

Transitions for Church Growth
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I'm so excited about what the Lord is doing in our church! The Holy Spirit is releasing something new and fresh. We are growing in numbers and in maturity.

We've been preaching a series called Transitions for Growth and today I'm preaching a message entitled Transitions for Church Growth. My apologies in advance – especially to visitors – because this sermon will be part announcement and part teaching. There are two major transitions we are making to facilitate church growth. Both of these will impact you.

When COVID hit – at first we were limited to 10 people in a service. That was Deb and me, the praise team and the media team. We led worship and preached in an empty sanctuary and our people watched online. Because of that – there was no need for 2 English services. We did the English service at 9 and the Spanish at 11.

When we started meeting in person again – only a fraction of our people came back at first – so we keep those times. Our intention was to keep the 9 am until we could add back the 11. We have grown some since then, but we feel we need to make transitions to grow back faster.

By the way – one of the reasons we cannot go to 2 services is that with less people attending we have less volunteers and we just can't pull off all the ministries for 2 services without more volunteers.

One of the things that I've been praying about the whole time is service start times. I felt that the 9 AM start time was too limiting for outreach. We've reached some new people, but many people said it was too early. In fact, some of our people quit attending because of that and some left to attend a church with a later start time. Others let me know that it was too early, but they would continue to watch online until we had a later start time.

As you know – we have a vision to reach young families. I had lunch with a friend who pastors a church mainly composed of young families. He told me that 9 was too early to reach young families.

So, I did some research on start times and discovered that the most popular church start time in America is 10 AM. So – after much prayer, discussion and research, we are moving our English service start time to 10 AM and Grace Latino to 12:15. It will start on Easter Sunday – April 9th.

Again – we want to eventually go back to 2 English services, but as an interim step – we are making this change.

For those of you who love the 9 AM service – so do I. We believe this step will enable us to grow faster and then we can add back the 9 AM service.

So that's the first transition we are making. Next – I want to talk about a leadership transition.

As you know, we have a vision to have our leadership structure based on the 5-fold ministry. In that model – you have elders who lead the church. All other ministries fit into one of the 5-fold roles – apostolic, pastoral, teaching, prophetic, or evangelistic.

We were moving in that direction a few years ago, but then 3 of the individuals who were going to be integral to that transition, left the church. So – we had to go back to the drawing board.

This last year we focused on that pastoral area through our Culture of Care training. That area is getting up and running and we are so excited about it.

We also focused on the teaching area and started up our Grace Groups and Grace Journey discipleship class.

A third focus was the apostolic area – which focuses on carrying out the vision of the church that the elders steward. We started an apostolic team which included the elders and Mary Searce, our executive pastor. That team focused on accomplishing our vision. But – we feel we need to make some changes to it.

First of all, it felt like we were diminishing the role of elders by focusing them on the apostolic team. We believe that we need to reposition the elders to focus on big picture items like vision, budget and personnel. We were spending too much time on small details and daily operations and that is bogging down our ability to get things done in a timely manner.

Also – we felt the need to expand our leadership base so we can have input from more leaders in the church. This also helps us build a leadership pipeline to raise up more leaders.

We don't have this totally fleshed out yet – there are many details to be determined – but I want to share what we know. This week will be an introductory message on the 5-fold ministry. Next week I'll focus on the apostolic ministry.

So - how does this impact you personally? I've been preaching on knowing your calling and ministry and being faithful and fruitful and multiplying. But, just because you know your calling from God does not mean you are ready to fulfill that call. You must go through a process of preparation 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. 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. Since none of us are totally like Christ yet, all of us have some equipping to do! 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. He uses the Word, the Holy Spirit, circumstances, other believers. One of His main tools is the 5-fold ministry. We get this from Ephesians 4:7-13

He has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. That is why the Scriptures say, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to His people."

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.

Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like

Christ, who is the head of His body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

The 5 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.

It takes all 5 of these ministries to fully represent Jesus Christ. If any are missing in the church, an important ministry of Christ will be missing.

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!

These ministry gifts are given to equip the Body of the Church.

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 5 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.

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

The apostle is the father of the house who 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 1 tool! Some churches concentrate on evangelism. They get people saved, but not disciplined.

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 ministry for them. He must equip them to do minister and to use their spiritual gifts 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. This is how the 5-fold ministry impacts you!

First is Christlikeness.

A maturing Christian becomes more and more like Christ. Eph. 4:13 says that when we are equipped we *will all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God—a mature person, attaining to the full and complete standard of Christ.*

The second result of equipping is stability.

Equipped people are stable people. Ephesians 4:14 says:

Then we will no longer be immature like children, tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies that sound like the truth.

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. Ephesians 4:15 says:

We will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of His body, the church.

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.

Ephesians 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.

Ephesians 4:16 says: *As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of 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? The strength of this church is not the people coming to hear me preach every Sunday. The strength of this church is what you do with what you hear, to minister to others in Jesus’ name.

If we want to see more people saved, and grow in maturity and stability,
 If we want to see people building strong relationships instead of falling through the cracks or slipping out the back door . . .
 If we want to see our church healthy and whole . . .
 Then we need to transition to the 5-fold ministry to expand our base of ministers and effectively equip the believers!

I want us to become a congregation where every person uses his or her gifts to minister to others for the glory of God!

This community needs you. This church needs you. I need you.

Will you answer the call? Will you say like Isaiah, “Here am I Lord, send me!”