

# **Jesus Is Building His Church**

## **How Does Jesus Grow His Church?**

*Ephesians 4:7-16*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

September 2, 2007

# How Does Jesus Grow His Church?

## Scripture

About five years ago someone apparently stole several copies of the Miami Hurricanes' football playbook from an assistant coach's office. Later, some of the contents from those playbooks appeared on the Internet. It didn't help the Hurricanes' opponents!

A playbook, as I understand it, contains the offensive, defensive and special team plays that have been designed to carry out the team's strategy in order to win a football game.

A playbook, of course, is a valuable tool for any team. It sets out their method and strategy for winning a football game.

Churches, just like football teams, also have playbooks. Over the past 30 years or so we have witnessed what is called the "church growth movement." Seminars, conferences, books, programs, and even special organizations are devoted to teaching methods and strategies for church growth. Each has developed its own church growth playbook.

Many of the efforts of these church growth specialists are helpful. But they are only helpful to the extent that they are consistent with the methods and strategies that Jesus has revealed to us in his word for church growth. I suggest to you that Paul has given us Jesus' church growth playbook in Ephesians 4:7-16.

Here, in its most succinct form, is Jesus' church growth playbook by which he produces church growth. Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). And because Jesus is building his church, it follows that it must be built according to his plan. Attempting to build the church by human means, by using an unbiblical playbook, will only undermine the work of Jesus.

So, what is in Jesus' church growth playbook? How does Jesus grow his church? Let's read Ephesians 4:7-16 and see how Jesus grows his church:

<sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,  
and he gave gifts to men.”

<sup>9</sup> (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Jesus, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Jesus, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Jesus, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:7-16)

## Introduction

Every pastor desires to see his church grow.

Pastor John Beukema tells the story of the time his church rented a theater to watch *The Passion of the Christ*. Afterward they gathered for dinner, discussion, and prayer. He returned home in a somber mood, deeply affected by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

When he opened his mail later that night, the first letter was from a local church, inviting him to visit their “special community.” They listed the ways they were unique:

- No religious dogma—We encourage the freedom of individual thought and belief
- A humanist view of life—Our faith is based on celebrating the inherent worth and dignity of every person
- Warm, accessible services—Our Sunday services include a mix

## Jesus Is Building His Church

of readings, music, moments of meditation, and a sermon

- Our children's religious education program—We teach our kids to be accepting of different beliefs, and the importance of each person seeking his or her own truth. We study the world's major religions and draw on the core values of each faith tradition.

So if you're looking for a congregation that cherishes freedom of belief and opinion, with a warm sense of community and fellowship, please visit us!

Pastor Beukema commented that he had just watched the horrific suffering of Jesus and heard him say, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Hours later he opened an invitation to visit a church where truth doesn't matter. The contrast was overwhelming.

### Lesson

Thankfully, Jesus has given us his church growth playbook in Ephesians 4:7-16. Paul explains how Jesus grows his church. This passage gives us four elements of church growth, not necessarily of growth in numbers, but in the sense of that which develops and matures the members of the body of Jesus.

#### I. Essential for Church Growth: Gifted Leadership (4:7-11)

The first element essential for church growth is gifted leadership. Paul begins by announcing in verse 7, "**But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.**"

In this verse **grace** means "the ability to perform the task God has called us to." In Romans 12:6 Paul similarly explains, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us."

The point for us is: *each of us has received this enabling grace in the exact proportion that Jesus gave it.* All of us (no exceptions!) have a serving grace, a spiritual gift, a grace-gift which has been given to us by Jesus in perfect measure. We all have a special place of service in Jesus' church.

Paul goes on to say in verses 8-10 that not only do we each have a grace-gift for service, but our individual grace-gifts have a spectacular origin: **“Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’ (In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)”**

Paul is simply borrowing the imagery of Psalm 68:18 and applying it to Jesus’ incarnation and ascension. The fact that he **“descended into the lower parts of the earth”** is another way of indicating Jesus’ incarnation (cf. John 3:13). His descent to earth meant that he set aside the independent exercise of his divine attributes (such as his omnipresence), submitting the exercise of them to his Father’s will, and went down in the incarnation, and then went even further down in his death, actually becoming sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

But then he burst up in resurrection, ascension and exaltation—so that he now fills the whole universe as a conquering King, and joyously lavishes gifts upon his children. He bestows abundant gifts on his church and gives his people power to exercise the gifts that he has given them.

The gifts and enabling grace which we have has been given to us **according to the measure of Christ’s gift**. They come from the conquering King. They are given with great expectation on his part, for he expects us to use them in the building of his Church.

What are the gifts he gives? In five places (4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; 12:28-30; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Peter 4:11), we learn of the different gifts that Jesus has given to each Christian. But here Paul focuses on four gifted leaders who are gifts to the church. Paul says: **“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers”** (4:11).

Without going into detail, let me simply say that **the apostles** and **the prophets** were given by Jesus to get the first-century church established, but now their role is assumed by the canonical

writings of the New Testament. **The apostles and the prophets** with their unique endowments did not extend beyond the apostolic age. These were *extraordinary* offices.

But God also gave two *ordinary* offices to the church. Jesus gave **evangelists** and **pastors and teachers** to the church of every generation. By the way, **pastors and teachers** is really one office. This is how it is constructed in Greek.

Speaking of the four offices of **apostles, prophets, evangelists** and **pastor/teachers**, Bible commentator F. F. Bruce says:

The apostles and the prophets as two offices of the ministry of the church were not perpetuated beyond the apostolic age, but the various functions they discharged did not lapse with their departure, but continued to be performed by others—notably the evangelists and pastor/teachers.

Our *Westminster Confession of Faith* says: “Unto this catholic [universal] visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles and ordinances of God, for the *gathering* and *perfecting* of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world. . . .” (XXV:3). The *gathering* is done primarily by the **evangelists**, and the *perfecting* is done primarily by the **pastor/teachers**.

Today **evangelists** are those who proclaim the gospel. These gifted men are uniquely designed and given by Jesus to the church to reach the lost with the saving gospel, and every church should consider this ministry as a high priority.

Then there are the **pastor/teachers**. **Pastor** literally means “shepherd.” This tender, caring, nurturing title suggests a touch here, a kind word there, and a gentle prod at the right time. Yet it also suggests resolute strength and protection of the flock.

**Teacher**, of course, is “one who teaches,” but in this context it has to do with the *primary* function of **pastors**.

So, a **pastor/teacher** is to make feeding the sheep a top priority—as Jesus three times charged Peter to do (John 21:15-17).

If there is one thing that characterizes all four of these gifts to

the church, it is teaching! John Stott, a man not given to overstatement, believes that this is the *sine qua non* (i.e., essential element) of the pastoral ministry, the greatest need of the church universal, and I agree. Listen to how he put it:

Nothing is more necessary for the building up of God's church in every age than an ample supply of God-gifted teachers. Yet I wonder if this need has ever been greater than it is in our own day. In some areas of the third world great "people movements" are taking place. Large numbers, in some cases whole villages and tribes, are accepting Jesus, and the church growth rate exceeds the population growth rate. This exciting fact brings with it both problems and dangers, however. The newly baptized converts are spiritual babies. As such they are prone to sin and error, and almost defenseless against false teaching. Above all else they need teaching from the word of God. In some situations, believe it or not, missionaries are calling for a moratorium on converts. "For heaven's sake," they pray to God, "don't give us any more, for we don't know what to do with the thousands we already have." I sometimes urge my charismatic friends, therefore, some of whom seem to me to be preoccupied with the less important gifts, to remember Paul's dictum "eagerly desire the greater gifts," and to consider whether these are not the teaching gifts. It is teaching which builds up the church. It is teachers who are needed most.

No wonder so many churches are stagnant. As someone once said, "Lame sermonettes produce Christianettes." Those who serve as **evangelists** and **pastor/teachers** must open wide the foundational teaching of the Old and New Testaments if there is to be true church growth. And those who receive the teaching must listen well, take notes, and put it into practice.

## II. Means of Church Growth: Ministry (4:12a)

Having spelled out that gifted leadership and people who use their gifts are essential to church growth, Paul goes on in verse 12 to state the means of church growth—*ministry*. He says quite sim-

ply that Jesus has given gifted leadership to the church **“to equip the saints for the work of ministry”** (4:12a).

This is a watershed text for the doctrine of the church. It effectively eliminates the traditional model of the local church, as John Stott says, as a “pyramid, with the pastor perched precariously on its pinnacle, like a little pope in his own church, while the laity are arrayed beneath him in serried [crowded] ranks of inferiority.”

It also shoots down the model of a “bus, in which the pastor does all the driving while the congregation are the passengers slumbering in peaceful security behind him.”

The New Testament, and this passage in particular, envisions not a single pastor with docile flock, but both a plural oversight *and* an every-member ministry.

The biblical model is the body of Jesus in which pastor/teachers equip God’s people for the work of ministry. The biblical concept of a pastor/teacher is not of a person who jealously guards all ministry in his own hands, and successfully squashes all the initiatives of the church members. But, rather, his role is to encourage all Christians to discover, develop and exercise their gifts. His teaching is directed to this goal, to enable the people of God to be a serving people, ministering actively but humbly according to their gifts in a world of alienation and pain. And so, instead of monopolizing all ministry himself, he actually multiplies ministries.

All of our choirs will start rehearsing this week. Soon the choirs will assist us in worship. We will appreciate, for example, the beautiful music that Stu will direct from the Sanctuary Choir. Now, Stu clearly has more education and experience than most of the choir members. And yet he will not be able to produce that beautiful choral sound by himself. He will teach and train the choir members to sing in beautiful harmony. Each choir member will sing his or her part to produce a delightfully beautiful sound.

A pastor/teacher is like a choir director. His job is to teach and to train the members in his congregation so that they sing God’s praises in beautiful harmony as they minister together. The



pastor/teacher may have more education and experience, but his job is to prepare the congregation for the work of ministry!

The body of Jesus can accomplish great things when we all work together. John Stott says:

I saw the principle of the every-member ministry well illustrated when I visited St. Paul's Church in Darien, CT, a few years ago. On the front cover of their Sunday bulletin I read the name of the Rector [Pastor], the Reverend Everett Fullam. Next came the following line: "Ministers: the entire congregation." It was startling, but undeniably biblical.

Are you involved in a ministry in the church? You should be. Every Christian is to be involved in the work of ministry.

### **III. The Goal of Church Growth: Maturity (4:12b-14)**

What will result from the work of pastor/teachers who do their job and a people who are all actively involved in ministry? In a word—*maturity*. The goal of church growth is maturity. Verses 12b-14 tell us:

to equip the saints for the work of ministry, **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, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.**

When I was a student at the University of Cape Town I went to a store to buy a stereo set. There were so many choices! I had a difficult time deciding which one I wanted. I finally bought one. But I had hardly unpacked the stereo set at home when I wished that I had purchased a different model!

This is the way the immature believer is: fickle, changeable,

gullible, easily influenced by the latest book or preacher or fad, vulnerable to the wolves, of which there are plenty.

But those who are mature are steady and focused. Paul describes here the *corporate maturity* possible for a church where **“all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”** (4:13).

A mature church fosters a corporate elevation among its people, just as a fine educational institution promotes the mutual elevation of its students.

But, of course, what happens in the church is far more substantial and dynamic, for the elevation is spiritual and eternal. What a vision this is! Christians ministering together so that there is mutual growth and maturity.

#### **IV. Medium of Church Growth: Speaking the Truth in Love (4:15-16)**

And finally, the medium of church growth is *speaking the truth in love*. Paul says in verses 15-16: **“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”**

**“Speaking the truth in love”** carries the idea of not only speaking the truth but also doing it. This is the medium through which growth is maximized. When there is truth *and* love, when truth is married to love, the Spirit is free to do his work, and the result is wonderful.

I once read that sodium is an extremely active element found naturally only in combined form; it always links itself to another element. Chlorine, on the other hand, is a poisonous gas that gives bleach its offensive odor. When sodium and chlorine are combined, however, the result is sodium chloride—common table

salt—the substance we use to preserve meat and enhance its flavor.

Love and truth can be like sodium and chlorine. Love without truth is changeable, sometimes blind, willing to combine with various false doctrines.

On the other hand, truth by itself can be offensive, some times even poisonous. Spoken without love, it can hurt and even turn people away from the gospel.

Some of you are strong on love, and you need to be bolder in proclaiming the truth. Others of you are strong on truth, and you need to learn to be more loving in your speech.

But when truth and love are combined, however, then we have what Jesus called “the salt of the earth,” and we’re able to preserve and bring out the beauty of the gospel. And this is the medium through which Jesus grows his church.

## Conclusion

So, what are the elements in Jesus’ church growth playbook? Unlike in Miami, we don’t have to steal the playbook. We have it here in Ephesians 4:7-16. Biblical church growth comes through:

1. *Gifted leadership* who in dependence upon the Holy Spirit teach and live out God’s word.
2. *Ministry* in which pastor/teachers prepare God’s people for works of service using their gifts to the fullest extent.
3. A growing *maturity* of God’s people, so that all are riding high on the tide of one another’s lives.
4. *Speaking the truth in love*—transparent, honest, loving speech and lives.

So, to summarize, Jesus builds his church through gifted leadership who equip God’s people for the work of ministry so that there is a growing maturity as they speak the truth in love.

This is biblical church growth! May God help you and me to follow Jesus’ plan for building his church. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributor\\_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181)
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz)

Please give your input and leave your feedback at websites 2 and 3 when requested to do so. This helps with evaluation and planning of sermons.

## Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

**PRAAYER:**

Our Father, we thank you that Jesus is building his church. Thank you that Jesus is building his church here at the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church.

I pray that Jesus will continue to build his church here at the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church through gifted leadership who equip God's people for the work of ministry so that there is a growing maturity as we speak the truth in love.

And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.