

“Equipped” Fourth in the Series “Sent”

1 Peter 4:10 and Ephesians 4:11-16

June 28, 2026

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1 Peter 4:10

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

Ephesians 4:11-16

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Sermon

Have you ever felt like you didn't have what it took to accomplish something you were asked to do or were hired to do?

Have you ever felt like you didn't have what it took to do what God was calling you to do?

I'm sure many of you have heard the statement "God doesn't call the equipped. God equips the called."

God promises to equip us – to provide for us what we need – to do that which God calls us to do. Throughout the Bible we read of people who are called by God who immediately say: "I don't have what it takes." Moses, for example, said: "I'm not a good speaker. People won't listen to me." Isaiah said: "I'm a sinner." God replied to Moses: "I'll give you words to speak." "I will be with you." "I'll send someone to be your partner who is a good speaker." To Isaiah, God said: "I will cleanse you from your

sin.” God said to people in the past and to us today: “I will give you what it takes. I will equip you.”

Years ago, our youth leaders took a group of youth to Montreat Conference Center in North Carolina for a conference. While there, some of the youth were inspired by what they were learning and expressed a desire to go to Haiti on a short-term mission trip to serve. Our youth leaders listened attentively and demonstrated support for the idea all the while thinking: “I’m not the person to lead this. I don’t have what it takes to go to Haiti with this group of teens or anyone else.”

Well, within a year or two, youth leaders and youth embarked on the first of many short-term mission trips to Northwest Haiti. I would add that even while in Haiti, some of us have said: “I don’t have what it takes,” but God has equipped us, strengthened us, helped us overcome fear and sickness, and much more. This church has equipped the teams with funds, prayers, and encouragement.

I personally believe that God uses many people, circumstances, and experiences to equip us for everything that God calls us to be and do.

This week I read on Facebook the obituary of one of my junior high teachers. Mrs. Devers was my English teacher, she directed the plays that I was in, and she worked with our Forensics Team teaching us public speaking. She taught me how to write and give speeches, something that has served me well in my particular calling. At least two of us who saw Mrs. Devers’ obituary are ministers. Both of us credited Mrs. Devers for equipping us for these parts of our calling.

Parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, scout leaders, coaches, Sunday school teachers, friends, choir directors, band directors, drama directors, robotics teachers, club leaders, and so many others equip us for our present and future callings. God uses many people, circumstances (both good and bad), and experiences to equip us for everything that God calls us to be and do. As I look out on this congregation, I know that each of you has had and is having an opportunity to equip others – to help them have what it takes to carry out their callings in this world. I thank you.

Paul, in Ephesians 4, begins by telling us what our “general” calling is. “Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called . . .” Eugene Peterson expresses it this way: “. . . get out there and walk – better yet run – on the road God called you to travel. I don’t want any of you

sitting around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. And mark that you do this with humility and discipline – not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.” Or, as it is expressed in the New Revised Standard Version which we heard earlier: “Live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called . . . with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (NRSV)

One question among others may be: “What is this calling to which we have been called? I understand this calling to be a call to **love God and to love people**. Paul would certainly say that one of the ways we love people is by sharing the Good News of Jesus. He would also say that loving people includes demonstrating compassion and kindness in words and deeds to all our fellow human beings. He would say that this calling includes living sacrificially on behalf of others as we die to ourselves and live for Christ.

When I consider this calling and the way in which our calling is to be lived, I think to myself: “I don't have what it takes.” Humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. “Not in fits and starts, but steadily.” “I don't have what it takes.” Maybe you feel the same way.

It's certainly true that we don't, in our own strength, have what it takes. But the Holy Spirit does. And the Holy Spirit plants and nurtures the Fruit of the Spirit in us. The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23a). The Holy Spirit plants, nurtures, and brings to maturity the Fruit of the Spirit within us so that we can live a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called.

The Holy Spirit also equips us with “gifts” within our lives that are meant to help us in the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all come to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”

Paul is abundantly clear that our gifts, whether they be as apostles, or prophets, pastors, teachers . . . are for building up, not tearing now; for promoting unity; for promoting maturity of faith. Elsewhere in the New Testament, these spiritual gifts are also listed: leadership/administration,

assistance, discernment of spirits, evangelism, exhortation/encouragement, faith, generosity, healing, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, teaching, giving, mercy/compassion, effecting of miracles, knowledge, wisdom. (*Serving from the Heart: Finding Your Gifts and Talents for Service Participant Workbook*)

Each of us has received at least one gift of the Spirit and we all have the Fruit of the Spirit growing in us. How are you and I using our gifts to build up others? How are you and I welcoming the growth of the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives?

Every time we feel like we don't have what it takes, we should reread these words which we read earlier from Ephesians. We do have what it takes to serve God and serve people. Listen again: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:4-6)

We may feel we don't have what it takes to share our faith, to fight for justice for the oppressed, to care for someone who is sick or dying, to teach little kids, to be compassionate toward someone who lives in ways we don't understand, to speak truth to power, to go on a mission trip, to defend someone who is helpless, to tell someone Jesus loves them, to pray for someone, and the list goes on and on and on.

But we do have what it takes if God calls us. We have God with us. We have God who created us, Jesus who redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit who sustains us and gifts us and bears fruit in us. We also have what Paul calls the Body – the Church – one another. We are not alone to answer the call of God and to live lives worthy of the calling to which we've been called. We are not alone. We are equipped by God before, during, and after we are called to our general and particular ministries. We are not alone. We do have what it takes or we will be given what we need in due time.

We are called – yes, us. Ordinary people. We are empowered by the awesome God who calls us. We are called to serve. And we are sent to answer the call of God in the church and everywhere else. We are equipped for what God calls us to be and do.

Called, Equipped, and Sent. Whom shall I send, God asks?
Here we are, send us.