



SHEPHERDS AND TEACHERS

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” [Ephesians 4:11-13](#)

Having considered apostles, prophets, and evangelists in the last three sessions, we will now look at shepherds and teachers. We might think we are on more familiar ground here than in previous sessions since, of all the Ephesians 4 ministries, shepherds (frequently referred to as “pastors”) and teachers are the most common and accepted in the Church at large. However, as we examine what the Word of God says about them, we can expect to be challenged in our preconceptions and expanded in our understanding of these gifts to the Church.

TWO MINISTRIES OR ONE?

In the context of [Ephesians 4](#), some consider shepherds and teachers to be a single ministry, namely the “shepherd-teacher.” One reason for this is linguistic, as in the original Greek, *shepherds* and *teachers* are not separated from one another in quite the same way as are the preceding gifts. Another reason is that the two ministries have many overlapping responsibilities and functions, and one might argue that it is impossible to properly fulfill the role of one without moving to some degree in the gift of the other. However, while acknowledging these points, we feel there is sufficient distinction and individual significance in these ministries to consider them separately. We will actually start by looking at teachers.



TEACHERS IN SCRIPTURE

When we come across the word *teacher* in the Old Testament, it is often translating the Hebrew word *sofer*, which is from a verb meaning “to tell or inscribe,” and could also mean “a secretary, scribe or writer.” It came to refer to a distinctive class among the priesthood who specialized in preserving and interpreting sacred writings. In the New Testament, the Greek word used to refer to teachers in the Church is *didaskalos*. It was understood to refer to those who were recognized authorities in the interpretation of Scripture.

“Behold, God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him?” Job 36:22

God’s heart has always been to impart understanding to His people so that they might know Him and fulfill His purpose. In His interaction with Moses in Exodus, we see His desire not only to communicate His will to His servants, but also that they would communicate it to others:

“Teach them [the people] the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform.” Exodus 18:20 (NIV 1984)

The faithfulness of teachers to confront God’s people with His Word, and the importance of their doing so, is evident throughout the Old Testament. For example, Ezra and Nehemiah’s teaching ministries were vital at a time of restoration in Israel’s history:

“They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.” Nehemiah 8:8 (NIV 1984)

TEACHERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the Gospels, Jesus Christ is revealed as the ultimate Teacher (“You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am” John 13:13). Since His Church is to reflect every aspect of who He is, it is not surprising that He gave teachers to help equip and shape it, and that they have such a fundamental place in God’s strategy:

“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers...” 1 Corinthians 12:28

As in Ephesus and Corinth, the church in Antioch had teachers, including Paul (then still known as Saul – Acts 13:1), who acknowledges this aspect of his gift and calling in 1 Timothy 2:7 and 2 Timothy 1:11. It is clear that Apollos was also a prominent teacher in the early Church (Acts 18:24-26). The caution expressed in James 3:1 (“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness”) shows that it was a recognized role in the Church throughout the nations, to which many aspired.

THE GIFT AND CALL OF THE TEACHER

Past experience of teaching in the Church and the world may have left some with negative preconceptions. In their effort to convey a deeper understanding of Scripture, teachers do tend to be more meticulous and methodical than the other ministries.

However, far from being dry or dull, the gift of teaching, operating under the anointing of God, should be captivating and revelatory, and should not only inform and equip, but also inspire us to live in the good of the Word of God. Again, we are conscious of the fact that this may not have been people’s experience of teachers, but that is probably because they have not encountered true, Ephesians 4 teachers. These may vary greatly in style and personality, but they do seem to share certain characteristics:



A PASSION TO KNOW THE TRUTH — Teachers tend to be motivated by a general desire to learn and understand, but in particular they have a hunger for the truth of God’s Word. They treasure it, love to spend time in it, and love to talk about it. They want to know everything about it! Whereas others might shy away from some parts of Scripture as “too difficult to understand,” teachers are excited to take up the challenge by diligently studying and reaching to God for revelation.

A PASSION TO INTERPRET THE TRUTH — No aspect of the truth stands in isolation from the rest of God’s Word. Therefore, teachers should always consider Scripture in the light of Scripture, and the smallest detail in the light of the big picture. This is often expressed in a desire to maintain balance or to hold the truths of God in tension, but the root is their desire to know the whole counsel of the Word of God.

A PASSION TO CONVEY THE TRUTH — It should perhaps go without saying that the foremost characteristic of the teacher is the ability to teach. While all Christians should have some ability in this regard, teachers are obviously gifted by God with a far greater measure than others. Once teachers gain understanding, they can impart it. Rather than making simple issues complex, they endeavor to cast complex issues in clear and simple terms, thus making the Word of God accessible to all people.

A PASSION TO APPLY THE TRUTH — Teachers should never be content with things staying in the realm of theory. They share the conviction of Moses regarding God’s truths: “**they are not just idle words for you—they are your life**” (Deuteronomy 32:47 - NIV 1984). Their passion is to see what they have taught outworked in practical and God-glorifying ways in people’s lives, and the Kingdom of God extended as a consequence.

PREPARING GOD’S PEOPLE TO TEACH

As with all the Ephesians 4 ministries, it is important to keep in mind that the teaching ministry is given to equip the saints for the work of ministry. This involves assisting in the process of transformation that comes by the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2). The goal of an Ephesians 4 teacher is that everyone in the church will hunger for, interpret, apply, and convey God’s Word themselves. Part of “The Great Commission” (Matthew 28:18-20) is that we are all to teach new disciples to observe everything that Jesus has commanded us. Although we will not all be teachers in the Ephesians 4 sense, it is interesting to note these challenging words from the writer to the Hebrews:

“In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again.” Hebrews 5:12a (NIV 1984)

There is, therefore, an expectation that everyone ought to be able to teach at least the elementary truths. Teachers can and should equip us for this work of service. Furthermore, we see in 1 Timothy 3:2 that an elder must be “able to teach,” and in Titus 1:9 that he must be able to “give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” Part of the role of Ephesians 4 teachers will no doubt be to help to equip local elders in these respects.

TEACHERS IN THEIR RIGHTFUL POSITION

To a large extent today, sound biblical teaching has been side-lined or even abandoned in favor of the pursuit of “experiences” or feel-good philosophies:

“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.” 2 Timothy 4:3 (NIV 1984)

This results in a selfish and ineffectual church. As R. T. Kendall has said, “A dearth of solid teaching in the church reveals that the body of Christ needs more than good experience—it needs good theology.”



However, it is also very important to remind ourselves not to elevate the role of the teacher to an inappropriate place. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones observed that churches can be “*perfectly orthodox and perfectly useless!*” This can certainly be the case where a teacher functions apart from the other gifts, or is the lead gift in the church. Our desire is for the restoration of the biblical model of teachers working alongside the other gifts, particularly apostles and prophets.

Having looked at teachers, let us now consider the Ephesians 4 shepherd.

SHEPHERDS OR PASTORS?

Surprising as it was to learn that *evangelist* appears only three times in our Bibles, it is even more surprising to learn that *pastor*—the most common and accepted of all the Ephesians 4 terms—appears only once in most English translations of the Bible!

The term translated *pastors* in most versions of [Ephesians 4:11](#), is translating the Greek word *poimenas*, meaning “shepherds.” The singular and plural forms of this Greek word actually appear seventeen other times in the Greek New Testament, but in all these other instances, most English translations correctly use *shepherd/shepherds*. Why did they not do so in [Ephesians 4:11](#), and why did they use the word *pastors*? *Pastor* comes from the Latin word *pastoris*, which has the root meaning of “feeding” (it relates to the English word *pasture*) and was used in Latin in connection with shepherding. As such, if one were looking for a substitute for *shepherds* when translating *poimenas*, it is a reasonable choice. We cannot say for sure why the early Bible translators *did* want to use a word other than shepherds here. Perhaps they felt that *shepherd* did not sound spiritual enough, or that people might actually confuse it with the farming role.

Whatever the reason, and no matter how well-intentioned it may have been, we have already seen in this course how the enemy can seize upon a mistranslation as an opportunity to distort a truth and wreak havoc in the Church. With the word *shepherd*, the nature of the ministry would have been clear. With *pastor*, the Church has had to accept whatever definition (if any) has been presented. This has led to the term being confusingly applied in some churches not just to the person leading the church, but to anyone leading a particular area of ministry, even if the role does not actually involve shepherding, e.g., the “Worship Pastor,” “Evangelism Pastor,” “Pastor of Administration,” etc.

PASTORS TODAY

In much of the modern church, *Pastor* has basically become the title given to the leader of the church. Since most churches do not have biblical elderships, the “pastor” is the primary, if not sole, authority. Such “pastors” *may* have a measure of one or more of the Ephesians 4 gifts, but are looked to by the congregation as the supplier of *all their* needs in terms of ministry, care, and government. This is often a source of great frustration for the church, and can be a crippling weight on the “pastor.” That said, the term *Senior Pastor* in larger churches often refers to someone who functions as a manager, or even in a CEO-like role, with little hands-on care for people. So then, even when the term *pastor* is used, it is important that we remain faithful to the original word being translated—shepherd/shepherds. We need, therefore, to take a brief look at what the Word of God shows us of shepherds.

SHEPHERDS IN SCRIPTURE

The image of the shepherd is prevalent and significant throughout the Bible. God Himself is often referred to as a shepherd, most famously in [Psalm 23:1](#):

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

Prominent figures in the Old Testament who were shepherds by occupation include Jacob and his sons, Moses, the prophet Amos, and of course the writer of [Psalm 23](#), David. God had deliberately placed David in this role to prepare him for his greater destiny as the shepherd of His people:

“He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people, Israel his inheritance.” [Psalm 78:70-71](#)

As with David, God often referred to those who ruled His people as shepherds. In [Ezekiel 34](#), God speaks against the “shepherds” of Israel who failed to care for, and indeed mistreated, His flock. In this instance, God declared that He would intervene to shepherd His flock Himself. Nevertheless, His purpose remained that His care would be outworked through faithful and anointed servants (**“And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding”** [Jeremiah 3:15](#)).

SHEPHERDS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew references the prophet Micah in speaking of the coming of the ultimate Shepherd, Jesus:

“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” [Matthew 2:6](#)

Jesus referred to Himself as **“the good shepherd”** ([John 10:11,14](#)) and is called **“the great shepherd of the sheep”** ([Hebrews 13:20](#)), **“the Shepherd and Overseer”** of our souls ([1 Peter 2:25](#)) and **“the chief Shepherd”** ([1 Peter 5:4](#)). Once again then, it should not be surprising that one of the gifts we see Him giving to the Church in [Ephesians 4](#) is a ministry by which His very nature as Shepherd is made manifest in His people.

Although no individual is specifically identified as a “shepherd” in the New Testament, it is significant to note the shepherding mandate given to Peter when Jesus re-commissions him in [John 21:15-17](#).

THE GIFT AND CALL OF THE SHEPHERD

[Ephesians 4](#) shepherds have a God-given desire to care for, nurture, guard, and guide the flock. Their genuine love for people is tangibly felt, as it is evidenced in real concern and practical care for individuals. As seen in the Parable of the Lost Sheep in [Luke 15](#), the shepherd’s heart is at times more focused on rescuing and restoring the one lost sheep than managing the many.

However, it requires more than love and good intentions to fulfill the role of the shepherd. Having mentioned earlier God’s choosing of David to be the shepherd of His people, let’s note the qualities he had for the job:

“...David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.” [Psalm 78:72 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Shepherds deal with people’s lives and are looked to and relied upon by them. They must act with absolute integrity, as befits any servant of God. They must never be self-seeking, or abuse the trust they are given by being controlling or manipulative. Their focus must always be on the righteous will of God and the best interests of the people.

It is equally important that shepherds are skilled in dealing with people, individually and corporately. Although some of this skill may have come from the experiences of life, it is primarily the anointing of the Holy Spirit that enables the shepherd to do the work of the Great Shepherd.

PREPARING GOD’S PEOPLE TO SHEPHERD

As we will see in the next session, elders obviously have an important responsibility when it comes to outworking God’s shepherding heart and care for His people. Both Paul and Peter exhort elders to “shepherd” the people of God whom they oversee ([Acts 20:28 - NIV 1984](#) and [1 Peter 5:2](#)). Though some translations render the exhortation, “be shepherds,” in the Greek it is the verb not the noun that is used. The instruction is what they are to do, not who they are to be. These instructions may, therefore, be like Paul’s instruction to Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist” ([2 Timothy 4:5](#)), the implication being that this was not the work that he was necessarily most gifted or inclined to do, but was the work that his position and the circumstances required. Similarly, it is unlikely that shepherding was the primary gifting of all of the elders Paul and Peter addressed. They, like elders today, would need substantial help to enable them to do this.

Since the Ephesians 4 shepherd is to prepare God’s people for the work of ministry, an important part of this task will be to inspire and enable the whole church, and especially elders, to shepherd all those whom God will bring into His Kingdom. As with apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers, this will typically lead the Ephesians 4 shepherd to have a ministry wider than their home church. This equipping aspect of the shepherding ministry has rarely been seen, and desperately needs to be restored to the Church.

EMBRACING CHRIST’S GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

“so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” [Ephesians 4:14-16](#)

Together, shepherds and teachers help to see the body of Christ built up to shepherd and instruct one another in accordance with God’s ways. To continue the building metaphor, they work to see the individual stones shaped so that they fit smoothly into the overall structure. However, much of the modern Western church, predominantly led by shepherds and teachers, has been guilty of producing increasingly fat and inactive sheep. The key to their God-intended effectiveness will come as they are partnered not just with one another, but also with the other Ephesians 4 ministries.

“AND HE GAVE THE APOSTLES, THE PROPHETS, THE EVANGELISTS, THE SHEPHERDS AND TEACHERS, TO EQUIP THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY, FOR BUILDING UP THE BODY OF CHRIST,”

[Ephesians 4:11-12](#)



These gifts are given by God to ordinary individuals, whom Christ then gives to the Church. There can be a tendency to want the benefit of the gift without real relationship with the person through whom Christ gives it. This should not be so, as it is made expressly clear in Scripture that we will lack tremendously, and in fact will fail to mature, if we do not embrace these indispensable parts of the body.

THE WORD AND THE WORKERS

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Most Christians rightly accept the essentiality of Scripture for growth and maturity. However, it is interesting to note the correspondence between what these verses say of the role and function of Scripture, and what **Ephesians 4:11-13** says of the role and function of these ministries. Just as all Scripture is given by God, these ministries are given by Christ. Just as Scripture is given to the man of God, these ministries are given to the people of God. Just as Scripture is given to thoroughly equip the man of God, these ministries are given to prepare God’s people. Just as Scripture prepares the man of God for every good work, these ministries prepare God’s people for the work of ministry.

As we hope has been shown over these recent sessions, the Ephesians 4 ministries, as well as the Word of God, are absolutely essential for the equipping and maturing of the Church. Our prayer is that everyone attending this course will be left with a lasting conviction regarding how God intends to build His house.