

Discipleship in a Broken World – Part 3

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This is the fourth of five articles in this series.

In part 1 I noted that the first challenge we face as missionaries is to genuinely trust that the Spirit goes before us in the world. Jesus really does “love the world,” (John 3:16), and he sends the Spirit to prepare the way before his disciples.

God is at work before we get there. Our task is one of discernment – to figure out what God is doing and learn to be his partners in his work. In John 17:15-19 Jesus tells us that we are to do TWO things well, and to hold them in tension. He calls us to be IN the world, and he calls us to be not OF the world.

Then we reflected on the nature of the cultural shift we are in, particularly the movement from Christendom to post-Christendom. This reality is especially clear in urban contexts, and the mission field in Canada is largely urban. Trying to preach in English when your audience is Chinese is a bad idea. It is critical, if we want to communicate the Gospel, that we learn the language of our culture.

In part 2 I noted the lingering divorce between matter and spirit in our way of seeing the world. Even though Mennonites have remained close to the land, we still tend to see the world, or matter, as bad, and the spirit, or heaven, as good. But no such division exists in the eye of God. God sent His son into the world, taking flesh and becoming one of us, and then promised a fully physical resurrection: matter is good! God loves it and rejoices in it because God made it!

In this article I want to discuss leadership, and our need to recover the biblical frame and practice offered in Ephesians 4. Paul gives us at least five types of leadership gifts for the church and the kingdom: we have tended to recognize only two or three, rolling pastor-teacher into a single gift, and sometimes adding evangelists. This gives us two parts of five: not even a chamber quartet! Reducing Paul’s equipping frame worked in a stable culture: but apostles and prophets were given to the Church for unstable and changing times, and unless we learn to recognize and equip these gifts again our ability to welcome the work of the Holy Spirit in OUR time will remain limited.

Related to this challenge, we are great at talking about Jesus but not so aware of the work of the Spirit. We see this in our tendency to use prayer as a foot-note in our meetings, instead of prayer as a pillar of all the work we do. How can we relearn dependence on the Spirit, the kind we see in the life of Jesus?

Ministry, Means and Method

In the last generation we saw the roles of church leadership shift from a community building and relational mode to a professional, rationalized mode. This mirrored the cultural shift during the industrial age, a shift to hierarchy and command and control. The church was strongly influenced by this shift, our way of seeing both methods and goals was largely drawn from successful business models.

The problem is that the church is not a machine, nor a business. It exists as a relational, spiritual organism created, and led, by the Spirit.

*So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists,
the pastors and teachers, to **equip** his people for works of service,
so that the body of Christ may be built up,
until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge*

of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Eph. 4:11-13

The passage moves from unity (verses 3-6) to diversity (verses 9-16). The context is interesting: chapter 3 ends on the fullness of God (*pleroma*) and the love of Christ (19), and chapter 4 moves through gifted service to the fullness of Christ (*pleromatos*, 13) and love in verses 15 and 16. The entire passage on gifted service and the building up of the body is framed by love which issues from God’s fullness.

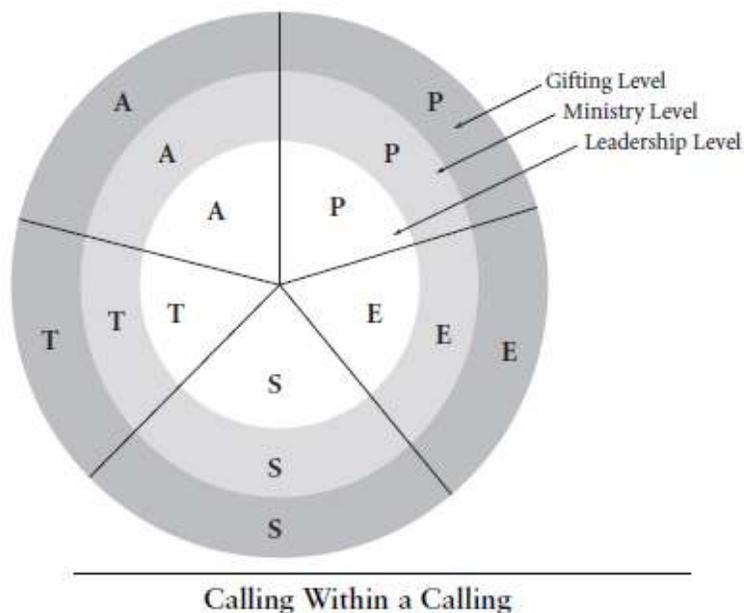
Just how important is this chapter in the book of Ephesians? Ephesians was a circular letter, and it summarizes the ecclesiology of Paul, a vision of the church that comes directly from Jesus Himself. Markus Barth calls this chapter “the Constitution of the Church.” What does that mean?

It means that Ephesians 4 is *normative for ecclesial life*. Our structures of leadership and governance, and our ministry orders should reflect these realities. We can’t call ourselves *biblical* Christians and ignore the implications of this chapter. Our failure to build our *practices* around Scripture is one reason for the decline of our churches, and our weakness at making disciples. Now back to Ephesians 4.

To whom did the victor give gifts? “*To each one.*” This reality is re-stated in a different way by Peter at Pentecost.

‘In the last days,’ God says,’ I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.’

In contrast to the priestly structure of the Old Testament, where special people stood between God and the *laos*, every person in the body has direct access to God – both for personal intimacy, and for empowerment in ministry. In the Spirit we are something new in history: a *kingdom* of priests (1 Peter).



Every person in the Body has one of the equipping gifts, but the gifts vary in their expression both by the level of faith with which they are exercised, and the sphere of authority where they are exercised. Not all who are gifted as pastors are gifted with oversight of hundreds of people. Not all who are apostolic will plant new works or oversee networks of churches. What we often call “leadership” in the local assembly is then *a calling within a calling*.

The diagram at left shows a ministry matrix. The inside circle is the leadership matrix. The outside circle is

the ministry matrix. All believers are gifted for ministry, but not all are ministry leaders.

The word “equip” is *katartidzo* and describes the means. Verse 15 describes the method – *speaking the truth in love*. It is the word that builds up the body, but it is expressed through the diversity of gifted ministry. Equipping is not a gift that some have, but rather what each is called to DO with their gift.

There are four NT words that describe the equipping task: and six word pictures in the NT where this word appears. In Matthew 4:21 the word has a double meaning in preparing nets: undoing the harm and damage of previous service and preparing the nets for further service. Three times we get a picture of **repairing** and three times we get a picture for **preparing**.

The equipper as physician is here in Eph.4:12. In ancient Greece the word has a medical history. A doctor would *katartizo* a body by setting a bone, putting it back into right connection with the other parts of the body.

These gifts or *charisms* of Jesus to his body are generally understood to be foundational ways of leading by equipping. They are “foundational” because they are intended to establish healthy expressions of body life that are kingdom outposts, incarnating the message of the Gospel. It’s helpful to recall that these gifts were given to a church in a cultural context similar to our own. There was a significant clash of cultures: Greek and Roman and Hebrew. The context was mission: there was no stable, Christendom culture.

Because the model we use becomes the way we read Scripture, too many leaders in our day think pastor-teacher is all we need. But a twofold ministry can never hope to reflect a complete and comprehensive ministry of Christ to the world, and neither can it ever hope to fulfill his purposes through the church. Anything less than a fivefold ministry is a misrepresentation of the ministry of Christ, and by consequence, that leads to a misrepresentation of Christ in the world.

Frost and Hirsch run the five gifts through the grid of organizational and social research. They make the following connections:

- entrepreneur/innovator - the apostle
- questioner - the prophet
- recruiter - the evangelist
- humanizer - the pastor
- systematizer - the teacher

Consider just two of the missing gifts: apostle and prophet. Apostles have their eyes set on the task given by Christ: to reach the world. They keep their eyes open to see what God is up to around them; they learn the language of the culture so they can effectively communicate, and develop effective strategies. They are constantly pushing the boundaries, innovating and adapting to remain connected to the world they want to reach.

Prophets are constantly asking new questions about what God is doing, and pushing beyond the status quo. They are looking for Gospel faithfulness. Both prophets and apostles are visionary, their hearts tuned to the Spirit and their eyes to the coming kingdom.

Neither of these gift types is necessarily easy to be around, especially if we feel we are entitled to a level of comfort and familiarity. Living with God on mission means that our lives and possessions are surrendered to his purposes. If we are not risking anything for God, it's not very likely that we are living by faith.

Are there apostles, prophets and evangelists among the EMMC? Of course – God has not changed the way he works with his people, nor has his purpose in reaching the world changed. The imposition of a mechanistic and rationalized view of the *laos* of God limited the expression of God's life in His people in favor of the work of a few. As old forms decay and new expressions are born we may experience a deeper truth about vocation and ministry: *the work of the church is whatever its members are doing.*

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves,
and blown here and there by every wind of teaching...*

*Instead, speaking the truth in love,
we will in all things grow up into him who is the head,
that is, Christ. From him the whole body,
joined and held together by every supporting ligament,
grows and builds itself up in love,
as each part does its work. Eph. 4:14-16*

Discipleship is all about life in this world; there is no other world in which we learn to be disciples and in which we follow Jesus. The model for our following is given to us in John 17:15-19, that we are both IN but not OF the world. Yet the whole context of this frame is prayer, an extended prayer that starts in chapter 14. In the immediate context (17) Jesus prays for protection for his followers and for their unity in him, a unity that is participation in his very life. Then in verse 20 he begins to pray “for those who will believe in [him] through their message.” What a surprise! The context is mission. The message is love (17:23-26). Jesus makes an astonishing statement: we are loved with the same love that the Father gives to Jesus.

We participate in the life of God through prayer: prayer unites us to God, makes us known to God and God to us.

But prayer is also the way God accomplishes his work. Prayer prepares the soil, sows the seed, and reaps the harvest. Prayer prepares the workers, protects them as they go, and teaches them as they work. But the preparation is more than sharpening, or learning to use the tool kit. Prayer roots us in the life of God, the life of the Son – the life of relationship and love. Prayer thus becomes the way the world knows of the reality of the God who is good and who loves – rooted and built up in love, the work we do expresses the character of the God who is love.

*For from him, through him, and to him are all things,
To him be the glory forever. Amen.*

BIO



Len lives with his wife Betty in Kelowna, BC, in the heart of the orchards and vineyards of the beautiful Okanagan valley.

Len is co-author of *Missional Spirituality* (IVP: 2011) and author of *The Missional Church Fieldbook* (Urban Loft: 2013). He is an adjunct Professor of ministry at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Chicago, as well as at Tyndale Seminary, Toronto and George Fox Seminary in Portland. His coming book is *No Home Like Place: A Christian Theology of Place* (The House Studio, 2013).

See also [Leadership in the Chaordic Age](#)