**Work for the Lord**

Ephesians 4:10-16

There is one church in Tampa Bay and we are all brothers and sisters in this one family of God, with one mission to lift up the name of Jesus. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Habakkuk 2:14.

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” Habakkuk 2:14

This is both a declaration of ***the work God is doing in history and a PROMISE that His work will not fail***. How do the waters fill the sea? Are there some portions of the ocean that are not filled with water? If you go deep enough or travel far enough, will you find some mysteriously dry parts of the sea? Of course not! The waters fill every available square millimeter of space.

That is what the glory of Jesus is doing: filling every available space on earth. How? Through us - through the church! Look at Ephesians 4:10.

“He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.” Ephesians 4:10

***Jesus, the all-glorious and eternal Son of God*** through whom all things were made and for whom all things were made humbled himself and descended from His throne in heaven to be born as a fully human baby and live a life of loving service to rebels and sinners like you and me. He lowered himself, according to Philippians 2 “he emptied himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.” Jesus descended to the lowest of all low places – into the grave.

But Jesus didn’t come just to die. He came to pay for sin and to defeat death forever. So the One who descended first ***ascended from death back to life***, then ascended back to the Father’s right hand where He reigns over all things as the Prime Minister of the universe, “upholding all things by the word of His power.”

And why did Jesus descend and ascend? ***To FILL ALL THINGS.***

Jesus is **Working** to fill the earth with His glory and love through us, His church

“He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.” Ephesians 4:10

Remember what Jesus called his followers? ***“You are the salt of the earth… You are the light of the world.”*** Jesus came to change people on the inside, to renew in us the image of God and fill us with His Spirit so He could continue to do His work on earth THROUGH US. Jesus is the Great Redeemer, the Restorer of all things. He is the Healer, the Giver of all mercy and grace.

And the way Jesus has chosen to heal, restore and fill all things is through normal people like YOU AND ME. Ephesians 3:10 says it is ***“through the church” that God is revealing the manifold wisdom of His grace***, the mysterious glory of His plan to unite Jew and Gentile into ONE BODY under Christ the Head.

And this is not hard to see ***in our city or in history***. Where did **hospitals** come from? Christians and churches serving the sick and dying. Where did **schools** come from? Mostly from churches coming together to educate and care for their children. Where did **orphanages** come from? Entirely from churches, especially in times when the culture was throwing babies away. Christians would walk the streets and go to the garbage dump to find the crying babies and adopt them as their own.

Guess what? We have ***babies right here in Tampa*** who are being thrown on the garbage dump through the heinous act called abortion, the genocide of now three generations, the holocaust of modern America. We have around 1,200 children in foster homes right now in Hillsborough County with more needing placement every day. And Florida is the number 3 state in the US for human trafficking, with Tampa/St Pete leading the way in our state. There are more adult clubs in Tampa than in Vegas.

Pastor Darryl asked me to challenge the church family on the topic of vocation as it relates to ***evangelism and kingdom mission.*** When most of us think of “calling” and vocation we apply it to our day to day work. We think of college students figuring out a career path and some may be “called” into ministry to serve the church or become overseas missionaries.

That is true and good. But the broader truth is that **ALL OF US are called** to be evangelists and missionaries RIGHT WHERE WE ARE. God is a missionary God and Jesus has sent us out with His authority to complete His mission of making disciples of all nations and filling the earth with His glory and love.

This is why Jesus came and died and rose from the dead: to fill all things with His love through people like you and me. Let’s walk through this powerful passage in Ephesians 4 to see **four essential steps** to join Jesus in His work. It conveniently works out to ABCD, though the steps aren’t necessarily in quite so clean an order. First:

**How to join Jesus in His work:**

1. **A**ssemble a **Team** and work **Together**

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints…” Ephesians 4:11-12

Everywhere that the Bible talks about the body of Christ and ***spiritual gifts we see a DIVERSITY of gifts***. It is interesting and significant to note that none of the spiritual gift lists are even close to being the same. Peter is the most economical in **1 Peter 4** simply dividing the gifts between those who speak and those who serve. Let’s be honest, some of us are good at talking and others are better at serving. It doesn’t mean talkers shouldn’t serve or servers shouldn’t talk; but we all have different strengths.

**Romans 12** expands on the speaking and serving gifts by breaking those categories out into different kinds of speaking: prophecy, teaching and exhortation and different kinds of serving: giving, leading and caring for people.

**1 Corinthians 12** addresses a church enamored with supernatural gifts like prophecy, miracles and spiritual languages and Paul cautions against elevating any one or two gifts to make them mandatory for everyone as if one kind of gift is more valuable than another.

Here in **Ephesians 4** we see five leadership offices that Jesus embodied perfectly as the ultimate apostle, sent to save the world; the authoritative prophet who not only preached the Word of God but actually WAS the word of God; the perfect evangelist proclaiming the kingdom of God; the loving good shepherd who cares for all of us and the wisest of all teachers, explaining how it all fits together. APEST is a handy summary of these five-fold offices for the church. There is debate about whether all five remain active in the church today. I’ll leave it to Pastor Darryl to resolve that.

What’s important for us today is simply to note that ***our ministry vocation is not a SOLO operation***; it’s a team effort. I think **APEST is helpful here**, especially if you are feeling led to start a new ministry. Guess what? You need an apostolically wired person on your team – an entrepreneur with creative ideas. If you’ve seen Patrick Lencioni’s Working Genius you need someone with ***Wonder and Invention***.

But an idea person is just one part. You also need ***someone with discernment***, like a prophet in the Bible. Someone who can tell right from wrong and good from best. But that’s not all, you need ***an evangelist, a connector*** who can help spread the word about your new program. Apostles, prophets and evangelists are great for starting things, but guess what they’re not great at? Maintaining those things over a long period of time.

For that you need shepherds and teachers. You need a caring people person to keep your group together and aware of the PEOPLE you are seeking to minister to. And you need a teacher to help organize and codify what you’re doing, and pass that training along to new people coming in.

In short, ***you need a TEAM***. This passage begins with the five-fold offices and ends with an exhortation about how bodies work.

**How to join Jesus in His work:**

1. **A**ssemble a **Team** and work **Together**

“From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint… when each part is working properly, makes the body grow…” Ephesians 4:16

This is the point of all the spiritual gifts passages in the New Testament: **we are a BODY**. Your body wouldn’t be much good if it was all fingers and eyes. Feet and toes are super helpful, so are ears and noses. And everything in between. ***When your physical body works properly you heal*** from those colds we all got over the chilly winter. You recover from playing soccer or pickleball when your muscles get sore. You eat and drink and your digestive system passes nutrients on to your circulatory system so every cell in your body is nourished and built up by the singular whole.

This is what **the Body of Christ** – locally, regionally and globally – is supposed to act like. But how often does it feel like a dismembered zombie apocalypse? A finger over here, a knee cap there, part of a scalp here where they fought over Calvinism…

The way forward, toward actual John 17 unity and Ephesians 4 maturity is to start small. Find one or two other believers who share your passion and start praying. That’s step two. Exercise the muscle of faith.

**How to join Jesus in His work:**

1. **B**elieve **You** can do it, **We** can help

“And he gave the apostles, prophets… to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” Ephesians 4:11-12

Here is your simple grammar lesson for the day: according to Ephesians 4:12, ***who is responsible to DO the work of ministry?***

The SAINTS. Meaning ***ALL BELIEVERS***. Who is responsible to EQUIP the saints? Leaders. Apostles, prophets and so on.

For years, arguably all the way back to the Reformation and before that in the Catholic Church, we have reinforced the mindset that ***“We can do it,” referring to the clergy*** and “you can help,” referring to “lay people.” Even that distinction is unhelpful right? I’m a clergy and you’re a lay person, one of the common folk. In other words, “peasants.”

Do you know why they put ***stained glass windows*** on the big cathedrals in Europe? Because most people couldn’t read. And, before the printing press, almost no one had a Bible anyway. So you had to come to church to hear Scripture read and explained.

Luther and the reformers talked about “the priesthood of all believers,” but practically speaking the educated preachers like Luther and Calvin did most of the work and mainly just expected people to show up and listen. Think ***how our church buildings, to this day, are designed.*** We sit in rows. Why? So one person can stand up here and talk to the “lay people,” down there.

***What is the expectation of the average churchgoer today?*** Come to church. We don’t even expect you to come every Sunday like your parents and grandparents. We are happy with once or twice a month. Come to church. Throw in some money – we certainly need that. Man, if you’ll actually tithe we will be ecstatic. And hey, if you could serve with the kids once a month or so, that would be amazing.

Do you see how much we have lowered the bar with the idea “We can do it, you can help”? Our main expectation of the average churchgoer is to **COME AND SIT**. That certainly wasn’t Jesus’ expectation, nor was it Paul’s as he wrote Ephesians. Jesus said, ***“Come, follow me.”*** And what it meant to follow him was first of all, “keep up,” we’re not staying anywhere for long, there are too many people to reach. But then it also meant, “***learn how we do things*** because it won’t be long before we send you back to your town and expect you to do the Jesus thing there.

We need to reject the “come and sit” complacency of the modern church and replace it with the Home Depot mantra, ***“YOU CAN DO IT, we can help.”*** If that is somewhat true for home improvement hacks like me who really can do very few things at home, it is ABSOLUTELY TRUE for us as followers of Jesus. Because you have been sent out by Jesus with all of His authority and because you are filled with His Holy Spirit (read the end of Ephesians 3!), there is NOTHING you cannot do.

***As we abide in Christ and pray in His Name*** we can pray with boldness and faith that He will tear down strongholds of the enemy and move mountains for His glory and the advance of His kingdom. Six times in John 14, 15 and 16 Jesus commands his followers to pray believing that He will hear and answer. He even goes so far as to say that we will do GREATER THINGS than He did because He will be at the Father’s Right hand interceding for us and working on our behalf.

***So I’m NOT saying “believe in yourself.”*** That is Disney nonsense. Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing.” Do NOT believe in yourself. Believe in Jesus. Trust in the Lord with ALL YOUR HEART and don’t lean one ounce on your own understanding but in all you do give glory and honor to Him, and He will direct your every step.

***How can we join in the work Jesus is doing of filling this world with His glory and love?*** First, assemble a team. Second, believe you are called to a kingdom purpose and in Christ, with the power of the Holy Spirit and with a team of believers beside you, you can do it. Church leaders are here to pray for you and to equip you to succeed.

We used to tell our boys when they were small, ***“YOUR JOB is to obey. Our job is to teach you to obey.”*** That’s almost as good as the Home Depot. It’s a great summary of discipleship. Guess what, Christian – your job is to obey Jesus. Our job as pastors and leaders in the church is to teach you to obey. That’s right in the great commission. Jesus does not give us authority to make disciples and say “Teach them to UNDERSTAND everything I have commanded you,” but “teach them to OBSERVE” it all. Two more steps toward partnering with King Jesus.

**How to join Jesus in His work:**

1. **C**ommit to grow in **Knowledge** and **Christ-likeness**

“For building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God…” Ephesians 4:12-13

A critical part of our growth as Christians is ***knowledge of the Son of God*** and understanding of His glorious supremacy and all sufficient grace. Doctrine is important to identify false teaching and to appreciate the wonders of our gospel and the Lord Jesus who accomplished and announced that good news.

But because of the “come and sit” culture of many churches, a lot of us have been trained to learn and learn and learn some more without much emphasis on **DOING ANYTHING** with that knowledge.

John Mark Comer wrote a powerful book a few years ago called ***The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry***. As a mega church pastor who burned out preaching nine services every weekend, John Mark abandoned the mega church model and has embraced the simple life, including a return to the ancient practice of SABBATH - or stopping for a full day every week. Spiritual advisors told him “to be all God wants you to be, you must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”

***Our culture thrives on busy-ness, activity, hurry and hustle.*** I bet if we did an instant survey right now for why you aren’t more active in some service project in the city all of us would say, “I’m just too….. BUSY.” Yep. We are chronically busy people, running from one thing to the next to the next. So the idea of Sabbath and slowing feel like brand new and radical ideas.

John Mark Comer wrote a second book last year that’s even better than Ruthless Elimination called ***Practicing the Way***. John Mark summarizes following Jesus as three simple activities: first, be with Jesus. Second, become like Jesus. And third, do what Jesus did. That’s it. Be with Him. Become like Him. Do the kinds of things He did; or do what Jesus would do if He were in your position.

That’s a really helpful summary of the Christian life. We make it so complicated with our theological systems, charts of the end times, debates over God’s sovereignty and human freedom and endless church committee work. ***But it’s really very simple.***

* Are you spending time with Jesus?
* As you are with Jesus, are you becoming more like Him?
* As you become more like Jesus, are you doing the kinds of things He did?

It’s like the old WWJD thing. Not the wristbands, but the question. It’s very simple. What would Jesus do if He were you?

**How to join Jesus in His work:**

1. **C**ommit to grow in **Knowledge** and **Christ-likeness**

“For building up the body of Christ… to mature manhood, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:13

Our job as followers of Jesus is ***to GROW UP***. We start as newborn babies, born again in Christ. We stumble like toddlers early in our walk with Jesus, and hopefully grow out of our flagrant, childish sins. But ***what does the mature Christian life look like?***

It looks like JESUS. The measure of the stature of **HIS FULLNESS**. And don’t forget the prayer in Ephesians 3, that we would so experience the love of Jesus that He would fill us with all of the fullness of God. So in Christ, we already HAVE the fullness of God. Yet in Ephesians 5 we are commanded to BE FILLED with the Spirit of God ***so we can walk out practically what is already true of us spiritually.***

**How to join Jesus in His work:**

1. **C**ommit to grow in **Knowledge** and **Christ-likeness**

“So that you may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine…” Ephesians 4:14

So many churchgoers remain babies who have to be spoon fed the simplest truths. They come to church wanting to be inspired, wanting to be encouraged, wanting to feel something. But ***part of growing up is learning to feed yourself.*** Learning to stand on your own and to walk on your own.

Yes, ***this world is turbulent***, windy and stormy, which makes it hard to walk a straight line. There are various winds of doctrine, there is human cunning and the deceitfulness of the devil’s crafty schemes. But as we learn to walk with Jesus we learn to walk ON the turbulent water. And we learn to trust Jesus to handle the storms. He’s not asleep. He is biding his time. He is helping us grow.

**How to join Jesus in His work:**

1. **C**ommit to grow in **Knowledge** and **Christ-likeness**

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” Ephesians 4:15

And this shows us that in order to grow we need one another. You cannot grow as a follower of Jesus without other Christians. We need each other. And we must speak the truth to each other in love. ***Both are essential: truth and love.*** Too much truth and you aren’t loving well. But too much love and you have lost track of the truth. It’s both truth and love that are needed.

So that’s the summary: ***grow up IN EVERY WAY into Christ.***

If you want to be a fruitful citizen of God’s kingdom, A) assemble a team. B), believe you can do it. C) commit to growing in knowledge and Christ-likeness. And one more to get to our D.

**How to join Jesus in His work:**

1. **D**evelop **Goals** and get **Started**

“To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Ephesians 4:12

Jesus is filling the world with His glory and love, through us His church. He is building His church and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. You may be a finger or an eye, an elbow or a kidney, but ***every one of us has an essential part to play.***

What is YOUR work of ministry? What is your ministry calling?

I like to picture it as **a GARDEN**. Your life is a garden. The Lord wants to produce fruit first in your heart and then in your life.

So how is your garden? ***How is your heart?*** Are you flourishing in your love for the Lord, so experiencing the love of Jesus every day that you abound with love, joy, peace and patience?

***What about your ministry garden?*** Are you seeing fruit in terms of people you are loving and serving in Jesus’ name?

That raises important questions, right? ***What people? What place? What garden?*** Exactly. That’s what you have to figure out. Because most of us are so busy we are tossing a few gospel seeds over here at work, a couple here where we live, a couple with our extended family, a couple with old friends from high school. And we don’t see much fruit in any of these places.

And what gardener would expect to?

I’ve never attempted ***an actual garden***. I am doing well if I keep the lawn mowed and by lawn I mean mostly Florida weeds. But we did have a little patch in front of our house that the previous owners had cultivated around our palm tree. No idea what the plants are called, but there were some grass-type ones, some purple guys, some yellow and green little trees. Some of you know exactly what those things are.

Anyway, we just let it go for like three years, to where you could hardly tell what was supposed to be there because weeds had grown up all over the real plants. So a couple of months ago my wife and I ***ripped everything out***. We left the two grass type plants but everything else came out. Then we laid down that weed barrier black fabric and a bunch of red mulch. So now it looks much nicer, much more planned. But there are no tomatoes. No avocados. No carrots or strawberries.

Because we didn’t plant any of that. And everyone knows if you plant an actual vegetable garden or berry patch, you have to protect it and fertilize it and water it. Or you won’t get any fruit from it. In other words, **IT TAKES WORK**.

Guess what? So does the Garden of your Life.

If you want your spiritual life to flourish and thrive, ***you have to cultivate it***. If you want to see ministry impact in the lives of others, if you want your life to make a difference for the kingdom of God, it takes WORK. Intentionality. You have to cultivate the soil of relationships. You have to plant gospel seeds, speaking the truth in loving ways. You have to fertilize and water those seeds through ongoing conversation. And you have to look for opportunities to share the life-changing words of the gospel and call for a response.

It hit us a couple of years ago that we had lived in **our neighborhood** for three years and knew many of our neighbors by sight but not by name. The garden of our neighborhood was basically barren. So we decided to do some cultivation work by initiating ***a monthly casual get together***. We didn’t even make it a dinner, just a potluck for an evening snack.

The first one had 14 people come! One neighbor from two doors down wore a T-shirt that said F-cancer. But not just the letter. (It was like a mature episode of sesame street - this episode is sponsored by the letter F!) But she quickly shared how her sister and mom had both died of cancer the year before. So she had some strong feelings about cancer.

I think we had five of these get togethers over that year. Had we sustained it longer, no doubt more fruit could have come from it. But just those five gatherings let us meet most of our neighbors by name and hear some of their personal stories. So there is lots more work to do in the garden of our neighborhood, but that was a step.

That’s my main point for you today. ***Get started. Don’t wait until you have a perfect plan.*** Take a step this week. I bet you already have a sense of where and how to start.

* You have a heart for single moms or women in a crisis pregnancy. Contact a pregnancy center and get some training to become a volunteer.
* Someone has been pestering you to help with the youth ministry, so it’s time to visit the youth group and see what that would be like.
* You have a neighbor in the middle of a serious health crisis. Go check on him and bring over a meal.
* You used to struggle with substance abuse and you’ve always thought about joining a recovery ministry. Look up Celebrate Recovery and go visit a meeting this week. They are all over.
* You used to tutor at risk teens in a local high school and really miss it. Guess what? We have big brothers, big sisters here in Tampa and a bunch of other programs like that.
* Or maybe you just have a friend who is on your heart and you just need to text them and arrange to have coffee.

The point is to DO SOMETHING. Take a step. And your homework this week is to ***SET A GOAL for the next few months AND SHARE IT WITH SOMEONE.***

I bet you have goals for your day to day work, right? You have a clear job description with key result areas and you work to exceed expectations for those goals, don’t you? ***Are you giving less to your heavenly Lord than you give to your earthly boss?***

I hope you have goals for your marriage and family. I hope you work to meet and exceed those goals so you marriage stays healthy and thriving and your kids feel loved and mature physically, emotionally, academically and spiritually.

What are your goals for your own spiritual growth this year?  
  
What are your goals for your ministry growth this year?

Brothers and sisters, hear this. ***We WILL see the knowledge of the Lord Jesus fill Tampa Bay*** as the waters fill the sea. Jesus has promised and He will not fail. The way Jesus is filling every neighborhood, every school and every workplace with His glory and love is through people like you and me.

* The Church United Network is actively praying that ***every orphan*** in the Tri County area will be placed in a loving Christian home in the next year.
* We are praying that Tampa will become known as ***a haven for life*** rather than a destination for abortion and death; and that every single mom will be supported by a Christian community this year.
* We are praying that Tampa will no longer be known as a destination for the sex trade but will be seen as ***a place of healing and freedom***, of holiness and righteousness and love.

These are miracles we ask you to join us in praying for - mountains only the Lord Jesus can move. And His hand is on each of these issues. But He is waiting. Waiting for you and me to take that step. To get started.

**William Wilberforce** worked for 20 years in British parliament to finally get the slave trade abolished. Then he worked another 25 years to ride the British commonwealth of slavery altogether, through a bill that passed just three days before Wilberforce died.

Most of us hear of heroes like Wilberforce or Frederick Douglas or Martin Luther King Junior and immediately feel inadequate. I’m not a senator. I’m not a gifted preacher. I’m not an educated scholar. ***What change can I make in the world?***

In one little patch of garden, **you can touch the lives of a handful of people** and change them for eternity. If you get a couple other believers working with you, together you can cultivate a larger, more productive gospel garden. If you prayerfully work in that garden for the next 45 years, you CAN and WILL change the world.

Trust me, Wilberforce knew it was going to take years, generations to address the problem of slavery in England. And let’s remember that our country was 30 years behind England and worse when it came to Jim Crow. But people of faith persevered and eventually God brought the change.

So be with Jesus. Become like Jesus. And start today doing what Jesus did. And you WILL change the world. Now. Get to work!

Let’s pray.