

JIM MURPHY
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Session 1

(...) and he comes right over and hugs me. I said, "Sir, I think you're mistaken. I don't have a brother." "Well, you're my brother!" Yeah, whatever. And I got there a little bit early; I think it was before the program started. I don't know what I was thinking. I walked right down the steps, second from the front row. In the meantime, people started filing in. And this guy must have had a big family because everybody was his brother and sister. I don't know who he's related to but the whole world was his brother and sister. So everybody starts filing in and I just kind of sit there being quiet, and the entire church was like the size of one of these sections so you really couldn't get away from anybody, you know. So I'm sitting there and this guy comes out, and he says, "Now, before the minister comes out, let's have a word of prayer." Seems reasonable, so I'm, you know, "Hail Mary, full of grace." And this guy's going, "Thank you, Jesus, thank you!" I said, "We can't do that in church!" And then everybody starts waving their hands, and I said, "You're just terrible. I hope they stop before the minister gets out here." And he came out and everybody's excited, and I'm like... I thought I'd try to get under the pew and crawl away. And then they started speaking in a different language. I thought, "Oh, that's interesting. I didn't know that people from Juneau had their own local dialect." I remember that for the next two hours I was like saying, "God, take me now! Just get me out of here." So about two and a half, three hours later, finally it goes by and I'm walking out of church shaking, and my long-lost brother says, "Brother, remember tomorrow night, 7:00!" And I'm like, "Oh, yeah, I'll be here." Don't hold your breath. But I did go back and I went back the next night and the next night, and I kind of got to like those guys. So if you ever go to the Assembly of God church in Juneau, Alaska, and you look in the main aisle, you'll see two skid marks where the last night they kind of pulled me up front and prayed over me. So I am always very much appreciative and a little sympathetic for anybody who comes to these for the first time. It's like, "What's wrong with these people?!" So it's always good to be here.

I do think that we have to realize that God works in many ways. And there's a time to give a shout to the Lord and there's a psalm that says, "Be still, and know that I am God." And it's not either/or; it's both/and. So the main thing is that what Jesus wants of us, that we love the Lord, our God, with our whole heart, our whole mind, our whole will, and our whole strength. And sometimes we should give a shout to the Lord. And sometimes we just sit there and say, "God, it's all in Your hands." It's all good, okay.

But anyhow, it's great to be together today. And I love our theme: Empowered and Equipped. I was thinking... from time to time I do some work at a local nursery or garden center, and a couple of years ago there was a guy that I was working with and they had these big front loaders that loaded wood chips and gravel and sand, you know, big tires and trucks that they

back these things up and dump all this stuff in. And there's this one guy I worked with who could not wait to get up on that loader: "I just want to run that baby." It was like a big toy for him. And he kept saying, you know, "Do you think I'm ready?" "Well, I don't know. You get up there and try it." He moved it an inch forward and an inch back. Well, one day none of the regulars were around and I said, "Okay, do you think you're ready for it?" "Yes, sir! I've got this." He gets up there and he's like, "Oh wow!" He scoops up the gravel, drives up to the cart, and he thinks he's going to tip it down into the cart but he pulls the wrong lever and starts driving through the yard backwards and backed the loader into the side of a brand new car, which then dumps all the gravel. The guy had plenty of power but let's just say his skills weren't quite so effective yet. And I think that's kind of an analogy of many times talking about the power of the Lord and how it needs to be balanced, let me put it this way, with a certain skill, a certain maturity. Because make no mistake about it, there is power in the Lord. In fact, when Jesus says this to us: "Wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit that was promised through the Father and you shall be clothed with power from on high." The word that Jesus uses in Greek is (sp?) which is our word for dynamite. So the Spirit of God is power, power to change, power to transform, power to raise up, power to pull down, power to heal, power to break. There is great power in the Holy Spirit. Make no mistake about that and have no doubt about that.

As I look around the world, I just feel that only God can save it. I am so sad; I think that's one of the reasons I am so sad. Like in our own country right now, the whole political bad taste. There's so much bitterness and angst. It just seems like we can't go anywhere without this contention. And it's really getting mean-spirited. It's really a sad thing in our country when... Seventy-two hours ago I was in Mexico, and I see this abject poverty. Ten thousand people living in a garbage dump. And here we have people all over the world who are being persecuted for the faith, I mean, literally being beheaded. It's going on a lot more than it's really reported. It just seems to me that the whole world is on this moral decline, and people are walking away from God in droves. So, you know, there are so many things that are so, to me, sad. And there's so... like I don't know how to fix the world. And unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

So I don't think we have to be discouraged but I think there needs to be a certain sobriety to recognize that what the world needs is the mercy of God. You know, God loves everybody who's trying to do a good thing. God loves everybody. But unless the Lord does this, we're incapable of saving ourselves. We can't fix it. That doesn't mean we just sit back and say, "Oh well, it's all going to hell in a hand basket." But what it means is that we really need the Lord. And one thing that Pope Benedict said that was very sobering, Benedict said, and I'm paraphrasing here, but Benedict used the analogy of a sunset, and he said, "Humanity is trying to put that aside." You know, some years ago the European Union rewrote their preamble to their constitution and, with intention, removed any reference to Christianity or Christ as part of

the history of Europe. It's like intentionally the world is trying to put God out of the picture. And Benedict uses that analogy of the sunset, and he said, "The world wants the light of God to be gone, but in the ensuing darkness, we see men stumble and fall." So it's like if you take God out of the equation, what do you have left? You have darkness. And it seems that at this moment, people would prefer to stumble in the darkness of humanity. That's a (...) from the light of God. So I am really very concerned for the things in the world. Really, I mean that.

But as Christians, we know that the Lord never will leave the world, and in reality, God will never actually leave the human race. There are people like you and I all over this planet today who are calling on the name of the Lord, seeking the Lord, trying to build the kingdom of God. So there's a lot of good news too. But it all comes down to God saving humanity. And for reasons that completely escape me, God has chosen you and I to be a part of His plan for the salvation of the human race. So when your friends say to you, "What do you do for a living?"; "I help God save the human race." Totally appropriate.

So we need the power of God, because God, and only God, can accomplish what humanity cannot accomplish. And St. Paul says that the power of God is demonstrated in the weakness of Christ. You know, the world sees Christ hanging on a cross and it looks like an absolute failure. It looks, at this point, like Jesus lost. But in His greatest moment of weakness, that was when He was breaking the power of sin and death and Satan. So there's a mystery here and you and I live in the mystery with Christ. And St. Paul will say in 1st Corinthians: "Not many of you are wise or smart or rich or powerful". We're kind of normal, folks. But God uses, what is little in the eyes of the world, to manifest His glory. Now, that way, nobody here can say, "Well, where do I come in?" It's always to (...) the power of God.

So I want to be very clear at the beginning today that I am absolutely advocating that we should live in the power of the Lord. And that power of the Lord is promised to us by the Father in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And I believe in the Holy Spirit we're given the power to be and the power to do. Very important. The Spirit gives us the power to be and the Spirit gives us the power to do. And it's not either/or; it's both/and. Men and women who continually yield themselves to the cross of Christ, men and women who continually, in the words of John Paul II, remain docile to the action of the Holy Spirit, those are the men and women who are being transformed. Transformed. We're different people than we were ten or fifteen years ago. Why? Because we finally got our act together? No. Because the power of God is at work in us. And sometimes those advancements are quick and obvious, and sometimes those advances are so incremental we don't even know it's happening. I have, rather I've seen people... an addict, a heroin addict, who one night at a prayer meeting, who after seventeen years of addiction, was completely set free. Never went back to the stuff again. That was an obvious infusion of the power of God that had an immediate and completely radical effect. Put that in the rest of this gentleman's life, you know, you grow a little bit every day. Kind of like most of us, you take

three steps forward and two steps back and another step forward. You're kind of on fire for awhile and you're kind of cool for awhile. It's kind of more of a normal journey of life. But make no mistake about it. The power of God is at work in you. And St. Paul defines the power of God. Paul says that whatever that power was that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, that is the same power that's at work in you. Think about that for a minute. Whatever power was that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, that is the exact same power that is moving within your being right now. So Paul's almost hinting... what can't you do and what can't you be for the sake of Christ? So again, I'm a big advocate of the power of God. We're not going to focus on this today but because I don't focus on it doesn't mean I'm not saying this is something we have to have. And this really has got to be the foundation of our lives – the power of God.

Paul says, "I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me." That's not arrogance. That's not boasting. That's having the humility to know the truth. And the truth is that Paul can do all things in Christ who strengthens him, and you can do all things in Christ who strengthens you. To constantly put yourself down isn't real humility. Real humility is to be able to speak the truth of who you are in Christ. You're not making it more than it is; you're not making it less than it is. It is what it is. And what it is, the power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power at work in you. And that's a fact, whether you like that or not, whether you believe that or not, whether you feel it or not, in all due respect, is irrelevant. That is what it is. So God, I think, is more troubled about the earth than we are. I think it breaks God's heart. And so God wants to save humanity; God wants to rescue us; God wants to bring people from darkness to light; God wants to break people out of their addictions; God wants to break the power of death and sickness and all these things. That's what He wants. We don't have to somehow beg God, "Hey, could You be nice to us today? Could You give us a break today?" He wants to be nice; He wants to give us a break. That's what He wants. The challenge is: Am I open to participating in His plan? You and I can never, ever, replace Him. But it's His intention that we work with Him.

I think it's interesting if you look at the Gospels, almost without exception, there are a few, but almost without exception, most of the miracles that Jesus performed in the four gospels, He had cooperation of people. He turned water into wine, absolutely amazing. In all due respect, it wasn't He who had to go get the water. He turned a handful of loaves and fishes and He fed, you know, perhaps up to 40,000 people, but in all due respect, it wasn't Jesus' loaves and fishes. He got it from a kid. He raised Lazarus from the dead; it wasn't Jesus who rolled the stone back. And when Lazarus comes out, it wasn't Jesus who unwrapped him. The man who was a paralytic; it was the friends of the man who ripped open the roof and lowered him down to Jesus. Most of the miracles that Jesus performed, He prefers to work with us. He's certainly capable of doing it himself but He likes to work with us. And so as we look at the heartache and the heartbreak and the darkness that our world is currently suffering, there's a reason for hope because there is a God. And there is light. And there's a God who loves us, and a God

who isn't saying... He's not up in heaven saying, "What am I going to do? What am I going to do?" He knows what He's going to do. And in His way and in His time, He will accomplish everything that the Father sends Him to accomplish. The real question is: Do you want in on that? Do you want to be part of the problem or do you want to be part of the solution? There's no middle ground. You're either in or you're not. It's kind of that simple.

So this power of God that raised Christ from the dead is at work within you so that you, my friends, can accomplish the works of Christ for the glory of the Father. That's what everybody's doing in this room today. We do it in different ways. We do it as raising families; we do it as teachers, medical people; we do it as plumbers; we do it as lawyers, as electricians; we cut lawns. Whatever we do, Paul says, whatever you do, you do it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. So it doesn't so much matter exactly what you're doing. Whatever it is, do it in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are participating in the salvation of the human race.

But going back to my friend who drove the tractor into a car and dumped a load of gravel on top of the car, and then took out about seventeen very expensive bushes, going back to him... There's something about power that also needs a certain finesse, a certain capacity, and that's why today we're going to focus on being equipped, to talk about being empowered and being equipped, and we want to focus on being equipped today.

I just want to take a quick look at this concept of being equipped. And if you have your bibles with you or your iPads or whatever you use these days, let's look into the fourth chapter of Ephesians, a very important letter that Paul wrote. And a lot of it has to do with unity and with building up the Body of Christ. It's not a long passage so you'll probably be able to get most of it even if you don't have your bible with you. But here's what Paul's talking about in Ephesians, chapter four. He's pleading with the Christians to be united. He says we simply can't keep, you know, kind of fighting amongst each other. And he talks about... and this is something that Pope Francis speaks a lot about, and Francis spoke a lot about it at Pentecost a few weeks ago. We had about 40,000 people at a meeting with him in Rome, and he was very much on this. And there's this whole concept of unity and diversity. What Christ is calling for, absolutely, is unity within His Body. What He isn't interested in is uniformity. There's a big difference between unity and uniformity. Sometimes in order to make an organization work, there's a uniformity. Everybody does the exact same thing to accomplish a particular end. What Christian unity talks about is a common heart, common mind, common purpose, a mutual respect for each other. But then Paul talks about diversity, and Paul is the first one to admit that we're not all the same. We have different temperaments, we have different personalities, and according to God's design, which we don't understand, He gives different gifts to different people. Not everybody is called to be a teacher; not everybody has a gift to play music; not everybody has (...) the scripture. And it doesn't matter as long as whoever does have those gifts contributes to the welfare of the whole group. I would guess right now in this room, within

these four walls, there are all kinds of resources and gifts that we don't even know are available to us. Now it doesn't matter if I don't have the gift as long as you have the gift and you're willing to share it, that I'm the beneficiary of it.

The other day in Rome we had this art exhibit of Art of the Holy Spirit. And people from all over the world had submitted art, paintings and sculptures, from literally all over the world. I mean, it literally moves you to tears to see the insight and the skill and the ability of these people. I don't think I have that particular gift but they do. So if I need to use a piece of art to make a point, it's acceptable to me because someone was able to contribute to the whole Body of Christ. So perhaps not everybody here has a gift of prophecy. It doesn't matter as long as somebody here has the gift of prophecy and has the humility to share it with the rest of us. Okay? Gifts are given to an individual, through the individual, and also for the good of the entire group. I always get nervous when people say: "Well, my ministry and my..." this and that. It's really not yours. God had to use somebody, I mean, in the Old Testament, He talked through a donkey. So He had to have somebody to deliver it to us. So don't get on your high horse because you've got some charisma. It's God and He's sharing it with us and He just happened to pick you. You know, tomorrow He could...

I had a thing happen awhile ago, very humbling, very humbling. Some years ago I had cancer, and I had surgery. And I was scheduled to give this conference. So now I'm in bed and my side is oozing, and my wife says, "You're not going to that conference." "I think if you could just stand me up and patch me up, I can make it." "You're not going to that conference." So she calls: "The guy's laying in bed bleeding; he can't come to the conference." So I'm getting all... I'm letting these people down, you know, the word of God must go forth. "Eat your lunch and shut up. Lay there and relax." So the whole week I'm out, biting my nails and going, "God, please help me, please help." So about two weeks later, I get a call from these dudes. "Oh, how are you doing?" "Oh, fine. How did the conference go?" "Oh, it was the best conference we ever had." "Really?" "Yeah, yeah, it was great. The teaching was so anointed." "Oh, did you miss me a little?" "Oh, it was great, great." I said, "Who did you get to give those talks that I was scheduled to give?" These profound, deeply theological talks. Whoever could you find to replace me? She says, "Oh, it worked out great. One of the girls in the prayer group, her brother is a custodian at the church. We just had him come up and he gave the talks. He was great." So, you know, it's all about God speaking to community, and if one jackass is laid up, you can find another one, you know.

So that's why Paul is pleading for unity on one hand but diversity on the other. And Paul will say in his letter to the Corinthians, he used the analogy of a body. What if we just had a giant eye and no feet? What if the entire Body of Christ was a hand but no heart? I mean, you'd have this freak. What we need is everybody willing to be who they are, with charisms, with temperament, with personality. (...) As long as you're surrendering to Christ, that's good

enough. And we try to find ways to share our gifts and to work together. And I find sometimes that we tolerate each other. That's not bad for a start. But God wants us to go from tolerating each other to cherishing each other, to really recognize how unique each person is.

I had a phone call early this morning from Rome and it just strikes me how unique the Body of Christ is. I was preparing for today and the director of the office, Rusty, was getting ready to have dinner and they invited our entire staff together today because it's been just such a big project in Rome. So he said to me, "Where are you at right now?" "I'm in Colorado." "Do they have mountains in Colorado? Can you see mountains?" I go, "I'm looking right out my window at Pikes Peak." "Oh, mama mia! I want to come to Colorado!" He's always wanted to be a cowboy. And whenever he comes to America, the only things he'll eat are steak and French fries because he thinks that's the American thing to do. So he wants to be a cowboy. "Oh, mama mia! Take a picture of the mountains for me." He's so excited. I said, "What are you guys doing?" "We're getting ready for dinner and we're having the entire staff over to my house tonight." Our staff is... Rusty is from Italy; one of our accountants is from Fiji out in the Pacific; one of the staff is from Lebanon; one of our staff is from Brazil; one of our staff is from Peru; one is from French-speaking west Africa, Cameroon. And so you have this whole group of people who have different languages, different cultures, different backgrounds, different history, and it doesn't make the group bad, it actually makes it better. So I think sometimes when we talk about unity, we think uniformity. And if we could quit resenting each others' differences and start cherishing each others' differences, friends, we could go to a whole new place. Your languages, your history, your background could be so good if we could quit resisting it and start appreciating it. And so that's why Paul is calling for unity, and that's where we're going to go with Ephesians 4.

So let's just take a look at Ephesians 4 and what Paul tells us about empowerment and equipped. I'm going to start with Ephesians 4, verse 11. And just before this, Paul is talking about Jesus coming and giving gifts to the church. Jesus is coming to give gifts to the church. And here's what Paul says in verse 11: *And he (Jesus) gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ.* Paul is sometimes kind of hard to follow. The wording kind of runs around a little bit. But let's just walk through that very quickly and look at a few key concepts that are important for Paul that we get.

Christ is the giver of gifts. And he, Jesus, gave some as apostles, prophets, evangelists, etc., etc., etc. That means... Think about this. That means that Christ gave you as a gift to us. One of the gifts that Jesus Christ has given us as a community is you. Are you comfortable in that role? Are you comfortable being a gift from Jesus to the rest of us? I find myself at times

wondering why people put up with me. I do. I find at times people think...I don't think people really like me. I think they're just being nice because they're Christians. I feel sometimes like I'm a burden or, you know, the odd man out. It's hard for me to believe that I could possibly be a gift from Jesus to the community. And I wonder if any of you feel that way. Do you ever feel like the odd person out or I don't belong here or what am I doing here or what do I have to give? You know, she's so talented. That person's so gifted. He's so bold. I'm like chop liver. What am I doing here? Okay, do you ever feel that way? I suspect that at one time or another most of us do. At one time or another, if we're really honest, most of us feel like the odd person out. And that okay; we're human and we feel these things. So let's realize what Paul is saying. You're not the odd person out. You are a gift specifically given from Jesus Christ to this community. And again I say, despite what you feel, what I just said is true. You are a gift from Jesus Christ to the rest of this community. And you need to have the humility to accept that, in spite of your feelings.

The second thing he says... he lists these things, the prophets, teachers, etc., etc., etc., and their role. Why are these people given to us? They're given to entertain us; they're given to strengthen us; they're given to make us feel good. Hold on – that's wrong. They're given, verse 12, to equip the holy ones, to equip the holy ones. In other words, the holy ones are already holy. They're not holy because they're doing everything right. They're holy because they've been consecrated to the Father through Christ on the cross. The reason you are holy, in all due respect, isn't so much a reflection of what you can accomplish; it's all a reflection on what He has already accomplished. You are holy because He is holy. And He died on the cross and rose from the dead so do not tell me you're not holy, because to deny that aspect is to mock the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is serious stuff. Just take it as an article of faith that you're holy. You're probably not perfect yet. I suppose there are a few minor rough edges that have to be smoothed out. I'm speaking in faith now, thank you, Jesus. But you are holy in the sense that you have been set aside for Christ. And Peter says, once you were (...) but now you're God's people set apart for His purposes. In the Old Testament, a bowl was considered holy, or an altar was holy. What it meant was that it was set apart for the exclusive use of the worship of God. Probably in a Catholic language, we would consider it sacrilegious to take a chalice that is used for mass and fill it up with a Coke. It would be considered sacrilegious because the chalice is used for one purpose only, the offering of the precious blood of Christ to the Father. You are that kind of a chalice. You are that kind of a tabernacle. You have been set apart for the purposes of God, and therefore you are, in fact, holy in the sense that your life has been consecrated for the praise and worship of the Father through Jesus Christ. That's a fact, and again, frankly, whether you believe that or not, it doesn't change the fact. So Paul says that God is sending us gifts of prophets, evangelists, teachers, and it's a pretty long list. Why? To equip the holy ones. You're already holy; you've already got the anointing of the Holy Spirit in your life, but He wants to equip you.

Now let's go on to the next line. To equip the holy ones for fun and games? Well, to equip the holy ones for good times and... no, that's not right. I got it here. To equip the holy ones for the work of ministry. So here's how this plan is laid out. Christ is come, not past tense, He's coming now. Christ, on this Saturday morning in June of 2017, Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Son of God, is in this room right now. I can't physically see Him, but He's in this community, in the midst of this community, right now. And He's here and He gives gifts. And the gifts He's giving is each other to this community. For what purpose? So that the holy ones will be equipped for ministry. The holy ones will be equipped for ministry. So that means, in Christianity, there are no spectators. You don't have to serve the way other people serve but everybody here has to do their part. Everybody here has their job to do for the sake of the kingdom and to help a very bedraggled world. There are no exceptions; there's no, you get a free pass. Just do this right now. Put your hand up by your face. Just put your hand over your nose and your mouth. If you feel any breath at all, if there's any warmth in the palm of your hand, I'm talking to you. If you are alive... if you're not alive, please let the Deacon know and we'll call 9-1-1 immediately.

I'm not saying that Catholic churches are low energy people. I was in a parish awhile ago and at a Catholic mass, a guy had a heart attack. Fell over right in the front pew. They called 9-1-1. You know, they had to carry twelve people out before they found out which one was really dead. I'm just kidding! That's crazy talk. Okay, let's get back to...

So He gives us as gifts to each other to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, and what's our goal? What are we trying to accomplish with God's help? The building up of the Body of Christ. So we are here to strengthen and help the people in this world, but by God's plan, He wishes all seven and a half billion people would be part of the body of Christ. So it's internal but it's also external. We gotta take care of the folks under this roof and take care of everybody else outside the walls. We gotta do both of those things. And here's Paul's benchmark: *Until we attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the extent of the full stature of Christ.* When He uses the word "mature" and the words "full extent", the correct term would be perfect. So someday, maybe only in the great by-and-by, let's see, it's a little touchy. Somehow you and I personally but communally will be perfected. We're not perfected now but someday in heaven we will be perfected and we will be identified with Christ as part of Him. I don't know how that works. I mean, we're not claiming that we're God, but the unity will be so close that we will be part of God, part of the Body of Christ. And Paul says that exists right now. Not in its perfection, not in its totality, but already as we sit here with our own brokenness, with our own sin, with our own shortcomings, already this is the Body of Christ. We've already crossed some kind of a line; we've already entered into that reality. Not perfect, but that's where we are.

So Paul is saying Christ comes and He brings gifts, not cosmic forces, He brings gifts as people, brings gifts to us through people so that we can be equipped, so that we can do ministry with the end goal being that the Body of Christ is built up and perfected. There's a line from the Epistle of John, and I'll tell you personally, it's the hardest passage in the bible for me to believe. I believe in the virgin birth; I believe in the resurrection of Christ; this is the one that I personally choke on. 1 John 3:2 – it's a one-liner. Here's what it says: *Beloved, we are God's children now.* On this Saturday morning, as we sit here, we are God's children now. Then John says: *What we shall be (future tense) has not yet been revealed, but when it is revealed, we shall be like him.* Someday, John the apostle says, we shall be like Him. And so what Paul is telling us today is that God has given you power and now God wants to equip you so that that reality that John sees in the future... we begin this process even now.

So friends, this is more than a handful of people trying to make the world a better place. This is... we're talking about the transformation of the men and women in this room to the complete vision that Christ has for us. And the way that He does that, the way that Christ will accomplish that, is by bringing this gift of power and transformation and equipping to the kind of average folks in the world. That's what this is all about.

We're going to take a short break now but when we come back I want to specifically focus on what this means to be equipped. It isn't what you think it is. So we'll take a look at that right after the break. Thank you so much. God bless you!