

How God's Kingdom Grows

Lesson 7: Roles Involved In Kingdom Growth, Part 3

Ephesians 4:11-16 demonstrates that God has given specific roles that are important to the growth of His kingdom. While there is overlap between many of these roles (i.e. 1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11), there are also clearly points of distinction between them (as seen in Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:27-28). Having considered the first four roles (apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds), there are two more to consider. Learning these roles should help people do what they can to fulfill their own work in the growth of God's kingdom.

1) Teachers. The term "teacher" refers to one who is an instructor, particularly used concerning one who teaches the instructions of God. Jesus was often called "Teacher" during His life on earth (Matthew 8:19; 19:16; even referring to Himself in this way, 26:18). Teachers at that time would often have disciples who would learn from and seek to become like them (Matthew 10:24; Luke 6:40). However, none should call another "Rabbi" ("Teacher") as a title, as only Jesus would truly be the Teacher (Matthew 23:8). Rather than teachers having their own disciples today, they simply must teach according to the teachings of Jesus and urge people to imitate Him rather than use themselves as the standard (1 Corinthians 11:1).

These would play a critical role in the growth of the kingdom in New Testament times and continue to do the same today. Note that while some believe the teachers in Ephesians 4:11 refer to shepherd-teachers, it is elsewhere seen as its own role (1 Corinthians 12:27-28). These are non-inspired Christians who are spiritually mature enough to instruct others in the ways of the Lord. For this reason, people were not to become teachers in a public way before they were ready for this

responsibility (James 3:1). Yet, there needs to be teachers in a congregation who can instruct the others in the Lord's ways (Acts 13:1). This duty would be given to Christian men during the assemblies of the church (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-14), though all mature Christians could teach outside the assemblies in various ways (Titus 2:3-5).

As the work of teachers continues today, there must be Christians who embrace the opportunity to do it. There is no unique "calling" a person receives to do this work besides the teachings of God's word in the Bible. Rather, as one comes to grow in his/her own knowledge of God's word, it is expected that this one work to be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2). In fact, failing to do what one can to develop himself/herself to teach others in whatever capacity possible is not viewed favorably by God (Hebrews 5:12-14). Therefore, all Christians should endeavor to grow in knowledge and application of God's ways with the goal of being able to pass it on to others – some in a public capacity and others in a more private way.

2) Saints. The term "saint" refers to one who is holy and set apart for God's service. Rather than this term referring some special role, it is a term that simply refers to all who are Christians (Romans 16:15; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1). Even the apostle Paul was a "saint" (Ephesians 3:8), though he also functioned in other roles (2 Timothy 1:11). The church at Philippi (Philippians 1:1), for example, consisted of saints, some of which occupied the roles of overseers (shepherds, elders) and deacons (special servants of the church, 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

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, although we often

think about the work done by the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers (as mentioned in Ephesians 4:11), these are clearly not the only ones who are doing God's work and contributing to the growth of the kingdom. In fact, though these have influential roles and specific works in the kingdom, one of their primary functions is for them all to work to equip the saints for the work of ministry (service) to God so they can be mature and do their individual parts in the work of God (Ephesians 4:11-16)! Therefore, rather than a system in which God's work is primarily done by those in positions of leadership, God has designed a system in which those who are in these positions are aiming to help those who are not to grow so they can then lead others in various ways and do the work of God!

As the work of saints continues today, all Christians must embrace the responsibility of being equipped to do God's work in whatever capacity he/she can. Fortunately, the work of God is not dependent on any one person. Instead, all the members collectively function as different parts of the body, with each one contributing whatever he/she can (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). Romans 12:3-8 emphasizes how each saint must use whatever God has given him/her. Although it is a mistake to think that only some must serve, teach, exhort, give, etc., the point is that each saint should make the most of whatever he/she has been given to serve Christ and contribute to growth in God's kingdom!

We have seen that God has placed roles within the church that will accomplish the work He desires to be accomplished! Now, it is up to each saint to do the best he/she can to grow and fulfill his/her part. Through these roles, individual disciples will grow, congregations will build themselves up in the faith, and the lost will hear the gospel preached throughout the world!

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?

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