

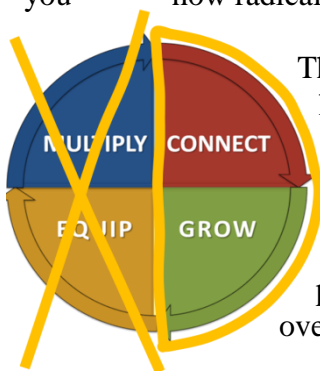


This is part three of our series, Organic Church, and the second week in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. Let's read the text again.

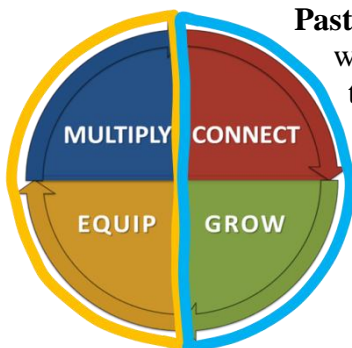
<sup>11</sup> It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to prepare (**equip**) God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

We left off last Sunday talking about an incredibly radical concept—that every believer would not only themselves be equipped for ministry but in turn equip others for ministry. Let me show you how radical this is using our four stages of discipleship.



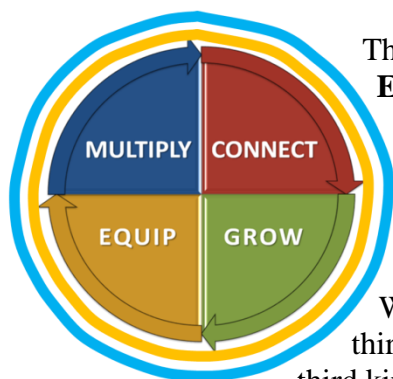
The **Traditional Church**—the way that most churches do ministry is that he pastor (yellow) does the work of the ministry and the congregation comes alongside and offers help. Ministry mostly consists of things that fit into the connect and grow categories—Sunday worship, Sunday School and visitation. There is very little equipping and virtually no multiplying happening in these churches. (please understand that I am painting these churches with broad strokes of the brush and oversimplifying these three categories.)



**Pastor Equipping Church:** The pastor equips the congregation do to the work of the ministry. As I said last week, this is a much better answer than the traditional answer/church. In these churches, the pastors rightly recognize their responsibility to train and equip (yellow) the congregation to do the work of the ministry (blue). Accordingly, there is a resurgence of the priesthood of all believers. Notice that in these churches, the congregation is doing the work that is typically done by

the pastor in traditional churches. Question—is this a Biblical model for ministry? I would say that it is definitely Biblical, but it is incomplete. As we saw last week, it is not only pastors who are supposed to be doing the work of equipping, but all believers. This is true because the list of spiritual gifts in this chapter were not meant to be complete. Everyone’s gifts must be used for equipping for the work of the ministry.

This also makes perfect sense when you understand the nature of spiritual gifts. No one person possesses all of the spiritual gifts. A pastor most certainly does not possess all of the gifts. In fact, pastoring is one of the spiritual gifts. If I don’t have the gift of leadership, how can I equip others in this gift? Therefore, who should equip others for leadership? Those people who possess the spiritual gift of leadership. This makes sense when we think about using our gifts—leaders lead, those with mercy demonstrate mercy, etc, but we tend to overlook this when it comes to equipping. If someone has the gift of evangelism that person should not only be doing the work of evangelism but he or should be equipping others to do evangelism.



Therefore, the most Biblically complete kind of church is the **Believer Equipping Church**: The pastor sets forth a Biblical vision so that every believer equips one another to do the work of the ministry. Both the pastor (yellow) and the congregation (blue) is to be engaged in every phase of the discipleship process.

Now for the really important question: what kind of a church are we? We are clearly not a traditional church but I cannot say that we are this third kind of church either. And one of the reasons that we are not this third kind of church is because your pastor has not set forth this Biblical vision of every believer equipping one another to do the work of the ministry. I have failed to articulate this vision to you in a clear and consistent manner. Actually, it would not have been possible to have laid out this vision because I have been thinking in terms of the second kind of church.

### The Discipleship Goal

Making **more** disciples and making **better** disciples by nurturing **all** believers toward the stage of multiplication.

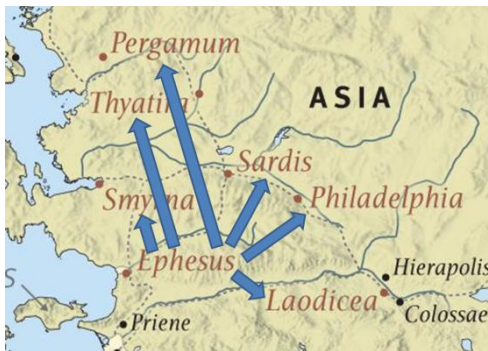
Look again our Discipleship Goal: Making more disciples by making better disciples by nurturing all believers toward the stage of multiplication. I am quite satisfied with this goal. It is Biblical and thorough. If you understood the four stages of discipleship it would be clear that we want all believers to reach the stage of multiplication, but the problem is that there are two ways to interpret the Equip

phase.

Interpretation #1—We want all believers to *become* equipped to do the work of the ministry. If you are tracking with me, what kind of church does this interpretation bet fit—Traditional, Pastor Equipping or Believer Equipping? This first interpretation looks good because the believers are being equipped, however, it fits with the second kind of church—Pastor Equipping Church—because the believers are being equipped but not necessarily equipping others.

Interpretation #2—We want all believers to *equip one another* to do the work of the ministry. Are you seeing the enormous difference between these two “interpretations”? In the first one the believer is equipped to do ministry and in the second they are equipped to do ministry and to equip others. True multiplication will never take place unless this is our vision and our goal. You can see why I call this an incredibly radical concept. This is a goal, a vision, but we are not anywhere close to reaching this goal. Don’t forget that what we are describing here is what the living body of Christ should look like. We are describing the living vine but we have not yet addressed what the trellis for this vine will look like. We must have a structure on which this vine can grow.

This is such a radical goal that I want to make sure everyone is absolutely convinced that this goal and these four stages of discipleship are thoroughly Biblical. If you have any doubts about all of this then you might be hesitant to jump in with all of your heart and soul. On the other hand, if we are convinced from Scripture that this is the right way to go, then we must walk forward in obedience together. Therefore, let me lay down some more Biblical foundation.



Last Sunday I showed you how these two passages (2 Timothy 2:2 and Ephesians 4:12-13) illustrate our discipleship goal. We make more disciples through the process of equipping others. Do you recall how effective this process was in the church in Ephesus where Timothy was the pastor? The process worked wonderfully as this one church in Ephesus was able to plant six other churches in Asia.

We make “better” disciples through the process of spiritual growth in the body. Furthermore, our four stages fit nicely with these two passages. The 2 Timothy passage illustrates equipping and multiplying and the Ephesians passage illustrates growth and connection. Of course I could add dozens of additional verses that would show the same truths.

But so that you may be convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt, let me show you how our discipleship process flows directly from the strategy of Jesus’ ministry.

We tend to think of Jesus’ earthly ministry as being three years long but it actually was 3.5 years long

**Equip**—Preparing to serve God in a wide range of areas and helping others to connect and grow.

**Multiply**—Training and releasing maturing, servant leaders so that all ministry is multiplied.

**The Discipleship Goal**  
Making **more** disciples and making **better** disciples by nurturing **all** believers toward the stage of multiplication.

**Connect**—Becoming connected to Jesus Christ, to a local church and to fellow believers.

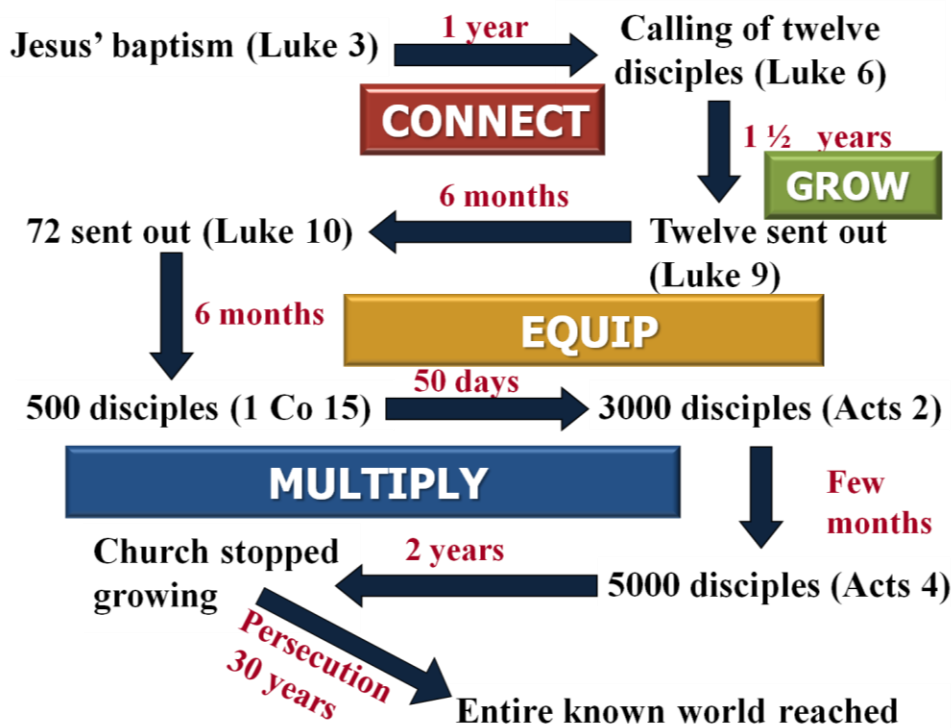
**Grow**—Growing in your knowledge of God and his Word resulting in continual personal transformation.

*And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. (2 Tim. 2:2)*

*so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> 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. (Eph. 4:12-13)*

and can be broken down into the following manner. His public ministry began with his baptism in Luke 3. During this time he invited many disciples to come and follow him, but he did not choose the twelve disciples until one year later. These twelve spent an additional 1.5 years with Jesus before he felt they were ready to be sent out on their own. They had been watching and learning from him for all of this time and now they were prepared to go it alone. Six months later he sent out the larger group of 72 to do similar kind of ministry in the surrounding towns. Six months after that Jesus was crucified, buried and raised to life on the third day. By this time we know that there were at least 500 disciples. Fifty days later on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out and the church grew to 3000 men and women. Within a few months time the church continued to grow to a total of five thousand. After all of this amazing growth, within two years the church stopped growing until they faced a time of intense persecution, which ironically, was led by the future apostle Paul prior to his conversion. Within the next 30 years, much of the entire known world was reached.

This is a quick overview of the ministry strategy employed by Jesus. You might think that the Savior of the World would have had more than 500 believers when he ascended to Heaven. That was a fairly miniscule number when you think about it. In today's culture, that is only a moderately sized church. A megachurch is defined a 2000 and more, so Jesus was a long way from a basic megachurch. But al of this was precisely according to his Master Plan. Now we can



overlay our four stages of discipleship next to Jesus' Master Plan. The first year was the connect phase where he invited people to "come and see" and "come and follow." The next 1,5 years could be called a growth phase. The sending of the twelve and the seventy two were clearly times of equipping. Finally not until after his ascension did the

church truly begin to multiply.

Are you growing in your confidence that we have established a Biblical foundation to our discipling process? Again, we are far from implementing this vision, but we have laid the proper foundation.



The equipping phase is probably the most difficult to grasp, so I want to make one more important point about it. First is the fact that the word for mature in this verse is singular. The word conveys a corporate maturity of the entire body of Christ. We—all of us, the entire body of Christ—all become mature together as a local body of Christ. Of course this requires individual maturity, but the end goal is corporate maturity.

The irony and beauty of these truths is the fact that as we help one another to mature, we ourselves are maturing. In fact, it is impossible to mature on your own if you are not helping others to grow. If we are not serving and equipping others, you cannot grow yourself. This is why the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> stages in our discipleship process are so important—equipping and multiplying. If you do not move to the equipping phase, you will cease to grow. You will be stuck without mutual service to one another. Do you see—it's not merely the best process, it is the necessary process. It does not matter how much knowledge you have about the Bible or how much ministry you do—if you cannot get to the point of not only doing ministry but also equipping others for ministry, you will be stuck in your spiritual growth.

Now I want to get back to the text of Ephesians chapter four where we left off last week. Verses 11-13 give a picture of Christian maturity, which we know also includes mutual maturity, but the next section describes what happens when a believer does not mature.

*<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*

I continually see Christians who match this description of being tossed about by the waves of false teaching. We have a need for continual Biblical discernment in our lives. Discernment is one of those tricky processes because most people can spot a cult when they see it. I would guess that no one in our church would suddenly convert to Mormonism or become a Jehovah's Witness or even follow the likes of Harold Camping. For most believers, these errors are relatively simple to spot. But good Biblical discernment involves knowing the Bible so well that you are able to spot less obvious false teaching.

Here are my two favorite quotes about discernment Charles Spurgeon said, "Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right." Similarly, John Murray is famous for this quote. "The difference between truth and error is not a chasm but a razor's edge." The most common type of false teaching uses Biblical words and concepts but redefines them to mean something entirely different. I won't spend time highlighting and specific false teaching because I do that occasionally when I think it is appropriate, but we must be reminded to be on guard against it. Paul has told us that immature believers are constantly led astray by false teaching. Excluding the gospels, nearly half of the content of the NT was written to correct some manner of false teaching.

Thanks to the world wide web, we have a proliferation of folks who are continually in the watch for false teaching and warning others of such people. Now some Christians despise these so-called "discernment ministries" and label all of them as heresy hunters. In my opinion, whenever someone is labeled as a heresy hunter it is because this person doesn't like the fact that one of

their favorite teachers is being called out. They don't like the fact that their favorite guys are being criticized so they try to brush it off by labeling the discernment ministries as "heresy hunters."

About once per week I skim over a website that is a watch dog ministry who watches out for false teaching and false teachers. In my opinion, this particular watch dog barks too loudly, barks too often and sometimes cannot distinguish friend from foe. Like a good watch dog that protects your home, sometimes this can be a little annoying, but isn't this the very kind of watch dog you want protecting you? If a burglar broke into your house, most family dogs would lick the burglar's face or want to play fetch, but if you want a really good watch dog, then you want one who barks too loudly, barks too often and sometimes cannot distinguish friend from foe.

Though we must be cautious of the extreme heresy hunters (...and they do exist. Try googling "EFCA" and "heresy" and you will find a webpage called "EFCA—A Smorgasboard of Heresy." This guy is a watch dog who is clearly out of control.), we must never say that such people do not have a right to make such judgments. I will defend his right to make such judgments even if I completely disagree with his conclusions. Every believer has a right and a responsibility to continually discern the messages that come at us, even on Christian radio, Christian books and Christian websites. There is a steady multiplication of false and dangerous teaching out there. Moreover, much of the false teaching is driven by *the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming*. (v. 14) That is one scary sentence when you think about it. Such people and such teaching is so dangerous precisely because it is cunning, deceitful and crafty. This is why so many people follow false teaching—because they do not realize that they have been deceived.

In contrast to the immature believer who is led astray by false teaching, the next verses define how a mature believer handles truth.

<sup>15</sup> *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.* <sup>16</sup> *From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

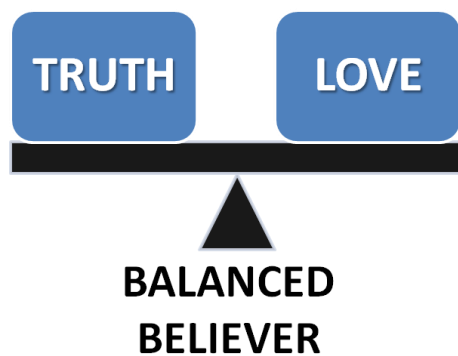
This is one of the hardest things in all of life. It takes more skill to balance these two than it does to walk a tightrope over the roaring Niagara Falls. You have to speak the truth in order to counter the *cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming*. Error and falsehood must be called out and identified as such. The church must be warned of false and dangerous teaching at every turn, but even more than that, the truth must be taught. The old illustration of the counterfeit bill is as good as it gets. We must know Biblical truth so well that counterfeit truth is immediately recognized as such. Moreover, this is the precise nature of false teaching. It is counterfeit which is intended to resemble the real thing.

Therefore, we must teach, preach and speak the truth, but we also must do it in love. Without love we are a resounding gong or banging cymbal. Without love we are nothing. The line in 1 Corinthians that gets me the most is verse three: *If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

Wait—Jesus told us to give to the poor and he held up the virtuous and faithful widow who gave all she possessed—two small copper coins. Throughout all eternity she will be remembered for her generosity.

Jesus also said this—Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for a friends (john 15:13). Therefore, if I surrender by body to the flames, isn't this the ultimate sacrifice?

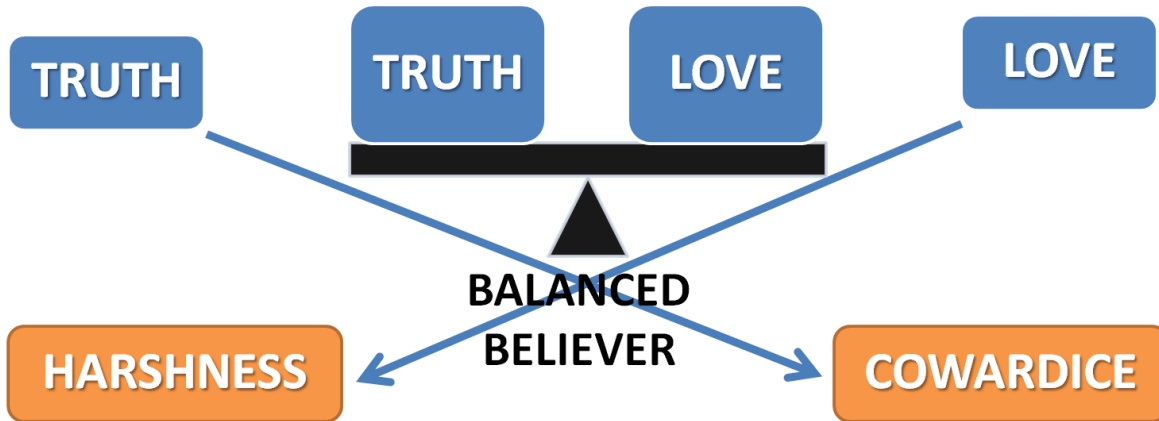
No, it is not. Paul implies that it is quite possible to give all that I possess to the poor and surrender all that I have—my body—to the flames of persecution, burned alive at the stake as my flesh peels off my body and I succumb to the flame and smoke; it is possible to do all of that and still not have love. This is frightening, is it not?



Here is a picture to which Paul is referring—truth and love and balanced on a fulcrum. (Even though there is no such thing a “balanced believer,” this represents the ideal.) The goal is to have the precise amount of love and truth. Both sides of the fulcrum must be perfectly balanced. But the problem is that we are all imbalanced on this fulcrum. All of us. No exceptions. Every believer is imbalanced. Churches are also imbalanced. But the problem is that the church that focuses on truth can be cold and calculating and the church that primarily focuses on love are wimpy and its members walk around with the spines of a jellyfish.

Every church is imbalanced and every believer is imbalanced. Some are grossly imbalanced and others are only slightly imbalanced, but they are all imbalanced. In fact, we are so imbalanced we don't know we are imbalanced, and that is the crux of our problems. Look at the figure below. The people who are imbalanced on the side of truth don't realize they are imbalanced so when they look at a balanced believer since this balanced person has more love than they do, they tend to look past the balance and see cowardice. They see a person who has too much love and too little truth.

Of course the opposite error is also true. The people who are imbalanced on the side of love also don't realize they are imbalanced so when they look at a balanced believer, since this person has more truth than they do, they tend to look past the balance and see harshness. They see a person who has too much truth and too little love.



Where would you put me on this spectrum—imbalanced toward the truth side or toward the love side? Where would you place yourself on this spectrum?

Notice carefully that I continue to use the word balance and have purposefully avoided the word moderation. Here is the problem with the word moderation. Some people will look at this scale and conclude that what we need to do is do everything in moderation. In other words, don't put too much emphasis on the truth side. Don't get carried away with Biblical discernment. Don't spend so much time identifying false teaching and false teachers. Just do the truth thing but do it in moderation. Likewise they will conclude: don't get carried away with too much emphasis on the side of love. Be kind and considerate of course, make sacrifices and help one another, but let go of this crazy idea of loving at every turn. Just love others in moderation.

To this notion of moderation I say the following—moderation, I spit you out of my mouth! Who said anything about moderation?! This balance of truth and love is not about moderation but rather about balance. In other words, the goal is not to have a little truth and a little love so that they can balance out one another. Instead, the goal is to have a crazy, passionate amounts of both truth and love so that they balance one another. Don't live your truth and love in moderation. Become unglued in your pursuit of truth. Become so flipped out in your pursuit of truth that the average believer thinks you are wacked out. Likewise, be completely unreasonable in your passionate of pursuit of love. Become so deranged and delirious in your passionate pursuit of love that the average believer thinks you are also wacked out. Increase in both truth and love to ever growing and ridiculous amounts, but as you do this, keep the two as perfectly balanced as you can.

When we speak the truth in love and use the grace and gifts given to us by the ascended and glorified sovereign of the universe, then we grow up into him, who is the head. We—all of us—work toward becoming mature believers, to the glory of God.

Rich Maurer  
July 10, 2011