

## 10. Learning How to Grow to Spiritual Maturity

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to keep the unity of the faith. In order to help our children learn to keep the unity of the faith, we want to help them learn to walk worthy of the Lord. We also want to help them grow to understand that their spiritual gifts are not given to them for self-glory. Instead, those spiritual gifts are given to them to serve Christ and bring glory to God. In order to serve Christ most effectively, we need to grow to spiritual maturity. In our topic today, we are going to see how to help our children grow to spiritual maturity.

In Ephesians 4:11-12, we read, “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.” In our last topic, we saw that Christ returned to heaven after He had fulfilled all of the ministries promised about His first coming. He is now in heaven where we see in verse 15 that He is the head of the church. As the head of the church, we see that Christ gave certain gifts to the whole church. First, we see that He gave apostles. In Acts 1:21-22, we read, “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” Since the disciples had been praying for several days, they knew that Christ wanted them to choose a replacement for Judas; one who was a witness of the resurrection, because that was the most important responsibility of the apostles.

Christ also gave prophets. In 2 Peter 1:19-21, we see that the prophets gave us the written Word of God. Those verses say, “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.” The prophets gave us the written Word of God. In Ephesians 2:20, we see that these two ministries form the foundation for the church. That verse says, “Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*.” The apostles gave us eyewitness testimony of the resurrection and the prophets gave us the written Word of God. Together with Christ as the chief cornerstone of the church, these form the foundation of the church. They completed their part in equipping the church.

However, we see that Christ still gives us evangelists, pastors and teachers. In verse 12, we see that the ministry of these individuals is to equip all saints for the work of the ministry. Evangelists equip the saints to share the Gospel. Pastors equip the saints to minister to one another. Teachers equip the saints to teach and apply the Word of God. In 2 Timothy 4:2 and 5, we read, “Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching... But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” Here, we see that the particular equipping gift that Timothy had been given was to equip and show the saints how to proclaim the Gospel to those who are not Christians.

The word that is translated “pastors” in this verse is used 18 times in the New Testament. The other 17 times it is translated “shepherd”. In most of these passages, it talks about Christ, the Great Shepherd of the sheep or the shepherds that came to visit Christ when He was born in Bethlehem. However, in John 10:2-6 Christ gave an illustration to tell what a shepherd does. Those verses say, “‘But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.’ Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.” Here, we see that the sheep hear the voice of the shepherd, because he knows them by name, he leads them, he goes before them and his voice is known by the sheep. Each thing points to the personal relationship between the shepherd and sheep.

The word that is translated “teacher” speaks of one who is equipped to teach. Luke 6:40 says, “‘A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.’” In this verse, the word that is translated “perfectly trained” is another form of the word translated “equipping” in Ephesians 4:12. A teacher is one who personally trains or equips others to teach and apply the Word of God accurately. In fact, Hebrews 5:12 warns, “‘For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.’” Here, we see that the people who received the book of Hebrews had been Christians long enough that they should have been able to teach others. Instead, they needed to be retaught the basics of Christianity. We will discuss this last sentence more fully in our next topic.

As we look at what it means to equip the saints for ministry, we see that every saint is to be equipped to share the Gospel, every saint is to be equipped to minister to one another and every saint is to be equipped to teach and apply the Word of God. Only as each saint learns to do each of these things can they have an effective and complete ministry to his or her physical and spiritual children. Luke 6:40, quoted in the previous paragraph, explains how a teacher equips saints to teach and apply the Word of God. There, we saw that a teacher is one who personally trains or equips a person how to teach and apply the Word of God accurately.

Paul explained how he equipped the leaders in Ephesus for evangelism in Acts 20:20-21 where we read, “‘How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.’” Here, we see that Paul taught the leaders publicly how to explain the message of the Gospel. Then, he took them with him from house to house to show them how to explain both to the Jews and to the Gentiles the meaning of repentance and faith. This helps us to understand that equipping for evangelism is showing one or a few people at a time how to share the message of repentance and faith with people where they live, work and spend their free time.

In the previous paragraphs, we have seen that training people for both effective teaching and effective evangelism is taking people with you and showing them how to minister through on-the-job training. The same is also true in order to show people how to shepherd others. Two

illustrations of showing people how to shepherd are given in Acts chapter 2. Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Then, Acts 2:46 says, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” The leaders of the early church showed what it meant to shepherd as they gathered in small groups for Bible study and fellowship, breaking of bread and time spent in prayer. They also ate meals together in their homes which provided an ideal opportunity to discuss questions and minister to the needs of the new Christians. The leaders who were leading these small groups in homes were showing those in the group how to shepherd others by their own example.

The examples from Scripture given in the previous paragraphs show why team leadership is so important in a church. Ephesians 4:11 makes it clear that leaders are most gifted in one area, evangelism, shepherding or teaching. However, we see Paul talked about the way that he equipped people for evangelism to both Jews and Gentiles even though he makes it clear in several passages that he was called by Christ to be a teacher of the Gentiles. Paul always had a team as he traveled so that the Christians could also learn from the examples of other team members. Acts 20:4 illustrates the team that traveled with Paul to Asia where we read, “And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia--also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.” The team members did two things. They showed others how to minister and they continued to learn.

Ephesians 4:13 says, “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.” Here, we see the goals of an equipping ministry. The early part of this chapter talks about learning to keep the unity of the faith. One goal is to help every Christian come to the unity of the faith. A second goal is to help every Christian come to a full knowledge of the Son of God. A third goal is to help every Christian become a mature Christian. A fourth goal is to help mature Christians continue to grow so their lives increasingly demonstrate the measure and stature of the fullness of Christ. These goals will only be reached in the lives of each Christian as the leadership team works together to help each Christian grow to maturity in godly character, develop a full knowledge of Christ and be shown by example how to effectively minister to others.

Here, we see that part of helping our physical and spiritual children grow to spiritual maturity is encouraging them to spend time with other leaders as well as ourselves so that they can learn from the example of many godly leaders. This will help them grow in godly character and ministry skills in addition to growing in the knowledge of Christ and the whole Word of God. Other leaders will also equip our children by their example more effectively for ministries where we do not have spiritual gifts. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn how to grow to spiritual maturity.