

Parable of the Fivefold

Apostles, Prophets,
Evangelists,
Pastors and Teachers

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Parable of the Fivefold

*“It was he who gave some to be apostles,
some to be prophets, some to be evangelists,
and some to be pastors and teachers ...”*

Ephesians 4: 11 NIV

FIRST, THE PARABLE

Following is a parable based upon Ephesians 4:11 about a Landowner and the city he envisioned and built.

THE LANDOWNER:

A MAN OWNED a large parcel of property. His real estate holdings, encompassing many thousands of acres, had been in his family for generations.

He enjoyed his estate and often went for hikes, sometimes camping overnight. His piece of the earth held many wonders. Visits took him to mountains and valleys, lakes and rivers, forests and meadows.

Immeasurable varieties of flora and fauna flourished on his property. And a broad array of animal species populated the forests and meadows. Every visit engaged his senses with new places, new sights, new sounds and new wonders.

The man found endless joy in his land. But slowly he came to realize that he was alone. His holdings held too much beauty not to be shared. So, after many years of taking pleasure from this vast, wonderful resource, he decided to invite others.

After prolonged contemplation, the Landowner concluded that what he really needed

were human beings. He loved the trees and animals but he could not build relationships with them.

But how would he share his estate? Should he create a park where people could visit? Or should he produce a community where people could actually live?

The thought of bulldozing his property to build homes lacked appeal. His estate held too much beauty to be turned into a subdivision.

No. He would not build just homes. He would build a city.

THE TEAMS:

THE LANDOWNER hired teams of workers to help fulfill his vision. High on his list of qualifications was passion.

He chose five teams in all. He enlisted architects and engineers to plan and design. Then he selected general contractors, skilled tradesmen and marketing experts.

THE VISION:

THE LANDOWNER assembled his teams around a large conference table. They sat spellbound as he shared his dream.

“First of all, I want you to know that I maintain a radical commitment to individual human dignity. I believe in the absolute value and worth of every individual. Our mission in this public venture must be to call forth the very best from each member of our community.

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“Our city will include parks, streets and public venues which foster—not frustrate—human contact. We’ll create walkable neighborhoods and warm public squares. We’ll build commons which draw residents into fellowship with one another. Our public places should flower with artistic works, vibrant musical expressions, literature and drama.”

He paused for a moment, taking a deep breath. He cocked his head, gazed away and rested his chin on his hand.

Then, as if to punctuate his next thought, the Landowner suddenly returned his gaze to his new friends and continued.

“I want these artistic forms alive with my own theology.”

Eyebrows raised at the provocative words. How could he? Why these thoughts were—they were scandalous!

No doubt anticipating his new friends’ reaction, he continued. “I assure you my theology will please you. And I invite you to spend time with me so you can come to know my theology.”

Then, without missing a beat, he continued his litany.

“Our city must be a place where the word weds the spirit, where the natural marries the man made, where freedom and responsibility walk arm in arm, where productivity reconciles with play, where justice and mercy partner to produce community healing, where the different races dance with one another.”

“Here, past, present and future will live together joyously. I envision a community where living places, work places, play places, places of commerce and worship all nurture the human soul.

“Here, the sacred will absorb the secular.”

“And I commission you to build our city with an aesthetic beauty that does not offend the conscience of the eye.”

The Landowner pushed back his chair and stood. He spread his arms wide and smiled.

“Here, the sacred will absorb the secular. In this place, grace will redeem the corrupt without consuming inspiration.

“And oh, yes. All who build this city must live in this city.”

THE LANDOWNER’S THEOLOGY:

IN A FEW DAYS the Landowner began to meet individually with his many teams. They spent months together walking the Landowner’s fields and camping overnight by his brooks and streams. They fished in his lakes, climbed his mountains and surveyed all of the Landowner’s holdings.

Time with the Landowner changed the team members’ thinking. They began to grasp his vision. They started to see from his perspective. And after time, the Landowner’s theology offended them no longer. In fact, they made it their own.

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WORK BEGINS:

TO FULFILL his vision the Landowner saw five integral roles.

1. THE PLANNERS:

From the architects and engineers he commissioned a team of planners to flesh out his vision, to design a plan incorporating form and function.

Minutia would wait. Detail would be put on hold. Particulars would tarry.

First the whole must be grasped. The total must be mastered. The city must be seen as an integrated one.

From the outset, spatial vision and three dimensional thinking took priority. Planners concentrated on flow, function and the beauty of design.

No inferior ideas would be tolerated. Conceptual integrity was foremost. Aesthetic integrity critical.

The planners would advance the Landowner's ideas from the concept stage to lines of ink on mylar and words on paper. Then, and only then, would construction begin.

2. THE TECHNICIANS:

The planners completed their preliminary design. Time for detail had arrived. From the same groups the Landowner ferreted out the technical minds from a variety of fields including civil, mechanical, structural, architectural, traffic, geotechnical and electrical engineers.

Structural integrity was paramount. Specifications must be carefully drafted. No inferior

materials would be permitted. All must be chosen for strength, durability utility and beauty.

Infrastructure would serve but not dominate. Finishing materials must be both diverse and harmonious. No detail was too small to be overlooked or ignored.

3. THE GENERAL CONTRACTORS:

Construction began. Now the dream would be advanced from mylar and paper to wood, stone, brick and glass.

The whole must be grasped. The total must be mastered. The city must be seen as an integrated one.

Due to the magnitude of his project, the Landowner assigned numerous general contractors to oversee the work. Each took on a different phase of the project. And each promised to enforce the high standards identified by the planners and technicians.

Often, contractors met with planners and technicians to assure the ongoing integrity of the project. Even so, the Landowner maintained responsibility for the overall.

4. THE TRADESMEN:

The dream's success relied heavily upon the skill of the tradesmen. Years of planning and the most careful oversight would be wasted if the tradesmen failed.

Now detail would take on physical form. Each tradesman excelled in his craft. Each shared an intimacy with his building materials. To him they were almost like friends. Each tradesman knew their feel, their form and their role in the overall.

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The tradesmen shaped their raw materials to fit where they belonged. They cut, bent, joined and mortared. Each piece must fit as perfectly as humanly possible.

5. THE MARKETERS:

All of the members of the various teams would live in this wonderful new city. But who else would take up residency and how would they learn about this extraordinary place?

Armed with attractive literature and slick brochures, the marketers fanned out into neighboring communities, anxious to find new residents. Publications touted the city's many features and benefits, carefully explaining why their city was unique— what made it different from other cities.

Soon, word of the project spread. People came from close by and from many miles away to see what the Landowner and his teams had created.

The Landowner and the team members devised a written constitution and an overseeing body to govern civic affairs. People purchased homes. Businesses relocated their plants and offices. Retailers set up shops. Established churches from outside the community seeded mission churches within the community. Schools opened. Libraries threw wide their doors and unveiled their small but growing book collections. Drama, literature, music and art clubs formed. Two newspapers launched dailies. Three radio stations and one television station began broadcasting.

The Landowner's vision, carefully planned, meticulously engineered, prudently managed during construction, lovingly crafted

and enthusiastically marketed had become the most visited, talked about city in all the land.

SECOND, THE PARABLE'S MESSAGE

BEFORE WE EXPLORE the parable's message, I need to make one thing very clear. What I am about to share with you is my perspective. I don't claim it to be the hard and fast word of God. But I do believe there are viable thoughts and ideas to consider.

Jesus often taught in parables. Though little Christian doctrine and theology have been drawn from Jesus' parables they do provide principles for Christian living. In the same way, I hope my modern parable of Ephesians 4:11 might become fodder for your imagination. The primary principle I hope that you, the reader, will extract is the fivefold grace of God given to his Church through gifted leadership.

I will have more to say about this fivefold grace at the conclusion of the article.

THE LANDOWNER, HIS LAND, HIS TEAMS AND THEIR CITY

THE LANDOWNER is God. His land is the earth, God's creation. The Landowner's teams are God's Christian servant leaders. Their city is the city of God. The outlying cities and communities who came to visit and eventually inhabit the new city represent the world.

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THE VISION

GOD HAS A VISION. And He calls his leadership teams together into His presence to share His vision. The parable's large conference table speaks of God's willingness to share His friendship and to partner with His sons and daughters.

Like the parable's team members, God's vision and dream holds God's servants spellbound.

God works to restore human dignity. Created in His image, the human race reflects God's highest creative expression. Redemption in Christ restores human dignity. And from the moment of redemption, God calls forth the very best from each of us.

City dwelling—living in the city of God—is God's highest design for redeemed man. Within the city of God lies the spiritual nourishment for our personal growth. God commands us to meet together. And Christians, whether individuals or entire churches, who live apart from the city of God endanger their spiritual well being.

Like the streets of the Landowner's city, the city of God, His Church, should be highly walkable with venues that foster—not frustrate—human contact. God's city is warm and pleasing to those who visit and take up residence. It is alive with culture—artistic works, vibrant musical expressions, literature and drama. And Christian culture should reflect God's theology.

God's city must be built with balance. Individual churches which emphasize teaching over prayer, worship over the word, grace over accountability or any one vital part of

Christian experience over another, skew God's message for the whole man. The fivefold ministry is a balanced gift that God has given to His Church.

The Church is a healing community, bringing together broken families, broken relationships and even estranged races. God's community should be so vibrant that the world and its ways are consumed by the Church's passion for God and His ways.

THE LANDOWNER'S THEOLOGY

THE CITY OF GOD will not be built from the ideas of men. God does not require our plans or schemes. He does not need pop psychology, slick marketing plans or media consultants. His theology—His truth—mingled with the work of the Holy Spirit, supplies all the requirements of His work.

Neither will the city of God be built from prayer alone. Even as a building's walls and floors are attached to its steel framework, so a sound, systematized, biblical theology is essential to support the Church.

WORK BEGINS

IN EPHESIANS 4:11 we read of God's gifts to the Church.

And He Himself gave some to be

- *apostles*
- *prophets*
- *evangelists*
- *pastors*
- *teachers*

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for

- *the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry*
- *the edifying of the body of Christ*

till we all come to

- *the unity of the faith*
- *the knowledge of the Son of God*
- *a perfect man*
- *the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*

Ephesians 4:11-13

For our purposes, I am going to examine God's gifts in a slightly different order.

- Prophets
- Teachers
- Apostles
- Pastors
- Evangelists

Before we begin, I should mention that the fivefold ministry of Ephesians 4:11 is God's gift to the Church. Ponder the power of such an idea. In these five leadership gifts, God has provided His Church with His kind of leadership. Go back and review the reasons God gave these ministries to the Church (verse 12 above). Finally, review and ponder God's mission for these gift ministries (verse 13).

Now let's explore the fivefold ministry.

1. THE PROPHETS (PLANNERS):

The eyes and ears of the prophets focus upon the Lord. They see. They hear. They envision God's kingdom. They measure the depth, height and breadth of all God has created.

The prophetic vision is expansive. Prophets do not concentrate on minutia and detail but on the whole. They conceptualize with integrity. They master the total. They understand how the smaller pieces fit together to make up the completed whole.

Prophets see the city of God not as it is but as what it can be. They think in three dimensions, in spatial, not linear terms. Prophets can reach into what seems like air to everyone else and come up with missing components that others cannot visualize.

Prophets have high standards. They quickly recognize inferior ideas and possess a low tolerance for them.

When prophetically gifted people are included as a vital part of church leadership and planning, when their ideas and heart are heard and received, the church moves toward wholeness. Without a prophetic voice in leadership, the Church struggles to find vision and direction. Instead of becoming a full fledged and vibrant city built from vision, the Church without a prophetic voice will be just a collection of disjointed subdivisions.

Envision our own community—Northern Virginia. Rather than develop from a thoughtful master plan, our region has simply evolved over several decades. Farms that once sat outside the parameters of development have now been swallowed by growth. Due to lack of early planning, our arteries and utility systems are congested and undersized and must be retrofitted to accommodate development.

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In the same way, lack of prophetic vision in building our churches has forced us to spiritually retrofit. It is always easier and more cost effective to install the ultimate infrastructure at the beginning. Going back requires undoing and tearing up ideas that are inferior or too small—in other words, pain and heartache.

2. THE TEACHERS (TECHNICIANS):

Teachers are God's technicians. They possess a passion for the Word of God. They examine the scriptures to find all of the detailed specifications necessary to ensure that the city of God is properly constructed. Unlike prophets who think spatially, teachers think linearly.

Like engineers, there are a diversity of teachers and subjects to be taught. Teachers find great joy in the details of the kingdom.

Without teachers, the city of God has no standards, plans or specifications from which to be built. God's city will not grow beyond concept or vision.

3. THE APOSTLES (GENERAL CONTRACTORS):

Apostles are the Master's builders possessing the skills necessary to bring each of the other four ministries in to their fullest expression. Apostles are hands on. They grasp the plan, understand the technical requirements, care for individual needs and preach the message of the city of God to those outside the city's walls.

Apostles are impassioned administrators, artfully guiding the project of God's kingdom to its completion.

4. THE PASTORS (TRADESMEN):

Effective pastors become intimately involved with as many lives as possible. Pastors appreciate individuality. They prize uniqueness. They invest time into the detail of people's lives. Like apostles, pastors are hands on.

Pastors care about people. They hurt when a member of their flock hurts. They get their hands into the "dirt" of people's lives and help them to get clean. They find treasure buried in people's souls. They often become intimate with their charges.

Like tradesmen, pastors bend, shape, cut, saw, mortar and join lives. Their careful work brings pieces of lives together to provide beauty and function in the body of Christ.

5. THE EVANGELISTS (MARKETERS):

Evangelists go forth into the world with the word of God and bring in the lost. Their deepest burden is for the unsaved.

How can the world ever learn about God and His city if some of us don't go out and tell them? Evangelists bring hope to a hopeless world.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

AS YOU CAN NO DOUBT TELL, I have invested more time and effort into developing the planning/prophetic & technical/teaching areas than the other three. I am naturally more slanted in these directions both in my career and my call. I encourage you to flesh out the areas where your burdens and giftings lie.

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Every phase of building God's city remains critical. Not one of the five strategic roles can be sacrificed or even slighted. Only as each of the five areas supply significant input can the body of Christ develop in a healthy fashion.

In biblical numbers, five represents grace. God supplies His grace through the unimpeded operation of these five ministry gifts. When one lacks, falls short or is purposely squelched, the Church, shortchanged of God's grace, suffers. But when all five roles operate according to God's plan, the Church flourishes with a supernatural, grace filled balance.

Churches out of balance—and nearly all churches fit this description—result from an overemphasis on either evangelism, the prophetic, teaching or shepherding. Few churches have genuine apostolic oversight.

Evangelical and Charismatic or Pentecostal churches are often built around one gifted

individual and tend to be skewed in one direction or another around the leader's giftings and vision. Traditional churches tend to be built around an historically based liturgical/sacramental/doctrinally driven framework shepherded by an ecclesiastical structure. Such arrangements do provide stability but often hinder gifted individuals from being as effective as they might otherwise be.

In conclusion, please bear in mind that my ideas are based upon my limited understanding at this point in time. Much more could, should and has been said about God's ministry gifts to His Church in Ephesians 4:11.

But please do consider my thoughts. Reflect upon them. Ponder the purposes of God in supplying these gifts to His church. And ask God to help us all understand His purposes and ways more clearly.

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PARABLE	EPH. 4:11	ROLE
Planners	Prophets	Visionaries
Technicians	Teachers	Specifiers
Contractors	Apostles	Managers
Tradesmen	Pastors	Builders
Marketers	Evangelists	Promoters