

Equipped for Life and Ministry
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We just finished a sermon series called Chosen: Finding Your Identity in Christ. We saw how that as believers in Jesus Christ, we are chosen by God, changed by God, complete in Christ, and called to minister to and for God.

I felt led to follow up on that today by preaching a sermon entitled Equipped for Life and Ministry. Just because you know your calling from God does not mean you are ready to fulfill that call. We all go through a process of being prepared for life and ministry and that process is called equipping.

The root Greek word for equip in the New Testament is katartizo. It means to repair, to mend, to adjust, to join together, to prepare, to restore, to put in order, to complete thoroughly. Thayer's Greek Lexicon says that it means to make you what you ought to be!

What is it that you ought to be? We know from Romans 8:29 that:

Those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.

Your destiny is to become like Christ – but that doesn't just happen. You must be equipped to become like Christ. You must be repaired and prepared. You must be restored and put in order. Luke 6:40 says:

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

The word katartizo is translated "fully trained" in this passage. The more equipped you are – the more like Christ you will be. When you are fully equipped – you will be just like Christ. Since none of us are totally like Christ yet, all of us have some equipping to do!

I want you to understand that the Hebrew view of the teacher/student relationship is very different from ours. We think of it as a transfer of information. Teachers teach information so that students learn it.

But in the Hebrew model was a student being discipled by a rabbi, or teacher. They virtually lived with their teacher so that they could absorb their thoughts, attitudes and actions. A disciple was not fully trained when he knew what his teacher knew. He was fully trained when he became exactly like his teacher.

Likewise, we are not fully trained when we understand Bible doctrine. We are fully trained when we become like the Bible's author!

Being fully equipped is not about learning information, but about experiencing life transformation to become like Christ!

And God oversees this process of equipping. Hebrews 13:20-21 says:

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ.

I want you to see that God uses the same power that raised Jesus from the dead to equip you! That same resurrection power will give you new life – will heal your wounds and will equip you with everything you need to do God's will!

God is not setting you up to fail! He's setting you up to succeed and He provides everything you need to do so!

God oversees this process of equipping, but He uses different tools to equip us. The word katartizo appears 13 times in the Greek text, but it is translated into different words in the English Bible. Those different words show us the various ways God equips us. 1 Peter 5:10 says:

After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, Who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will Himself complete and make you what you ought to be, establish and ground you securely, and strengthen, and settle you.

In this passage, katartizo is translated to show that equipping is overseen by God and He will complete you and make you what you ought to be: established, grounded, strengthened and settled.

How does God equip us? Hebrews 11:3 says:

By faith we understand that the universe was formed by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

In this verse, katartizo is translated formed, which means to arrange and put in order. How did God do that in creation? By His Word! And how does He equip us? By His Word! 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip His people to do every good work.

God's word equips you to know the truth. It puts things in order in your life and equips you for good works. You will never be equipped apart from the word of God.

God also uses other people to equip us. We get this from Ephesians 4:11-13

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

The five gifted ministers listed here are what is called the 5-fold Ministry. Their job is to prepare God's people for ministry – not to do all the ministry themselves. Some people believe that apostles and prophets are no longer valid ministries in the church today. But this passage says they are needed until we are in perfect unity and we become like Christ. In case you haven't noticed – we aren't there yet! So, all the 5-fold ministers are still needed today!

It takes all five of these ministries to fully represent Jesus Christ. If any are missing in the church, an important ministry of Christ will be missing.

Apostles are sent out to start churches and lay the foundation.

They are spiritual fathers.

Prophets speak forth the word of God.

Evangelists proclaim the good news to lost people.

Pastors shepherd the flock.

Teachers teach and explain God's truth.

Apostles erect the church.

Prophets direct the church.

Evangelists connect to the church.

Pastors protect the church.

Teachers correct the church.

These ministry gifts are given to equip the Body of the Church. Here's how it happens.

Evangelists are gifted to share the gospel and birth babies into the Kingdom. The evangelist is excited to see a new Christian birthed into the kingdom, but that excitement lasts about five minutes! Then the evangelist is ready to move on and birth another baby.

That baby would be left to itself if it were not for pastors who provide nurture, care, comfort and protection. The problem in many churches is that a pastor is all you have. So, Christians who have been saved for 30 years are still looking to the pastor for care, comfort and protection.

Christians need more than to be birthed into the kingdom and to be cared for in the church.

That's why we need prophets who say, "It's good that you're in the kingdom and you're comfortable and well fed, but God has a call on your life. You have a destiny and it's time for you to do the work of ministry."

Prophets impart vision and motivation to fulfill our destinies. But if prophets are all we have, Christians will fail because they don't know how to do what they are called to do.

That's why we have teachers.

Teachers open the Bible and show us how to do what we're called to do. They show us how to walk in the power of God and live in God's blessing.

This is how the evangelist, pastor, prophet and teacher work together to equip the saints to grow to maturity.

The apostle is the father of the house and he oversees the whole process to be sure all the gifts are operating in order. The apostle watches the baby Christian grow in their faith. Finally, the apostle says, "I think you're ready to launch out in ministry."

But the process is not over yet! What happens when you step out in faith the first time? You usually crash and burn and sometimes you get hurt.

So, the pastor rushes in to comfort and encourage you.

The prophet says, "You messed up, but you still have a call of God on your life. Don't give up!"

The teacher steps in and says, "You crashed and burned because there are some things you didn't understand. Let me explain it to you."

Finally, the apostle says, "It's time for you to try again!"

Do you see how the 5-fold ministry works together to equip you for ministry? This is how God designed the church to operate.

There's an old saying: If the only tool you have is a hammer, then you will treat everything like it's a nail. And churches can't operate with only one tool! Some churches concentrate on evangelism. They get people saved, but not discipled.

Some churches concentrate on teaching. They impart information, but no one does anything.

Some churches concentrate on prophecy. They give people words – but no one knows how to carry it out.

We need all the tools in God's toolbox.

The 5-fold ministers must all work together. Their job is not to do all the ministry themselves. It is to equip you to minister.

I grew up in churches that expected the preacher to do all the ministry. However, it was never God's intention for one person to meet all of a congregation's needs, i.e., visiting all the sick, preaching to all the lost, or discipling all of the new converts.

It is the job of 5-fold ministers to equip the congregation to minister in these areas as well. This makes ministry a unique job. For example, a doctor doesn't train his patients how to be a doctor; he simply gives the diagnosis and prescribes the medicine. A lawyer doesn't train clients on how to be lawyers; he simply represents the client in legal matters of arbitration.

However, a pastor's job is to train others to do what he does – to become ministers who do the work of ministry. A pastor must not allow himself to do everyone else's service for them. He must equip them to do service and to use their spiritual gift-mix to build up the church.

Ephesians 4 shows us what happens when the 5-fold ministry operates biblically. It shows us what it looks like when someone is fully equipped.

First is Christlikeness. A maturing Christian becomes more and more like Christ. Eph. 4:13 says that when we are equipped we will *all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God—a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature.*

The second result of equipping is stability. Equipped people are stable people.

Eph. 4:14 says: *So we are no longer to be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes.*

A third result of equipping is that truth and love are both evident. If you're all about truth and confronting all the wrongs and yet have no love, then you're not being equipped properly. On the other hand, if you're all about love and mercy, and never hold anyone accountable to the truth, that's not proper equipping either. Equipped people will love you enough to hold you accountable.

Eph. 4:15 says: *But speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head.*

To attain maturity in the Christian life takes someone willing to speak the truth in love into our lives. This involves direction and correction. Galatians 6:1 says:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

The word katartizo is translated “restore” in this verse.

A fourth result of equipping is strong relationships.

Eph. 4:16 says: *From Him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament.*

Joining together speaks of relationship. Unfortunately, most of us do not know how to have deep loving relationship these days. That’s why we need to be equipped.

The fifth result of equipping is everyone doing their part of the ministry.

Eph. 4:16 says: *As each one does its part, the body grows in love.*

When everyone does their part, the church grows in numbers and maturity. One of the reasons the church in America is not growing is that there are too many spectators and not enough participants. One of the reasons there are so many immature Christians is that they are not growing because they are not doing their part.

We will grow as a church when everyone does their part in giving and serving. And you will grow individually when you do your part. What’s your part? What’s your ministry? Part of that ministry will be within the church, part will be outside. We see this in Matthew 4:21 –

Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. And He called them...

In this verse, the katartizo is translated “to mend.” Mending nets involved cleaning the nets of seaweed and sticks, retying parts of the nets that had been torn or damaged, and then untangling and folding the nets so that they could be quickly used at a moment’s notice. They were not being prepared for storage, but for service. All of this was so that their nets would be ready to catch more fish.

The same is true of us – equipping includes cleaning up dirty areas of people’s lives – mending broken areas of people’s lives and preparing them for service. God doesn’t equip you just for yourself – He equips you for others!

In classical Greek the word katartizo is used for setting a bone during surgery. The Great Physician makes all the necessary adjustments so the church will not be “out of joint.”

In ancient Greek it also meant to supply an army with provisions! And God wants to equip you by healing you and supplying you with everything you need to succeed in life and ministry.

When you were lost – He saved you.
 When you are held captive by something – God set you free.
 When you are broken and wounded – He heals you.
 When you are incomplete – God completes you.
 When your life is out of order – God sets things back in order!
 When you feel like something's missing in life – God supplies what is missing!
 When you are weak and worn out – God strengthens you and gives you rest.
 When sin has damaged your relationships – God forgives you and restores you.

And when God restores you:
 He restores you completely.
 He equips you fully.
 You will not go through life as damaged goods.
 You will not carry psychological scars.
 You will be happy and whole.
 You will be strong and steadfast.

And you will be equipped to equip others!
 It won't happen overnight.
 But step by step – from faith to faith – from glory to glory – you will become like Christ and then you will help others become like Christ.

You will do what Paul told the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 3:10

Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

That word supply is katartizo.

And I pray and prophesy over you today that there will come a day when there is nothing lacking in your faith - you are fully equipped – mended – healed – restored – prepared – trained and fully qualified for service.

You are becoming you who ought to be - more and more like Christ!
 And you will help others become who they ought to be – more and more like Christ!