The Katartismos Pastor

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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). 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). 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.

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. 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. While this holds true, we must remember that Jesus did

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Ministry by investing in a training center for ministry. 6 Pastors equips members, the church becomes and leads them to green pastures, the shepherd takes care of the sheep this mentality is deeply ingrained. While the only soul winner in the church is unbiblical and counterproductive. Yet is the only ministry capable of developing ministries.7

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.7

Seek to multiply ministry by investing in a few

The Bible should be both a “message book” and a “method book." 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.9 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.10 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.11 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!  

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