

How God's Kingdom Grows

Lesson 6: Roles Involved In Kingdom Growth, Part 2

Ephesians 4:11-16 demonstrates that God has given specific roles that are important to the growth of His kingdom. We have already considered the roles of apostles and prophets. Although these two roles have been completed, those who have fulfilled them continue to impact people in positive ways today. Most notably, the words recorded in the New Testament through the apostles and prophets inspired of God give us the seed we must sow and cultivate to see growth in God's kingdom. Still, there are other roles given we must consider.

1) Evangelists. The term "evangelist" refers to one who is a spreader/proclaimer of good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. The word itself, though, is only used in three New Testament passages. First, it is used in our text of Ephesians 4:11, where this role is distinguished from the others. Second, Philip is called an evangelist (Acts 21:8). We see Philip serving in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5), then preaching in Samaria (Acts 8:4-13), teaching an Ethiopian man (Acts 8:26-39), and preaching the gospel in all the towns until he came to Caesarea (Acts 8:40). Third, Timothy was urged to do the work of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5). Thus, the work we can see Timothy doing in Acts and through the two letters written to him (as well as Titus) give us insight into the work of an evangelist involving both spreading the gospel to unbelievers and helping churches be built up (Acts 16:4-5, 10).

These would play a critical role in the growth of the kingdom in New Testament times and continue to do the same today. For example, these are committed to spreading the good news of salvation through Jesus to those who are lost. They take the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the cities and villages in the world today, being sent by churches to do this work (Acts 13:1-3; Romans 10:13-15).

Then, these also work to help local churches for a time when they are needed to help in the teaching and maturation of those Christians (1 Thessalonians 3:1-5; 1 Timothy 1:3), to set in order things that are lacking (Titus 1:5, i.e. appoint elders/shepherds), instruct and remind them of God's ways (Titus 2:1; 3:1), equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12), and entrust the gospel to others (2 Timothy 2:2).

As the work of evangelists continues today, there must be men who embrace the opportunity to do it. There is no unique "calling" a man receives to do this work besides the teachings of God's word in the Bible. Rather, as one comes to love the Lord and recognizes the important role God has given for some to be evangelists, men must be willing to give themselves entirely to it (1 Timothy 4:12-16), even when the gospel is not readily received and hardships are experienced (2 Timothy 2:1-4; 4:2-4). This one must choose to take up the work of an evangelist and determine to fulfill his ministry (2 Timothy 4:5).

2) Shepherds. The term "pastor" or "shepherd" refers to one who watches, leads, feeds, protects, and takes care of sheep. As a noun, the only time it is used in Scripture to refer to a role in the church is here in Ephesians 4:11, where these are distinguished from the other roles in the church. It is used often, though, to refer to Jesus as being the Shepherd (John 10:11; 1 Peter 2:25). However, the verb form is used in other passages to refer to the work that some leaders in local churches must do (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Peter 5:1-4). Notice in these passages that this role is also identified by the terms "elders" (presbyters) and "overseers" (bishops). Therefore, those who serve in this role shepherd a local church of Jesus's people, as those with experience living for Jesus, to lead the church to do what pleases God.

These would play a critical role in the growth of the kingdom in New Testament times and continue to do the same today. For example, as is apparent in the meaning of the word, these lead, feed, protect, and watch over a local flock of saints. The Scriptures are clear that it is God's plan for every church to have their own shepherds (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) – multiple shepherds in each church. For, it is vital that these shepherds be local and know the sheep well (the flock among them, 1 Peter 5:2). They need to know the physical and spiritual needs of the sheep, know the dangers the sheep are facing spiritually, and be working to feed and lead the sheep so they grow and mature in God's service. Particularly notice the teaching role the shepherds will have among the sheep (1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17-18; Titus 1:9).

As the work of shepherds continues today, there must be men who embrace the opportunity to do it. Like the evangelist, there is no unique "calling" these men receive apart from recognizing the importance of this role in every church and their ability and opportunity to fulfill it. As God has given specific requirements concerning the character and family of the men who are to shepherd local churches (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9), it is critical that those who possess such characteristics step up to do this work! Then, it is critical for other men to aspire to one day be able to serve God in this capacity so that they actively work toward that goal!

We are seeing the various roles God has set in place in His church so that His kingdom will grow as He desires. While the apostles and prophets accomplished their work in the past (though it continues to impact the kingdom today), evangelists and shepherds continue to function today. Through these roles, God continues to use people to help His word accomplish what He intends for it to do!

Discipleship Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Teaching: What did you learn from this lesson?

Rebuking: What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

Correction: How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

Training & Equipping: How can you apply this lesson to be trained and equipped in God's service?