

A Framework For Equipping

In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul paints a clear picture of how God wants to lead a community of believers into His mission. In the passage, Paul explains that God gave certain people as gifts to the church and He gave those people in order that the church would be equipped, built up, unified and matured in their representation of Jesus Christ to the world.

God's desire is that these gifts be propagated in every church, enabling them to more effectively align to His mission. We like to refer to these gifts as individual values that, when functioning together, form a powerful representation of the life and mission of Jesus Christ. Much like a woven rope has greater strength than its individual cords, so too, when these gifts/values are fully functioning together, the church is more effective in living out the mission of God.

When propagated in the church, these values will collectively equip the church to better function holistically in pursuit of the mission of God. God does not desire that the gifted person be the only one to function in their specific value, but instead He desires that the gifted person be the catalyst in equipping the entire church to collectively embrace and live in that specific value.

The gifted people/values that God gives are easily remembered through the acrostic APEST: apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher.

APEST Explained

When we look at the New Testament we are forced to acknowledge the unique position and role that some men had, namely the twelve original disciples. We understand that they were selected to fulfill a unique purpose for a unique period of time. This is indisputable. This does not however corroborate the traditional view that these gifts/values have all ceased and are not relevant or present today.

There are a number of examples that present an expanded view of the APEST gifts outside of the selective group of the twelve disciples. In the case of the apostolic gift, we see Barnabas (Acts 14:14) and James the brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19) both listed as apostles. In the case of the prophetic gift, Agabus (Acts 11:28), the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8), and the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:4-5) are all spoken of as relevant examples of the prophetic value functioning outside of the twelve disciples. This provides for us a view of the APEST gifts as having both a specific sense for a specific time and people (12 disciples) and also a more general sense for us today. With this understanding in mind, we want to briefly describe each of the specific gifts/values and how they are to be understood in a general sense for us today.

The apostolic value is given by God to expand, ensure and invigorate the mission of God through the church. As the church embraces the various values of dynamic life together, they need clear model of

leadership and stated vision of the ultimate purpose of the church - to make disciples. That is precisely why God gives the apostolic value.

The prophetic value is given by God to maintain the integrity of the community on mission. Every biblical example of prophetic ministry is defined by the need to challenge the people of God to return to Him and His purposes. The prophetic value is a passion to maintain the clear purpose of the church in the midst of distraction and diversion.

The evangelistic value is given by God to infuse the gospel into the community on mission. The tendency of most groups is to unknowingly allow time to slowly erode their focus on and application of the gospel. God desires that the good news be understood in all of its broad implications and regularly infused into the very fabric of the church.

The shepherding value is given by God to cultivate and maintain a sense of community within the MC. The reality of broken people pursuing mission together is such that care and counseling will be necessary for the community to maintain a unified vision. Without a purposed effort to build a loving ethos in the community on mission, division will become the default result.

The teaching value is given by God to instruct the church on mission. The design for teaching is not to set the agenda or the direction of the church, but rather to inform and train the church in the vision and direction that is set by the apostolic value of the mission of God. Scripture focuses heavily on mindset and the need to be transformed in our minds; this is the responsibility of the teaching in the church.

APEST APPLIED

It is our desire to recognize this design of God and respond to it because we know that it is through the embracing of these values that our church will more effectively embrace God's mission. If we desire to be an effective church on mission for God, then we must understand, recognize, and build up these values in our church.

In order to accomplish this, we have started by recognizing the individual gifting of each elder and are seeking to facilitate and empower each one to more effectively embrace their gifts in an effort to prioritize the equipping of the church for the work of ministry. Practically this means a more focused and intentional approach to where we give our time and energy, all in an effort to take seriously the charge of equipping the church.

We believe that if we as a team of elders can increasingly prioritize the influence of the APEST gifts/values into our church, then we will be leading better, more leaders will be raised up, and ultimately more disciples will be made. We do not believe this to be a man made strategy, but rather the biblical model for how we are to lead, equip, and multiply the church of Jesus until He ultimately restores all things.