



And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 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, 14 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. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 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.

Two weeks ago I received an email that began like this: "Hello, I am interested in your Spiritual Growth Pastor position at Grace." Last December I received a remarkably similar email. " I am interested in applying for the Spiritual Growth pastoral position at Grace EFC." How do they know? we haven't even approved the position, let alone given a title to it and two months ago we had our first applicant! Then on Friday I was sent 6 more resumes!

It's actually my fault because a few months ago I talked to Don Price, one of our district superintendants and asked him some questions. He has talked with graduates from Trinity Seminary and he told some of them that we were hiring an associate pastor. I still don't know where they got the title of "Spiritual Growth Pastor." One thing I have committed to doing is clearly communicating with everyone who contacts us. I recall my original search process after I graduated. I would send out dozens and dozens of resumes and never hear back from the vast majority of them. So one of the things we need to do is be fair and kind to every applicant.

Nevertheless, it's rather surreal to think about getting resumes before we are ready and even before we have approved the position. But it's also kind of exciting because we know that God will supply the right person.

Last week we left off in the middle of this message on the Equipping Church. if you recall, there were three parts to it-the Person, the process and the Purpose. The PERSON is the

shepherd/teacher. The word in Ephesians 4 is shepherd, not pastor. I think the word shepherd is also useful because it doesn't separate the paid shepherds from the volunteer shepherds. When you hear the word pastor, we almost always think of a person who gets paid by a church to be their pastor. Obviously, the word pastor is a functional term. As I said last week, it really does sound strange to hear you call me Shepherd Rich. But you like it so much, about half a dozen of you actually tried it out on me. One person even called me "Shep," which I'm pretty sure is a dog's name. ;-)

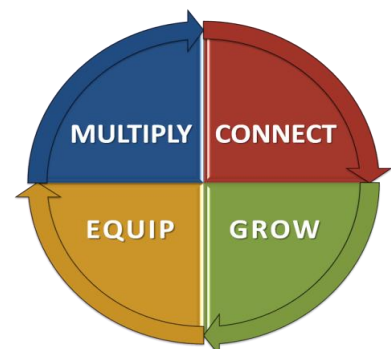


Let me make a deal with you. If you can call me Shepherd Rich, I get to use this contraption on you. Caleb Allen drew this little gem. Apparently he was inspired by the idea of a ministry wood chipper--the ministry machine that constantly requires more bodies to be fed into it. Maybe I should have a weekly cartoon contest as a way to get the younger kids to listen more attentively to the sermon? I would judge it based on understanding the message, not on the artistic quality (though Caleb's is quite good!)

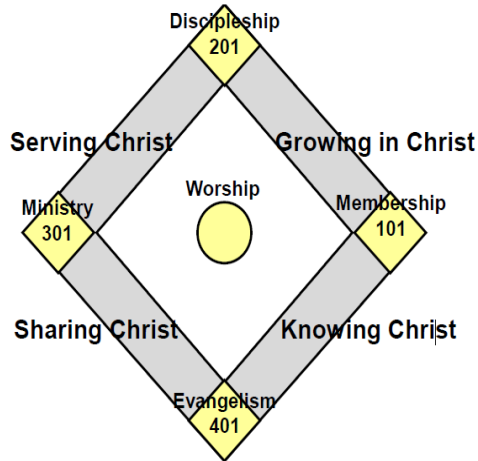
Anyway, back to shepherds and pastors. The word shepherd is better, not only because it's the Biblical word, but because most shepherds are volunteer shepherds. In the New Testament, elders and the same thing as a shepherd. Shepherding is what elders are supposed to be doing. "So I exhort the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God that is among you" (1 Peter 5:1-2). But the word pastor tends to make an artificial line of separation between the paid shepherds and the volunteer shepherds.

Scripture does allow for some shepherds to receive an income for their service. *Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."* (1 Timothy 5:17-18) So it is appropriate for some shepherds to be paid for doing so. It follows then that it is acceptable to have more than one paid shepherd at a church. If it is their full time job and they labor in preaching and teaching, then it's a good thing. However, we must understand that shepherding extends to all of the elders. It's not an "us and them" sort of thing. I am one of the elders and the new guy will be one of the elders. We have been and always will be an elder team.

The PROCESS of reaching these goals is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. I said last week that I wished I had done this more effectively over the years but at the very least, we have had a good process laid out. This is seen in the four parts of our discipleship circle. The first part of the process is CONNECT--becoming connected to Jesus Christ, to a local church and to fellow believers. This seems like a simple thing but building relationships in a new church is not easy. You might walk into a



church and find it to be the friendliest church you have ever seen but realize a year later that you really haven't made any connections with other people. As I said last week, service is a must for spiritual growth. Over the long term, you cannot grow unless you are engaged in service. It's as simple as that. And service also happens to be the best way to connect with one another.



GROW-Grow in your knowledge of God and his word, resulting in continual, personal transformation. There are four steps in this discipleship process but you should not think of them as steps on a stairway-once you have passed one step you will never go back. I have seen some churches build their growth process like this. Maybe you've seen the baseball diamond illustration. Countless churches use this model. It is similar to ours in that it has four parts and a progression. But the great downfall is that each step is represented by a class that you take. In this case, the membership class is first base. Once you take the class then you are ready for the higher level class--the discipleship class. As you know, we do have a membership class. In fact, the current class is by far the

largest membership class we've ever had. but it's not just something you do to check off and move to the next class. In this baseball diamond model of spiritual growth, once you have taken four classes, you are done. You're at home base.

The problem is that this leaves you believing that spiritual growth is just a matter of getting through a few good classes of instruction. But our model is superior because it is a circle and circles are better than diamonds. ;-)

That's not why, of course. The idea of the circle is to see that the process is never done. At times I have called this the discipleship spiral, but that would look kind of strange. But the point is that even though there is a progression taking place-you don't go directly from being converted to equipping others for ministry.-you never stop the process. There's no one right way with this model either. It's messy. The Christian life is messy. We fall and get back up again. You don't just move neatly from one level to the next, passing the grade with a class or a test. But you do want to grow, don't you? you don't want to be stuck at the same place forever, do you?

Equip—Preparing to serve God in a wide range of areas and helping others to connect and grow.

Multiply—Training and releasing maturing, servant leaders so that all ministry is multiplied.

The Discipleship Goal
Making **more** disciples and making **better** disciples by nurturing **all** believers toward the stage of multiplication.

Connect—Becoming connected to Jesus Christ, to a local church and to fellow believers.

Grow—Growing in your knowledge of God and his Word resulting in continual personal transformation.

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. (2 Tim. 2:2)

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. 4:12-13)

You can see what I have been saying is true by the description of the equip phase-Preparing to serve in a wide range of areas and helping others to connect and grow. So the ones who move forward are the ones who turn around and bring others along with them. You help others to connect and grow. It's not just all about your own growth and progress. It's about everyone's progress.

You know why we resist thinking this way about spiritual growth? Because we tend not to like group projects. If you have ever been assigned a group project in school, you know exactly what I am talking about. I had a really bad experience with a group project once. I started taking online seminary classes in 1988. But in 1988 there was no such thing as online classes so they called it "distance learning." Do you know how they did distance learning in 1988? I would sign up for my class--by mail--and they would send me the materials by mail. Then I would go to the post office and pick up this enormous box filled with videotapes! When I was finished I would have to ship the huge box of tapes back to them. The costs for shipping these tapes was more than the entire seminary class! Not really, but it's quite funny when you think about what I had to go through.

My very first seminary class was on hermeneutics-how to interpret the Bible. One-third of my grade for that semester was a group project. I had take what I was learning in class some of that same material to three other people. First of all, you had to find 3 people who were willing to sit through your teaching sessions. That was challenging enough. I am sure that the seminary students who took this class on campus just found other seminary students as pupils. They would probably help one another fulfill this requirement. But not only did I have to find my own students and teach them hermeneutics-a subject the average person knows nothing about-my students had to take a final exam. So one-third of my final grade was based on the final exam of my class of unmotivated students. They had absolutely no reason to study for this test. In fact, two of the three were college students themselves so they didn't have time to study for my test. The result was that I got a "B" in my very first seminary class. It wouldn't have mattered if I had aced every single test myself. there was no way I could have gotten higher than a "B" in the class. From beginning to end, it was a group project nightmare.

This is why we don't like group projects in school and I think this is also why we resist the idea of spiritual growth as something we do as a group. After all, it's hard enough to live the Christian life on our own let alone that we have to help other people do the same. But for the rest of the message, let me show you why the christian life is fundamentally not an individual effort. God has created you and I to work together. The christian life is a group project and unlike group projects in the classroom, I want to convince you that this is a good thing.

I am finally on point 3 of our outline.

The PURPOSE of hiring a pastor is found in the ABC's.

Attain to the unity in the faith

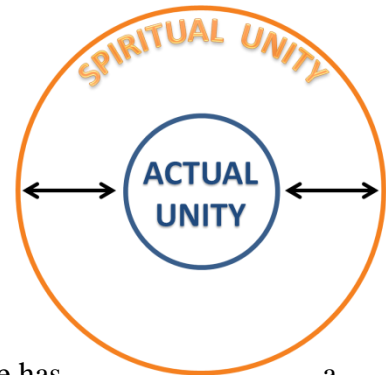
Build up the body of Christ

Clothe yourself with Christ

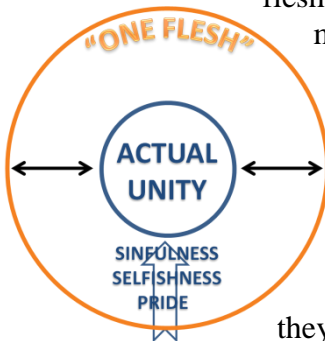
Attain to the unity in the faith

why do we have to attain to the unity in the faith? A few weeks ago I told you that transitioning to worship services would affect our fellowship but not our unity. So if unity is a spiritual reality that's already accomplished, why do we have to attain it? Why do we have to work at it? We work toward it because there are two dimensions to our unity. First, there is the true spiritual unity. We are one in Christ and nothing we ever do can change this fact. There is a corporate sense of salvation that we almost always forget about. Unbelievers and believers live in the same world but exist in two different kingdoms. When you are saved, you literally change locations. *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son* (Colossians 1:13). At the moment of salvation, you move from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. You change teams and you never go back. You were God's enemy and now you are his child. These are unchangeable spiritual realities. Spiritually speaking, we are one in Christ.

But there is what we could call "actual unity" which is how we live out this spiritual unity. This is a smaller domain within the larger spiritual reality. Nothing can change our spiritual reality but our actual reality is much smaller. This is also what marriage looks like. The outer circle is the one flesh of a husband and wife relationship. When you enter into a covenant commitment of marriage, the Bible does not merely assign you the label "one



flesh." You literally are "one flesh." So all of your marriage problems take place in between the



inner circle and outer circle. A good marriage has a large inner circle and a bad marriage has a small inner circle. Our sinfulness, selfishness and pride are all powerful forces which work against actual unity in a marriage.

This one fleshness is modeled after the holy Trinity. God exists in three persons yet they are one. A husband and wife exist as two persons yet they are one. In the same way, believers exist as many yet they are one. And what do you think works against unity in the body of Christ? It's no coincidence that sin, selfishness and pride are also to blame. This is where the work comes in. The difference between our actual unity and our spiritual unity takes work. But what kind of effort is needed? If sin works in the opposite direction of our unity then it's obvious that this has to be mitigated. But more is needed in order to attain to the unity in the faith. I want to show you how the A and B of our ABC's work together.

Build up the body of Christ

Verse 12 is our key verse-*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ*. That's the role of a shepherd, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. But for what purpose? The end purpose is not merely to be equipped, but to be equipped "for the building up of the body of Christ." In other words, the Christian life is a group project, do you see? The purpose of the church is not to raise your own spiritual maturity but to raise the spiritual maturity of those around you.

But this is not the way we normally think about church. After all, why do we choose to go to one church instead of another? There are about 50 churches within a 25 mile radius so why are you sitting here and not in one of those churches? I'm not trying to make this into a competition but you all have one or more reasons for your decision. Maybe you prefer our doctrine over some of the others. Maybe you like the fact that we have lots of kids in church. Maybe you like our worship. You like electric guitars and drums and contemporary worship. Maybe one of your good friends invited you here. We all have our reasons but how many reasons are based on personal preferences and likes instead of a call to minister to others. I am not saying that all of your reasons are bad reasons. They're probably all good reasons but how many are about how the church can serve you versus how you can serve the church?

Notice how this matches 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, 16 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.

This is the definition of a church. Everyone is equipped. Everyone is doing their part and the result is that the body is built up. Do you see? The *body* is built up. The goal--the purpose of a church is to build up the body, not to build yourself. Body life is fundamentally other focused. But we tend to make it all about ourselves or at least too much about ourselves.

But here's the wonderful paradox about this truth. As you are equipped to minister to help others grow in spiritual maturity, you yourself are growing in spiritual maturity. So just like my seminary class, your success is dependent upon their success. The Christian life truly is a group project. It is how God created it to work. As you are equipped and minister to others, the body is built up but so are you. You see, if you aim for personal growth alone, you will not grow and neither will the body. But if you aim for growth in the body, as the body grows, so will you.

And this is also the answer to the unity question. How do you attain to the unity in the faith? It happens when *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.* Unity is attained by mutual service to one another. You don't get unity just by being nice to each other. You don't attain to the unity if the faith just because you don't have any conflict. In fact, I would argue that if everyone is being equipped and ministry is happening left and right, you will have more conflict. If there are all kinds of wonderful things happening the conflict is inevitable, it's inevitable because Satan won't like it. But it will also be inevitable because there would be a lot more people engaged in a lot more ministry. And since all of us are redeemed sinners, what happens when you add more and more sinners into the mix of active ministry? You get more sin. You get more conflict.

So unity is not sitting around a cozy campfire singing kumbaya. Unity is *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.* And when this happens, you are also clothed with Christ. As verse 15 says, *we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.*

Can you see how it all works together? These are not separate pieces from which you can pick and choose. This is all or none. All of the parts hang together. But one of the driving pieces is the equipping part. If we are not equipping you to do the work of the ministry, the process slows down considerably. Which gets back to the need for a pastor of equipping. In fact, we have decided that that this will be his title.

So we have had the right purpose all along. Maybe we haven't articulated it quite like this, but this is our purpose.

We have had the right process all along—equipping the saints. We haven't done enough of this but we have the right process.

What I am suggesting is that we need the right person. The right person to help equip all of the saints for the work of the ministry.

We have put together a rough draft job description. Let me show you the number one qualification and the number one responsibility.

Qualifications

The Pastor of Equipping will:

- Above all, be humble and teachable.

Responsibilities

The Pastor of Equipping will be responsible to:

- Identify and develop people and processes for effective discipleship of all ages in the church.

Would you pray about this and pray through this?

Pray that we are in agreement.

Pray that we will find the right person.

Pray that we will look like this description of the church in Acts.

So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily (Acts 16.5).

Rich Maurer

February 22, 2015