

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Leading: The five gifts we all need - introduction



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Introduction: This session opens up the area of the five gifts in Ephesians Chapter 4. You may wish people to do an online diagnostic test beforehand, or wait till after, to discern which of the fivefold gifts they are strongest in. There is quite a lot of teaching in this session, with additional notes. It is recommended you have a follow up session to enable people to apply what they are discovering. There is a follow up session material available with handouts on each of the five gifts which will enable people to dig into what to be aware of and how to grow in their giftings.

Opening question(s) (10 minutes)

Read Ephesians 4: 7-13. Why do you think Jesus handed these gifts to His church after He ascended?



Understanding the information (45 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Jesus commissioned His disciples not to start a new work but to carry on His. What gifts are essential if we are to fully live out the continuing work of Jesus in the world? This session we explore the primary biblical giftings given to each disciple. These are less about the gifts you can use, and more about the gift God has made you to be. This is about working out your main ministry or motivation within the church, and how to live into it.



None of us can be or do everything in God's mission. But by knowing our ministry, we can both be living fruitfully, and also be part of enabling the church to carry out the continuing work of Christ in its fullness.

In Ephesians Paul describes five ministries which Christ gave to His church after His return to the God the Father – apostle (meaning “sent one”), prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher.

These five ministries, working together, are essential in helping us embrace a forward-looking and missional life as God's church. Indeed, unless all five of these ministries are expressed through us as the church, it will be impossible to embody Jesus' ministry.

Paul makes clear that they are given to each Christian. In the New Testament, the church was not divided into a hierarchical class system, in which some are called to a ministry, and others are not. The whole body does the whole ministry.

These five ministries are so essential because, as Christ's church, they enable us to fully live out the whole life of Jesus in the world and each of us to take part. At His ascension, Christ pours out these five specific ministries on His church to enable this unity and harmony and for His work to continue, if you like He is passing on His DNA.

These five ministries – being sent (apostle), paying attention to God's word above all (prophet), speaking and demonstrating good news (evangelist), caring and loving (pastor/shepherd) and clarifying and discerning God's will (teacher) can be clearly seen both in God's activity and character, and the ministry of Jesus – He is the perfect example of them. It is only when these ministries are being expressed that we are truly His body.

There are other lists of gifts in the New Testament given to the (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, 1 Peter 4). How does these gifts relate to the five ministries? The gifts mentioned in these passages are seldom part of our identity in the same way as fivefold ministries. Rather, they are tools to be used for specific times and particular places, to be drawn upon when needed.

Whereas these other letters were written into particular situations, and do not contain a complete list of gifts, the book of Ephesians was not written to just one church on a specific occasion, but to all the churches in Asia Minor. It represents Paul's best enduring wisdom on the church.

Whereas in the other lists gifts are manifestations of the Spirit, or useful skills, in Ephesians 4 the five ministries describe the way **people are the gifts**. They are a list of persons with callings, not tasks. The emphasis is on who you are, not on a task or temporary gift.

It may be that there are more than five ministries given to the church – while the five ministries are defining, they are not necessarily final. We can perhaps say that Jesus' ministry through the church is **at least in five dimensions**.

Apostles are essential to the ministry of the church as they steward the mission of the church, helping to pioneer into new areas, making sure vision and mission of the church is maintained. They are strategic and risk-taking.

Being a **prophet** can mean predicting the future, but more commonly is about pointing others to what God might be saying, often in ways that might be in tension with the way most are thinking at the time.

While all disciples are called to be witnesses when the opportunity arises, **evangelists** are recruiting truth-tellers who call people to a personal response to God.

Pastors care for, nurture, protect and develop God's people. They promote the spiritual maturity of the church and build supportive and loving relationships. As such, they help develop healthy community and connect people.

Teachers understand, communicate and explain God's wisdom. They can look at the whole of God's truth in Scripture, reason and experience and bring clarity. They enable faith to go deeper and ensure that the wisdom of one generation can be handed on to another.

When we are living in our particular ministry we feel restored and energised. When we go beyond the "grace He has given us" in trying too hard to live into a ministry that is not our gifting we might experience burn out. If we know who God has made us to be, we can stop trying to be someone we are not and let go of the stress that comes with trying to do that.

Recognising our ministry and strengths also helps us with our expectations of others as well, as we allow them to offer things that we can't.

In a sense, we are **each called to all five ministries**. While we are not all called to be pastors, we are all called to care. We are not all called to be teachers, but we are all called to share God's Word. We are not all natural prophets, but we are all called to listen to God's voice and pay attention. We are not all evangelists, but we are all to witness to the good news. We are not all apostles, but we are all needed to be ready to step out and take risks.

Just as we are all different personality types, so each of us will have one or two ministries that work with our natural gifts. Nevertheless, from time to time, there may be seasons where God leads us to step into a ministry, in the church or the world, as a way of maturing us, and giving us a base-level confidence in, for example, being able to share our faith, or encourage someone in need.

The more fully a church community can practise the five ministries, the more we will be the church. To the questions: is the church to be apostolic? Is the church to be prophetic? Is the church to be evangelistic? Is the church to be a shepherding and teaching community? The answer must be a resounding yes!

The writer Alan Hirsch points out how many churches in the West, organised to manage the needs of their existing members, have emphasised the "pastor-teacher" ministries, while largely losing sight of the apostolic, prophetic and evangelistic. He writes, "The historical reduction of ministry down from the fivefold ministry of the New Testament to that of Christendom's twofold function of shepherding and teaching has bequeathed a fatal and degenerative dis-ease into the Body of Christ."

When we rely on only some of the ministries Christ gave to His church we do damage to the whole - just as if you only tried to live on 40% of your organs you would quickly disintegrate, so if we do not embrace all the five giftings we will not be able to thrive.

An APEPT ministry team provides a complementary way of being in which the balance between impact and effort can be most fruitful.

Each dimension can compensate for some of the possible shortcomings of the others. The apostolic person would talk about the need to motivate the church around mission. The prophetic people would challenge everything and ask irritating questions about God, making sure there was time for listening before action. The evangelist would emphasize the need to bring people to faith and not to be internally focussed. The pastors would ensure that mission and ministry were sustainable, loving and joyful, and the teachers would make sure any plans were rooted in scripture and tradition.

In addition, such a dynamic would ensure that the best decisions could be made. Whenever approaching a decision within the church, deliberately looking through all these lenses helps us ensure we are coming to the mind of Christ in the fullest way possible.

Discuss: What gifting might you have? How do you know?

As a follow up, you can do an online diagnostic test around the fivefold ministries. There is a free one here: <https://fivefoldministry.com/> or one for £8 here: <https://5qcentral.com/tests/> (recommended). In addition, there is a follow up to this session with detailed handouts on each of the five gifts which you can use to explore further.

Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/GEyhHTwLtW4>

What struck you as important in the video?



Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

In a bit more detail:

Apostle. All the disciples were also called apostles, and the church is defined as apostolic. Apostle is used over 80 times in the New Testament.

It has two meanings. The apostolic character of the church expresses the need for us to inherit what has been handed down to us from the beginning.

However, the apostolic ministry of the church continues, not just in terms of “guarding a tradition”, but in the sense of an apostle as being a “sent one”. They transmit the faith, and extend it, from one context to another.

Apostles are essential to the ministry of the church as they steward the mission of the church, helping to pioneer into new areas, making sure vision and mission of the church is maintained. They are strategic and risk-taking.

They provide forward-looking and inspirational leadership, but by providing the web that holds the ministries of others together, keeping them focussed on the vision, and embedding that into the way things are done. They are always thinking about the future and developing others.

If you are someone who likes to start things up, and like to move on to new things, your gift-as-a-person may well be to be apostolic.

(As we describe apostles and prophets particularly, it is worth noting that it is more important that these ministries are being developed, than people are receiving roles with names attached to them. While sometimes we might make certain ministries explicit by naming people “teachers” or “evangelists”, by and large it is less necessary to name individual ministries, as it is to ensure that they are being nurtured.)

Prophet is used nearly 800 times in Scripture, and over 150 times in the New Testament. Being a prophet can mean predicting the future, but more commonly is about pointing others to what God might be saying, often in ways that might be in tension with the way most are thinking at the time.

Prophets tune in to God’s will for the present, often challenging dominant assumptions in the church and in the culture. They call people to obey God and to be faithful to Him above everything else. They are passionate about living holy and authentic lives, and are strong on speaking up for justice, and for praying for others.

If you are someone who sees how things might need to change in the church, government or workplace to become more just, or to be more faithful to its purpose, you could have a prophetic ministry.

Evangelist. As well as being named as a ministry in Ephesians, it is used in Acts and 2 Timothy.

While all disciples are called to be witnesses when the opportunity arises, evangelists are recruiting truth-tellers who call people to a personal response to God.

They also encourage others to take part in God’s mission and drive the growth of the church. They make sure people are given an opportunity to hear God’s invitation to covenant relationship, salvation and the kingdom.

If you are a natural story-teller, focussed on those outside the church, and can easily enlist others to join in you may have the ministry of evangelism. You may be a good salesperson or in your work life be involved in some kind of public relations role.

Pastor/Shepherd. While the word pastor is used only once in the New Testament (in Ephesians 4) the ministry of shepherd is used 23 times in the New Testament. For the sake of simplicity and easier cultural understanding we will use pastor.

Pastors care for, nurture, protect and develop God’s people. They promote the spiritual maturity of the church and build supportive and loving relationships. As such, they help develop healthy community and connect people.

They are essential in providing stability, making sure the church does not break apart, or burn out, and caring for disciples in the challenges of life.

If you are a care giver, find that people trust you easily, feel others’ pain, and can listen to and empathise with people even when you disagree with them, you may have a pastoral ministry.

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They are essential for helping the church remain faithful to Christ’s word and to be guided towards discerning God’s will.

You might be a teacher if you love learning and passing it on to others, seeking to make complicated things understandable, and helping others make changes based on what they are learning.

A metaphor of house building both shares what each ministry brings and how it works with the others:

When building a house:

The Apostle will have vision for where to build and what kind of house to build. Apostles build where others haven't.

Prophets will have a sense from the Lord about the significance of what the house is for and what God may be doing through the process of creating a new house. Prophets will also be sensitive to any emerging threats to the project.

Evangelists fall in love with the vision of the house and desire to connect (sell) others to the vision. They just can't imagine that others wouldn't love the opportunity to buy this new house!

Pastors are most interested in making sure those who will live in the house are cared for well. After all, the house is only as valuable as the people living inside it.

Teachers will have the blueprints out on the tables ensuring the house is made to specifications and that every last detail is accounted for. After all, caring for the new residents means caring for their new residence.

On a practical level, this means that when you are growing a team, or employing someone, using an understanding of the fivefold might help you recruit someone who you are not, and help build for the full ministry of Christ in your community.

Discuss: which of the five ministries do you see as strongest and weakest in your church?

Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that we may know him better.

May the eyes of our hearts be enlightened in order that we may know the hope to which he has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Amen.

From Ephesians 1





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