

TUTORIAL 9.21 Equipped for service 1

This tutorial introduces the fourth question in the area of *Discipleship*: 'Are they encouraged to function in the areas in which God has gifted and given the abilities so they can develop in their service to Him and His body?'

Romans 12:4: Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

Paul gives this statement after his exhortation to be a living sacrifice, and now he applies that specifically to the service of the body. He makes the point that the body has different functions. Good discipleship recognizes the different functions. It's not a cookie cutter formula, but it recognizes and encourages different functions in the body.

We need to be looking for opportunities for those gifts to be used. By default, we might be quick to recognize a certain type of gift, possibly the gifts that are similar to ours may be the easiest to spot. It's important to learn about the different types of gifts that God has given and to see those being used. That requires, though, that we understand what they are and how they can best fit into the body. There's this idea of individuals with gifts all being encouraged to serve the body. There's a sense of mutual ownership of those gifts.

Last time

We looked at the third question from the WILD outline in the area of Discipleship. We discussed the importance of people having access to regular, Godly input and intentional friendships that help them along as they follow Jesus in the walk of faith. In this tutorial we will discuss the fourth question in the WILD outline in the area of Discipleship.

Are they being encouraged to function in the areas in which God has gifted and given them abilities so they can develop in their service to Him and His Body?

We want to see people functioning in line with the gifts that God has given them. We want to avoid forcing square pegs into round holes, to be sensitive

to the way that God has made each individual. Often gifts don't reveal themselves clearly until people start to serve, then we can start encouraging them to use their gifts and help them to even recognize it themselves, as well as have others recognize it and support them in it. That's a really important part of discipleship.

That comes back to what we said previously, which is just how important it is for us to know the people that we're working with, to have those relationships with them. One thing that comes to mind here too is how it ties back into the narrative flow right from the beginning, starting with God's intention for His image bearer, Adam. There we see the origins of discipleship where He gives them a task. They're to represent Him on the earth and to flourish and to spread out and to be His representatives here. He teaches them and guides them in that. We see that pattern all throughout the Old Testament with individuals in different times who were raised up and who had God given functions or roles. God didn't just give those jobs but He also walked alongside people in that and always in light of the purpose He had for them. Then in the flow of history, Jesus chose these men, His disciples, and appointed them, gave them His word to pass on, put churches into place, and then that continues on to the next generation of the Church.

So, we see that progression coming down into the Church; God's intention and that cycle of passing it on from one to the other. Even as churches were coming to maturity in Acts, we see that Paul told Timothy and Titus to have elders recognized in each of the locations, men who were set aside to help lead these groups, not just a directionless discipleship but they actually move with purpose and want to see certain things accomplished. That comes back to the different gifts that God has given the body. In Ephesians 4:11-12 it says, "He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." So we see even today there are people that God has set aside for the growth of the church and they have particular gifts and so we need to recognize those and actually encourage them to use them.

One of the things that is often a hindrance to the process of people using their gifts is our lack of recognition of them or when we don't have a means for them to use them. That can happen when we have the view of the "professional". in some cultural settings, that's the way it is, but when we come into these settings we shouldn't bring into them, by default, our view of the clergy or insist on seminary training before people can begin to function in leadership. God has raised those people up from within local bodies, and without getting into saying that something is wrong or right, certainly this is the pattern we see in Scripture, like the obvious passage in 2 Timothy 2:1-2 where Paul says, "Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

We should be passing the truth on to people who are faithful and be looking for them and believing that God will raise them up from within local fellowships that are planted in these different places. It's incredibly important for us to have that as an end goal then, and not something short of that because if it's something shorter, then they're going to reach a certain place but after that they're going to look around and there will be no more opportunity. They won't be actually able to use the gifts that God has given them for the growth of the whole body and so it will remain stunted in its growth.

We can develop ways to promote growth, such as structures and systems, which aren't necessarily at odds with the friendship-based discipleship we're talking about. Churches need to know how to bring on those who are going to be the leaders and function in their areas of gifting. When the initial church planters are no longer there, they need to know how to bring on the next generation and how to see elders raised up and teachers equipped within the local body. It should continue past the first generation. That's the plan, that's what the narrative is all about really, isn't it?

Are they being discipled into areas of service or are they being held back by personal, systemic or cultural barriers?

Dave describes the cultural leadership structure that existed before the church was planted and how that affected the leadership that developed in the church:

The patriarch of each clan was a leader and when it came to a village or even multiple villages coming together, these clan heads would get together. They were like the elders and they would come together and make decisions. If there was some kind of court case that needed to be handled, they're the ones that handled it. If there were serious decisions to be made, they are the ones who made the decisions for the entire village or even for the entire tribal group. Eventually, of course, we started teaching them about the qualifications for Biblical leadership within the church. These qualifications of course, were very, very different from the qualifications for being a tribal leader.

The qualifications for being a tribal leader, well, first of all, it was an inherited position. It would be the oldest son among brothers within a clan. Then there were certain things that were expected of these leaders to where some of them would rise above others, perhaps because of their ability and oratory, or their hard work and productiveness in gardens, and also owning many pigs. There were things like that that would help raise the status of some of these village elders above others. Of course, we taught them Biblical principles of what a Biblical leader within the church is supposed to be.

It was exciting to see that even some of these older men who didn't really qualify Biblically were able to fit into the structure of the church and see some of the younger men take the leadership roles in the church. Some of the older ones had disqualified themselves by marrying multiple wives or in other ways they just were not qualified to be church leaders and yet the churches have moved forward in this and it's been very encouraging to see the church as a whole understand what Biblical leadership is all about and recognize those leaders and give them the respect, that ear that they truly should give them and realizing that this really is God's way. That God's standards for leadership in the church need to be our standards.

John explains how evangelism was always in the forefront of the thinking of church leaders and how that motivated them to disciple more young men as Bible teachers:

As for Bible study times, they would get together during the evening or sometimes during the day, depending on who they were and what they were involved in. As more and more Scripture was translated, Bible teachers started to develop who would lead people and lead these Bible studies. At the same time, there was this awareness that there's still a lot of people from that language group who don't know Christ and who need to know Christ and to reach some of those people was very, very difficult. So, evangelism was always something that was in the forefront of their thinking. We had some young men who were very, very capable teachers. They were usually guys who had been involved in the translation process or lesson development, and that was tremendous grounding for them in learning God's Word and being able to share it with others.

So, the way that all happened was usually this: one of us would teach the lesson to these guys who would then be responsible to teach it to the church. Out of that group came those who went and planted churches.

John describes how leadership developed in the church and some of the challenges in that process:

There were a number of guys who helped with translation. Those guys were probably in the forefront of being developed as church leaders, although we would have meetings during the day for the men and anyone could come to those meetings. Those groups had this specific goal of raising up leaders, of teaching areas of truth that would really develop men who had a heart for the people, to shepherd the people. I can remember like groups of fifteen or sixteen men gathering together during the day to be taught. Not all

of those guys ended up in leadership, but a number of them did. I think that's taken a long process and it's been interrupted because one of my team members, Keith, was just at the point where he was wanting to really concentrate on leadership development when the fighting broke out. The whole thing was disrupted and he was never able to really get into that as seriously as he'd hoped to be able to.

I'm sure that's a disappointment with the work. Had that not been the case we would have hoped that we'd had stronger leadership. That has been an area for prayer really that the men will accept responsibility, and there are a number who do. Some of them have been through some pretty discouraging times, some really hard times. Some of them, because of their families, have felt disqualified and it's nothing that they have actually done, but something that their families, their kids maybe have done. They've felt, "How can I lead the church if I can't lead my own family?" I know with one couple who were on outreach, their lives were threatened a number of times and eventually they came home. That was a real discouragement to them. So, there have been these discouraging times. There's been some real challenges for the church there.

Are opportunities being created for the expression of spiritual gifts and is there scope for people to explore appropriate ways to use their experience and skills?

Is there a paternalism that stifles the growth of younger, newer and less mature believers OR is there a vision for discipleship that actively works to bring them to places of equality and hands authority over in a timely way?

Greg explains how the leadership roles in the church encourage and facilitate discipleship taking place:

One of the aspects, or functions, of the churches that we are talking about here is that they have roles of elders and we've appointed elders in these roles. These are guys that the Body of Christ identifies as leaders of the church and these are the ones that take responsibility as far as the spiritual life, the teaching, the involvement with families, and investing in the spiritual levels of it.

There are also different roles in the church that exist, in the sense of deacon roles, where these guys are functioning and existing. When the original guys were brought in, we did appoint them, but these were men and women that had been disciplined and mentored and trained over a number of years. They were actually functioning as elders before we ever appointed them as elders. They were already doing it. That's been the philosophy right along as the church has been adding new life on and new elders into the churches. These

guys get brought on and these are usually men or women that are actually already functioning in those spiritual roles where they're discipling and are also mentoring other families and other individuals in those churches.

We started this tutorial with the question, "Are they being encouraged to function in the areas in which God has gifted and given them abilities so they can develop in their service to Him and His Body?" This question helps us evaluate where we're at and what to look for so that we can truly help one another. Our goal as church planters is to see people being encouraged to function in areas in which God has gifted them. We are hoping for the different individuals in the church body, along with their own gifts, to be given a place where they can actually function and be encouraged as they do so.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Equipped for service

1. A woman in the video described her life working alongside her husband in various roles in the church. For a couple seeking to disciple cross-culturally, how important do you think it is for both husband and wife to be involved in all aspects of the work? If you are married, have you talked about this together and how do you see it working?
2. Research how 'paternalism' is portrayed in the history of missions.
3. In your own words give a defence for this statement, "Paternalism obstructs discipleship."