

## Are You Being Equipped or Stripped?

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*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers* (Ephesians 4:11)

When you think of a pastor or a prophet or a teacher, do you have differing ideas about what their purposes are today? Maybe you think that a pastor is to effectively govern a church body and feed inspiring messages to the flock. Perhaps a prophet's role in today's church is a bit more confusing for you to understand – you may even question the validity of the need for prophets today. A teacher's role isn't so hard for you to imagine; they are to teach the Bible and spiritual truths, right?

Ephesians 4:11 leaves us no choice but to accept the reality that the ministers Paul mentioned have been given to the church for some reason, and there is nothing in Scripture that indicates an expiration of their need in the church. We should thus conclude in an unbiased way that there are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers today, even if we aren't quite clear on what their intended roles are for today. Paul, however, leaves no ambiguity about what their primary function is in the building of Jesus's church:

for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12)

Those in Christian leadership – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers – have a specific assignment from Jesus. That assignment which is given in Ephesians 4 doesn't entail making believers feel good about themselves, become better people, or cognitively learn wonderful truths. The assignment is to equip the members of the body of Christ to become workers in *ministry*. "[T]he edifying of the body of Christ" can be seen as an additional role in their functionality, but it is mainly a byproduct of the body of Christ ministering in the world and in the church.

Unfortunately, many in leadership do not equip believers to do works of ministry. Instead, they focus either on building robots who seek self-help techniques, or they strive to sound like wise and wonderful shepherds of spiritual truth who can lead their flocks to pastures where the spiritual buffet is a 24/7 feast – in many cases, of spiritual "food" made from new and exotic recipes, never before tasted.

Is that what Jesus called those in leadership to do? Not according to Ephesians 4:12. Leaders are to equip, equip, and then equip some more. So the question I'm asking in this brief article is, "Where is the equipping of believers to minister to the sick, dying, demonized, hurting, brokenhearted, homeless, and the rest of humanity?"

The sad reality is that in many cases, believers are not being equipped; they're being stripped - stripped of their purpose that develops from being trained as Jesus trained His disciples. This training is needed for believers to

become ‘power-from-on-high’ ambassadors of God’s kingdom who can then partner with Jesus in ministry works to reach the people of this world.

Where is this equipping / training supposed to come from? Ultimately, it is to come from a believer spending intimate time with Jesus, garnering His insight on how to minister effectively.

But He said to them, "**Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth.**" And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons. (Mark 1:38-39)

Notice that Jesus said, “Let us go”.<sup>1</sup> He wanted His disciples with Him as He preached and demonstrated the Gospel by casting out evil spirits. Did He take them to show off His preaching abilities and power to them? Not likely. He took them to show how kingdom ministry is to be done – preaching of the kingdom of God accompanied by demonstration of the kingdom He preached about.

Later, Jesus sent His disciples out *on their own* to do the same ministry of preaching and power...

Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons (Mark 3:14-15)

**And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.** (Matthew 10:7-8)

Just as Jesus took His disciples along, trained them to minister by demonstration, then sent them out with His leading, He wants to send us out with His equipping. One way we’ll become equipped to do His works is to spend time with Him *before and as* He sends us out. This process is circular and continuous in that Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to be with us and to accompany us on every ministry journey. He’ll teach us before, during, and after we step out in His power and leading to minister to the inhabitants of earth.

Next, we see this model of training / equipping being followed by the apostles...

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark. (Acts 12:25)

It is possible that Mark was taken along for training purposes since we see him shortly after called an “assistant.”(Acts 13:5) Later, he assisted Baranbus:

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<sup>1</sup> Italics mine

And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. (Acts 15:39-41)

Silas is described as a prophet earlier in the text (15:32), so Paul took someone who already had a ministry 'track record'. Barnabas took Mark as his assistant, and I believe that it was for Mark's continued equipping. Much later, Paul wanted Mark to visit him, adding a brief statement implying that Mark had been well trained by Barnabas...

Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. (2 Timothy 4:11)

Barnabas mentored Mark to the point where Paul later saw Mark effectively equipped "for ministry."

Where are the mentors today? Are leaders taking congregants and followers alongside to show them how to minister, then releasing them into ministry? Perhaps in some places it is happening, and for that, I thank God. But I believe some leaders are afraid that equipping believers to do ministry works will make those under their leadership feel like they actually have to *work* for the kingdom. The false notions of, "*Isn't Christianity supposed to just be a joy ride to the pearly gates?*", and "*Aren't the leaders the ones who should do ministry since in many cases they are paid a salary by the church?*", are being perpetuated, perhaps unknowingly, by mistaken models of leadership.

The Great Commission, as it's been termed, is a call to make "disciples", not just student converts...

**Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*" Amen.**  
(Matthew 28:19-20)

A biblical disciple is someone who proceeds to live and act as taught and equipped by a mentor. To make a disciple, we have to be willing to spend time with the new believer, ensuring that they are fully equipped to meet the demands of the same Commission that brought us into the kingdom of God.

Jesus said that discipling was to be accomplished through "**teaching** [believers] **to observe all things that** [He] **... commanded** [the apostles/disciples]." The "**things**" that Jesus referred to here must include those things that He told His disciples to *do* during their ministry journeys. This conclusion seems plausible since Jesus said to teach them "**all things**". On many occasions, Jesus commanded the disciples to go to various locations, preaching and also demonstrating the kingdom through miraculous works. Jesus didn't tell the current disciples to only teach new believers the great and wonderful pearls of wisdom He had spoken about to them. So, we can reasonably conclude that the

discipleship Jesus was referring to includes both the teaching of truth as well as the equipping for kingdom works.

Today's discipleship methodologies must include both visibly showing kingdom works being done and "hands-on training" for those being disciplined so that they can do those works also. What are 'kingdom works'? They are the works that Jesus and the apostles did. They are also the works that today's disciplers should do. These works should include healing the sick, raising the dead, delivering the demonized, freeing those in bondage, and other activities that visibly demonstrate the kingdom of God.

In conclusion, Jesus wants to build a church that is completely active in performing kingdom ministry. When He walked the earth, He took twelve flawed humans along for a three year course in how to minister with power to change lives. Leaders of today need to employ His model of discipling their congregants and followers by equipping / training them in how to minister through mentorship discipleship, encouraging them that they can and should minister, and sending them out in some form or fashion to minister.

How can this world be touched by God's powerful love if the church just warms the pews to hear wonderful sermons? If that's all the church is receiving, then the church is being stripped of its purpose—a purpose that proceeds out of being trained and sent out to do the works of Jesus, which in turn will bring in more disciples.

Do most Christian leaders want a vibrant, spiritually mature church? I'm sure they do. But the means to the end should be how Jesus designed it to happen: by *everyone* ministering, having *been* equipped...

“from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” (Ephesians 4:16)