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## The Katartismos Pastor

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# The *katartismos* pastor

A few years ago, I went through a serious spell of “Lone Ranger” ministry. I was active in evangelism in the city of Auckland, conducting one program after another. I had the privilege of conducting a series of felt-need programs for different communities across the city. While the program was rewarding, the follow-up programs were time consuming. After conducting three programs, one after the other, I branched out to a series of meetings in a neighboring city. This ministry meant traveling to and fro for about a month, leaving home around 4:30 P.M., conducting the meetings, and arriving home after 10 P.M.

Even with all this work, I attempted to spend time with my wife and young children. My wife never complained about my workload, recognizing that I was “working for the Lord.” However, I became so engrossed in ministry that my time with them did suffer, I began to experience exhaustion, and my moods were not the best. As that year began to wind down, one day my wife and I took an inventory of our lives in a casual conversation that opened our eyes. Time with our family and loved ones really mattered to us, but we had not seen our extended family that whole year because I had been so busy. I did not even take my wife on a date that year.

Pastors often take on the role of “Lone Ranger.” They think that the church will not go on unless they reside at the helm, at every committee, at every function, at every meeting. Though surrounded by people, we minister

in isolation. Not only does the church become dependent on the pastor, but so often pastors are dependent on the church for their sense of work fulfillment. I failed that year in my role as equipper.

Indeed, an important role and function of the pastor includes that of “equipper” (*katartismos*). This Greek word, found only in Ephesians 4:12, is variously translated as “equip” (RSV), “perfect” (KJV), or “prepare” (NIV).<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:11–13 reads, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare [*katartismos*] God’s 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” (NIV).<sup>2</sup> We will look at the use of this word in Scripture in order to understand its meaning more fully and then draw out the implications for the pastor.

## Biblical mandate

The verb *katartizō*, found 17 times in the LXX, can mean “to establish” (Ps. 74:16); “to equip or restore” (Ps. 68:9); and “to complete and finish” (Ezra 4:12, 13). The word appears 13 times in the New Testament and can mean “to restore or mend” fishing nets (Matt. 4:21); “to restore a fallen brother” (Gal. 6:1); “to prepare” (Rom. 9:22; Heb. 10:5); and “to put into proper order, complete, furnish” (1 Thess. 3:10; 1 Cor. 1:10). The

word suggests making something work the way it was designed to, to bring something from a place of ineffectiveness to effectiveness.<sup>3</sup>

The deep and complex concept of *katartismos* strongly suggests that pastors are unable to *solely* carry out all that is required to fulfill this core function. The whole church needs to fulfill this ideal, but the pastor must lead, motivate, demonstrate, and empower the congregation in initiating, developing, and growing an equipping ministry in the local church.<sup>4</sup> When the pastor fulfills the role of equipper, the body of Christ is mobilized through the power of the Spirit, and the church itself becomes an equipping agency.

The pastor, who is the chief agent for change under the guidance of the Spirit, needs to be a leader who has a vision of what God can do in and through the local church. The pastor should not work like a Lone Ranger or manager but, rather, like a shepherd equipper. The pastor, working with a Lone Ranger or manager model of ministry, will not be able to cope or provide the vision and leadership to grow and lead the local church. The *katartismos* model takes its basis not just from the ministry practices of Jesus and Paul but also from the Exodus 18 story of Moses assigning leaders to groups of 10, 100, and 1,000. The idea behind this concept is simple: shepherds care for individual sheep, while shepherd equippers care for those who are caring for the sheep.<sup>5</sup> While this holds true, we must remember that Jesus did

participate in one-on-one ministry without the presence of His disciples. Thus, there will be occasions where the pastor will be engaged in one-on-one ministry. However, the prevailing mind-set in many churches is that the pastor must perform the duties of ministry, especially visitation and Bible studies. The expectation that the pastor is the only soul winner in the church is unbiblical and counterproductive. Yet this mentality is deeply ingrained. While the shepherd takes care of the sheep and leads them to green pastures, the sheep bear other sheep. As the pastor equips members, the church becomes a training center for ministry.<sup>6</sup> Pastors equip the members when they are effective in the body of Christ, utilizing their spiritual gifts and leading them into maturity (Eph. 4:14), spirituality (v. 15), and unity (v. 16).

## Implications for pastoral and evangelistic ministry

The vision, ministry capacity, and evangelistic effectiveness of a congregation rise and fall on leadership. Ineffective leaders equal ineffective ministries. In two of the churches to which my wife and I ministered, there were elders who had been in leadership for a number of years. These were good men who had run out of ideas. I still trusted and valued their leadership but knew I needed to develop future leaders. Through the nominating committee, I had two new associate elders appointed. These were younger men who loved the Lord and His work. I met with them over a period of some months during which I trained and then assigned them roles where they could care for new developing ministries.<sup>7</sup>

## Seek to multiply ministry by investing in a few

The Bible should be both a “message book” and a “method book.”<sup>8</sup> By investing His life in His 12 disciples, especially in the three (Peter, James,


and John), Jesus gives us the method of how to engage in fruitful ministry.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, *katartismos* pastors will gather a few people around them and teach and train them for one year to be effective workers for the Lord. The pastor may then have a leadership group and a discipleship group that he or she trains. The pastor prayerfully selects the discipleship group after consultation with the elders and the church board, many of whom may be part of the discipleship-training group. The pastor meets weekly with the group to pray, study the Word, fellowship, and clearly articulate a vision of discipleship for the group. After one year, each person in the group prayerfully connects with two other people to form a discipleship triad. After two years, those who were trained continue establishing discipleship triads. The pastor oversees all the triads; continues meeting with the original group, perhaps once a quarter; and then enlarges the group as the discipleship triad moves into the third and fourth years.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of these discipleship triads or groups is for the church to become an effective equipping agency and point to the genius of Jesus in challenging the church to “‘go and make disciples’” (Matt. 28:19, NIV).

Furthermore, within these discipleship structures both the Great Commission and the Great Charter will be fulfilled. The Great Commission is the mandate of Christ to go and make disciples (vv. 19, 20), while the Great Charter is the mandate of Christ to take care of His sheep (John 21:16). The one calls on the local church to make disciples; the other, to care for those disciples.<sup>11</sup> Both the commission and the charter continue to be conducted in the context of living, experiencing, and proclaiming the everlasting gospel (Rev. 14:6–12).

## Conclusion

We reap what we sow. If we only sow methods that result in education but not transformation, we will see poor outcomes in our people. Equipping is far more than Sabbath

preaching and midweek Bible teaching; it has to include application and transformation in our lives and in the lives of the people to whom we minister. Pastors must continue giving ministry away, for ministry belongs to the whole people of God! 

- 1 Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 128.
- 2 According to Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4–6*, Anchor Bible 34A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 478, it is a *locus classicus*, pointing out the coherence of the church's origin, order, and destiny. Ephesians 4:12 reads, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (NRSV). Scholars that support the NIV and NRSV include Barth, *Ephesians*, 478–481; E. Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 395–399; and H. W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 547–551.
- 3 Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 550. In summary, we find three primary ways in which the word *katartizō* is used in Scripture:
  1. Mend/restore (Ezra 4:12, 16; 5:3, 9; Ps. 68:9; Matt. 4:21; Mark 1:19; Gal. 6:1; 1 Thess. 3:10)
  2. Establish/lay foundations (Exod. 15:17; Ps. 8:2; 17:5; 74:16; 89:37; Heb. 11:5)
  3. Prepare/train (Luke 6:40; Rom. 9:23; Eph. 4:12; Heb. 10:5)
- 4 This corporate reading of Ephesians suggests that the whole church must become an equipping agency. Martin Kitchen states, “The whole of the epistle focuses upon the corporate nature of Christian origin, existence and behaviour.” *Ephesians*, New Testament Readings (London: Routledge, 1994), 119. See also Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 2002).
- 5 Joel Comiskey, *Leadership Explosion* (Houston: Touch Publications, 2000), 106.
- 6 Russell Burrill, *Revolution in the Church: Unleashing the Awesome Power of Lay Ministry* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1993), 29.
- 7 Greg Ogden states, “The manner in which the Lord works is incarnational: life rubs up against life. We pass on Christlikeness through intimate modeling.” *Discipleship Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 21. (See 1 Cor. 4:16; 1 Thess. 1:6.)
- 8 Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 60.
- 9 Robert Coleman states, “The best work is always done with a few. Better to give a year or so to one or two men who learn what it means to conquer for Christ than to spend a lifetime with a congregation just keeping the program going.” *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1963), 117.
- 10 See the outstanding book by Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*.
- 11 Melvin J. Steinbron, *The Lay Driven Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1997), 67. For further insights on equipping, see R. Paul Stevens and Phil Collins, *The Equipping Pastor* (New York: Alban Institute, 1993), 128–130. They state that pastors ought to (1) work with the whole church and with individuals as required. Also let the group equip others. (2) Cultivate healthy interdependence among members. Equipping is a relational ministry and not a program. It involves building people's lives and families. And (3) lead the process of discipleship and not just the people.

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