

Equip the saints Handout and discussion questions

1. Dwelling in the Word. Ephesians 4:7-16 (see final pages of this handout)

Discussion point:

"The verse is clear. The saints are the ones doing the works of service. Every single believer is to be involved in using his or her own gifts for building God's kingdom. There is more than enough work to go around. God has a job for you (Ephesians 2:10)."

You cannot be mature if you are not engaging in the work of ministry!

Discussion questions:

Given Paul's words in Ephesians 4, how mature is your congregation, in terms of *all believers* using their gifts to build up the body of Christ? Rate your congregation from one to ten. What would it practically look like to move one number up that scale? What would need to happen?

In what ways is your congregation actively equipping your members for their lives of witness and proclamation in their everyday vocation?

What *could* you do to improve that equipping?

2. Equip the saints...for discipleship in the church and in the world.

"Those in full-time church ministry too easily forget that there are two spheres that church leadership must constantly tend to: (1) The development and implementation of church leadership and (2) the development and implementation of regular, ordinary Christians in their work outside of the church context, utilizing their gifts for the common good...The goal should be equipping and empowering Christians to be Salt and Light in every nook and cranny of the world in which they find themselves"¹.

Ephesians 2:8-10: we are saved by grace FOR good works: poiema, masterpiece/handiwork

Not just what are we saved *from*, but what are we saved *for*?

Luther's quote on faith and good works.

Discussion questions:

Does your congregation have a plan for making disciples?

Is the plan working?

In what ways is your congregation equipping your members for building up the body of Christ?

What could you do to improve that equipping?

¹ Bob Robinson. Accessed at <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/reintegrate/2017/04/28/great-worrisome-irony-apest/> on 1/02/2024

In what ways is your congregation equipping your members for their lives of witness and proclamation in their everyday vocation?

What could you do to improve that equipping?

3. Prepared AND Equipped

Being 'prepared' is being 'ready, willing' to do what God says. It's the internal axis of **motivation, confidence or willingness** (bible verses).

Being 'equipped' is having the skill and knowledge to do something. It is the external axis of **competence** (bible verses).

Discussion questions:

You can be prepared without being equipped. You can be equipped without being prepared (as I think many Lutherans are).

Get table groups to talk about this.

Which do you think is a greater challenge for you and for the members of your congregation: being prepared (confidence, motivation) or being equipped (competence, skill)?

How well equipped do you think you are?

How prepared are you to put into practice the commands of Jesus? What is your level of willingness?

4. The virtuous cycle (as opposed to the vicious circle!)

Jesus: "Blessed are those who hear my words and *put them into practice.*" *Matthew 7:24-26*
Equipping the saints doesn't just mean teaching them. It means giving them opportunities to put it into practice, learning through an apprenticeship model. We are to learn from the master, and we are to reproduce disciples who can make disciples.

A quote from research into effective learning:

"Deliberate practice (DP) occurs when an individual intentionally repeats an activity in order to improve performance. The claim of the DP framework is that such behaviour is **necessary** to achieve high levels of expert performance"²

"Deliberate practice consists of activities purposely designed to improve performance"³

Discussion questions:

² Campitelli & Gobet, 2011, p. 280, quoted by Brabeck, Jeffrey, and Fry, *Designing activities with the goal of transferring knowledge*, accessed at <https://www.apa.org/education-career/k12/practice-acquisition>, on 11/12/2023

³ Gobet & Campitelli, 2007, p. 160, quoted by Brabeck, Jeffrey, and Fry, *Designing activities with the goal of transferring knowledge*, accessed at <https://www.apa.org/education-career/k12/practice-acquisition>, on 11/12/2023

Discuss the following challenging quote from Neil Cole:

*"The church is suffering from a bottleneck of teaching without obedience. In essence, we are educated beyond our obedience, which is not to say that we know a lot, but that we do not practice the elementary things we do know"*⁴ Neil Cole, *Search and Rescue* p 176

Do you agree? Disagree? Partly agree? How does the Holy Spirit want to use this challenge to help you step out of your comfort zone?

Talk about a time you put Jesus' words into practice. What happened? How did you see God at work or discover God was faithful?

How can we actively ensure the 'virtuous cycle' is built into our teaching and learning?

Which point of the virtuous cycle do you most get stuck at? Why?

How does the 'virtuous cycle' build culture?

What could your congregation do as small 'faith experiments' in hearing and putting into practice the words of Jesus? To rephrase the question, what steps could you take to experience the second part of the virtuous cycle?

5. The discipleship square – a model for apprenticeship based equipping⁵

Discussion questions:

How is the discipleship square paradigm different from the way we normally do things in leadership?

Do you recognise where you/your congregation has missed parts of the discipleship square or got them out of order?

Why is D2 (the right hand side of the square) so difficult? As leaders, what can you do to lead apprentices through this difficult phase of learning?

6. The 2:2:2 Principle

2 Timothy 2:2 speaks about four generations of disciples.

(Name them...1. 2. 3. 4.)

This is about intentional multiplication of leaders!

We have not yet been effective in equipping the saints if we do not have fourth generation discipleship.

Discussion questions:

Fruitful 'equipping the saints' reaches to the fourth generation of disciples.

How are we measuring up against this standard?

What would our churches and ministries look like if we were embedding fourth-gen multiplication? What would need to change? What paradigms must be broken?

⁴ Neil Cole, *Search and Rescue: Becoming a Disciple who makes a difference* p 176

⁵ The Discipleship Square is extracted and modified from *Building a Discipling Culture, 3rd Edition*, by Mike Breen.

7. Tools that prepare and equip.

Discussion Questions

What other tools also prepare and equip the people of God?

How is your congregation putting these tools into practice?

8. Some examples

Can I pray with you?

Would you like to read the bible with me?

Discussion questions:

How could you move from 'additional' (doing extra stuff) to 'intentional' (making use of rhythms and practices that already happen) use of these tools? One practical example: you eat 21 meals a week, give or take a few. How could you use two of those meals in discipling others?

What strikes you about the Luke 10 set of practices – bless, eat, heal, tell? Which of these would you like training and equipping in?

With whom could you say the five simple words? With whom could you say the nine simple words?

Bible Discovery Method outline

- Read the passage aloud twice
- Close your bible (or put down your device)
- Retell the story from memory
- Open your bible
- Sit quietly
- Answer four questions:
 - What stands out for you right now?
 - What does it say about God or Jesus?
 - What are you going to do as a result of this passage?
 - Who are you going to tell about this?

Note: Q3 and Q4 are non-negotiable.

9. Conclusion

What is ONE THING you want to take from this session back to your congregation? Teach it to your table group.

What ONE PRACTICE you have learned do you want to try/keep doing?

WHEN will you give it a go?

WHO will you do it with?

WHO is ONE PERSON you want to apprentice deeper into a particular aspect of discipleship (preparing and equipping)? HOW and WHEN will you do that? Who else will you tell, to help keep you accountable?

1. Dwelling in the Word. Ephesians 4:7-16

Ephesians 4:7-16

⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people."

⁹ (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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 people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ 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.

Your notes:

Notes on your partner's discovery:

Dwelling in the Word outline

Pray together. A simple prayer might be 'Holy Spirit, open up your Word for us, and open our hearts as we read. In Jesus' name. Amen.'

1. Listen to the Word.

One person reads through the bible passage aloud, slowly. Pause between verses or phrases. Repeat the reading.

Sit in silence for 90 seconds or more.

Jot down thoughts as they come to you. Questions that might help form your thoughts include:

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Does the text connect with your life at any point?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?

2. Listen to one another.

Begin *listening to one another*. Split into pairs, and tell each other what you heard in the text. Listen well until each person is speaking freely. Take seven to ten minutes for this part. Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report back to the whole group what your *partner* said (not what you found!)

3. Listen to the group.

Now get your pair together with one or two other pairs. Report back to this group **what your partner said**. Give five minutes or so for this part.

After pairs have shared, give time for the whole group to report what were some of the important things coming out of this discussion. Finish with prayer.

Participants can return to this passage at any time during the day. For example, 'Remember what we read in the Dwelling in the Word passage? I think we need to remember this (thing we heard from Dwelling in the Word).'

The Dwelling in the Word passage sets the foundation for the whole time together.