

Equipping Counselors for Your Church

The 4E Ministry Training Strategy

By

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Chapter One

More Than Counseling: Catching God's Vision for the Entire Church

With our regular attendance of 275 people, ours was an average-size church, at least in the mega-church culture of the day. But because our church served an infinite God and tenaciously pursued a giant vision for every-member-ministry, we were significant in God's eyes. Perhaps that's why, in His affectionate sovereignty, He called us to face a significant situation.

At first glance, Steve and Alexis were the All-American Couple living the American dream. Married over two decades, three teen children who would make any parent proud, great jobs, beautiful home, active in their previous church...

But look beneath the surface and you would see another story, as I did the day that their oldest son, Eric, knocked on my office door. Hesitantly, he unfolded a family narrative that shared how their American dream had become a family nightmare. One child physically abused. Another child depressed. A mom who was fearful and in denial. A dad who was angry and controlling. Infidelity had previously rocked the family.

A church our size—we should refer, right? An average-size congregation, surely we did not have the resources to meet such an immense and complicated crisis, right?

There was nothing small or average about this problem. If most churches and Christians are honest, nothing that unusual either. Filled with sin and suffering, yes. But out-of-the-norm, no. By God's grace, there was nothing small or average about our response because there had been nothing small or average about our *proactive, congregation-wide preparation* for such messy, real-life issues.

From the day I first candidated to be Sr. Pastor, I asked God to help us to change the ministry mindset from small church, pastor-centered (the Milton Berle church) to big God, equipping-focused (the Ed Sullivan church). To communicate this shift in perspective, I declined the title *Sr. Pastor*, choosing instead the clunky but precise title *Congregational Discipleship Pastor*. That didn't mean that I would disciple everyone. It did mean that my main calling was to oversee that *we* disciplined every member.

That's why, two short, but intense and active years later, an entire congregation was prepared to unite as a team, a family, as the Body of Christ to minister to this young man, his parents, and his siblings. Even before Eric walked out of my office, biblical, relational, relevant plans were in place to begin to address not only the immediate crisis, but also the ongoing heart issues. Our "average" church had learned the awesome lesson about how to change lives with Christ changeless truth. Together, we caught and cast the vision of the priesthood of every believer—not as some academic idea, but as our biblical calling.

We understood that "pastoral care" is not just what the pastor does, but what every member is equipped to offer. With my Th.M. in Biblical Counseling and my Ph.D. in Counselor Education, I could have (unwisely) tried to handle this on my own. Instead, we responded as a united family to minister Christ-centered help to this family.

Steve met with me for formal biblical counseling (while a trainee participated in our sessions). Steve and Alexis met for formal biblical counseling with one of our trained biblical counselors. One of our elders began an informal, but intensive mentoring relationship with Eric. One of our deacons began the same with Eric's younger brother. One female biblical counselor

met with Eric's younger sister in a mentoring relationship, and another met for formal biblical counseling with Alexis.

We understood that "biblical counseling" is not simply a ministry of a few in one corner of the church, but a mindset of an entire congregation that the Bible is sufficient for every life issue. With our active LEAD (Life Encouragers And Disciplers) group of trained biblical counselors, we could have (unwisely) tried to handle this within the confines of the biblical counseling ministry. Instead, we responded as an equipped congregation to minister to this family.

Because there was evidence of physical abuse, we worked through the proper channels and worked out a plan for the daughter to stay for a period of time in the home of a family in our church—a family equipped to minister biblically and lovingly. Our *Iron Sharpeners* men's ministry provided Steve with love—tough love. Our women's ministry became a haven, but not an escape, for Alexis.

It took a congregation. It took both formal biblical counseling and informal one-another ministry. Both emphasized the personal ministry of the Word where members spoke and lived God's truth into the lives of this family.

We understood that "one-another ministry" is not just shallow chit-chat reserved for the "easy stuff," but a biblical vision for the entire church for all of life. With our connections with licensed Christian counselors in the community, we could have referred this whole "matter" to outside professionals and assumed that our only roles were to pray and hug (both essential callings). Instead, we responded as the unified Body of Christ to minister comprehensively to this family. (Of course, given the issue of abuse, we communicated with outside authorities; and given the issue of depression, we consulted with medical personnel.)

The ongoing, intensive, intimate, biblical response of our church exemplifies the purpose of this book. I want to help your church to become a place not simply *with* a biblical counseling ministry, but *of* biblical counseling. You don't need another program. You want a congregation saturated by the vision of every-member ministry and equipped to offer one-another ministry. Even more, you want a congregation where *every member is a disciple-maker*.

Every Member a Disciple-Maker

It's in to talk about every member a minister. I get that and I agree. However, I don't think the language of every member a minister goes far enough. My passion, the passion of this book, and most importantly, God's passion focus on every member a disciple-maker. That ministry mindset shift changes everything.

Every member a disciple-maker explains the title of this chapter: *More Than Counseling*. Biblical counseling is vital—it is my life calling. Launching biblical counseling ministries is important—you will learn how to do that in this book. You won't learn *less than* that, however, you will learn *more than* that—much more.

The 4E Ministry Training Strategy is nothing less than an application of the Apostle Paul's admonition in 2 Timothy 2:2 to pass the baton of ministry. "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." It's the Ed Sullivan church.

"Teach" is the same Greek word Jesus chose in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20. The word implies much more than academic knowledge. Instead, it embodies the "4Cs" of disciple-making that we will learn throughout this book:

- Biblical Content/Conviction
- Christ-like Character
- Counseling Competence
- Christian Community

In order to help Steve, Alexis, and their family—especially to help them not only in a reactive crisis mode, but also in a proactive discipleship mode, our congregation needed 4E equipping for 4C ministry. That’s exactly what you are about to learn in this book—how to *make disciple-makers*. This chapter equips you to become a catalyst who spurs your congregation to catch God’s vision for every-member disciple-making.

The Big Picture: The End Goal—Transformed People

The end goal of this book and of all church ministry is not simply to launch a biblical counseling ministry. The end goal is transformed people—people transformed into the image of Christ. Remember this core theme:

- A relationship with *the* transforming Person (Christ)
- Produces transforming leaders (you and your team)
- Who relationally lead a transforming process (the 4Es)
- That the Spirit uses in transforming your church (the Body of Christ)
- So others (the congregation and community) are also transformed into disciple-makers.

My vision is to equip you to build an equipping culture. God’s fundamental vision for Body growth focuses on every member speaking the truth in love one to another in every situation. That’s it. Get that and you get this chapter—you get God’s purpose for His Body today.

It’s everywhere. It’s in Ephesians 4:11-16; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Romans 15:14; Hebrews 3:12-13; Hebrews 10:24-25; Philippians 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 2:8; 2 Timothy 2:2; Matthew 22:34-40 with Matthew 28:16-20. God’s end goal is for every member to be a disciple-maker who speaks and lives Gospel truth in love to help every member to grow in content, character, competence, and community.

One of the problems with the way we have defined biblical counseling is that we have made it about problem-solving. We’ve made it a sub-set of discipleship focused on reactive work with persons struggling with sin. Instead, we should think of biblical counseling as another word for comprehensive personal discipleship. Biblical counseling is focused one-another ministry designed to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

We don’t want to create the ministry mindset where the only way people can relate to one another is by discussing their problems. The goal is to move people forward in Christlikeness whether or not they are facing specific crisis problems. We need a definition of biblical counseling that encompasses all of life.

Christ-centered, church-based, comprehensive, compassionate, and culturally-informed biblical counseling depends upon the Holy Spirit to relate God’s Word to suffering and sin by speaking and living God’s truth in love to equip people to love God and one another (Matthew 22:35-40). It cultivates conformity to Christ and communion with Christ and the Body of Christ leading to a community of one-another disciple-makers (Matthew 28:18-20).

I love biblical counseling, but we can't see it as a ministry of a few people to a few "unhealthy" people. Biblical counseling is the calling of all of God's people all of the time because we are all striving to grow in Christ all the time.

So, does that mean we shouldn't launch local church counseling ministries? Not at all. There is nothing unbiblical about people with a special gifting and a special passion wanting to focus their ministry energy on biblical counseling.

Just like there is nothing unbiblical about some folks in a church taking extensive training in evangelism. Does that mean that only the "evangelism folks" are called to share their faith? Of course not. We want a church *of* evangelists where everyone is passionate about and has some equipping in sharing their faith, even if we also have some within the church who give more of their focused time to evangelism. In the same way, we want a church *of* biblical counseling where everyone is passionate about and has some equipping in speaking the truth in love, even if we also have some within the church who give more of their focused time to biblical counseling. This book helps you with *both* goals.

In my ministry as a pastor in three churches, and in my consulting ministry, I use simple language to identify this both/and idea of equipping every member for one-another disciple-making *and* equipping some members for biblical counseling. I call every-member ministry the *Informal Model*. Throughout this chapter and book, you will gain practical insight into how to saturate your congregation with passion for and equipping in every-member disciple-making through the *Informal Model*. Throughout the book you will also be trained to envision, enlist, equip, and empower biblical counselors—the *Formal Model*.

The Big Question: The End Game—Disciple-Makers

When we understand the big picture, then we are prepared to ask the big questions—the right questions. Questions like:

- How do we make disciple-makers?
- How do we leave a legacy of loving leaders?
- How do we encourage our congregation to be caught by God's vision for every member a disciple-maker?

It is when we are asking and answering these big picture questions that we are best prepared to ask the more specific questions related to equipping biblical counselors for one-another ministry. Questions like:

- How do we effectively disciple the Body of Christ for one-another ministry in the church and community?
- How do we prepare people for the personal ministry of the Word?
- What is God's strategy for preparing a congregation to speak the truth in love to one another?

I asked you the biggest of big questions in the Introduction. *Want to change lives?* There is nothing more life-changing than discipling disciple-makers, passing the baton of ministry, and leaving a legacy of loving leaders.

This was our goal in ministering to Steve and Alexis. Not only is their marriage united and glorifying Christ, not only is their parenting (of their now young adult children) vibrant; they are now discipling other disciple-makers. They not only made it through their family crisis; they became Christ-centered disciple-makers as a result of moving through their crisis with Christ and the Body of Christ.

The Personal Ministry of the Word: Seven Church “Styles”

Sometimes when I train pastors, especially in seminary settings, I get a push back about “counseling.” It typically sounds something like this, “I do my counseling from the pulpit. People don’t need anything but the preached Word.”

Having been a Sr. Pastor, and rarely having given up the pulpit, I don’t take issue with any pastor who is passionate about the pulpit ministry of the Word. I do take issue with anyone who pits the pulpit ministry of the Word against the personal ministry of the Word.

All biblical ministry should involve speaking the truth in love. That should be done from the pulpit to the crowd through an equipped person fully focused and prepared to relate God’s truth to people’s lives—the *pulpit ministry of the Word*. Speaking the truth in love also should be done one-to-one and in small groups, both formally and informally, as members of the Body of Christ change lives with Christ’s changeless truth—the *personal ministry of the Word*. If we want a church of biblical counseling where everything is saturated with the conviction that God’s Word is sufficient for all of life, then pulpit ministry and personal ministry must remain in harmony.

Disciple-Making Champions

As part of my best practice research, I surveyed two dozen cutting-edge churches that equip their people to speak the truth in love. Throughout each chapter we will hear from these *Disciple-Making Champions*.ⁱ

Disciple-Making Champions:

Steve Viars, Sr. Pastor and Rob Green, Counseling Pastor, Faith Baptist Church

Steve Viars and Rob Green are just two of many leaders of the biblical counseling ministry at Faith Baptist Church in Lafayette, Indiana. At Faith, you find no discrepancy between what happens in the pulpit, what occurs in formal biblical counseling sessions, and what transpires in informal spiritual conversations.

Our goal is to be a church of biblical counseling—we want these truths to permeate everything we do.... Call it counseling; call it specialized discipleship. It doesn’t matter. We want to be a progressive sanctification machine, a discipleship factory. We want people growing and changing where God’s Word and Spirit make each of us more like Jesus Christ through careful attention to the inner person. That is what brings honor to God.... The goal of our biblical counseling training just like the goal of all our ministries is to glorify God by winning people to Jesus Christ (for unsaved counselees) and equipping them to be more faithful disciples (for saved counselees).

Pastor Bill Goode, the Sr. Pastor who preceded Pastor Viars, and who launched Faith's Biblical Counseling Ministry, clung to the same vision.

The local church *is* a counseling ministry. The question is not, "Should Christians counsel each other?" because they already are. Most Christians are ministering to one another on a personal basis. So the question is, "What *kind* of counseling is offered? How *effective* is the ministry? Do people have *confidence* that the Word of God has answers to everyday life problems?"

**Disciple-Making Champion:
Pastor Mike Wilkerson, Pastor of Biblical Living, Mars Hill Church**

Mike Wilkerson's title screams Ephesians 4 vision: *Pastor of Biblical Living*. Mike pastors at Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington. He makes plain their biblical philosophy. "When I say we envision being a church *of* biblical counseling, that's just to say that one-anothering is normative in our church life."

Pastor Wilkerson uses several terms to show the synergy between the pulpit ministry of the Word and the personal ministry of the Word. He describes the pulpit ministry of the Word as the "air wars" in which sermons bomb the shores, softening and preparing hearts for the personal ministry of the Word. He calls that the "ground wars" in which biblical counseling, small group ministry, and one-anothering provide the hand-to-hand combat in helping each member of the Body to be disciple-makers.

When we re-launched the ministry, since our Sr. Pastor initiated the process, and he desired unity, we all agreed on the biblical direction. So we had the Air War covered—the biblical philosophy of ministry embedded in the preaching. The Ground War is an equal priority. We're committed to building it well—theologically and relationally—and having it unified with the Air War (the pulpit).

When it comes to the personal ministry of the Word, not every church is like Faith Baptist and Mars Hill. Churches have various styles of doing relational ministry. Knowing how personal needs are met in typical churches helps us to compare and contrast these models with God's vision for His church.

The Staff Model

When a person in a church has "a problem," a primary way that many churches respond to that person is through the *staff model* where the main care-giver is one of the pastors. This approach uses the classic pastoral care model where the pastor marries and buries, ministering from cradle to casket, in the home and in the hospital. The pastor typically focuses in a reactive way on crisis needs.

A potential strength of this model is that theoretically you have well-trained care-givers. Unfortunately, very few pastors believe they have received effective training in the personal ministry of the Word. There are major weaknesses in this approach, including pastoral "burn out" and the pastor monopolizing the ministry (the Milton Berle church). Also, the majority of

members are not ministered to because the focus is on the “unhealthy person in crisis.” People learn that if they want the pastor’s attention, they better have a problem. As a church grows, there is no way for one person or even a staff of people to minister to the entire congregation.

The Shepherding Model

Because the staff model can’t work as churches grow, other churches implement the *shepherding model*. In this approach, the primary care-givers are deacons, deaconesses, elders, ministry of mercy team members, shut-in teams, visitation teams, etc. The methods vary, sometimes using tele-care, other times systematic home visitation, or crisis responses teams, or dividing the church into groups with someone designated to oversee care for group members. Typically the ministry occurs on a regular but infrequent basis as the focus is on “touching base” so no one “falls through the cracks.”

Strengths include many members having a ministry, every member having a minister, and no one falling through the cracks. Weaknesses include some members resisting being assigned to a certain group since this model is often geographically-based rather than based upon natural relationships. Additionally, the team members may burn out, drop out, or drop the ball. At times training is inadequate and sometimes non-existent.

The Small Group Model

Since intimacy and frequency is often missing in the shepherding model, many churches use the *small group model* as their primary vehicle for meeting personal needs. Here the care-giver is the small group leader and hopefully each small group member. Methods vary since small group ministries have a myriad of philosophies. The frequency of care typically involves weekly to monthly connection on an ongoing basis, sometimes being time-limited.

There are numerous strengths in this model when it is run well. Many members are ministered to and many members can have a ministry. Close relationships can develop and spontaneous need-meeting often occurs. There are, however, weaknesses in this model. Those not in small groups (in many churches at least 50% of the congregation) fall through the cracks. Unfortunately, many churches provide little equipping in small group leadership—especially in the personal ministry of the Word of speaking the truth in love.

The Sunday School Model

Larger churches often institute adult Sunday school classes frequently known as Adult Bible Fellowships (ABFs). These ABFs become mini-congregations within the congregation. The care-giver in this *Sunday school model* is the ABF teacher, or the ABF care group leader. Methods include meeting needs through care groups, tele-care, and spontaneous need-meeting. The focus is placed on crisis need-meeting, plus semi-regular touching base, as well as periodic social/fellowship gatherings.

There are several strengths in this approach. Many members have a ministry and many are ministered to. No one in the ABFs falls through the cracks. Weaknesses include those not in ABFs falling through the cracks. Also, at times you find untrained care-givers, few counseling needs are typically met, and ministers burn out and drop out.

The Specialist Model

Some churches, especially with “tough cases,” select the *specialist model*. In this method, the care-giver, if inside the church, is the pastoral counselor or lay counselor. If outside the church, the care-giver is the licensed counselor, social worker, or psychologist. The method of care-giving involves scheduled appointments for primary care. The focus is on crisis need-meeting and on-going counseling.

Strengths include, theoretically, well-trained care-givers offering intensive help for intense life issues. If inside the church, weaknesses include a professionalized and specialized model of ministry, counselors who are not fully equipped, and few members ministering. If referred out, weaknesses include potentially secular care, or Christian care that is not biblically-based. Also, the role of the church as a discipling community is minimized. At best, this model results in a church *with* biblical counseling, but it is not a church *of* biblical counseling.

The Spontaneous Model

In reaction to the professionalized approach, many churches follow the *spontaneous model*. In this method, theoretically every member cares intimately for a few other members. The methods include an Acts 2 spontaneous combustion model aided by a passion for connection built into the preaching, the vision statement, and the hearts of members. The focus is on the holistic care of members as found in Acts 2:42-47. Ideally, the frequency is daily as needs are perceived and shared.

The strengths are obvious: the model is biblically-based and involves Holy Spirit-empowered reciprocal one-another ministry of every member. However, in actuality, often only the deeply connected are cared for. Additionally, this model often minimizes training because it lacks a focus on “organizing the organism.” At best, this model results in a church *of* one another ministry, but it is not always a church *with* biblical enlisting, equipping, and empowering.

The Scripture and Sacraments Model

Other churches react against a therapeutic, seeker-sensitive culture and decide to follow a *Scripture and Sacrament model*. Picture this as the pulpit ministry of the Word minus the personal ministry of the Word. The method involves little structured means for care-giving and need-meeting with the assumption that the truth preached from the pulpit produces two results: it provides all the biblical counseling necessary, and it motivates the Body equipped by the pulpit to minister to one another. The focus typically is upon doctrinal correctness and depth.

There are obvious strengths to this model. Truth is preached. Doctrine is learned. People can be inspired to live an Acts 2:42-47 body life approach. There are also weaknesses. The personal ministry of the Word is de-emphasized and if it happens at all the care-givers are often ill-equipped to translate truth to life. They know truth, but they don’t know how to bridge the truth-life gap. At times the staunch preaching of doctrine can lead to a mood of truth trumping love, of head over heart.

The Biblical Plumb Line

As you reflect on these seven styles of meeting congregational needs, which do you value? As you ponder your church, which methods does it blend together? How well do they function?

My objective in presenting this overview is not to say, “Don’t implement any of these models.” Many have real value. My purpose is to encourage you to evaluate each model using Ephesians 4:11-16 as your biblical plumb line.

My goal is to urge you to use a 4E strategy when you implement any of these models. In my ministry experience, research, and consulting, very few of these models apply a comprehensive *envisioning, enlisting, equipping, and empowering* philosophy to ensure that the model is biblically-sound and practically-effective.

My aim is to highlight how most of these ministry models fail the “both/and test.” They rarely include both the pulpit ministry of the Word and the personal ministry of the Word; both truth and love; both the formal and informal modes of speaking the truth in love; both pastors-teachers equipping the Body and the Body doing works of service; and rarely include the vision of a church *of* and a church *with*. They lack a comprehensive approach to training God’s people.

Most importantly, none of these models highlight or effectively result in making disciple-makers. Most focus on meeting personal needs—not a bad aim, but not God’s ultimate vision. Others focus on care-giving and some on every member a minister—but not on *every member a disciple-maker*. Even the Scripture/Sacrament model which seeks to prioritize making deep disciples follows a model that will not result in equipped disciple-makers. Telling truth does not produce 4C disciple-makers. Section three on equipping describes the type of training that best produces disciple-makers who are complete in knowledge (content/conviction), full of goodness (character), and competent to counsel (competence) one another (community).

God’s Grand Vision for His Church: Ephesians 4:11-16

In Ephesians 4:11-16, the Apostle Paul highlights the Bible’s most powerful, focused vision statement for the Church. This passage offers God’s ministry description for church leaders and for every member. By distilling the essence of God’s call, His vision captures our imagination and motivates the shift in ministry mindset that changes everything.

The Résumé of Pastors

Most pastoral search committees would be thrilled to read a candidate’s résumé that demonstrated the ability to preach, counsel, and administrate. Most seminaries would be delighted if graduate exit interviews indicated that pastoral ministry students perceived that their seminary training equipped them for preaching, counseling, and administrating. Being equipped to *do* the work of the ministry seems to be everyone’s ideal goal for church leaders.

Everyone but Christ. His pastoral ministry description demands the ability to *equip* others to do the work of the ministry. If seminaries followed Christ’s vision for pastoral ministry, they would focus on *training trainers*. If pastoral search committees desired in a pastor what Christ desires, they would throw out every résumé that failed to emphasize experience in and passion for *equipping the saints*.

You would think that we would listen to the Head of the Church. Paul spends the chapters and verses leading up to Ephesians 4:11-16 showing why Christ has the right to write the pastor-teacher's ministry description.

- He is our Redeemer in whom our full salvation is complete (1:1-14). We should surrender to His will for His redeemed people.
- He is seated at God's right hand ruling over everything with all authority, appointed the Head over everything for the Church which is His Body (1:15-23). We should follow His directives for the Church.
- We are His workmanship, created in Christ to do the beautiful work prepared for us from all eternity (2:1-10). We should want to know what He prepared pastors and people for.
- He is the chief cornerstone upon whom the whole building (the church) is being built (2:11-22). We should follow His architectural drawings for the Church.
- He is the revelation of God's grace toward which all time and eternity have been moving (3:1-14). We should yield to His infinite wisdom for His people.
- His love for us surpasses all knowledge (3:15-21). We should submit to His calling on our lives.
- He ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe (4:1-10). We should listen to the Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of the universe.

The Pastoral Ministry Mindset Shift That Changes Everything: Every Pastor an Equipper of Equippers

Instead, we listen to modern church culture that screams, "The pastor is the preacher, caregiver, and CEO!" It's time to listen to the Head of the Church. "It was he who gave some to be ... pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service..." (Ephesians 4:11-12a). *Christ's grand plan for His Church is for pastors/teachers to focus on equipping every member to do the work of the ministry.*

Under the Spirit's inspiration, Paul launches verse 12 with a tiny Greek word (*pros*) translated by an even smaller English word ("to") with giant meaning: with the conscious purpose of, in order for, for the sake of, with a view to. The word indicates the future aim and ultimate goal of a current action. That is, by definition, a vision statement—Christ's grand vision statement for every pastor/teacher.

What is the future view, the future vision to which Christ sovereignly gave His Church pastors and teachers? Paul says it succinctly: *"To prepare God's people for works of service."* These eight words must be every church leader's reason for existence.

One central word—"prepare"—must capture every leader's passion for ministry. "Prepare" comes from the word for artist, craftsman. Local church leader—your special craft, your opus is people, equipped people, disciple-makers. Your spiritual craft or gift is to help others to scout out their spiritual gift, identify that area of ministry, and empower them to use that gift.

In Paul's day, people commonly used "prepare" in the context of conditioning an athlete. Local church leader—you are a spiritual conditioning coach. Your job is not to play all the positions on the team, but to coach every player on the team, to strengthen their spiritual condition so they are able to do works of service. This fits perfectly with how Paul uses the word prepare—to train someone so they are fully fit and mature enough to complete their calling. *The leader's calling is to help God's people to fulfill their calling.*

These weren't just words for Paul. He made making disciple-makers his personal ministry description—Colossians 1:28-29. He made equipping equippers his personal ministry practice—Acts 20:13-38. Christ's grand vision so captured Paul's ministry mindset that at the end of his life he passed onto Timothy the vision of equipping equippers of equippers—2 Timothy 2:2. The baton of equipping passed from Christ's hands, to Paul's hands, to Timothy's hands, to the hands of reliable disciple-makers who passed it on yet again.

Let's not drop the baton. Let's keep Christ's grand vision alive and moving into the future.

Yes, But

Some may ask, "Are you saying that pastors should not preach the Word, counsel, and administrate?" Not at all. Christ, the Head of the Church, has written the primary ministry description for all pastors. Pastors should equip equippers for the work of the ministry. Within this overriding calling, pastors can preach, counsel, and administrate.

When I was Sr. Pastor, every time I preached, I asked myself, "How does this message further my calling to be a catalyst for equipping the saints for the work of ministry?" As a player-coach, when I counseled, I had trainees in the room with me. When I visited the hospital, I took apprentices with me. My goal wasn't to be the church's primary care-giver, but to equip a church of care-givers. In my administrative role, I sought to oversee the equipping of every member. Yes, I preached, counseled, and administrated—always within the context of Christ's grand vision for the Church—the pastor as the equipper of equippers.

Others may be thinking, "I'm with you 100%, but I'm not an ordained pastor, although I am a recognized, active ministry leader in my church. How should I apply these truths?" Ephesians 4:11-12 provides the ministry description for all those raised up for church leadership. If you are the Small Group Director, ask, "How can I oversee that all our small group leaders and members are being discipled to speak the truth in love?" If you are the Women's Ministry Director, ask, "How can I fulfill Christ's call for me to equip women to equip others?"

The Résumé of the People of God

Sadly, in far too many churches, the people of God are second-class citizens when it comes to the work of the ministry. If a "lay" person makes a hospital visit, that's okay, but we want to know, "Where's my pastor!" Christ's vision is so different. *Pastors and teachers serve the people so God's people can serve the congregation and community.* Far too many "lay" people are recruited to fill a position and to fill a need—make the coffee, cover the nursery during the service—but not to fulfill a calling.

Paul's phrase "works of service" elevates the ministry of God's people. "Works" has a sense of divine calling and meaningful purpose. We could translate it as vocation and mission. The Bible uses it to describe God's creative work. God the Creator commissions us for creative, zealous, purposeful work—work that glorifies Him as we serve one another.

Paul's word for "service" highlights personal service rather than serving for wages, serving as a slave, and serving publicly. It involves love in action through sacrificial ministry modeled after Christ's sacrifice. Christ calls His people to creative, purposeful, meaningful, sacrificial, personal ministry to one another in His name. In the context of Ephesians 4:11-16, that work is nothing less than making disciple-makers through the personal ministry of the Word.

The Member Ministry Mindset Shift That Changes Everything: Every Member a Disciple-Maker

When leaders and members fulfill their purposes together the Body of Christ builds itself up in two specific, cohesive ways: doctrinal unity and spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:12-13). When a congregation knows the truth not just academically, but personally, then their love abounds in knowledge and depth of insight (Philippians 1:9-11).

We often miss the vital real-life, how-to application of every-member disciple-making that Paul embeds in this text. How does the church come to unity and maturity? Exactly what are pastors equipping people to do? Specifically how do members do the work of the ministry?

Paul answers: By “speaking the truth in love” we grow up in Christ (Ephesians 4:15). Every word in this passage funnels toward this remarkable phrase “speaking the truth in love.” *Christ’s grand plan for His Church is for every member to be a disciple-maker by speaking and living Gospel truth to one another in love.*

Paul selects an unusual Greek word which we often translate as “speaking the truth.” Actually, we should translate it both as speaking and living the truth. We might even coin the phrase “truthing.” Paul likely had in mind Psalm 15 where the Psalmist asks, “Who may dwell in your sanctuary?” He answers: “He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, *who speaks the truth from his heart*” (Psalm 15:2). Who can serve in God’s sanctuary, the church—the one who embodies the truth in relationships.

The word for “truthing” that Paul uses means transparent, truthfulness, genuine, authentic, reliable, sincere. It describes the person who ministers from a heart of integrity and Christ-like, grace-oriented love. It pictures the person whose relational style is transparent and trustworthy. The tense and context indicates that the Body of Christ should continually, actively, and collectively be embodying truth in love as it walks together in intimate, vulnerable connection. In one word, Paul combines content, character, and competence shared in community!

While the word means more than speaking, it does not mean *less* than speaking. While it means more than sheer factual content, it does not mean *less* than the Gospel fully applied. Paul uses the identical word in Galatians 4:16. There he is clearly speaking of preaching, teaching, and communicating the truth of the Gospel of Christ’s grace (salvation) applied to daily growth in Christ (progressive sanctification).

Combine Galatians 4:16 with Ephesians 4:16, both in context, and we find an amazing description of Gospel-centered biblical counseling—of the personal ministry of the Word. Speaking the truth involves:

Communicating Gospel truth about grace-focused sanctification in word, thought, and action through one-another relationships that have integrity, genuineness, authenticity, transparency, and reliability, done in love to promote the unity and maturity of the Body of Christ for the ultimate purpose of displaying the glory of Christ’s grace.

The normal agenda and priority of every Christian is to make disciple-makers. Christ’s training strategy for disciple-making involves pastors and teachers equipping every member to embody the truth in love through the personal ministry of the Word—biblical counseling.

What happens when leaders focus their calling on equipping God’s people to make disciple-makers through the personal ministry of the Word by speaking and living the truth in love? Paul

shows us in Ephesians 4:16. The Body in robust health grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Disciple-Making Champion:

Pastor Robert Cheong, Pastor of Care and Counseling, Sojourn Community Church

Dr. Robert Cheong, Pastor of Care and Counseling for Sojourn Community Church in Louisville, Kentucky, is passionate about equipping God's people for Gospel-centered counseling. His definition of church-based counseling harmonizes beautifully with Paul's Ephesians 4:11-16 vision.

Gospel counseling is a way of loving one another by understanding the struggles of unbelief in the midst of life and suffering through listening to and drawing out the heart, while proclaiming how Christ and His gospel truths apply in deeply personal and specific ways, so that we can live out and grow in the gospel by faith in community, by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Cheong unites counseling and the personal ministry of the Word.

Gospel counseling is an aspect of gospel ministry that represents the inter-personal ministry of the Word in which every Christian is called to participate. In less "technical" terms, the essence of counseling is helping one another to understand and apply the gospel to the details of life so that we can live the gospel.

Pastor Cheong's connection between the church and counseling is an apt exclamation point on Christ's grand vision.

Counseling that flows from the gospel, reflects the essence of gospel ministry and must be done by the church—the people of God. God calls every member of His church to the relational ministry of the Word where people labor with their entire lives to help those in the church family to grow in maturity in Christ (cf. Col. 1:28-19) and to help those outside the church family to see their need for Christ as Savior and Redeemer. Helping others to live out the gospel and to submit to the gospel is what it means to "be the church." Therefore, the renewal of counseling is not to have such a ministry done *in* the church but *by* the church, so the church can *be* the church.

Commencement: It Takes a Congregation

Most books end each chapter with a *Conclusion*. I don't like that label any more than I like it when counselors call their final session the *Termination* session. I call my final biblical counseling meeting *Commencement* because I want to communicate positive progress on an ongoing journey with Christ. For the same reason, I'm calling the end of each chapter the *Commencement*. Let's commence.

When I started my ministry as Congregational Discipleship Pastor, I didn't begin by launching a biblical counseling "program." That never would have been sufficient to minister effectively to Steve, Alexis, Eric, and the rest of their family. Instead, I invited our congregation to join me on a journey of catching God's vision for every-member disciple-making. Because of

that focus, this family received both formal biblical counseling and informal one-another ministry.

As our congregation engaged in the vision-catching process, we joined together in assessing and diagnosing the heart health of our congregation and community. We knew that we couldn't understand where to head until we knew where we had been and where we were now. Join me in chapter two as we learn about that process: *Examining Heart Health: Diagnosing Congregational and Community Fitness*.

Growing Together: Questions for Reflection, Discussion, and Application

1. If the All-American Couple entered your congregation, how prepared would your church be to minister to them in their current crisis and in their ongoing Christian lives? What do you think your congregation might need to do in order to be better prepared?
2. Would you say your church is a church *with* biblical counseling or a church *of* biblical counseling (a congregation saturated with equipped one-another ministers)? Why?
3. In your life and in your church, how much of a transition would it be to shift from doing the work of the ministry to making disciple-makers? What might that shift look like and involve?
4. Of the seven styles of churches, which do you value? Which methods does your church use? How well do they function in your church?
5. Reflect on the résumé and the ministry description of the biblical pastor, teacher, leader.
 - a. Who has equipped you to equip others? How did they do it?
 - b. Who have you equipped to equip others? How did you do it?
6. Ponder the definition of speaking the truth in love:

Communicating Gospel truth about grace-focused sanctification in word, thought, and action through one-another relationships that have integrity, genuineness, authenticity, transparency, and reliability, done in love to promote the unity and maturity of the Body of Christ for the ultimate purpose of displaying the glory of Christ's grace.

- a. How would you evaluate your personal ministry of the Word based upon this definition?
- b. How would you assess your congregation's personal ministry of the Word based upon this definition?

ⁱSee Appendix C1.1 for a listing of the twenty-four best practice churches and para-church agencies.