, like me, the challenge that comes from that is it can end up feeling a little bit like the expectation is we become like one of these guys from Star Wars.

But every one of us then has to be kind of the same, has to act in the same way, just receive central kind of commands and just kind of do the same stuff.

But I love that Ephesians 4 is full of so many different examples of the ways we can be different to each other. And the first one is this, that in verse 7 it says, but to each of us, to each of you, grace has been given, appointed, apportioned, sorry, by Christ.

[17:44] So one of the differences between us is what he's given us grace for and how much he's given of it. Different graces for different people, that we don't have to all be identical.

Each of us has been given grace by Jesus and he's decided how much. And then what we find in verse 11 is that he has also not just given different amounts of grace, but there's an example there quite specifically of what they can look like.

Some are called to be prophets, some apostles, some evangelists, some pastors, some teachers. And we'll have a look at those in a second because I can almost hear a couple of you saying to me, why are we talking Christianese today?

Like some of us are very familiar with those and others are like, what? Like given what? But there are these distinct giftings that Paul is pointing out here so that we might know that to be one doesn't mean to be carbon copies of each other.

Like copy and pastes of you must look like this. We are all chosen. We are all adopted if we know Jesus. We are all redeemed. We can all be filled with the Spirit. But Jesus gives you different graces, different areas that you have grace for, different strengths that you can use, and different things that he wants to grow you in.

[19:07] And once we know that, it kills off any sense of inadequacy or jealousy. He's giving you grace for things. Like lean into that. Go with where he's giving you grace.

All why? Verse 12 says this. Let's have a quick look at our Christianese there then.

So here are the ones that we've just found in Ephesians 4. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. And Paul primarily here is saying that there are loads of different gifts given to different people.

And leaders often have one of these that he's led them to as their kind of primary thing. But actually, I think there's really helpful stuff there for all of us. I do believe that as we grow as a church, not just numerically, but as we grow into maturity, he's going to be growing individuals of us into different ones of these.

You might be a bit more of a pick-and-mix person. You might find you're growing in a number of them. But I love that they're given as a way of realising that there's diversity within the body by design.

[20 : 31] It's not a glitch, it's a feature. It's not a bug. He put it there. And he's showing that leaders come in varieties too. Apostles, for example, they're the ones who lay foundations.

You know, when this church was first being started, it would have been someone with an apostolic gift who said, well, let's pray about this together or let's seek God on this together. And the same for Kings Edinburgh, the same for every church, particularly in our type of church.

We believe that God has called people, as it is in the Bible, to have an apostolic gift to help lay good foundations. And when things aren't going so well, they'll come along and say, hold on a second, you know, let's check this out.

Let's see what's going on here and help relay foundations if needed. They tend to be people who love the new and exciting and are unafraid, like easily, not easily afraid.

They're saying, where is God calling us to next? But let's lay some really good foundations in there too. On the other hand, and desperately needed to work together, you've got prophets, the prophets being the gifting and hearing and telling people what the Lord is saying.

[21 : 43] Now, we all need to push forward into what God's doing. And to a degree, we all need some of all of these. But there are people that you meet and you think, wow, you hear God in an amazing way.

And I am sure that he's going to be growing us in these years to come because it's what a healthy body looks like. Or evangelists, the bridge builders, the ones who share the good news and who help people connect and respond to the good news of Jesus.

There are people, I know some of you are these, who just think, of course I just ended up in this conversation about Jesus and then this person asked me loads of questions. I think, that's amazing, that's actually wonderful.

There are some of us who feel less confident in that. But it's okay, he's either given us someone nearby to say, come and talk to this person. Or maybe he's going to give you grace for that, that you might more confidently share truth about him with someone who doesn't know him.

He also gives us shepherds, people who look after the flock, who ensure that people are cared for and refreshed in God, who notice people, who lead people well when they're wandering, say, come on, let's get back on the right path.

[22 : 57] We're going over here because that's where the Lord wants us to be. And then Paul paints this picture of teachers, those who bring clarity and understanding by unpacking the scriptures.

What a beautiful selection of gifts that we can expect, both to serve the church but to grow within the church. I don't know how you feel about those.

It can be a bit intimidating. When we realise that we weren't saved because of our own strength, we don't really grow in our own strength, you then realise we don't have to achieve these in our own strength.

What we can do is we can look in faith and say, what might you do, Lord? What might you call me to? What might you grow me in? What might you be doing around me?

And see if you think someone, you think, I just love that this person is great at that. In a healthy body, we just say to them, like, listen, I think God's really speaking to you. Like, lean into that.

[24 : 01] Like, why don't we, let's be a people who encourage one another. Now, if seven of you come and say, thank you so much for your preach today, I'll know you're just doing it because I said that. That wasn't what I was doing, okay? I want you to talk to each other, not me. Well, me too, but not today.

I'm now digging a hole that I need to stop digging, aren't I? He's given us a diversity of gifts. The Lord is gracious to us. The verse that came to mind as we were worshipping for me earlier was the way he gives grace upon grace.

The future is good for his body. You and me. Because he's generous. Because he's kind. Because he places us with each other to spur each other on.

And here Paul's giving us an example of the kind of things we can expect to see. And why? Well, verse 12. To equip his people to serve him. To build up the body of Christ.

Now, we're coming to land soon, but my final thing here is, because the one thing I know he's doing is he's growing us.

[25 : 10] He's growing us in depth with him, that we might continue to work together to serve him really well. And it says in verse 15, Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become the mature

body of him who is the head, Christ.

Not just bigger, but deeper. More like him. Into full maturity of looking like Jesus through the power of his Holy Spirit. We're planting loads of stuff at the moment.

Currently, and if you know us, you know I'm pretty dreadful at gardening. But we've just been to the garden centre this weekend. There are a range of things waiting to be planted. Now, that's how bad I am.

We haven't even planted them yet. They're just sitting there waiting to be planted. But we hope there'll be peas. We hope there might be sweet corn, although I'm sceptical. We hope that there will be, I've forgotten now, carrots.

There are definitely some carrots sitting there waiting to be planted. A whole range of things. And there are shed loads of sunflowers. If our garden isn't filled with sunflowers, by the end of the summer, I think our daughter's going to disown us, because she's adamant we will grow sunflowers. [26:18] The truth is, we might. We might tend to them well enough. Probably sunflowers are pretty easy, right? Even if they grow, we won't have grown them.

As we've just read a moment ago, we will grow to become a mature body. But not because we've got it all together, but because he's at work in us.

We're to play our part. Let's keep the unity of the spirit. But it's only a little part. His plan is that we will grow into a mature body.

It doesn't even say size there. It doesn't even say a big body. It's a mature body. To become the mature body, verse 15, of him who is the head, Jesus.

He wants his body to grow. It doesn't happen in isolation. It comes because we commit to one another. Heart and lungs and kidneys and noses and ears all connected together in one body to look more like him.

[27:22] Now, just as we come into land, let me tell you this story, which I only discovered listening to one of our New Frontiers, New Ground colleagues, but I thought it was absolutely brilliant.

In January 1881, a violent storm hit the Yorkshire coast. A ship called The Visitor was wrecked near Robin Hood's Bay and six men were stranded offshore facing death.

The lifeboat in a nearby town couldn't reach them by sea. There was something wrong with it. And they went to the next one along and said, would you come and send the lifeboat out?

We need to save these six guys. And the storm is awful. And the storm was too bad there. In fact, it was even worse. So they realized they had one lifeboat nearby that was done, was defunct.

They had another lifeboat six to eight miles up the land, up the coast, that couldn't get out because the storm was so great. What did they do?

[28:24] They went to the local town and said, we need you. We can't do this by ourselves. Would you come and help us? I think they did the most mad, amazing thing. The Whitby lifeboat, this town up the road, they took it around six to eight miles overland through snow, hills, narrow roads, and quite literally through walls that they had to knock down to get this lifeboat from where it was to where it needed to be to save these six guys.

Can you imagine the chaos? I tried to sort of represent it here, but we had horses and ropes, people with their spades clearing seven-foot-high snowdrifts, removing obstacles, taking down walls, guiding the route, replacing broken oars, and using their local knowledge to get the right boat to the right place to do its mission.

Not everyone was seen, but every part mattered. When they launched the boat, the first attempt failed, as I just hinted at. They had to replace all the oars because they all just snapped because the weather was so bad.

But they had someone there who went, I know where there are oars, who ran off and got a load of new oars for this lifeboat. It's the most amazing, chaotic picture of a community working together to fulfil its purpose.

They tried again after their first failed attempt, and all six men were saved. By a bunch of nobodies, believing together they could be somebody.

[29:56] That's the image, a body working together so that no individual part is bearing all the load, and no individual skill is everything, but everyone is something.

I love that idea, but how much more does this apply to the people of God who are called to be the body of Christ, and who have been designed to be the body of Christ?

Many parts, one body. If you want more on that, 1 Corinthians 12 is a beautiful, I think almost comedic version of what Paul is saying here. We have so much greater hope that he can use us as we continue to love one another, gently, humbly, patiently, bearing with one another.

He has built us into a family, and he has plans for us to grow to maturity. I'm hoping we deal with no shipwrecks, because we're not that well placed for boat problems.

But I do know that he continues to build his people together into maturity, and that's what he's calling us to. And also that we might fulfil what Jesus prayed, John 17.

[31 : 07] The mission is much larger than six people in a boat.

The mission is him calling us to keep being here, to love and serve West Lothian together, our neighbours and beyond. And the power is in the spirit, but the picture is like that.

The boat, the hundreds of people getting together, working together, all playing their part. I love that we don't preach this message to a church that kind of really hates each other.

Can you imagine having to stand up here and say, would you all just get on? I love that you love each other so well. I love that you serve so hard. I love that you're all in about 17 rotas, or that's at least how it feels most Sundays, I imagine.

But I do want you to kind of see again that when we do that, it's not just a good idea. It's not just to keep doors open or to keep kids quiet.

[32 : 16] It's a kingdom calling. When we play our part in the body and we connect with other people and we maintain, as we heard earlier, the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace, it is a high calling that God is doing and calls you to do with him.

And it's wonderful what a seven-hearted church we are. But I just encourage you to see that afresh as building his body, growing into maturity of Christ, and continuing to be humble and gentle and patient with one another, actively protecting what we have, and then building in what he's calling us to be.

Keep playing your part. None of us is everything. No one is nothing. He's given grace to you. He longs for you to be your part in the body. And if you're feeling, I'm not, or actually, I've got something else to offer, have a pray, have a chat with people who know you well.

He's constantly building and stretching us. And just as we come into land, I would say to you, as we grow, and we know, I'm assured, we're growing in maturity.

I see it. If we continue to grow in number, as I imagine, I do believe we will. Now, he's given us, particularly related to giving us a home here, I think he will open doors to new and different people.

[33 : 43] And to be honest, we've probably got a bit of work to do on making that work. Our teams are wonderful. We serve really hard. But there is probably some stuff we need to change just to make things oil the cogs a little bit better.

You'll probably find your team leaders asking you to do things a little bit differently over the coming months. We have no idea when we're going to move back into the hall next door or how that will be possible. But I don't know about you, that feels like the dreads slightly.

I'm going to need to remember we're a body and we can all work together because it usually causes chaos when we change things around. But as bodies grow, the shape changes and we adapt.

We find we don't quite fit in the way we did before. I just encourage you to see your serving, to see your gifts and to see changes whenever, whatever they are, in the light of this text.

He's maturing us into his body. We're one body called to keep unity, given different graces, designed to grow into the likeness of Jesus.

[34 : 44] Let me pray for us and then we'll look at what we're doing next. Father, I thank you so much for our church family and for the body that we are.

I thank you for this wonderful picture and scripture of us living a life worthy of the calling you have for us, being a body that gives and receives, that bears with, forgives, endures.

I thank you so much for your Holy Spirit at work in us. Keep leading us into your great ways, your great truth and giving us power to be all that you want us to be as a church together.

Above all of this, I thank you for Jesus. Thank you that he won our membership in your family, our part of the body. It wasn't on our own merit, but on his.

That's wonderful news for us, Lord. Thank you so much. Amen.