

“Some authors write long books but are short on experience. JR Woodward, by contrast, writes a first short book that is long on experience. Don’t be fooled by the brevity of this book. It may be small but it is heavy, and the weight consists not of lead but of gold. JR provides substantial biblical exegesis and theological reflection. In so doing he also demonstrates a breadth of reading and depth of reflection. He has the makings of a pastor theologian, which in my opinion is the best combination.”

- **Eddie Gibbs**, Senior Professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and author of books like Leadership Next and Emerging Churches

“JR Woodward is that rare missional leader that brings both relentless courage and intellectual depth to the “missional” task. He plants churches with relentless courage. He reads theology tirelessly. I know of no one who combines both like J R Woodward. In Re-sketching the Church, he brings this utterly new perspective to bear on “the missional church” and the kind of leaders she needs for the twenty-first century. I recommend this book to all who care about the church and its emerging leadership.”

- **David Fitch**, Pastor Life on the Vine Church, Long Grove Il, BR Lindner Chair of Evangelical Theology, Northern Seminary and author of The Great Giveaway

“That we need to recover the lost ministry ethos embedded in Ephesians 4, I have no doubt - the missional effectiveness of the church in our time depends to a large degree on this. JR is a sound, practical, and uncommonly wise, guide on this topic and one with ample practical experience in planting churches and leading ministry with the fivefold gifting in mind. A great study guide.”

- **Alan Hirsch**, Author of The Forgotten Ways and The Shaping of Things to Come. He is also founding director of shapevine.com, a forum for the exchange of world-changing ideas.

“With wisdom, insight and deep personal warmth, JR Woodward lays out a challenging and compelling vision of a counter-cultural church - a church that embodies the hope of the gospel, and provides the surrounding culture with a foretaste of God’s coming kingdom.”

- **Dr. Benjamin Myers**, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia. Author of the popular blog Faith and Theology

JR Woodward has a burden for seeing the good news of the kingdom become reality through communities of faith in very concrete places. Bringing fresh theological insights to the five equipping ministries found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, this book inspires and encourages church builders in a variety of contexts to become more like Jesus and to engage in the missional task.

- **Kurt Fredrickson**, Director and theological mentor of the Doctor of Ministry program at Fuller Theological Seminary.

"JR is not your run-of-the-mill church planter. Not only has he got a creative edge about him but, most importantly, he passionately lives out his creative thinking in ways that prove effective in ministry. The ideas contained in this book are not from a theoretician but from an energetic practitioner who no doubt has experienced, and continues to practice, what he's talking about."

- **Wil Hernandez, Ph.D.**, author of *Henri Nouwen: A Spirituality of Imperfection* and *Henri Nouwen and Soul Care: A Ministry of Integration*

"Re-Sketching the Church with the Help of an Ancient Master outlines how people fit into God's grand pre-creation plan for building a Beloved Community which accurately reflects the divine image on earth today."

- **Jan Johnson**, author of 18 books including *Invitation to the Jesus Life* and the *Spiritual Disciplines Bible Studies*

RE-SKETCHING THE CHURCH

WITH THE HELP OF AN ANCIENT MASTER

[Engaging in the Craft of Equipping]

BY
JR WOODWARD

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Kairos Los Angeles and
church planters around the world.

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Gratitudes

My gratitude is deep for the many people whom God has used to touch my life and enabled me to have the ability to write. I'm grateful to both my parents, Nonnie and Woody Woodward for the amazing support they have shown me through the years, as well as my younger brother Joe Woodward, his wife Suzanne. My niece and nephews - Kara, Luke, Curt and William also have provided me much encouragement as well.

I am grateful to Pavi Thomas for his rich insights and our many late-night conversations that have sharpened my sense of understanding when it comes to the five equippers. I am thankful to Jonathan Williams and his influence on the re-naming of the various equippers. I appreciate Craig Wollack and Bob Logan who both had their hand in pushing me to think through the effects of the equippers within the congregation.

I'm thankful to my long-time friend and fellow equipper Joe Racek and his wife Lisa for their support and love through the years and their willingness to join me on this crazy journey. I'm thankful to Chris Backert and Jim Pace who have been a great encouragement to me through the years and took the challenge of leading [nlcf] after my departure. I am thankful for the many conversations that I have had with Andy Bleyer, one of the equippers of Kairos West LA and for all I have gained in our conversations. I am thankful to my MAGL cohort at Fuller Seminary and the various professors who have stimulated my thinking. I am thankful to Eddie Gibbs for his willingness to let me study under his supervision.

And finally, I am very grateful to the community that I have the privilege of serving - Kairos Los Angeles, which has birthed into Kairos Hollywood and Kairos West LA. I'm thankful for their willingness to journey together and experiment with the ideas

I write about. This book would not be in your hands apart from Rick Myse encouraging me to put pen to paper - I am indebted to him. To God be the glory in His church and in Christ Jesus through all generations, forever and ever.

JR Woodward
Kairos Los Angeles
Hollywood, California May 2008

foreword

Some authors write long books but are short on experience. I have to admit that I am in this category! JR Woodward, by contrast, writes a first short book that is long on experience. And he promises that the books that follow in the series will be just as concise! Yet, despite being a practitioner and story-teller, he eschews the “just-do-it-my-way” approach adopted by many pastors who turn to publishing. Don’t be fooled by the brevity of this book. It may be small but it is heavy, and the weight consists not of lead but of gold.

JR provides substantial biblical exegesis and theological reflection. In so doing he also demonstrates a breadth of reading and depth of reflection. He has the makings of a pastor theologian, which in my opinion is the best combination. Like the Apostle Paul, he develops his theological insights in the crucible of ministry and mission. He represents a new generation of Christian thinkers in the Western world who are reconnecting ecclesiology and missiology; two disciplines that have separated during the 16 centuries of Christendom to the detriment of both. The consequence has been a church in which mission has become marginalized and a mission that is weak in ecclesiology. JR remarries church and mission after a debilitating and destructive divorce.

The book of Ephesians provides the marriage counseling manual, binding church and mission together in a covenant relationship. In this first book, JR provides us with an overview and appetizer for what is to follow. I once sat down to a formal Chinese meal in Singapore. It consisted of small helpings in a succession of dishes. Like the waiters at that restaurant JR has the task of serving up the dishes to further stimulate my tingling taste buds!

Eddie Gibbs
Senior Professor,
School of Intercultural Studies
Fuller Theological Seminary

Introduction

I love reading good books because they are like food to the soul. Good books stimulate my imagination and inspire me to practice living and ministering in a wiser way. It is my hope that something that I have written here will help you in the same way.

Those who study both culture and the Gospel have written much about the rapid, discontinuous change that we are undergoing in Western Culture.¹ One of the great missiologists of our time, Lesslie Newbigin, has helped many of us recognize the need to engage our current culture in the West like missionaries going to a foreign land. When Leslie Newbigin returned to Europe after spending years in India as a missionary, he realized that Europe had undergone huge cultural shifts, seemingly without the notice of the church. So after his return, he began speaking and writing in such a way to call the church to take culture seriously, if she wanted to see the kingdom of God become a greater reality. Since Newbigin, there has been an avalanche of books both in academia and popular writing² stating that if we are going to take our Western context seriously, we must re-consider the way we go about fulfilling our mission.

While the church in the southern hemisphere seems to be thriving, the church in the western world seems to be waning. There is general agreement that not only do we need to take the incarnation more seriously as we think about our approach to church, but we also need to take a fresh look at how we approach leadership. Some authors call for revolutionary change and propose practical ways forward³, while others call for evolutionary

¹ One network that has been writing on this topic is The Gospel and Our Culture Network that states the network has been spawned by: the cultural currents of Western society and ethnic tradition that have shaped how we live in North America, the rapid changes taking place as we move from a “modern” to “postmodern” form of society, and the growing unease of the church as it experiences a dislocation from its prior places of importance. The aim is to explore what these things mean, under the light of the gospel for the life and witness of the church. (<http://www.gocn.org/main.cfm>)

² I will be mentioning a number of these books throughout my series of books.

³ Like Frost and Hirsch in *The Shaping of Things to Come*, and Alan Hirsch in *The Forgotten Ways*

change⁴ and propose we take some time to stop, grieve, and then re-emerge.

I think there is merit in each of these thoughts and we need to continue to converse, experiment, and keep in step with the Spirit as we move forward in being the people of God. Wisdom dictates the need to go back to the drawing board to re-sketch some of the ways we are doing things. We cannot continue to do the same things in the western world and expect different results, for as Einstein has said, that is the definition of insanity. We need to go forward as we learn from our past. Like a treasure hunter, we need to search the sacred text, our history, and our current reality so that we might better embody the good news today. We need to re-look at how an ancient follower of Jesus, who was a master church planter, approached the area of leadership.⁵ As we appreciate our roots and understand our present context, we can better allow the Spirit of God to shape us for the future.

The ideas in these pages come from conversations in the communities that I have served, as well as conversations with leaders from dozens of organizations and churches. They have come to me as I have read and interacted with many authors⁶, as well as through the crucible of learning as a church planter. This experiential knowledge began after starting a campus church at Virginia Tech⁷ with a few dozen people and by God's grace seeing it grow to close to a 1,000 people, and has continued while helping to plant churches in the Los Angeles area.

As I have studied and put into practice different ideas, my thoughts have developed much like a Polaroid picture - barely visible at first, but in time and through experiential knowledge a faint sketch has appeared. Yet I can easily echo the words of Paul: "We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and

⁴ Like Kester Brewin in Signs of Emergence

⁵ The Apostle Paul

⁶ I will bring you in contact with a number of authors that have shaped my thinking throughout this series of books

⁷ [nlcf] New Life Christian Fellowship - www.nlcf.net

the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us."⁸

I write these words because a number of people have asked me to⁹, and Rick Mysse has commissioned me to do so. I offer these pages to God in the same way the little boy offered his fish and loaves to Jesus, in hopes that these words might be multiplied and feed your imagination and inspire you to be stronger in your craft of equipping.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:12 The Message

⁹ Some of the pastors and church planters who I have met over the years, through blogging, coaching, and speaking at conferences, have asked me to write down my thoughts on this topic.

DRAFT

|draft| noun

A preliminary version of a piece of writing

[Re^oengaging God's Mission]

“It is Red Smith who is reported to have said that it’s really very easy to be a writer—all you have to do is sit down at the type writer and open a vein.”

- Fredrick Buechner
Speak What We Feel

“You yourselves are our letter written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts”

- I Corinthians 3:2-3
The Message

Remembering Our Mission

One day I was driving down High Street in Columbus, Ohio, and I saw a young man who needed a ride. It's not my habit to always pick up hitchhikers, but I've been without a car at times in my life, and this time I sensed God wanted me to pick him up. This guy wasn't your average hitchhiker. He stuck his thumb out and kind of tilted his head to the side in such a way it was hard not to help him out.

So I picked him up, and within a short time I found out he was an Aryan - he basically told me he was a white supremacist. His name was Mike, and he was very vigilant in what he believed. He told me that his group was planning a racial war, and that he didn't care if he died. He was going to fight until the end. When he was sharing this with me, I sensed that he fully believed everything he was saying.

Then I asked him why he believed what he believed. He actually tried to justify his beliefs from scripture. I said, "I think if we look at that scripture that you would be able to see how it is being taken out of context." I asked if he would be willing to look at the text together. He agreed. So I found a little half circle and pulled over to park. And as I reached back for my Bible, I discovered a gun pointed to my head. I have to say, I was a little surprised. I said, "Dude, I'm just getting my Bible. No need to pull a gun on me." Well, he put the gun back, and my heart started beating again.

We went and got something to eat, and then I found out this guy had no place to stay that night. So I said, "Get back in the car. We'll think of something." And as we were traveling, I couldn't believe what I was saying, but I said, "I tell you what, man. If it's ok with my roommate, you can stay with us for the night." I looked over at Mike the Aryan and I saw tears in his eyes. He said, "You mean, you trust me even after I pulled a gun on you? How can you do that?"

I was thinking, "Good question." Then I said, "Well, Mike, the only way I could do that is because I believe that God loves you, and because God loves you, I love you." By this time, Mike was doing everything possible to prevent himself from outright bawling. And right then, a thought came to me. "JR, you may be the first person who ever trusted Mike." I took a moment to share a little bit about the love of Christ.

We got back to the hotel where my roommate and I were staying, and I asked my roommate, Tom, if he minded if Mike stayed with us. I kind of woke him from his sleep, and I had to tell him about the gun. He wasn't very favorably disposed to the idea, so I ended up getting Mike another room. Mike didn't want it, but I insisted. It gave me the chance to share more with him. I continued to share the good news about Jesus and about what Jesus wanted to do in his life and in the world until 4 a.m.

To make a long story a little shorter, later that week Mike repaid me for the room by taking me out for Chinese. I shared with him again about Jesus and the invitation that Jesus gives us to partner with God to redeem the world. Mike said, "I want that. I want to experience forgiveness, and I want to help make this world a better place." So in the parking lot, Mike started his journey with God. The next day we baptized him in the pond in the backyard of a pastor's house in Columbus. When I left Mike in Columbus, it was his heart's desire to share what he had learned about Jesus with his Aryan friends, in hope that they would let go of their racist behaviors and become a part of an alternative social community that includes people from every race, tongue, tribe, and nation.

As I reflect on my encounter with Mike, it reminds me of two things. First, we live in a messed-up world, a world filled with violence, prejudice, racism, poverty, and many other problems. The second thing Mike's story reminds me of is that Jesus has invited you and me to partner with God in the redemption of the world and that we can make a difference.

The Federal Aviation Administration once developed an

experiment to test the strength of windshields of airplanes. And so they developed this cannon-like device that would actually take a dead chicken (I'm serious), and at the approximate speed of the plane, throw that dead bird into the windshield to see if it could simulate a real situation where a bird might hit a plane in flight. Well, a British locomotive company heard about this device and this test. So they communicated with the FAA, and they asked if they could borrow the device. They had just developed a train that had gone faster than any that they had created before, and they wanted to also do the same thing with their windshield.

And so they followed all the steps of the experiment. They loaded the bird up, and they shot it at the locomotive at the approximate speed. It went through the windshield, knocked over the back of the chair of the engineer, and put a major dent in the cab of the locomotive. And so they wrote back to the FAA and asked if they could please check out all the things that they'd done. They didn't understand what happened. The FAA's final report said, "*You might want to try the test with thawed chicken.*"

Now why did everyone in the British locomotive company assume that a frozen chicken was used in this experiment? I mean, was there no debate about whether this should be a frozen chicken or a thawed chicken - regular or crispy? No one asked the most basic question of the experiment.¹⁰

I want us to take a look at one basic and vital question: What does it mean to be the church? What does it mean to be the people of God in our neighborhoods in our day?

Missio Dei

One of the most influential theologians of the last century, Karl Barth, re-introduced the classic doctrine of *missio Dei*, which is Latin for Mission of God. We find this idea in scripture where you have God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and

the Son sending the Spirit, and then the Father, Son, and Spirit sending the church into the world.

In other words, mission is not primarily an activity in the church, but it is derived from the very nature of God. Jürgen Moltmann puts it this way, "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church."¹¹

In fact, Karl Barth said, "A church which is not on mission is either not yet or no longer the church, or only a dead church - itself in need of renewal."¹² When we read the scripture, we learn that it is God's mission is to set things right in a broken and messed-up world. God's mission is to redeem and to restore the world to its intended purpose. The mission of God is the reason that the church exists. So when we participate in God's mission, we become living signs of God's intended future for the world.

Planting Another Church

Recently, we were having a vision dinner to raise funds for our second church plant in Los Angeles. Our first church plant was in Hollywood, California. Our second plant in November 2006 was in West L.A. So I invited a friend of mine who lives in Venice Beach to come to this vision dinner.

This guy, who is about my age (in other words, a really young man), is a very successful businessman. He grew up in a Jewish home, but since then has been more involved in the self-realization fellowship. We have had a friendship for some time. He has come to our church on different occasions, but mostly our church at different times has come to him. I've brought many of my Christian friends to hang with him.

¹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1977) p.64

¹² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV 3.2 The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962) p. 874

¹⁰ I heard this story from a message by John Ortberg

Well, my friend has known for some time that we were planning to start something in West L.A., and in his own way has been excited about it. So I decided to invite him to this dinner we were having even though he is not a Christian and isn't particular fond of the Christian church in general. I told him that it was a fundraising dinner, that the dinner was free, but most people who were coming were going to be donating something.

And I just loved the response he had for me. He said, "JR, you know I'm not a Christian, and you know I don't agree with a lot of things about the church, but I will plan on coming to this dinner because as I have gotten to know you through the years and some of the people in your church, I have been encouraged by the good things that I see in you and the good things I see you guys doing. And that, I can support."

That was deeply encouraging to me because God created the church to be a sign and foretaste of his coming Kingdom and an instrument in which more of the reality of the kingdom would be realized here on earth. Lesslie Newbigin has made the case that the church is only true to its calling when it is a sign, an instrument, and a foretaste of the kingdom.¹³

Church as Sign

When Jesus told us, "*You are the light of the world*," he was reminding us of the fact that we are a sign to the world in which we live. But how is the church a sign? Well, let's think about it. What exactly is the purpose of a sign?

Let's say that you are driving down Sunset Boulevard and you are trying to find a restaurant that you have never been to before, a restaurant that happens to be a short distance from the main road. Most likely as you drive along, you will be looking for

a sign with the name of the restaurant pointing in the direction to where the restaurant happens to be, right? And the purpose of a sign is to point to something that is not yet visible.

If you owned a restaurant that was a block off of Sunset Boulevard, you wouldn't just put the sign of the restaurant in front of the restaurant, but you would put the sign on Sunset Boulevard to point to where the restaurant happens to be. The reason for a sign is to point to something that is real but not yet visible - it points to something that exists but exists over the horizon.

You see, God created the church to be a sign of His coming Kingdom, and in as much as the church is faithful to her calling, to that degree she becomes a credible sign.

One of the reasons that God created the church on the day of Pentecost, was to erect in this world - credible signs - that point people toward His coming kingdom, credible signs that give people a taste of the future in the present.¹⁴ God desires to multiply these signs in every neighborhood in the world, so that people will be able to join together with the church on the journey to the future that God has prepared for us, so that others can join us at the great banquet that is to come.

The church is called to be a sign. We are called to be lights that point others toward God, His Son, and His future. So the question is: what kind of sign are we? And what kind of sign do we want to be? Newbigin poses this important question:

The question which has to be put to every local congregation is the question whether it is a credible sign of God's reign in justice and mercy over the whole of life, whether it is an open fellowship whose concerns are as wide as the concerns of humanity, whether it cares for its neighbors in a way which reflect and springs out of God's care for them, whether its common life is recognizable as a foretaste of the blessing which God intends for the whole human family.¹⁵

¹³ Idea found in: Lesslie Newbigin, *Lesslie Newbigin Missionary Theologian: A Reader*, ed. Paul Weston (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2006) pp. 130-142

¹⁴ Thought found in: Lesslie Newbigin, *Lesslie Newbigin Missionary Theologian: A Reader*, ed. Paul Weston (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2006) pp. 130-142

¹⁵ A Lesslie Newbigin quote, source unknown

Church as a Foretaste

Not only is the church to be a sign, but it is also to be a foretaste - a place where people can get a taste of the future here in the present. The church as a foretaste demonstrates what life is like when men and women live under the rule and reign of God. It is a community that has learned to love one another, encourage one another, forgive one another, exhort one another, and live in harmony with one another. In this way, the church becomes a concrete, tangible foretaste of the kingdom that is to come, though not in perfect form.

Church as an Instrument

Not only is the church to be a sign and foretaste, but also an instrument. The Apostle Paul, when writing to the church in Ephesus, talks about how the church is God's chosen instrument to show the manifold wisdom and grace of God to both the visible and invisible world. He says, "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."¹⁶

We see throughout the letter to the Ephesians that the church is to be kind of a preview or movie trailer of what is to come. The church is to be an instrument through which God's will for justice and peace and freedom is done in the world.

Becoming More Like Jesus

Yet, the sad fact is that if I am honest with my community

and myself, we aren't the kind of people that God wants us to be yet. We aren't even the kind of people that we hope to be. When I look back over this past week, or this past month, or this past year, I ask myself, "Is there anything I wish I would have done differently?"

I can think of times when I wish I had kept my mouth shut rather than saying something stupid or degrading to someone else. There are other times I wish I would have opened my mouth and given someone encouragement, comfort, or a proper rebuke. There are times I wish I would have been more humble or more respectful. There are times where I feel I have fallen into a consumeristic trap and lived more selfishly than I wanted to live. I am a cracked pot.

More than anything in life, I want to be more like Jesus. It is my prayer and hope that the community that I help lead would become more like Jesus. An encouraging verse I was thinking about recently was one written by John in I John 2:6, "*Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.*"¹⁷

We are to be more like Jesus, not just as individuals, but also as communities of God's people. John Drane in *The McDonaldization of the Church* has this to say: "Counting people should not be made a substitute for taking risks to focus on discipleship, renewal and ministry. A more discerning question will be not, 'how many of us are there?' but 'how much like Christ have we become?'"¹⁸

Stanley Hauerwas in *A Community of Character* put it this way: "The most important social task of Christians is to be nothing less than a community capable of forming people with virtues sufficient to witness to God's truth in the world... it is not the task of the Church to try to develop social theories or strategies... rather, the task of the Church... is to become a polity that has the character necessary to survive as a truthful society."¹⁹

¹⁷ I John 2:6 TNIV

¹⁸ John Drane, *The McDonaldization of the Church* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2001) p. 47

¹⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981) p. 3

And finally, Dallas Willard in the *Renovation of the Heart* encourages the church to focus on the goal of being like Christ by putting our efforts under God and making “spiritual formation in Christlikeness the exclusive primary goal of the local congregation.”²⁰

Being a Christian means following the way of Jesus, living like he lived. What is encouraging to me is that John was writing to people like us who were messed up. The good news is that he believed that God has the power to transform people to the point that, if Jesus came to live in their shoes for a day, there would be no difference.

So how will this transformation happen? What are the ways in which we can assess our own spiritual formation as well as that of our community or ministry?

That is what I want us to consider. As I mentioned in the introduction, these ideas developed much like a Polaroid picture in the crucible of ministry. Eddie Gibbs describes the process well when he says, “The Church needs navigators tuned to the voice of God, not map-readers. Navigational skills have to be learned on the high seas and in the midst of varying conditions produced by the wind, waves, currents, fogbanks, darkness, storm clouds and perilous rocks.”²¹

In community and conversation, I have navigated my way to a helpful matrix as I have taken some time to reflect on my first couple of church plants and then given some sustained thought on this topic. To get to this matrix, I have had to go through fogbanks, darkness, and storms.

Now it should be noted that the matrix that I am suggesting is simply one way that I have found beneficial for both my community and myself. While it is helpful to develop tools to try and discern where we are at in the transformation process, it would be wise for us to remember the advice of Marshall McLuhan who

understood that we create tools and then our tools re-create us.²² We would also do well to heed the words of Sue Monk Kidd when she said, “I’m discovering that a spiritual journey is a lot like a poem. You don’t merely recite a poem or analyze it intellectually. You dance it, sing it, cry it, feel it on your skin and in your bones. You move with it and feel its caress. It falls on you like a teardrop or wraps around you like a smile. It lies in the heart and the body as well as the spirit and the head.”²³

It seems to me that as we look at a way of assessing spiritual transformation, if we remember both McLuhan’s and Kidd’s words, not only would we avoid over intellectualizing things, but we will learn to use the tools that we develop in such a way to bring a sense of life to our congregations.

Being a Faithful Sign, Foretaste, and Instrument

So if we are going to cultivate churches that are a faithful sign, a rich foretaste, and a powerful instrument bringing more of heaven to earth, then we first need to understand the dominant culture that we find ourselves in and what it means to live as contrast-societies in this culture. Here is how Eugene Peterson interprets Romans 12:1-2 in the Message:

“Don’t become so well-adjusted *to your culture* that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. *Unlike the culture around you*, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”²⁴

20 Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002) p. 235

21 Eddie Gibbs, *LeadershipNext: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005) p. 66

22 McLuhan and Fiore, *Medium Is the Message* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967) pp. 26-41.

23 Sue Monk Kidd, as quoted in Michael Yaconelli, *Dangerous Wonder* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998) p. 105

24 Romans 12:1-2 The Message

I believe that if we have any hope of developing churches that live as contrast-societies in our world, then we need to understand the concept of culture and what it means to cultivate contrast-communities. Gerhard Lohfink, in *Jesus and Community*, makes a strong case that it has always been God's intention to work through a visible, tangible, concrete community that lives as a contrast-society in the world for the sake of the world.²⁵ When we grasp the power of culture, it gives both perspective and a fresh hope for transformation.

So what is culture? Philip Kenneson, in *Life on the Vine*, while conceding that there are numerous strengths and weaknesses to varying definitions, says “cultures are distinguished from one another by those shared *practices, convictions, institutions* and *narratives* that order and give shape to the lives of a particular group of people.”²⁶ This definition of culture is insightful, helpful, and true to life.

What Paul tells us in Romans 12:1-2 is that culture tries to squeeze us into its mold. In other words, the *practices* we engage in, the *convictions* that we hold, the *institutions* that we are a part of and the *narratives* that we listen to have the power to shape our lives profoundly. Here are some questions that I have found helpful to ask my community and myself when it comes to spiritual transformation:

- What is the guiding *narrative* of our host culture here in the U.S.?
- Which *institutions* are shaping our lives the most?
- What *convictions* are we developing in light of the stories and narratives that our host culture shares?
- What *practices* are we engaging in that are shaping us into the kind of people we are becoming?

As Kenneson says, “The question is never simply *whether* we are being molded, but more importantly, into *whose image* are

we being shaped?”²⁷ It seems that any helpful model of spiritual formation would try and understand the various ways that the dominant culture is trying to shape us, as well as what it means to live in the contrast-society that God created in Christ and has called us to cultivate. For, as Lohfink has so aptly stated, “Paul speaks of... the arrival of the new world of God in Christ, which has already begun in the community.”²⁸

So Paul tells us that transformation comes through renewing our minds, and one way to do that is by being immersed in *the narrative* of Scripture. Directly following Romans 12:1-2, Paul refers to the body of Christ and how God has given each of us different gifts so that we can shape and mold each other. In other words, we cannot become like Christ apart from the rest of the body. We need the body, and the body needs our gifts if we are to become like Jesus together. Transformation does not happen in isolation, which is why God has given us the church. The church is a living organism as well as *an institution* that God created.

So God has given us the scripture, which is our *narrative*; He has given us the church, an organism and *institution*, and it is our responsibility to understand the heart of God so that we can build *convictions* and engage in *practices* that will help us experience transformation.

So how can the church become a faithful sign, a rich foretaste, and a powerful instrument bringing more of heaven to earth? Where can we go to find some wisdom on how to have healthy churches that reproduce themselves? If you had to go to a place in scripture to find some of the best advice on planting and maintaining churches that are faithful to God's mission, where would you go? Who does God seem to lift up as an example for us when it comes to church life?

²⁵ This is what I believe Lohfink's thesis was for his book *Jesus and Community*.

²⁶ Philip D. Kenneson, *Life on the Vine* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999) p. 21

²⁷ Philip D. Kenneson, *Life on the Vine* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999) p. 25

²⁸ Gerhard, Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith* (New York: Fortress Press, 1984) p. 93

Questions to Reflect On

1. What does it mean to be the people of God in our neighborhoods today?

2. Define *missio Dei* in your own words.

3. Why is it so easy for the church to forget her calling in the world? What are some of the most significant obstacles that she faces in trying to carry out her mission?

4. In what ways is the congregation you serve a sign, foretaste, and instrument for the kingdom?

5. How would you define culture, and in what ways is the church called to be a contrast-community?

MASTERPIECE

| mās'tər-pēs' | noun

*an outstanding piece of artistry or workmanship
or a person's best work*

[Re•membering the Design]

“Mistaking this active life of faith for an institutionally backed and culturally bound belief system is similar to reducing the Mona Lisa to paint-by-numbers.”

- Dan Taylor
The Myth of Certainty

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”

- Ephesians 2:10
New Living Translation

Thirty Minutes with an Ancient Master

What if you had the opportunity to get into a time machine and go back to 60 A.D. right now? What if you could have an appointment with an ancient master - the Apostle Paul - to get advice about your church? What advice do you think he would give you?

The Apostle Paul was a wise builder of the church.²⁹ He was an incredibly humble, gifted, and devoted man. God used him to pen many of the letters of the New Testament. Most were situational, written to address particular problems within the church. You can understand that, can't you? We all have problems in our churches. If you are reading this with your staff team, you don't have to look at them now, but we all have problems. While most of Paul's letters were situational, some were pastoral, written to other leaders. Yet others are what some call general letters. In these letters, Paul doesn't necessarily address specific problems as much as he paints a picture of something in a broad way.

The interesting thing about the book of Ephesians is that it is one of the very last general letters that Paul wrote, and it is all about how to have a church that is a sign, foretaste, and instrument. Catholics call it the hallmark book on ecclesiology. The book of Ephesians was written by Paul near the end his life and contains some of Paul's best and most mature reflections on how to be the church. I mean, if Paul were living today, and you could spend 30 minutes talking to him about how to effectively plant healthy churches that reproduce themselves, he would share material that he wrote in the book of Ephesians. So when you and I read the book of Ephesians, we basically get Paul's best and most mature thoughts on how to be the church in the world.

And it is within this book, in Chapter 4, that Paul begins to take his deep thoughts on the church (Chapters 1-3) and give some

feet as to how this reality can come about. At the apex of the book, Paul talks about the five equippers. But before we start to unfold the fivefold ministry of the equippers, let's quickly look at a panoramic view of the letter to the Ephesians.

Overview of Ephesians

Watchman Nee, a Chinese missionary, summed up the book of Ephesians in three words. Sit. Walk. Stand.³⁰ I can't think of three better words to describe the flow to the book of Ephesians.

SIT. The first thing that Paul lets his readers know is that God chose us to be with him and to be a part of this new humanity that he was creating. He declares that we have been seated with Christ. We have a place at his table.

Paul reminded us that we are all born and shaped by an atmosphere that the god of this world polluted, and as we breathe in this toxic air, it causes us to live for ourselves. So God stepped in, and by his grace he placed us into a completely different atmosphere, an atmosphere where the air is pure and filled with mercy and love. He seated us, both Jew and Gentile (bitter enemies), together with Christ.

God's work of salvation, bringing us from the atmosphere of the prince of darkness and self-interest, into God's new world, God's atmosphere, is a work of grace and a gift of God. And as we sit in this atmosphere of love, mercy, and forgiveness, together with those who have been bitter enemies, we become God's master poem to the world, his living letter on display for the entire universe. Remember the story of Martha and Mary? Mary took the time to sit at Jesus' feet while Martha was worried and bothered about so many things. Mary understood what it meant to sit at Jesus' feet, to be still and know He is God.

Our journey with God begins by sitting down, not by

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 3:10 Paul calls himself a wise builder, in some translations a master builder

³⁰ The book goes by the same title: Sit, Walk, Stand and is about the book of Ephesians.

walking. Paul says, “For he raised us from the dead along with Christ, and we are seated with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.”³¹ God seated us with Christ. We want to walk to reach a destination, but that is not God’s order. God’s order is always sitting down first. Then walking. And when we walk, we will need to learn how to stand.

WALK. After three chapters of sitting down with God, trying to understand his plan and purpose from the foundation of the world, Paul finally tells us to get up and walk. He urges us to walk with God in light of all that God has done for us. Paul outlines the strategy of how the church can operate in her fullest capacity - when the five equippers are unleashed and are actively equipping the entire body to live out their roles. He then calls us to live the larger life. He calls us away from trying to construct a self in this world that has idealized idols and put a blind eye to God’s presence. Instead, he calls us to enter into God’s project and plan for the world - to build a new humanity where we live in the light, where all that we do in our marriages, families, and places of work, we do for Christ. For when we walk with God, we experience Him in our everyday lives and become a part of his living letter to this world on how they, too, can live fuller lives.

STAND. So first we sit. Then we begin to walk. And as we walk with God, fulfilling his calling, when as individuals and communities we are moving forward and partnering with God in His project of building this new humanity, helping to bring a greater sense of peace, love and justice to this world, then we will face opposition. When we start to identify injustices and those who perpetrate injustice, when we start to make right what is wrong, then we will encounter the onslaught of the forces of darkness and the enemy of all that is good. It is at those times, we need to learn to rely on God’s power to stand. One of the early church fathers, Evagrius of Pontus puts it this way, “The further the soul advances, the greater the adversaries against which it must contend.”³²

And I would add to that, the further the church advances in bringing more of heaven to earth, the greater the adversaries against which she must contend. Paul understood this. I mean, think about it - where was Paul at when penning this letter? He was in jail! Why was he in jail? Because he was preaching the good news to the oppressed - to the Gentiles, to the poor - and he was making right what was wrong. He was confronting the injustices in his day as well as those who oppress others. Who put him in jail? It was the forces of darkness working through the current political and religious structures of Paul’s day.

I have encountered many attacks in my life when I was just simply trying to follow God and do what is right. When we find ourselves being attacked for doing what is right, we need to learn how to stand with Jesus. Jesus calls us to follow him and his way. We stand with Jesus by overcoming evil with good.

God’s Masterpiece

Sit. Walk. Stand. That is the outline that Paul gives us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is God’s plan for the church. With this in mind, let’s dive into what it means to walk. This is where Paul gets very practical with the design of the church. This is where we learn how God has designed his masterpiece. Paul mentions earlier in this book, “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”³³ When Paul says that we are God’s masterpiece, he is talking about the church. He refers to not just individuals, but the collective whole. This is why he uses the word *we* instead of *you*.

So we the church are a work of art in progress. We are a painting on a canvas. The canvas is the collection of our souls in community - we are the material that God works on. He picks up

³¹ Ephesians 2:6 Italics mine

³² I can’t remember where I got this quote from, but you can Google the name and quote for reference.

³³ Ephesians 2:10 NLT

his brush and with all of the energy and depth that he possesses, he begins to paint. And at the end of it all, there is a masterpiece.

When I think of masterpieces, I think of art. How would you define art? I like the way that Thomas Hoving, who was the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, put it. He said, “Art happens when anyone in the world takes any kind of material and fashions it into a deliberate statement.”³⁴ I really like that, because, as I reflect on my life, the life of the prophets, the life of a church, and the life of the people of God throughout time, I see how God does that with people and communities of people. He crafts us to make a statement to the world.

One of the reasons it is important to have churches that cross ethnic, class, and age barriers is because one of the statements that our world needs to see is that there can be unity in diversity when Jesus is king of that community.

Now, how can you tell if a work of art is any good? Hoving has some great ideas about this as well. There are six good questions to consider when understanding the value of art:

1. Does it express successfully what it’s intending to express?
2. Does it amaze you in a different way each time you look at it?
3. Does it grow in stature?
4. Does it continually mature?
5. Does its visual impact of mysterious, pure power increase every day?
6. Is it unforgettable?³⁵

Those are helpful questions to think about when it comes to what God is doing in our lives and our communities. Jesus talked about us being lights and living in a way that brings our Father great honor.

Hoving also gives us this incredible definition of great art:

“As you climb the stairs of quality, you’ll meet individual works that you’ll need for the rest of your life, works that will thrill you, energize you, lift your soul, soothe you, make you smile, make you think about the fate of mankind and the universe, make you have to see them again and again for the good of your psyche, state of mind, and strength of heart.”³⁶

Wouldn’t that description be great to hear from someone who has come to visit our communities of faith? “Man, I had the most amazing time tonight. I sensed a Great Power in the room. It was an experience I won’t soon forget!” As I look through the book of Acts, those are the kinds of comments that people made when they connected to God’s community. Shouldn’t that be the case for us today as well, since we have God as our ultimate artist? So how is God creating his masterpiece?

Our Attitudes

At the beginning of Chapter 4, when Paul is instructing us how to walk, he starts to unveil the design of God’s masterpiece, the church. And wouldn’t you know it, he starts with our attitudes. He gets very practical. He tells us to be humble, gentle, and patient and to bear with each other in love in order to keep the unity that God has already given us. Why does Paul start with having humility, gentleness, and patience? Because the church was filled with people who normally didn’t hang out with each other.

When Paul writes to the people in Colosse, he says, “It doesn’t matter if you are a Greek or a Jew, or if you are circumcised or not. You may even be a barbarian or a Scythian, and you may be a slave or free person. Yet Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.”³⁷ Paul is talking about old divisions and old labels

³⁴ Thomas Hoving, *Art for Dummies* (Foster City: CA, IDG Books Worldwide, Inc. 1999) p. 3

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 6

³⁶ Thomas Hoving, *Art for Dummies* (Foster City: CA, IDG Books Worldwide, Inc. 1999) p. 6

³⁷ Colossians 3:11 CEV

that separated people and kept them hostile to one another for centuries. Now they are just obliterated. Paul says that they don't matter anymore.

You have to picture the people in this community. It would be like the Bloods and the Crips finding themselves sitting next to each other and worshipping God. It would be like a homeless person getting up to teach someone from Beverly Hills about God. Where else would we ever see something like mortal enemies suddenly find themselves sitting side by side. All kinds of people who were enemies, whom this world made into enemies, are suddenly part of the same body. That's why Paul starts with our attitudes.

Common Creed

After Paul gives us the necessary attitudes for this endeavor, he continues to paint the picture of how God will bring about his masterpiece, and he talks about a common creed. He reminds us that we are all made from the same cloth, the same DNA. This section contains a hymn or early Christian confession. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."³⁸

You can see a Trinitarian structure here. Paul starts with the reality of the church, moves to Christ, her head, and from him to the origin of all, God the Father. At this point, Paul "is not interested in the fabrication or existence of an invisible unity, but in the factual manifestation and enjoyment of oneness."³⁹

Diversity of Gifts and Intended Results

³⁸ Ephesians 4:4-6 TNIV

³⁹ Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6* (New York: Doubleday, 1960) p. 463

So, as Paul lays out the design of God's masterpiece, the new humanity, the church, he starts out with our attitudes. Then he talks about our common creed where we find unity. Lastly, Paul speaks of the diverse gifts that God gives the church so that she will grow into maturity and be like Christ himself. We see this in the next section of the chapter:

"However, he has given each one of us a special gift according to the generosity of Christ. That is why the Scriptures say, 'When he ascended at to the heights, he led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to his people.' Notice that it says, 'He ascended'. This means that Christ first came down to the lowly world in which we live. The same one who came down is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that his rule might fill the entire universe.

He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelist, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ. Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth. Instead, we will hold to the truth in love, becoming more and more in every way like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."⁴⁰

If we want to become God's masterpiece, we must take God's design for the church seriously. Let me highlight just a few

⁴⁰ Ephesians 4:7-16 NLT

things from this passage before I take some time to unfold the nature and ministry of each of the equippers.

First, we see that it is the exalted Christ who establishes this design and gives the church a particular structure. God appoints Christ to be the head over the church and the universe, and Christ then gives certain gifts to the church.

Notice the gifts that Christ gives the church are not personal services, but particular servants - people, in particular - apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. An interesting thing to remember is that each of these titles, except for “prophets,” describes a secular occupation in the first century.⁴¹ Paul bypasses impressive Old Testament titles such as king, priest, scribe or Levite.

So remember, we are getting the Apostle Paul’s best and most mature thoughts on the nature and structure of the church. Frost and Hirsch tell us that what we see through this passage in Chapter 4 is that,

“The same logic that asserts the church is gathered around one Lord, [one] faith [and one] baptism is the same logic that says God has specifically and deliberately... with purpose, placed [certain people in a certain pattern of ministry in His church.] [The unity and faith of the church] is inextricably linked with a comprehensive understanding of [these five equippers] in the life of the church. The church and its fundamental ministry are one. [In fact, in this passage, the mission is] directly related to its ministry structure.”⁴²

As I understand this passage, Paul sees each of these five equippers and the ministries that they represent as the “very mechanism for achieving mission and ministry effectiveness as well as Christian maturity.”⁴³ Paul seems to say that without a five-fold ministry pattern, we cannot mature and become the

masterpiece that God intended. Commenting about this passage, Frost and Hirsch continue to say, “If this is true, it is impossible to estimate the terrible damage that a lot of the church has experienced because of the loss, even active suppression, of this crucial dimension of New Testament ministry and leadership.”⁴⁴

Perhaps one of the reasons for the immaturity that we find in the Western church, and for the church being tossed here and there by every wind of doctrine, is because these five different equippers have not been appreciated, understood, or nurtured.⁴⁵ If we grow up and become like Christ, then we need each equipper and we must have a clear understanding of what each of them brings to the body. So how do the equippers operate?

41 Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6* (New York: Doubleday, 1960) p. 437

42 Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 2003) p. 168

43 *Ibid.* p. 169

44 *Ibid.* p. 169

45 *Ibid.* p. 169 I have paraphrased this section

Questions to Reflect On

1. Why does Paul often ask us to sit before we walk? What does it mean to sit before the Lord?

2. How important is attitude when it comes to ministry? How do you help create an environment where people have attitudes that reflect Christ?

3. Why is it important to have a common creed? How do the early creeds differ from statements of faith that we often see today?

4. Do you think that each of the five equippers is needed today? Why or why not?

5. Why do you think that the five equippers have not been “appreciated, understood, or nurtured”?

EQUIP

| i'kwip | verb

to furnish or provide with whatever is needed for any undertaking; to prepare

[Engaging in the Craft of Equipping]

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelist, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”

Ephesians 4:11-13
Today's New Intl. Version

“Learning a craft is accomplished more by participating in particular activities under the guidance of those who excel than by studying texts (unless that study is conceived of precisely as a practice in which the apprentices and the exemplars are engaged together). To be sure, there is an important place for reading books; even so, they ought to be seen as aids to a much larger and more comprehensive craft rather than as a primary means by which someone comes to understand a craft such as forgiveness.”

L. Gregory Jones
Embodying Forgiveness

The Craft of Equipping

One of the reasons we are less familiar with the nature and function of the five equippers than we should be is because we have lost the art of apprenticeship in our local congregations. We need to expand the craft of equipping from the classroom to the living room and from the sanctuary to the streets. Equipping needs to move beyond simply reading books and writing reports to practicing the craft and participating under the guidance of a mentor.

My friend Pavi Thomas believes that the medical field gives us some practical insights into how we can better engage in the craft of equipping. In a short paper, he makes the point that in the medical profession there is an integrated approach to training. He sat down with four of his relatives who are in the medical field and had a long conversation about their experience of being trained for their work as a surgeon, gynecologist, cardiologist, and pediatrician. He listened to each of them share about their training experience. After reflecting on the conversation, he says there were five fundamental elements that shaped their training.

1. Strong theoretical foundations
2. Integration of theory and practice - nothing was learned only theoretically
3. Mentoring - they were always under the oversight and care of experienced specialists
4. Experience - everything they were trained to do was by wide and repetitive experience
5. Specialization - they were trained to specialize, since the overall body of knowledge is vast⁴⁶

When Gregory Jones in his book *Embodying Forgiveness* talks about forgiveness as a *craft*, we gain more insight into the importance of the need for the local church to engage in the craft

of equipping. He states, “The craft of forgiveness is a lifelong process that people are initiated into as apprentices to those who excel at the craft. Those who excel have a moral authority as teachers, and apprentices must recognize the gap between their present competencies and genuine excellence.”⁴⁷

When Paul talks about the apostle, the prophet, the evangelist, the pastor, and teacher, he calls them equippers because their role is to embody particular elements of Jesus’ ministry in such a way that they prepare the body to live like Jesus. William J. McRae in his book *The Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts* mentions that the equipping ministry is a two-fold ministry. He talks about equipping in terms of being a *repairing* ministry and a *preparing* ministry. The verb “equip” in Ephesians 4:12 is also used as a fishing term in Matthew 4:21. The disciples were “mending” their broken nets. And in Galatians 6:1 it is used more like a medical term. The spiritual brother is to “restore” a dislocation or a broken bone. So one element of equipping involves mending broken and dislocated people so that they might actively serve again.

The other element of equipping involves preparing. The verb in Ephesians 4:12 is also a nautical term used for preparing a ship for voyage. So according to this passage in Ephesians, the function of the five equippers is to prepare the people of God for the journey toward God’s eschaton. The equippers prepare the body to be like Christ and thus fulfill the prayer that he taught us to pray, by bringing more of heaven to earth.

So in what way do these different equippers function? What is their calling? How do they reflect the ministry of Jesus? What are the issues that deeply concern them? What is their effect within the body? That is what I want to tackle in this series of books. But before closing this chapter, let me give you a short description of each of the equippers and then an overview of where we will be going in the next five short books.

When it comes to giving an overview of the equippers, rather than citing particular verses or passages in scripture, I will give

⁴⁶ Thomas, Pavi. The e4 Project. (Handout 3.14.02) p.8

⁴⁷ Jones, L. Gregory. *Embodying Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995) p. 226

you definitions based on my understanding of the scripture as a whole as well as my experience in practical ministry. I ask you to recall your understanding of scripture as well as your experience to see if these descriptions fit well.

Short Description of the Five Equippers

Apostles [Dream Awakeners] - They help people discover and live out their first and second callings; our first calling to follow Jesus, and our second calling to find our particular vocation. Apostles value the multiplication of disciples, small groups, and churches. They help individuals and groups move toward their destiny. Apostles can wear any of the equippers' hats, but because of the nature of their gifting, they look to build a team of equippers so that the body of Christ is fully activated to fulfill God's will on earth.

Prophets [Heart Revealers] - They are basically the conscience of the church. They help us come into the presence of God and lead us to fight for justice on behalf of the oppressed. They question the status quo and lay our hearts bare before the living God. Prophets disrupt our lives for the good of the kingdom, and they are easily despised.

Evangelists [Story Tellers] - They help equip the body to share the story of God in such a way that everybody recognizes that they are a part of the story as either a villain or hero. They tell the story in a way that encourages everybody to want to be a hero or heroine. They help the community to have a bigger heart for those living outside the kingdom. They also equip the body to be redemptive agents, redeeming people and every aspect of society.

Pastors [Soul Healers] - They help the community embody the ministry of reconciliation and work through conflicts so that there can be a sense of harmony. Soul Healers, like counselors, help people work through past hurts and move toward a sense of wholeness in the context of community. Pastors help the church to feel just like a family.

Teachers [Light Givers] - They help people immerse themselves in the sacred text and live faithfully in the story of God. Teachers shed light on the scriptures, so that the people of God might hear the voice of God through the sacred text. Teachers are not satisfied if people have simply memorized the text. Their heart's desire is that the people of God embody the sacred text faithfully.

Fresh Terms

You may notice that I have put another term [in brackets] next to each of the equippers. These are terms or nicknames that I give each of these equippers. Why fresh terms? Sometimes giving new words to the same essential reality helps bring needed life to old concepts. Fresh terminology can connect better with the culture in which God has placed us, which is why we always have updated translations of the Bible. The truth is that words can change meanings through time. In England, only a few hundred years ago, if you used the word "awful" to describe a work of art, it was a compliment. Try using that same word today when describing your friend's new painting.

The Value of Every Member

Now let me underline an important part of the design that Paul lays out in Ephesians 4: all people of God are enabled by the five equippers to fulfill the ministry given to them, so that the whole church is taken into Christ’s service and given missionary substance and purpose. As Markus Barth so aptly points out, “The whole church is the clergy appointed by God for a ministry to and for the world.”⁴⁸ In this passage, Paul refutes two widespread opinions: “the assumption that the bulk of the church members are reduced to the rank of mere consumers of spiritual gifts, and the notion that the church as a whole must strive primarily for a ‘build up’ which benefits only herself.”⁴⁹

The dignity and usefulness of the five equippers given to the church are as great or as small as their effectiveness in making every church member, including the smallest and most despised, a redemptive agent in her own home and environment.⁵⁰ In short, the equippers are servants who understand themselves to be ministers to other ministers, so that each member does his or her own special work, and helps all the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy, growing, and full of love.

Can you see how we can become God’s masterpiece as we understand and live out God’s design for His body? Paul tells us if we start with the right attitude of humility, gentleness, and patience; if we confess a common creed and appreciate, nurture, and release the five equippers to equip the whole body; and each part does its work, we will, in time, reach the intended result. We will become just like Jesus Christ. We will be His living letters to the universe, written by the One who opened His vein and wrote in blood.

⁴⁸ Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6* (New York: Doubleday, 1960) p. 437

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.479

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 479 I paraphrased here.

An Overview of Where We are Going

There are five more short books in this series. Since this short book is an overview, let’s take out our telescope so we can envision the big picture of where we are going, and then in each successive book we can pull out our microscope to take a closer look at each of the equippers.

In each of the next books, I will be taking a look at the focal concern of each of the equippers as well as their chief effects within the body. I indicate their chief effects by the word destinations - where they are bringing the people of God. These destinations could also signify the marks of the church, or ways to describe the church when she is healthy and fulfilling Jesus’ ministry. The following chart gives an overview of the focal concerns and destinations of each equipper.

EQUIPPER	FOCAL CONCERN	DESTINATIONS
Apostle [Dream Awakener]	Living Out our Calling	Following Jesus and Expanding the Kingdom
Prophet [Heart Revealer]	Walking with God	Walking with God and Engaging in Justice and Mercy
Evangelist [Story Teller]	Incarnating the Good News	Being People of Welcome and Redemptive Agents
Pastor [Soul Healer]	Pursuing Wholeness in Community	Embodying the Ministry of Reconciliation and Experiencing Healing and Pursuing Wholeness
Teacher [Light Giver]	Shaped by the Sacred Text	Immersing Ourselves in the Sacred Text and Living Faithfully in the Story of God

Table 1.1 The Equippers, Focal Concerns and Destinations

After I take some time to work through the essence of each equipper, as well as their focal concerns and destinations, I will examine at least one concrete practice that I would recommend to each equipper to encourage the community of faith to engage in. While each of the five concrete practices I mention are foundational, they are not exclusive. And while each practice isn't necessarily tied to a particular equipper, I do think that as each equipper encourages these specific practices, they will help the community of faith to stay true to her focal concerns and reach her destinations. Here is a quick overview of the focal concerns and concrete practices.

EQUIPPER	FOCAL CONCERN	CONCRETE PRACTICE
Apostle	Living Out our Calling	<i>Sabbath</i>
Prophet	Walking with God	<i>Fasting</i>
Evangelist	Incarnating the Good News	<i>Hospitality</i>
Pastor	Pursuing Wholeness in Community	<i>Confession</i>
Teacher	Shaped by the Sacred Text	<i>Worship</i>

Table 2.1 The Five Equipppers, Focal Concerns and Concrete Practices

When each equipper encourages the congregation to engage in at least one concrete practice, they help to contribute to the cultivation of a contrast community - one that is indicative of God's New Age. They help us to live as an instrument, foretaste, and sign of the kingdom - that has come and is coming.

Because the fact of the matter is that in this day, the world is continually trying to squeeze us into its mold. And so these concrete practices that we engage in act as crucial counterforces to the prevailing lure of the dominant culture. And as we engage in these concrete practices with the help of each equipper, we can trust God to help us become the kind of people that He is making us into. The following chart gives an overview of the ways the world tries to squeeze us into its mold, the practices we can engage in to help us live differently, and the hopes of the kinds of people we will become as we engage in these concrete practices.

WORLD	PRACTICE	HOPE
Slaves of Production	<i>Sabbath</i>	Faithful to our Calling
Purely Consumers	<i>Fasting</i>	Walking with God
Egocentric Lives	<i>Hospitality</i>	Blessing the Neighborhood
False Self	<i>Confession</i>	Real Community
Stories of Advertisement	<i>Worship</i>	Signposts of the New Creation

Table 3.1 The World, The Practices, and Hopes

With this in mind, let's look at the big picture of where we are going, in hopes that we might better understand how the five equipppers fit into the design of God's masterpiece.

EQUIPPER	FOCAL CONCERN	DESTINATIONS	WORLD	PRACTICE	HOPE
Apostle [Dream Awakener]	Living out our Calling	Following Jesus and Expanding the Kingdom	Slaves of Production	<i>Sabbath</i>	Faithful to our Calling
Prophet [Heart Revealer]	Walking with God	Walking with God and Engaging in Justice and Mercy	Purely Consumers	<i>Fasting</i>	Walking with God
Evangelist [Story Teller]	Incarnating the Good News	Being People of Welcome and Redemptive Agents	Egocentric Living	<i>Hospitality</i>	Blessing the Neighborhood
Pastor [Soul Healer]	Pursuing Wholeness in Community	Embodying the Ministry of Reconciliation and Experiencing Healing and Pursuing Wholeness	False Self	<i>Confession</i>	Real Community
Teacher [Light Giver]	Shaped by the Sacred Text	Immersing Ourselves in the Sacred Text and Living Faithfully in the Story of God	Stories of Advertisement	<i>Worship</i>	Signposts of the New Creation

Table 4.1 The Big Picture

So I trust that this overview has whetted your appetite to learn about the ministry of each of the five equippers. I believe that Paul, the ancient master, through living out his calling as an Apostle of Jesus Christ, left us with some great advice on how to cultivate missional communities that partner with God to bring about His New Age. As Robert Webber and Rodney Clapp say, “The church intends to be a community where the peace of God’s kingdom begins. In this sense the church is the beginning of the future of the world... As an eschatological community, the church always has its eyes on the end. It is unique among earthly communities in that it has its roots in the future and its branches in the present.”⁵¹ In this series of short books, I plan to take a microscopic look at each equipper so that we might better know how to nurture and release them to equip the entire body. And as each part of the body does its work, we will become more like Jesus, in our way of life and ministry. We will be his living letter to the universe, written by the one who opened his vein and wrote in blood.

Questions to Reflect On

1. How would you define equipping and what have you found to be the best way to equip people?
 - Apostle (Dream Awakener):
 - Prophet (Heart Revealer):
 - Evangelist (Story Teller):
 - Pastor (Soul Healer):
 - Teacher (Light Giver):
3. Which equipper do you most identify with and why?
4. Which equipper(s) are currently active in the congregation you serve?

⁵¹ Robert E. Webber and Rodney Clapp, *People of the Truth: A Christian Challenge to Contemporary Culture* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1993) p. 60.

5. Which equipper(s) are most needed in the congregation you serve?

6. What is your biggest take-away from this lesson and how will it change the way you approach ministry?

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JR is currently pursuing a Master of Arts degree in global leadership at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He loves to surf, travel, and have a glass of wine with old and new friends. He enjoys watching films as well as engaging in the art of photography. He currently resides in Hollywood, California.

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