

Something Old and Something New: Apostolic Ministry for the 21st Century

Some Preliminary Thoughts:

Why this paper? With a growing understanding of the five-fold gifting mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, I began to ask myself what exactly apostolic ministry is and does if apostles existed after the 12 original apostles who walked with Jesus for several years. As I began to read works done by 21st century people who were proponents for apostolic ministry today, I began to notice that they were almost all talking about strategies and methodologies for planting churches. These strategies and methodologies, as great as they sounded, often seemed narrow in scope, inorganic (even simplistic) in their timing and application, and overly confident in all their human resources. There was a decided lack of input from and cooperation with prophetically gifted people – be it in garnering fresh prophetic intelligence (i.e., spiritual G.P.S.) or even in heeding prophetic cries for priorities that God was asking His sent ones/messengers to heed.

After my wife, a prophetically gifted person, and I moved out of pastoral ministry in California and moved to a small Arizona town for the establishing of new missional, resilient and sustainable communities, we realized that apostolic ministry needed a second look – looking not only back to Scripture and historical expressions, but also forward to where the future seems to be heading. This means that some of what will be mentioned here will get approving nods from evangelical readers while still other parts of what will be written here will get puzzlement and possibly even hostility – especially from any readers who are not comfortable with mystery and prophetic revelation that is modeled, taught and assumed in the Scriptures.

This essay is my attempt at pooling together pieces of what God has revealed to me thus far. There is a lot I have had to unlearn along the way, and I still claim no expertise on the matter. But, hopefully, this entire exercise will be fruitful in its ability to stimulate new thinking, feeling and imagining from any who, like me, want to see God release more workers into the world-wide harvest.

Some Preliminary Assumptions:

- 1. That the five-fold gifting of Ephesians 4:11 is still valid for today; and in particular, the role of apostle and prophet.*
- 2. That the nature of the church itself is apostolic, as the early church fathers stated in the Nicene Creed: “We believe in one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.”*
- 3. That since we are in the “last days” when God has “poured out His Spirit on all flesh,” God still speaks today to His people through many means and sources – especially when there is opportunity for the Kingdom to expand into new peoples; and this is the NORM – not the exception in the Kingdom economy.*
- 4. That the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20 (which includes the Abrahamic blessing of Genesis 12:1-3) is THE unfinished task that God has for the church until He returns.*
- 5. That from a perspective of sheer numbers, the way things are being done now are insufficient for the large Mission-to-the-World task ahead.*

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Michael Kim, July 07, 2010

Intro

APOSTLE... the word rarely evokes positive emotion. For many who have never darkened the door of a church, “apostle” conjures up memories of actor, Robert Duvall, delivering an award winning performance as “Apostle E.F.”: a former minister who runs from his sad and checkered marital past only to reinvent himself as an authoritative, traveling preacher in Louisiana. For some who grew up in more Pentecostal circles of the church, “apostle” may evoke memories of conversing with a charismatic leader who claims a near Pope-like spiritual authority and expects his audience to submit to him ex-officio. Or for many, “apostle” is no loaded term at all and simply brings to mind one of the original 12 disciples or writers of the New Testament who died long ago. In short, an “apostle” is often, at best, a neutral outdated role and, at worst, a negative contemporary role.

This should not be! When one takes a closer look at what the Bible says about an “apostle,” a more positive and valuable role emerges. For example, the popular passage used to promote the role of pastors and teachers in the 21st century church, Ephesians 4:11-16, also mentions apostles [chronologically first actually!] as part of God’s plan for and gifting to the church.

11 Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. 12 Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. 13 This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. 15 Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his

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body, the church. 16 He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Assuming, then, that Paul nowhere teaches or assumes an expiration date in the era of prophets and apostles (which, contra hard-line Dispensational thought, he never comes close to doing!),¹ to accept the valuable role of pastors and teachers for the maturing and growth of the church also requires us to accept -- not only the existence but also value of the less-understood roles of apostles, prophets, and evangelists. ALL FIVE are necessary ingredients for a healthy church. This is the easiest and most natural reading of Ephesians 4:11-16.

So if we are to believe the truth of this apostolic teaching from the apostle Paul for the churches in Asia Minor², then there is quite some deconstruction and reconstruction to do to re-establish the mission-critical role of apostles for the completion of Jesus' Great Commission. It is the burden of this essay to, not only explore what an apostle is and does, but to also spell out implications for ways in which apostles will need to function for the future that awaits the Western church.

What is Apostolic Ministry?

We begin first with a simple word study of its occurrences in the N.T.

¹ For any then who see the apostolic role as temporary, they must assume and read this assumption back into Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 12, the prophetic and apostolic gifts are mentioned next to the teaching, administration, healing, miracles, helps and tongues gifts. It would be arbitrary to pick and choose which one of those doesn't exist today if Paul is supplying no further indication on their shelf life for the church on the whole.

² Keep in mind that Ephesians was a circular letter meant to be passed around and read in other churches -- giving it a wide, trans-local application.

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What a Word Study Shows Us:

“Apostle,” which literally means “sent one” shows up in the N.T. 87 times: 9 times in the gospels in reference to the original twelve disciples; 34 times in Acts in reference to the early church leaders that expanded beyond the twelve; 36 times in Paul’s letters primarily in reference to his own apostolic credentials that authorized his teaching of new churches; and 8 times in the other N.T. letters. When we look at this linguistic proliferation of references to “apostles” from the nine references to the original twelve to the 78 references to apostles and their key role in the rapid growth of the early church, we can safely proclaim that apostles played a big part in the growth of the early Church and her progress in the fulfillment of the Great Commission that started in Jerusalem and is expanding to the ends of the earth.

What many do not know is that we can actually trace the evolution of “apostle” in the N.T. starting as one of twelve original disciples who were part of Jesus’ inner circle and expanding to a wider group of people whom God gifts to the church universal for a specific purpose and time period. From the beginning, we are given clues as to why God even called apostles: in Mark 3, *14He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach 15and to have authority to drive out demons.* These twelve men were intentionally chosen to spend time training with him in “fishing for men,” so that they may be sent out to proclaim the arrival of God’s Kingdom in power. And as we know from Gospel accounts in Matthew 9-10 and Luke 9-10, these original twelve are given on-the-job training to do just this. After Jesus sends them out, they end up multiplying themselves to 70 (or 72) – who are then trained up and sent out to do the same one chapter later! While not carrying the title

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or role of “apostle” in the same way as the original twelve, these new followers were sent out with similar instructions to multiply and to both preach and demonstrate the Kingdom of God being present in power. So even in the Gospels, we see the progression from twelve moving functionally outwards to include more “sent ones.”

By the time we then get to Acts and the progressive expansion of the early church in the epistles, we see the name “apostles” being used of many beyond the original twelve. True, in Acts 1:25 only one, Matthias, is to round out the place of Judas back to the original twelve apostles according to O.T. prophecy; but after the filling of this symbolic role and its accompanying prophecy, we see people being called “apostles” in a way that differed from its reference of the symbolic twelve. At least twelve others are mentioned in the New Testament. For example, we see Paul in Galatians 1 calling someone who was not part of the original twelve an apostle: *I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother.* This trend continues in 1 Thessalonians 2:6-9 where Paul, after beginning the letter with reference to the threesome of *IPaul, Silas and Timothy* being the authors of this letter, Paul calls this threesome “apostles:”

As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, 7but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 8We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. 9Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

Most know Paul to be an “apostle” from his self-designations in all his letters, but few think of Silas and Timothy as apostles as well. Yet, this is what Paul calls all of them! Timothy, Silas and James comprise a new group of “apostles” that come into existence in the developing early church. And to show the interesting evolution of this new kind of apostle, we discover in Romans 16:7 that this list of new kinds of “apostles” also includes

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at least one woman, for in Romans 16:7, Paul instructs the church to *Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.* Not much else is known about an Andronicus or a Junias in biblical times, but the clear reading of Paul's words is that they were "noteworthy among [other] apostles" by the time Paul is writing his letter to the Roman church. So clearly, "apostle" was an evolving and expanding term that was including more and more people ministering in the expanding early church.³

Such occurrences would be baffling were it not for the simultaneous appearance of N.T. teaching that explains apostles – not as a symbolic 1.0 role, but now as a spiritual gift to the church for the equipping of the church. Enter "apostle 2.0." The main illuminating passages can be found in Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Corinthians. We've already seen Ephesians 4:11-16 that talks about the critical role of the five-fold gifts. Verse 11 unequivocally establishes the gift of apostleship to the church: *11 Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. 12 Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.* The reason God gives these gifts? The equipping of every body part of the church to ministry for its maturing that is further described in verses 13-16:

13 This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. 15 Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. 16 He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As

³ Also in this list of twelve other "apostles" are Apollos (1 Corinthians 3:5, 10), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), and two unnamed apostles in 2 Corinthians 8.

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each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Apostles, as we can clearly see in Paul's train of thought, play a large part in this bodily strength and maturity. In fact, Paul in Ephesians 2:20 references apostles and prophets as foundation-layers, suggesting that their role is important especially on the front-end of Kingdom-building since foundations must be set *before* the structure can be built.

Apostles are squarely, along with the other four gifts, in Paul's mind as he describes this beautiful and organic picture of strong and growing church. They are part of God's recipe for vv.12-16. Without them (or any one of these five for that matter), the Body of Christ will not realize this health and maturity. Yet, when churches talk about philosophy of church ministry or "leadership" from Ephesians 4:12-16, they consistently reference pastors and teachers and never apostles! Certainly this goes against what Paul was trying to teach churches!

Not only that, but the systematic neglect of apostles continues on in any and all spiritual gift discussions; in standard church surveys and teachings, "apostles" never show up as a legitimate spiritual gifting. Yet gifts never once mentioned in the bible like "writing," "leading worship," or "evangelism" consistently find their way into spiritual gift surveys and seminars! How is this possible? Most people in evangelical churches probably do not even know that "apostles" are mentioned in Paul's gift list in 1 Corinthians 12:28ff: *And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.* Some systematic neglect and confusion have clearly entered into the church landscape. Our traditions and cultures have consistently failed to

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communicate the biblicality of the apostolic gift. Whatever an apostle may be, there it is in Scripture, spoken of as something valuable and “indispensible” (as Paul calls every gift) for God’s plan in growing His church.

And to squelch conjectures that this apostolic gifting and role is only for the “church age” that closes with the forming of the canon of Scripture, it is worth noting that Scripture speaks of the apostolic gift/role continuing on until the return of Christ. How do we know this? Because the beginning and end of John’s Revelation from God assumes the continuity of apostles decades after Paul wrote his letters as well as in the final tribulation before Christ consummates His Kingdom. In Revelation 2:2, God commends the church in Ephesus for testing for true apostles: *I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.*

The obvious and unspoken assumption here is that where there are counterfeits, the real also exists. So the very church that is told by Paul that apostles are foundation-layers (Ephesians 2:20) is also commended decades later for being discerning in welcoming genuine apostles and rejecting the counterfeit ones. This we glean from the first few chapters of John’s Revelation; we glean even more insight on the continuity of apostles near the end of John’s Revelation in 18:20. There, after Babylon has fallen, a voice from heaven instructs everyone: *20Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you.* Here, we see three groups of people ALL PRESENT in the final tribulation, having suffered persecution at the hands of “Babylon” and all those associated with this anti-Kingdom: “apostles,” “prophets” and “saints.” The event that follows right after this announcement is the

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White Rider's crushing defeat of the Beast, the false prophet and the armies of men, followed by the binding of satan for 1,000 years. Regardless of one's position on the Tribulation or the Millennium, these events associated with the closing of history as we know it are all well past the era when various canon councils met. So even up until the end of all things, the testimony of Scriptures assures us that apostles are still present and part of God's Kingdom work – which obviously reinforces that the work apostles are sent out to do (whatever it may be) is not complete until Jesus is reigning in power.

So in summary, there is continuity from the Gospels to Revelation that apostles exist and are part of God's plan for the maturing of the church in the New Testament. It is the simple and clear reading that takes into account New Testament teaching as well as New Testament assumptions about the presence and role of apostles/apostolic gifting God gives to the church for the church. What remains to be seen now is how exactly "apostle" undergoes an evolution from the one of the original twelve men (i.e., "apostle 1.0") who walked with Jesus and was sent out *to preach and to have authority to drive out demons* (Mark 3:14-15) to those men and women God has strategically placed in His church to help prepare her to become what she will one day be (i.e., "apostle 2.0").

Apostle 2.0: some themes:

So what does an apostle, who is not part of the original twelve, do? At this juncture, I will venture to take a stab at a provisional definition to help give shape to various biblical teachings and personal reflections on apostles: ***an apostle is a spiritual mother or father sent out like Jesus with the authoritative presence of Jesus for the expansion of Jesus' Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.*** This purposefully is a broad

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definition that will need parsing out as the New Testament has much to say about apostles. But worth mentioning before we dive further into this definition is the all too obvious but rarely mentioned fact that the apostolic role is molded squarely in the person and name of Jesus; He is part of everything that the apostle does. The apostle is sent out like Jesus, sent out with Jesus, sent out by Jesus, and sent out for Jesus' ongoing mission. The apostle is about Jesus from every angle. This makes sense when we consider that the author of Hebrews teaches us that Jesus was the first and greatest apostle in chapter 3:

1Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. 2He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. 3Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself.

And as the first and greatest "sent one," Jesus in John 20, turns around and sends out others in the same manner he himself was sent: *21Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* Matthew's version of the Great Commission/Sending teaches us that Jesus promises both an authority and a presence "as we go:"

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

In short, Jesus will be with his sent/commissioned ones in a real and powerful way! In summary, an apostle is all about Jesus: Jesus is the sender, the role-model, the companion, and the spiritual source of power.⁴ And as we will see later in this paper,

⁴ This must always be kept in mind as the temptation among Charismatic circles is to pedestalize or attribute more power and position to apostles than anyone ever should. Jesus must be central in the apostle's heart and mind.

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apostles MUST have that reality of Jesus in their lives to do the things that Jesus will ask of them.

Having established this simple but profound truth, we now have clearance to further explore what this Jesus-centric role could look like. *An apostle is a spiritual mother or father sent out like Jesus with the authoritative presence of Jesus for the expansion of Jesus' Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven*

Apostles as spiritual mothers and fathers

Functionally speaking, there are two specific responsibilities of spiritual mothers and fathers that we see operational in apostles: reproducing new children (i.e., converts or new disciples) and parenting young children into adulthood (i.e., strong disciples). Both of these parental functions find precedent in New Testament letters which, when we stop to think of the context behind their origins, are nothing more than apostolic teaching to new disciples and spiritual families from a spiritual father figure.

Examples of the both kinds of parenting (reproduction and rearing) can be found in 1 Corinthians 4:14-17 where Paul differentiates between a “guardian in Christ” and a “father in Christ” “through the gospel” and, in the process, helps his readers understand spiritual parenting more.

14I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. 15Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16Therefore I urge you to imitate me. 17For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

The reason that Paul is their father as opposed to a mere guardian is found in the phrase “through the gospel;” Paul literally fathered or sired them as Luke tells us in Acts 18:

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4Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

5When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ... 8Crispus, the synagogue

ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized. This is Luke's account of how Paul directly

"fathered" these new disciples in the faith "through the gospel." Paul provides his own thoughts one chapter earlier in 1 Corinthians 3:

5What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. 9For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. 10By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it.

Paul was "the servant, through whom you [they] came to believe" (v.5) who planted the seed of the gospel among them and who also (switching metaphors) "laid the foundation as an expert builder" (v.10). And as Paul indicates in this delineation, Paul fathered them on the front end, and Apollos fathered them on the back end: watering the seed Paul planted (v.6) and building on the foundation Paul laid (v.10). It is because both Paul and Apollos both played a fathering role for the Corinthians that the church even found themselves taking sides, saying some followed Paul and others Apollos. For the purpose of this paper, I will refer to them as Type 1 spiritual parenting (reproducing new converts and disciples) and Type 2 spiritual parenting (raising and rearing current followers of Christ into greater maturity). So far, we have discussed Type 1 spiritual parenting through Luke's account in Acts 18 and Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 3.

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But Paul, as an apostle, specializes in both. In the previously quoted passage of 1 Corinthians 4:14-17, Paul also references and practices this back-end spiritual fathering of young disciples/children into more mature and stronger ones; and the primary example and medium of this Type 2 spiritual parenting is Timothy.

14I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. 15Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16Therefore I urge you to imitate me. 17For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

Paul is able to go from urging the Corinthian church to “imitate” him directly to “For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love” because Timothy is Paul’s closest and best example of Type 2 spiritual parenting. Paul frequently speaks of Timothy as his “son” and often directly calls him so. In both his letters to Timothy, Paul calls him his “true son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2) and “dear son” (2 Timothy 1:2). The father-son bond happened without Paul being the evangelist who converted Timothy, for Luke reminds us in Acts 16 that Timothy was already a disciple when Paul came to Lystra and Derbe.

1He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 3Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. 5So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

The insight we need into how Paul became a “father” to Timothy whom he did not personally convert is found in Philippians 2:21-22 where Paul boasts about Timothy and

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his connection to Paul: *21For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.* So Paul can literally “send” Timothy as his representative to the Corinthian church because Timothy, as his son, knows of Paul’s ways from ministering alongside Paul: *because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.* Not only through this, but Paul has elsewhere indicated that he has intentionally poured much of himself into Timothy for the purpose of Timothy reproducing other Timothy figures in his own life; 2 Timothy 2:1-2 reads: *1You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2And 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.* Paul had so great a confidence in his spiritual son, Timothy, that he told the Corinthian church that the way they could imitate Paul (v.16’s exhortation) is to imitate Timothy in 1 Corinthians 4:17: *17For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.*

The resemblance was so close between father and son that to learn from one was to learn from the other. Timothy then stands out, not only Paul’s best example of a spiritual son in the Type 2 sense, but he also stands out as a clear testimony to the priority Paul placed on spiritual parenting in his apostolic missionary work.

1 Thessalonians 2:6b-12 is another important piece of Scripture that illuminates apostolic parenting in action. The unique contribution to this discussion comes in the fact that Paul uses both “mothering” and “fathering” as his metaphors for how they “as apostles of Christ” interacted with the Thessalonians.

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As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, 7but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 8We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. 9Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. 10You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Paul was able to call on these specific familial metaphors because spiritual parenting was an integral part of Paul's understanding and application of apostolic ministry. We already know from Acts 17 that Paul had "fathered" the Thessalonian converts "through the gospel" in a Type 1 spiritual parenting way:

1When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. 4Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

But now we know that Paul also spiritually parented them in the other, Type 2 way – which included a mother's love and gentleness in their care (specifically sharing not only the gospel message but their lives and friendship as well) as well as a fatherly care which Paul likens to *12encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God.* Such language and such comparisons are not accidental in Paul's apostolic mind. They are part of what he, Timothy and Silas did as apostles of Jesus Christ. We can collapse and join together the core of this passage then by saying, "As apostles of Christ, we were like mothers and fathers to you."

Whether he stayed only a short period of time in a village, city or region (as was

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customary for Paul), or whether a long period of time (like the year and a half he spent in Corinth), Paul made it a point to do follow up Type 1 spiritual parenting with Type 2 spiritual parenting. He did Type 2 spiritual parenting in person – even re-visiting regions like Ephesus, through writing letters, or through the sending of spiritual sons like Timothy, Titus (Titus 1:4), Priscilla and Aquila, and others in whom Paul invested his life.

So in summary, where Type 1 spiritual parenting had to do with evangelism and conversion of not-yet-believers into new converts and disciples, Type 2 spiritual parenting has to do with intentional pouring into and raising up; this included working alongside/showing a ministry/work skill set for the purpose of the son's learning (Philippians 2:22), as well as verbal instruction for the purpose of the son teaching others who can also teach others (2 Timothy 2:2), and modeling/living out for imitation a way of life (1 Corinthians 4:17). Or in other words, Type 2 spiritual parenting in the apostle's mind is necessarily transferable/reproducible and also necessarily pragmatic/goal-oriented: it is supposed to prepare the young son or daughter to be a spiritual mother or father herself/himself. In fact, one can safely say that Paul's strategy for planting reproducing churches is to raise up reproducing sons and daughters. A similar sentiment is raised by Oscar Muriu, a ministry leader at Nairobi Chapel in Kenya. In a conversation with Steve Addison, author of *Movements that Change the World*, Steve recounts hearing the same apostolic point of view from Oscar:

The one statement that I will never forget was, "Steve, I don't plant churches. I grow sons." And some of his best "sons" are daughters. About half of his interns are

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women.⁵

Such familial and relational language has not trickled down into conventional mission parlance. Yet, many missionary trainers are adopting the same outlook. One of my mentors, Neil Cole, traces the evolution of Paul's apostolic ministry style over his lifetime and concludes that Paul accomplishes the most when is doing the least! He is most effective in, what Cole calls, his "Fourth Missionary Journey" which happened while Paul was in his prison cell! But because Paul had matured in his understanding of apostolic fathering, he is able to minister vicariously through his sons and daughters while he "stuck" in prison.

Paul learned to emerge as a father who was more interested in his son's success than his own. He travelled less and less each journey, and [yet]the message went further. This is the genius of apostolic gifting. It gives it away to others, and they take it where others cannot go.⁶

Summary – Apostolic work must be intensely relational in its disciple-making. Not only must apostles make new and stronger disciples, but their crowning work is PEOPLE – not organizations, numbers or churches. People can recognize apostolic fathers and mothers because they have lots of strong and healthy children who 1.) look like them and 2.) who also turn around and reproduce new children and/or help raise up growing children into adults. This relational string of sons/daughters and grandchildren several generations removed becomes the greatest "carrying card" or proof of apostolic

⁵ Steve Addison, *Movements that Change the World* (Smyrna: Missional Press, 2009), p.123.

⁶ Neil Cole, "What will the Apostolic look like in the future," Antioch Starfish Conference (November 2009).

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credibility. Or as Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 9:1b-2: *Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? 2Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*

Implication – **For the sake of the future, spiritual parenting needs to happen in greater measure in order to send more workers into the harvest.** The question needs to be asked out loud: why not just call it “disciple-making” instead of “spiritual parenting;” what do we stand to gain from changing our vocabulary to match Paul’s in his apostolic parenting texts (a.k.a., the epistles)? There are several blessings to experience with such a correction.

Perhaps what we stand to gain the most today in western circles is a re-enveloping of evangelism into the “discipleship” process. They have been divided for too long with the result being shallow converts who are never grown up and crusty Christians who have been over-educated (beyond their obedience) and no longer engaging with the lost. Spiritual parenting involves new birth as well as nurturing people into maturity – a maturity that the bible spells out as involving the reproduction of new and stronger sons and daughters. In the end, multiplication is the goal of spiritual parenting and it happens in a way that conventional discipleship in the Western church does not pursue.

Another benefit is that the spiritual parenting paradigm puts a renewed focus on growing people into greater maturity. Parents cannot treat 21-year-old daughters like they are five; and so, they work with all their energy to help their children stand strong on their own in their teen years. Parents work to make themselves less functional needed in their children’s lives. Discipleship in the West has not always followed this approach of expecting and preparing disciples to grow to maturity and reproduce others; in fact, it has

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often taught a “learned dependence” that cripples children from ever realizing the maturity that God expects from all of us.

A third benefit to spiritual parenting over conventional discipleship is that it is more holistic and organic in the tools it uses. Standing in the stream of Greek philosophy and Modernity, discipleship in the Western churches have often taken a content-heavy approach where knowledge is the path to personal growth. The value of the parenting approach is that it is more holistic in its teaching “methods” and “times.” When does a parent ever stop teaching? If we take modeling into account, the parent never stops! Parenting is a 24-7, lifetime calling even if the parent will be progressively less involved in the day-to-day functions of a growing son or daughter as he/she matures. Seeing discipleship as parenting reminds us of these wide-open opportunities to impart and also opens us up to powerful, informal teaching-tool of modeling.

A fourth benefit of this shift in direction is the way it helps combat an overemphasis on position and title falsely attributed to apostles. There are those in Charismatic circles who believe Paul is attributing pre-eminent importance and rank to apostles in 1 Corinthians 12:28⁷. Certainly, as we will see later in this paper, there is a Christ-imbued spiritual authority with which apostles are gifted, but any talk of hierarchy, rank or importance in God’s Kingdom is glaringly absent in the Scriptures. Those who emphasize hierarchy and power actually end up losing power by emphasizing unnatural positional authority over a relational one. Why should a son listen to his father? Not because of the father’s rank, his power or his value in the family; a son should listen

⁷ Which reads: *And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.*

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because the father is wiser than the son and because he loves his son. He has the wisdom forged from life experience and the loving commitment forged from fathering that combine to make him an ideal advocate for his son. And most sons (not experiencing a rebellious stage) readily recognize this and function out of this relational matrix. There has been relational input and blessing into the son's life. There is a history; there are shared memories and culture. There are good subjective and experiential reasons why he should listen to the advice of his father. As such, the parent-child relationship is the most natural and universal human relationship upon which people can draw. And it is the very language that Paul, a seasoned apostle, often chooses to communicate his relationships with his spiritual family. Discipleship as spiritual parenting helps correct this fault that robs the process of natural design power.

So, indeed, there is much to gain in recovering the role of spiritual parenting associated with the apostolic gifting.

And with that, we close out the first part of our functional definition of an apostle: **an apostle is a spiritual mother or father** who specializes in giving birth to and growing sons and daughters.

Apostles sent out like (or in the pattern of) Jesus: in weakness and suffering

The next aspect of apostolic ministry that we'd like to address, like spiritual parenting, does not often get talked about: that apostles are sent out LIKE Jesus Himself. The theological ground for this is in Jesus' sending of the apostles following his resurrection appearance near the end of John's gospel:

19On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said,

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"Peace be with you!" 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit..." (John 20:19-22)

Here in this passing of the baton moment, Jesus equates the manner in which He was sent by the Father in the manner in which He sends the apostles: *As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.* It is a deliberate parallel where Jesus makes Himself the role model for the apostles. It is the same mission; now they are being deployed to continue it. Jesus has changed roles now from the first sent one (i.e., apostle) to role model and sender. From this moment forward, the apostles are to look to Jesus to understand the manner in which they are to go and continue Jesus' mission. He is the example par excellence for the kind of apostle God desires since He has successfully completed His part of the mission, and is now deploying more apostles into the harvest field.

Given that Jesus makes himself the forerunner in whose stream the apostles must follow, it would seem natural and wise to incorporate Jesus' own "apostolic" life and ministry into any understanding apostolic mission. But for whatever reasons, the first place most people turn in understanding New Testament mission is the apostle Paul, since he traveled extensively and planted many churches. Paul, as a third generation apostle and, self-described, "expert builder" is a wonderful example, but given Jesus' deliberate comparison of apostolic ministry to his apostolic ministry, the first place any sort of New Testament study of mission should turn is Jesus. The life and ministry of Jesus take on a new significance as an apostolic context for understanding how apostles (who continue the mission of Jesus) are to function. So we turn our attention now to Jesus as the author

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of Hebrews directed in chapter 3:1: *Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.*

The first and natural question that arises in any examination of Jesus' life as an apostle: how was Jesus sent out by the Father? Or more specifically, what does it look like to be apostolically sent like Jesus? Philippians 2 has something to say on this front. Paul begins by exhorting his sons and daughters to elevate the prominence of others over themselves – which gives us a significant clue of what to look for in the Jesus' sending: *3Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.* All of these commands have to do with relationship to and valuing of others, and the inner movement that must happen to do it. Paul seizes the moment to then make the comparison to Jesus' incarnation, death and exaltation as a more severe example of what he is asking his sons and daughters to do:

5Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! 9Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Here, in what many scholars see as an early hymn about Jesus, we find insight into the manner in which Jesus was sent out. There was a necessary stripping away and humiliation that Jesus had to undergo to be sent out apostolically by the Father. He could not stay as he was – grasping onto the rights of his divinity – if the world was to be saved. Jesus had to transform! He had to make hard choices for the progress of God's

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redemptive plan for the earth; any redemptive benefit He could offer others would come at his own expense. These costly choices included a releasing of his divine right and privileges as God (v.6), a severe humbling by adopting a new and paradoxical mode of being as a God-man (v.7-8a) – which made as much sense as a “divine slave,” as well as an obedience into the most shameful sort of death fit only for a criminal (v.8). These scandalous choices Jesus made provided the necessary means to bridge a sinful humanity with God and, ironically, were the means of securing a future glory and honor for Jesus as the name above every other name. Or to put it simply: the way up was down. And this down included surrender, sacrifice and suffering --- all things usually associated with weakness, not strength. Two realities that now emerge from this hymn that will help frame further thought on this subject are: 1.) Jesus was sent in weakness – not strength, and 2.) Jesus was sent to suffer greatly so others could connect with God.

That Jesus was sent out in weakness is a statement to which many would readily consent but few would gladly imitate. Jesus never had or wielded conventional human sources of strength. At the end of the day, Jesus was a single, unemployed, homeless man who died in the prime of his life like a criminal. He owned no material possessions, had no honorific title, was attached to no reputable organization, and he intentionally did not flaunt his power or seek out the limelight on many occasions when the crowds were ready to greatly honor him. Jesus epitomized weakness in so many ways and purposefully CHOSE this mode of existence as an apostle sent from the Father.

He also consistently taught weakness. Whether it was his scathing rebuke of the religious elite (the Pharisees) of his day, or the subversive commendation of a begging Gentile mother’s faith in Matthew 15, or his pointed rebuke of the disciples for arguing

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who would be greatest in the Kingdom, or his paradoxical teaching like the last being first and the first last, or his call to be like a child in the Kingdom, or even teaching that wealth – a traditional sign of divine favor – was an obstacle into the Kingdom, Jesus consistently taught weakness was the way of the Kingdom. Even his famous Sermon on the Mount teaching where Jesus utters such subversive teaching like Matthew 5:3-12, punctuates this:

*3"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*4Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

*5Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.*

*6Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

*7Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

*8Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*

*9Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.*

*10Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

11"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus' Beatitudes teaching in Matthew 5 is as anti-power and anti-position as anything ever articulated. The Kingdom of God is filled with these sorts of weak people who are poor in spirit, mourn, hunger and thirst for righteousness, show meekness and purity of heart, and are persecuted – none attributes that put one's best foot forward! There is no lack of teaching in the four Gospels along this very thread: weak is the new strong in Jesus' Kingdom.

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Jesus not only taught it for day-to-day life, but he also made weakness a pre-requisite in his training for the apostles. In Luke 9:3 (cf., Matthew 10:9-10), Jesus instructs the apostles to go into mission situations weak: *1When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, 2and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. 3He told them: "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic.* One chapter later, he sends out the 70 with similar instructions in Luke 10:3-4:

1After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. 2He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. 3Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. 4Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

In both cases, the command to not bring anything with them follows closely on the heels of the command to go out. And in Luke 10, Jesus likens it to sending the apostles out as *lambs among wolves* – in other words, absolute slaughter unless God intervenes! They have no resources, no purse, no extra clothes. They are squarely dependent in faith on God's provision for them in the harvest itself. Clearly then, weakness is not just part of what it means to follow Jesus generally, but it's also part of what it means to follow Jesus into the harvest – being sent out like Jesus himself was sent out. Somehow, kissing goodbye to security, respect, wealth, fame and the currency with which the world deals is part of the necessary preparation of those who are sent by Jesus as Jesus was sent by His Father (John 20:21).

One generation after the original twelve, Paul displays similar apostolic values in 2 Corinthians 13 – showing a third example where weakness was an integral part of an apostolic calling. Addressing accusations that he was weak while with them but strong

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and forceful in his letters, Paul first notes the theological reason behind his weakness in vv.2-4:

2I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, 3since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. 4For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you.

Weakness in the worldly power was the way of Jesus. And it is also the proof that Paul furnishes that Christ is speaking through Paul as an apostle. Jesus is his role model as one who was *crucified in weakness, yet... lives by God's power* (v.4). As a result, a few verses later in v.9, Paul is able to say: *9We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong.* Paul, in the same letter to his Corinthian sons and daughters, goes so far as glorying in his weakness. After detailing a long list of suffering he has endured to date, he reflects on his apostolic credentials in chapter 11:30: *30If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.* And in this case, it is the suffering he has endured (the next theme we will pick up on). Paul continues on a few verses later in chapter 12 to further explain the context behind his theology of weakness:

7To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

This “thorn in his flesh” was indeed unpleasant for Paul – enough that he asked for it to be removed three times; but Paul came to see this weakness was straight from the hand of God to allow Christ’s power to shine. So Paul was able to also affirm the truth of what

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we've discussed previously in regard to Jesus: that weak is the new strong in God's Kingdom: *For when I am weak, then I am strong* (v.10). Paul came to experientially and theologically understand what Jesus had taught his disciples in Luke 9 and 10 about the important of weakness in sent apostles, thereby continuing the thread from Jesus to the twelve to now Paul. In these three generations, we see a consistent thread of weakness being modeled and taught by these apostles – testifying to an obvious truth: to be sent like Jesus is to be sent in weakness.

To be sent out like Jesus also involves suffering for the salvation of others. For Jesus, as we saw earlier in Philippians 2:8, the ultimate suffering came when he became *obedient to death – even death on a cross*. It was a suffering that led Jesus perspire blood when praying in anticipation of his crucifixion in the Garden of Gethsemane. The God-Man experienced a true dread at the thought of suffering a moral and relational separation from His Father for the first time ever in divine history. By taking on the sins of the world, he was preparing to relate to the Father as an enemy, instead of a Son. This was the necessary suffering that the Son had to experience for the redemption of mankind. Without this paschal suffering, the human race ends.

While there is no developed or articulated theology on the necessity of apostolic suffering for the salvation of others by the twelve apostles in the book of Acts, Luke is keen on recounting multiple incidences of apostolic suffering as well as their unusual response to it. Before Luke makes Paul the focal point of Acts in chapter 13, he recounts the imprisonment of Peter and John in Acts 4:3, imprisonment of the apostles in 5:18, the flogging of the apostles in Acts 5:40, the imprisonment of Peter in 12:4, as well as the beheading of the apostle James in Acts 12:2. Despite this persecution, Luke is sure to

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remind the reader that the apostles were undeterred: for example in Acts 5:41-42: *41The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. 42Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.* In addition to this joyful response to suffering on account of the continued preaching of the gospel, Luke even seems to suggest a correlation between this persecution and the growth of the church as he links them in close proximity to one another like in Acts 4:3-4: *3They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. 4But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.* While it is impossible to exactly know Luke's mind, we can safely piece together from these carefully chosen accounts that Luke saw apostolic suffering and general persecution as part of the fuel that helped the gospel take flight in the 1st century. And for what it's worth, history also confirms the place of suffering in the apostolic calling since every apostle except John (who was exiled onto the island of Patmos) died a martyr's death! This is more than coincidence and should be placed into the greater tapestry of apostolic suffering from Jesus to Paul that is woven into the New Testament.

What may be lacking in a developed theology of suffering from the twelve apostles is more than made up for by Paul in his apostolic letters to his spiritual sons and daughters everywhere. Suffering, as Luke tells us in Acts 9:16, was actually part of Paul's apostolic calling: *15But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."* Most people, including me, have understood this troubling phrase to refer to Paul as an individual that

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was unique to him alone. But given that Acts records apostles suffering and given various N.T. teachings on suffering (which we will soon delve into), it would seem more fitting to open up our minds to the possibility of this suffering being an apostolic, rather than a Pauline, calling. Paul as an apostle is going to suffer for Jesus' name; why? Because of the nature of his apostolic ministry: he will be carrying Jesus' name before Gentiles and Jews. While the specific degree of suffering could be unique to Paul, it would seem more natural to see Paul's apostolic mandate of carrying "Jesus' name" to unreached peoples as the very reason for why Paul will "suffer for Jesus' name". Luke is keen on pointing out this key detail about Paul's apostolic calling; it is part of Paul's conversion story that helps us make sense of the rest of his apostolic ministry in Acts.

The rest of Paul's life indeed confirms the truth of this prophecy. Acts details much of it, but there is more that Paul illuminates in 2 Corinthians 11:

21...What anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. 22Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. 23Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. 29Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? 30If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 31The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. 32In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. 33But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

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Interestingly, Paul uses this list as his defense of his apostolic calling and credibility – taking what his opponents (interestingly, “false-apostles”) use against him and using it as an opportunity to highlight his willingness to suffer as a key criteria to consider. He has worked harder and endured more than any who accuse him of being “out of his mind” (v.23). His “apostolic scars” that he now brandishes are part of his carrying card of how much he is willing to suffer for Jesus’ name. This is not the first time that Paul brings up suffering as part of the apostolic description. In his earlier letter to the Corinthians, Paul speaks about apostles in not so glamorous terms in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13:

9For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. 10We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! 11To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

Obviously addressing criticisms directed his way, Paul takes it and displays the unconventional and unexpected truth. They are indeed dishonorable as apostles: a spectacle of weak and dishonorable fools who do not use their authority to hold themselves up, but rather serve and suffer. They have become *the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world*. Why endure all this suffering and shame? Because as apostles, they are *fools for Christ* who are in line to die like fools in the arena. Paul could not have used a more shameful picture for apostolic suffering than the procession line for others’ entertainment. This is the backdrop behind Paul’s later boasting of his sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11, thereby showing the critical place of suffering in Paul’s understanding of apostleship.

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These sufferings were not out of some masochistic sort of craze; in Paul's mind, they were squarely serving a mission-of-Christ function. We see him illuminate such purposes in passages like Colossians 1:24-29.

24Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. 25I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— 26the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. 27To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 29To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Various bible scholars have seen within this sentence a cup of suffering that is partially-full, a cup called “the sufferings [literally, the “afflictions”] of Christ.” Ernest G. Ashby in the New International Bible Commentary differentiates these sufferings from the ones that Jesus suffered on the cross: “The sufferings of Christ involved in His expiatory death are not here in view, for that work was complete and peculiar to the Lord Himself. But in the proclamation of the gospel the Church must suffer, and their sufferings are His also (Acts 9:4).”⁸ So in some sort of mystical connection with Christ, Paul's sufferings for Christ fill up to greater measure this pre-ordained amount of suffering -- most likely the very suffering Jesus prophesied Paul would undergo. As a result, when Paul undergoes this co-suffering with Christ, he “rejoices” (v.24). This willingness to suffer is part of Paul's apostolic heart that is clearly more at one with Christ's than previously given credit for!

⁸ F.F. Bruce, The New International Bible Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p.1455.

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And so, it should come as no surprise that Paul makes suffering a key component in his disciple-making curriculum. How does he teach his spiritual sons and daughters about suffering? Mostly with frequent descriptions of suffering he endured in order to preach the gospel; Paul lifts himself up as a role model for them to imitate in the area of suffering for Christ. His letter to sons and daughters in Philippi is a great example of this disciple-making curriculum at work since the letter is written while Paul is in prison! His imprisonment and suffering for the gospel become the back-story and set the tone for this epic letter. Paul wastes no time getting into the topic, explaining the well-known results of his imprisonment in chapter one.

12Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. 15It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

This is not just for-your-information material. He is modeling what a sincere, well-motivated and Christ-like perspective on suffering looks like against the foil perspective of those who *preach Christ out of selfish ambition*. Paul's life is focused on [the preaching of] Jesus Christ; so this section here becomes the launching pad for his famous words, "for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain," soon after in vv.21-22. Paul's rejoicing at the gospel inroads made by his imprisonment illustrates what "to live is Christ" looks like in real life: it rejoices in suffering and even welcomes death. Either way is a win for Christ, and, thus, a win for Paul since Christ is Paul's very reason for existence.

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Paul then follows up this snapshot of a life in Christ with a phrase later in chapter 1 that would seem sadistic if not for his own perspective on suffering being tied closely to life in Christ:

27Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel 28without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. 29For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, 30since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Verse 29 is the kicker: Paul speaks about the suffering as if it were a gift or an honor:

29For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him. And the reason for this is, because in Paul's mind, it IS an honor – a gift from the hand of God that allows for a closer union with Christ. They get to experience life with Christ as it is meant to be... the same life that Paul still hungers after in 3:10: *10I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.* To know Christ is to also share in his sufferings; this is bedrock gospel reality in the heart and mind of this apostle.

It is this rugged spirituality and hunger for intimacy that Paul wants his sons and daughters to take note of and imitate. He calls them to this a few verses later in chapter 3: *17Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.* Paul already has a deep understanding of imitation as part of his disciple-making (he asks the Corinthians to “Follow me as I follow Christ”), but we see in Philippians that suffering for the gospel was part of the good, spiritual DNA that Paul wants to reproduce in his sons and daughters.

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This same pattern is confirmed elsewhere in Scripture quite explicitly. For example, in his opening words to the Thessalonians (1:5b-7), he commends them for imitating the apostolic trio of him, Timothy and Silas, highlighting their resilience to suffering: *You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.* Then, one chapter later, Paul expresses gratitude to God for their imitation of [presumably healthy] Judean churches – once again, highlighting their suffering for Christ in 2:13-15:

13And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. 14For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, 15who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men

Paul sees their ability to handle suffering as he did, and it causes him to “thank God continually” (v.13). The spiritual children indeed resemble their apostolic father.

Clearly, a pattern is emerging, but to leave no room for doubt, perhaps the most explicit place where Paul intentionally disciplines his spiritual children to imitate him in his suffering for Christ is in his correspondence with Timothy, his closest son in the Lord. Twice, he exhorts Timothy to suffer WITH him: first in 2 Timothy 1:8: *8So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God* and in 2 Timothy 2:3: *3Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.* The first verse is quite telling in showing how

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much suffering for Christ has become a part of Paul: associating with Paul means suffering for the gospel. They are so connected that Paul can call him to both simultaneously. Later on, when Paul asks Timothy to recount his way of life in his final letter to him, Paul highlights most ...[guess what?] his suffering; and he explicitly teaches Timothy to expect every bit of the same in 2 Timothy 3:

*10*You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, *11*persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. *12*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

So Paul definitely had a discipleship agenda with his sons and daughters: model and prepare them for suffering on account of Christ.

Summary – In summary, it is simple and clear: suffering for Christ is a part of what Paul reproduces in those who imitate him; he models it, teaches it, and imparts it to his disciples. It is part of the apostolic pattern established by Jesus of suffering for the salvation of others. And it is part of what it means to be sent out like Jesus was sent out: *apostles are sent out in weakness to suffer much in order that many may be saved.*

Implication 1 – Often times, this will mean that **apostles will be misunderstood and persecuted – even by colleagues.** It happened to Jesus,⁹ the apostles in Acts and to Paul. It will happen to other apostles as well. As one apostolic leader mentor and friend of mine, Tony Dale, eloquently put it in his musings on “What Apostolic Gifting Must Look Like in the Future:”

⁹ In Luke 11:48, Jesus lambasts the religious leaders of the day for their inability to recognize Jesus as an apostle from God: “God in his wisdom said: ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’”

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“So maybe God is saying apostles look totally different from each other and from what we’ve expected and anticipated – especially from charismatic background’s hierarchical discomfort. They are not at the top of the heap but at the bottom, the last people in the parade. Then, the last and least are apostles. You don’t look at foundations; you walk on them. And Jesus will build his church on them. Apostles can be so ordinary that most people don’t even know they’re Christian leaders. ...I am not sure how God will use you [as an apostle] but don’t assume that it will be the same as any who shared so far. God is raising up an army of ordinary people who look like nothing we’ve seen.”¹⁰

If indeed, this “last” and “least” is part of the weakness and suffering that Jesus modeled, then it goes without saying that this precludes a hierarchical understanding of apostles as regional C.E.O’s – as some people are prone to describe them. They are not glamorous people who walk in elite coalitions with one another and have people begging to be under their “spiritual covering.” They are misunderstood freaks who are stoned, spit on, imprisoned, and constantly critiqued from people on the outside ... and inside. I like the way Wolfgang Simson put it all together in his groundbreaking work, *The Starfish*

Manifesto:

“And finally, the desert or Tarsus test: Are apostolic people shy of pain and suffering, are they able to handle with gentleness the multitudes of stones that are being thrown at them, not becoming bitter and fighting back; are they people able to speak of their frustrations, weaknesses and lost battles as openly as they speak about their triumphs? Are they, ultimately, dead to self, to their own ambitions and desires? Are they ready to allow God to put a crown of suffering on their head – and have them praise God for the privilege of being allowed to partake in his suffering? Are they convinced they do not really qualify for the job naturally at all, and God had better have someone else step in for them? If they can say that, and are disqualified in their own eyes, we can take this as a healthy sign that we have met the real thing.”¹¹

¹⁰ Tony Dale, “What the Apostolic will look like in the future,” Antioch Starfish Conference (November 2009).

¹¹ Wolfgang Simson, *The Starfish Manifesto* (Kandern: Starfish Publishing, 2009), p.268.

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So then, for the sake of the future, we need to start looking elsewhere besides God TV, Moody Radio, or the Christian conference circuit for tomorrow's apostolic leaders. Chances are they are not there, and would not even last a month there in this system that gives them applause and a paycheck simply for showing up. They are the educated who have written plenty of books and have their large ministries and even a parking space to boot. Yet nothing in their red-carpet treatment aligns with the standard that Jesus and Paul both model and teach. Perhaps we should start looking for the spiritual mothers and fathers who have endured much suffering and misunderstanding – especially from their religious superiors, yet come out still dedicated to the mission of Jesus?

Implication 2 – For the sake of the future, a rugged spirituality needs to be a bigger part of what we're reproducing in our disciples. Another mentor and friend who is a well traveled missionary/church planter trainer, Curtis Sergeant, sees this as important and missing piece in what apostles must do now and in the future. Taking his cue from 1 and 2 Peter, he told the same group of conference attendees in Antioch, Turkey that he senses we are in the last days. And like Peter who in 1 Peter 3:8-14, 17-18 tells us to emphasize who we are as followers of Jesus: what kind of people should we be? The right response, Curtis maintains, to being in the last days is “to be right people.” And the takeaway from this was that “we have a lot of growing to do if God is going to use us in the end days.”¹² A big part of this that Curtis pointed out was preparation for suffering; “it is the responsibility of spiritual fathers and grandfathers to prepare sons and grandsons

¹² Curtis Sergeant, “What the Apostolic will look like in the future,” Antioch Starfish Conference (November 2009).

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to bear the weight of suffering.”¹³ In Curtis’ estimation, this is something that we’ve been inadequate in doing across the world, but something that apostolic ministry must get better at as persecution increases in the last days. Taking a cue from his time spent training the house church network leaders in the China, Curtis mentioned surprising story after surprising story of how the networks prepare their people to expect and undergo suffering: training in dehydration for long periods of time, training in removing handcuffs, training in jumping out of 2nd story windows, and so on. The training begins with new converts who are asked to make a statement that they are “willing at any time and place to suffer, go to prison, escape or die for their faith.”¹⁴ And they so successfully train people in this rugged spirituality that they affectionately call prison their “seminary;” it is a gift from God where they can openly preach. If they are put in solitary confinement, they see it as an opportunity to meditate and pray without hindrance. Any property confiscated from them is seen as an opportunity for mission work and travel. Curtis aptly summarizes: “If you have generation of disciples who have this, what can satan do? If they die, they go to glory.”¹⁵ Curtis’ cultural translation of this rugged Chinese spirituality to Western disciples was the practice of writing out “Last Letters,” letters to be read when a person dies, soon in one’s walk with Christ. Like the Chinese rugged discipleship training, this would help followers of Jesus in the West to expect suffering (even death), and to live with resultant zeal and purpose that we all need to possess.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

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This is one positive step towards preparing sons and daughters to stand up under the weight of suffering as they are sent out like Jesus in weakness and suffering. But we face inherent cultural and spiritual challenges that disciples in India and China are only now beginning to taste: prosperity and all that materialism does to slow down discipleship and mission.

We will need forward-thinking spiritual parents in the West who can create durable and sustainable disciple-making communities that will do spirituality, mission and community differently with the Lordship of Jesus as the organizing principle – not the American Dream and Democratic idealism. Just as the Moravians did with Herrnhut, entire communities will have to journey together to pursue lifestyles that are more durable and sustainable. Discipleship must be more holistic and more radical if we are going to get past Suburbanized, Diabetic Christianity that serves the idols of security, pleasure and comfort more than it serves Jesus. Apostolic ministry must be forward-minded enough to help raise-up durable and rugged disciples for the 21st century, just as Paul did in the 1st. The future of the church depends on this.

Apostles sent out with the authoritative presence of Jesus

We now turn to the third aspect of our functional definition of apostles, the authoritative presence of Jesus, in context of what we've covered so far: *apostles are spiritual mothers and fathers sent out like Jesus with the authoritative presence of Jesus*. The key to this obvious but under-discussed reality is found in Jesus' final commission to the apostles in Matthew's gospel account in chapter 28: *18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

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19Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." It is the promise of that last phrase that inspires great hope for the final push that lies ahead. The task is large indeed, but the resources are commensurate to it. Jesus, as the risen and all-authoritative Lord, promises to be *with you always, to the very end of the age*. This part of Jesus' commission to the apostles is often overlooked as a "yeah, yeah; that's nice" part, but it amounts to more than just Jesus saying "I'm in your corner cheering you on." It means that he is present [through the Spirit] to bless in a special way all people who are making disciples of all nations. And since not all nations in the "end of the earth" (Acts 1:8) have experienced the Matthew 28:18-20 disciple-making to date, it stands as a safe and logical conclusion that just as the Commission is still applicable to the scattered church to date, so is the promised authoritative presence of Jesus.

Being sent out *with* Jesus would surely amount to the possession of awesome supernatural resources and privileges for the disciple-making journey, but what exactly are these resources that Jesus' presence brings to the apostolic task? Scripture seems to speak of two: the first is a new insight, revelation or "intelligence" that guides the apostle; and the second is a supernatural power to perform miracles and wonders. Thanks to Luke, we see both when Jesus sends out the 12 and 72 on apostolic mission in Luke 9 and 10 and also in Luke's account of apostolic mission development in the book of Acts. Luke 9:1 very much functions as a precursor of Jesus' commission in Matthew 28 that gives a foretaste of what that sending presence would look like: it would look like the apostles doing the very works of Jesus. In Luke 9:1, Jesus gives them the authority to

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perform miracles specifically for a mission context: *1When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, 2and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.* He does the same again one chapter later in Luke 10 with an expanded group of 72 “apostles” (in the literal sense of the word): *9Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' ... 19I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.* Because the sent apostle goes with the seal and authority of the sender, in a very real way, the sent one is the proxy for the sender. This is precisely what Jesus is getting at in Luke 10: *16"He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."* The sent one stands in as the physical representative of the sender: to reject one is to reject the other. And these 72 aren't even part of the original 12 apostles; they represent the next generation of apostles who, nonetheless, because of Jesus' granted authority experience the same miracles, signs and wonders. In fact, when the 72 return joyfully proclaiming, *"Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."* Jesus gives a glowing commentary on what He did through them: *18He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.* All of this happens *before* Jesus' commissioning in Matthew 28:18-20 and *before* the granting of His abiding presence through the Holy Spirit. And that we know of from the gospel accounts, there are no more such apostolic sendings and displays of power. The gospels seem to show the disciples in a less than positive light in regard to their spiritual acumen and ability to reproduce the ministry of Jesus.

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But the story significantly changes after Jesus' commission and after the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The stream of miracles, signs and wonders that characterized Jesus' ministry and once characterized the 12 and 72, all of a sudden, returns as the norm in Acts. There are healings, escapes from prison, and extremely fruitful evangelistic messages that the formerly obtuse and scared apostles are, all of a sudden, doing with regularity! We don't have the space to recount all of them, but a few representative miracles should suffice. First is Luke's summary in Acts 2:42-43: *42They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.* The miracles continue on steadily with a mission result: for example, in Acts 3, Peter heals a crippled beggar which leads to an evangelistic message with the result of Act 4:4: *4But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.* And in the second half of Acts 9 Peter heals Aeneas, the paralytic, which leads to v.35: *35All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.* Clearly in Luke's mind there is a link between the miracles that move the gospel forward in power and the reception of Jesus' presence through the Holy Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost.¹⁶

Luke also recounts multiple examples of new revelation, insight and spiritual intelligence given by God for the purpose of creating opportunities for apostolic mission. Some examples are worth listing at this juncture. In Acts 8:26, an angel of the Lord tells

¹⁶ Wolfgang Simson did an extensive study on this topic in his [German] work, *Supernaturally Natural: The role of signs and wonders for the advancement of the Kingdom*, and had this to say: "...of the 186 various supernatural events recorded in the gospels and the book of Acts, 119 of them have a reaction or a result reported in response to such a sign; all of them have demonstrated and advanced the Kingdom" (The Starfish Manifesto, pp.203-204).

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Philip to take the south desert road to Gaza where he meets an Ethiopian eunuch reading the book of Isaiah. The Spirit then tells him in v.29 to “Go to that chariot and stay near it,” which leads to the conversion of this key Ethiopian official. In Acts 10 we see specific spiritual intelligence given through a dream both to Peter and Cornelius, leading to the conversion of Cornelius’ entire household. There is also the time when the Holy Spirit speaks to the church in Antioch in Acts 13, initiating the first missionary journey: *2While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.* Not long later, the Spirit speaks to Paul through a vivid dream where he sees a Macedonian man beckoning him to cross the sea; this brings the missionary journey team to Europe for the first time ever! And in Acts 18, God gives Paul further spiritual intelligence about Corinth that leads Paul to go against his customary short duration in his visit; instead, he obeys and stays for a year and a half: *9One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. 10For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." 11So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God* (presumably with greater evangelistic success as a result!).

Because of the clearly supernatural inspiration behind all of these missionary encounters, we can safely say that none of these missionary plans and strategies would have been birthed into being. They were all divinely initiated, inspired and communicated. Spiritual insight and intelligence was God’s way of making significant apostolic movement in Acts. Without these specific strategic, spiritual “downloads,”

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Africa has no missionary, a Centurion's household knows not Jesus, Europe never hears the gospel, and the first missionary journey never gets off shore!

The ability to walk in the miraculous and to receive supernatural insight were not only modeled by Paul in Acts, but they are also taught by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 one litmus test of a true apostle – thus, confirming the case we've made so far: *III have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the "super-apostles," even though I am nothing. 12The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance.* Paul couldn't be clearer: signs, wonders and miracles are part of the apostolic calling that comes when Jesus goes with His sent ones.

Summary – The point? Jesus is so deeply committed to the Great Commission that He goes with us – providing supernatural insight into the who, what, when, where and how? and providing supernatural power to perform the very miracles He did when “sent out” by the Father. There simply is no greater resource He can give: *to be sent out by Jesus is to literally be sent out with Jesus.*

Implication – As A. W. Tozer once said in a Devotional Thought: "God is looking for people, through whom He can do the impossible, what a pity that we spend so much time in the church on planning the things we can do in our own strengths - where is God in that?" We have to allow for his last question to continue echoing out: *where is God in what we do?* The fact remains: we have the greatest spiritual resource anyone could ever desire: JESUS! Yet we continue to choose to do ministry FOR Jesus instead of WITH

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Jesus. **We in the West must stop being satisfied with our small gains that could be accomplished even if Jesus were not alive and begin asking the right questions: why are we not seeing a releasing of Christ's authoritative power that leads to the salvation of others like we see in Acts?** Few here are seeing miracles that move the gospel into entire households and few are receiving and acting on the spiritual intelligence God regularly provides for mission breakthroughs. Practitioners all point to various causes behind this glaring absence of the supernatural in our ministries. Which is the greatest culprit behind this missionary "power outage," we cannot say with full divine insight. What we can say is that something is definitely short-circuiting the naturally supernatural power lines that Jesus promises to give – power that He, Himself, claimed would lead to greater things than He did in John 14:11-13.¹⁷ Especially damning to the Western church is the fact that mission reports from the 2/3 world tell us that the signs, wonders and miracles we read of in Acts are indeed happening in the 2/3 world as the gospel flies from household to household. Given that this phenomenon has been reproducible over time and in different cultures, it sure seems likely that we're looking at a "user-error" rather than a problem with Jesus' presence and authority. **Surely, this is something to repent of and to seek the face of God over. For the sake of the future, we must not accept Deistic status quo and must rediscover Supernatural Theism where God consistently breaks into human time and space to draw His lost children back to Him.** There is too much at stake in North America and Europe – the only two

¹⁷ *11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. 12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.*

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continents where Christianity is on the decline. We must ask the hard questions now to release the full resources Jesus has given us for the task ahead. And somehow in this mix, apostles, who by Scriptural definition walk in the supernatural, hold the keys to unlocking the chains around the Western church. It's time to let apostles be apostles.

Apostles sent out to expand the Kingdom of Jesus on earth

This takes us then to our final part of our functional definition of an apostle: *an apostle is a spiritual mother or father sent out like Jesus with the authoritative presence of Jesus for the expansion of Jesus' Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.*

Interestingly yet understandably, contemporary discussions about apostolic gifting will usually turn to church planting as the sign of apostolic gifting. While I am all for church planting, I am weary of it as the litmus test as I take Neil Cole's approach that church-planting is the result of disciple-making.¹⁸ It is certainly not a bad problem to have but it does seem to narrow the disciple-making field more than it should be when the field is quite wide open. While Christ loves His church and calls her His bride, there is an interesting paucity of references to the word, "church" (used twice by Jesus in the gospels in contrast to His 100 plus uses of the word "kingdom") in Jesus' vocabulary, as well as a glaring absence of training in church planting [as we know and do it] when Jesus sends his apostles out on their first outing in Luke 9 and 10. What does Jesus "train" them to

¹⁸ As a former conventional church planter, I know from experience that usually the training and execution has it reversed: plant churches among Christians first, then try to make disciples of all people. Not surprisingly, those of us who go in this order are not seeing anything close to the rapid and extensive, multi-generational church planting happening as is happening across the world with planters who start with disciple-making among not-yet-Christians.

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do in Luke 9 and 10? More than training them to plant churches, Jesus is instructing them to move in Kingdom legitimacy (hence, the bit on prayer and weakness/dependence) as they literally seed the Kingdom through their arrival into towns. He is having them proclaim through words and demonstrate through miraculous deeds that the King had come in power. At this moment in salvation history, kingdom expansion and movement in the hearts of men is the goal – not the addition of more faith assemblies. Whether there are faith assemblies that come out of this endeavor is not made known to us, as Luke’s emphasis is on the apostolic sending rather more than the apostolic fruit – which he details in Acts. The “fruit” Luke does detail here is the interesting power transfer in Luke 10:17-19 that we earlier referenced with the authority Christ imbues apostles: *17The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." 18He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.* This power transfer, or losing of ground by the “god of this world” is the important result that sets up quite masterfully for what is to come in Acts.

We do not have, in this paper, the space needed to develop a full-orbed theology of the Kingdom. But a few remarks are in order here to set the bigger picture. If the gospel is the name of the one story told in Scripture, the reality of which the gospel speaks is the eternal and ever-growing Kingdom of Jesus (probably the reason Jesus so often calls it the “gospel of the kingdom”). From the early Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem, the rule of Jesus has been progressively growing everywhere on earth where it

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is not: in the hearts of all God's lost sons and daughters.¹⁹ The redemption story takes a large turn when the King Himself arrives on earth, proclaiming his gospel message in Mark 1:15: *15*"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" The significance of this gospel message, that is nearly identical to John the Baptist's message, is in Jesus being the apostolic messenger for it.; the King HIMSELF is saying it, creating a dynamic moment where the Kingdom has never been nearer! In His arrival and preaching of it, the Kingdom – as a governmental rule of Christ – is truly at hand. Jesus Himself referred to this quickening of time and intensity that has happened from John the Baptist's ministry to his own in Matthew 11:11-13, remarking that the Kingdom has been moving forward violently since John. And so, when the King, teaches his own apostles to proclaim the very same message in Luke 9 and 10 and to demonstrate it in the very same way He did, it has added significance. They, and all apostles for that matter, are stepping into that stream of dynamically taking spiritual ground back from the "god of this world" as Jesus did one new spiritual son or daughter at a time – especially Post-Pentecost when our spiritual resources significantly changed. This apostolic activity then comes into congruency with Jesus' teaching on prayer when He taught his apostles to pray, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." They are putting action to words, feet to road; and, in so doing, they are swimming in the inevitable current that is filling the planet called the Kingdom rule of Christ. We know how this story will end, for Revelation 11:15 tell us that the time will come when the angelic messenger will proclaim, "*The kingdom of the world*

¹⁹ God's Kingdom grows one life at a time; or as Wolfgang Simson puts it: "The Kingdom of God grows by humans pledging their allegiance to God (*The Starfish Manifesto*, pp.225-226).

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has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.” Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord,” and the glory of the King will cover the earth like the waters of the sea. That is the endgame of where history has been going, and what apostles (and the Church for that matter!) are to work towards.

How do apostles work towards this inevitability? Since the Kingdom of Jesus is not a geo-political and physical Kingdom but instead a spiritual Kingdom moved forward by people (apostles) in the hearts of people (new disciples), apostles are in God’s design the ones who move the Kingdom forward -- especially on the front end. Their work allows the further work of others, and their work “moves the [proverbial] chains.” Two metaphors in Scripture that illuminate this unique role are used by Paul in his letters to his Corinthians and Ephesians: “expert builder” and “foundation layer.” Foundation laying we’ve seen before in Ephesians 2:19-21 when Paul describes the role of apostles in the church: *19Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.* In a way upon which Paul does not further elaborate here, apostles (along with prophets) help secure the foundation of the church and align it to Jesus, “the chief cornerstone.” The related analogy Paul uses elsewhere that expands this architectural imagery is in 1 Corinthians 3:9-11:

9For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. 10By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 11For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

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Reiterating the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ as the ultimate foundation, apostles literally lay down *Jesus* as master builders where He previously was not; others – Apollos in this context but also the rest of the Ephesians 4:11 gifts of Evangelists, Shepherds, and Teachers – can then build on that proper foundation that Paul as an apostle built. Taking a cue from Paul, Wolfgang Simson calls apostles a “building gift” and coins the phrase “apostolic architecture” for the systems that apostles put in place to help put into reality what God is revealing – in particular to prophets. Apostles are the hands, and prophets are the eyes. Prophets point the way as God’s Positioning System (spiritual “G.P.S.”), and apostles build the infrastructure to that destination called Kingdom realization.

While this sounds theoretical, in truth, it is functional and practical... not to mention written all over the Scripture as a pattern. For example, in the Old Testament, though lacking the Greek word “apostle,” has apostolic type people all throughout. The pattern is this: God supernaturally reveals a plan to someone -- usually a prophetic person but sometimes the apostolic type person; then God calls an apostolic type person to implement and build on that revealed plan. Whether it was Noah, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, Nehemiah, or Zerubbabel, clearly, there were people whom God raised up to build the road *there* – whether that “there” was a new temple, a time in the wilderness to become a new nation/people for God, a wall for Jerusalem, an ark, government assistance in a famine, conquest into the promised land, a theocratic kingdom, or a temple for God to dwell in. These people acted on the prophetic (spiritual G.P.S.) intelligence, and built the roadway to allow for the Kingdom to move forward in key ways.

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To return to apostolic architecture in the 1 Cor. 3:10 way, one may wonder: what would foundation-laying work look like? Foundation work is front end, often pioneering work -- a new people group or oikos to hear the gospel, a new “beachhead” established in a new sector of society (like medicine, education, the arts, media, etc.) that is gospel-resistant, a new wineskin that does spirituality, community and mission differently. Whatever the situation, front-end work is almost universally harder than back-end work. Foundation-laying involves breaking up the ground with a shovel, analysis and preparation of the soil, leveling off to the perfect standard, putting in just enough materials to have a strong, weather-proof and uncomplicated foundation on which the rest of the building can hang, imagining and forecasting how the rest of the structure gets built. All of this is critical to the strength of the building.

How does this translate to placing the foundation of Christ as chief cornerstone? Deconstructing old and obscuring paradigms, removing weeds of sin and spiritual strongholds, imparting the right spiritual DNA disciples that they can also embody and pass on to their disciples, instilling new foundational values that not only function well but fit the Scriptural plumb line – values like transferability, simplicity, reproducibility, scalability, durability, and sustainability enter into a foundation layer’s mind in a way that others who come along after don’t have to worry about (A painter can come and think about visual appeal and a sales person about marketability. But foundations don’t need those values.). Apostles also network and work in coordination with others to secure needed resources; they identify, train and establish next generation leaders; and they innovate, implement and execute an exit-strategy. These are just a few ways that apostles themselves can lay foundations once they’ve put feet to conviction and shown up

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where God leads them.²⁰ And since they move with the presence and authority of Jesus Christ, there is blessing in their building work. The reason Paul can call himself an “expert builder” in 1 Corinthians 3:10? Because regardless of what part of the process Paul is contributing to as an apostle, God is making the seed grow! Paul has tapped into that divine power that allows him as a Kingdom builder to move things from possibility to reality.²¹ Apostles help bring what is conceived in heaven to be born on earth. And when all is said and done, in Revelation 21:14 the New Jerusalem (The church in its new form) will have twelve foundations named after the twelve apostles – perhaps further testimony to the importance of foundation-laying as a core task in apostolic ministry?

Summary: There is a lot here, but the bottom line amounts to this: apostles have been gifted by God to move the Kingdom forward from the mind of God to the streets of earth. They are the architects and builders of the heavenly imagination that make the Kingship of Jesus the central premise for the universe. Their work in particular sets the stage for others to function well in their gifting after Kingdom space has been cleared away for them; or as Neil Cole and his Church Multiplication Associates 4:11 council friends call

²⁰ Not only can and do they do it themselves in pioneer soil but as Ephesians 4:11-16 shows us, apostles are gifts to the church to help “equip” the church towards health and maturity – a health and maturity that includes reproduction as we spoke of earlier. It is an interesting tension for them as they are sent out to the future church-that-is-yet-to-form as well as to the present church that already gathers. They help the gathered church to be the scattered church, the apostolic church that goes into all the world and multiplies new sons and daughters who will do the same.

²¹ My prophetic friend, Dezi Baker, often talks about it as the pairing of prophetic possibility and apostolic certainty. The wedding of the two yield a formidable combination that leverages both giftings in the way God desires.

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it: apostles with prophets comprise the “start and go” team” with evangelists, shepherds and teachers forming the “stay and grow” team.²²

Implication:

Due to years of marginalization and ignoring, apostolic movement is in short supply. Of the five-fold ministry in Ephesians 4:11, it is the least understood, least implemented and least embraced gifting. Yet, it is and always has been one of the most crucial ones needed for the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Praying through Operation World and reading the world news, one can see that there is much work still left to do.

For the sake of the future, we need for apostles to BE apostles. Apostles need to do what God has designed for them to do. Apostles need to equip the present and the not-yet-formed church to “go into all the world and make disciples of all nations.” They need to go themselves in obedience to prophetic intelligence. They need to model a “sent” life and the simplicity of a reproducible life for not-yet-Christian as well as current Christ-followers. They need to impart their multiplication values, their Holy-Spirit dependence and their expectant faith for the miraculous to happen. They need to raise up next generation leaders and send them into the harvest. Teachers and Pastors, as well intentioned as they maybe, cannot play this “start and go” role. They cannot equip the gathered church to make disciples of all nations and keep the priority of apostolic mission

²² My good friend and own apostolic father, Ross Rohde, has often called apostles the “the tip of the spear.” They work on the front end and provide the entry-point and ministry access for others. Ross’ apostolic thoughts can be found on his website: www.thejesusvirus.org.

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before the church like apostles can. They were never intended to. Apostles must take their place in God's economy.

We also need more apostles in many places – especially the places where the reign of Christ is not. Not only do we need them in the two Continents of Europe and North America where Christianity is declining, but we especially need apostles in the 10/40 window. In this very hour we need people who will pray to the Lord of the harvest for more workers, and then go be that first one; and as apostles, they have been graced by God to survive and thrive in the rigors of lawless countries like Somalia, war-torn countries like Rwanda, dictator-ravaged countries like North Korea, poverty-stricken cities like Calcutta, and bastions of radical Islam throughout the Middle East and Southeast Asia. We need apostles in influential sectors of society that have long been controlled by the enemy, whether that is the academy, the media, local and national politics, science and medicine, international finance, and the like. They can stand tall as contemporary Josephs, Esthers, Daniels, Nehemiahs, and Lukes who powerfully move the Kingdom story forward right where God has placed them.

This is a call to arms, for all apostolic hands on deck. *People are waiting.* Prophets are waiting for apostles to lay foundations with them from the things God is showing them. Evangelists, Shepherds and Teachers are waiting for the “start and go” team to establish the groundwork for them to go in. Everyday followers of Jesus who long to be with Jesus in the harvest and live out what they read in the Scriptures are waiting—waiting for someone to show them the way of Jesus. Everyday people who don't know Jesus are waiting. And God is waiting... for all His lost sons and daughters to be brought back to Him.

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Conclusion

An apostle is a spiritual mother or father who gives birth to new children and parents children into strength and full reproductive maturity sent out like Jesus in weakness to suffer for the salvation of many with the authoritative presence of Jesus to perform signs, wonders and miracles for the expansion of Jesus' Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

This paper was an exercise in exploration: exploring the Scriptures to get back to something ancient and true that, if no longer ignored, misconstrued or even falsely pedestalized would alter the way that ministry and mission is done. That something-old-yet-new was the God-designed gift of apostles that He flung out like treasures in triumphal procession to the “Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” for her continuing growth into the Body that would one day – because of her Apostolicity – be His multi-cultural bride from every nation, tribe and tongue. In the process of this exploration, we have discovered that apostles play a vital role in the continuity of Jesus’ mission on earth of creating a King’s people in a King’s place under a King’s rule. Walking in the authority and presence of Jesus Himself, apostles reproduce new spiritual sons and daughters, and parent existing ones into maturity and multiplication. They are quintessential family people – giving birth and adopting multi-generational lines of family across the globe, yet they know not how extensive their family lines really are. We also got to see how these apostles walk in an authority rarely seen today in the West; indeed, it is an authority we mostly read about in Scripture and in mission reports from that amorphous place called “the mission field.” But there it is in Scripture: modeled, taught and made a requirement for apostleship by Paul! Such divine capacities to

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perform signs, miracles and wonder will be needed in order to build dynamic Kingdom inroads deep into that “mission field” – whether that mission field is in pioneer, gospel-hostile soil or the dead and fallow soil of post-Christian lands like Europe and America. If we were to stop here in our journey, then we leave behind a glowing description of apostles: multiplying disciple-makers who walk in the presence and authority of Jesus and assist the global church in transforming the planet as they cry out, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”? What Jesus-follower wouldn’t want to be that?

But also in this journey, we have taken some unexpected turns: seeing that apostles have a great price to pay; theirs is a destiny like Jesus’ that includes misunderstanding and ridicule as they are clothed in weakness and great suffering as they seek to bring all God’s lost children back to the Father. Tying together this notion of suffering to spiritual parenting, Bruno Bayer of Switzerland had this to say about apostles:

“[An] Apostle is a spiritual Father... To be an apostle is to be deep down in the foundation of the church. To be one is to be called or [to be] sick! [An apostle] Must die. Nobody would recognize it. [He is an] Unseen person. That’s why it’s important that it comes from father’s heart because a father can carry the burden.”²³

That burden of suffering includes both the external and internal. Wolfgang Simson, addressing the suffering from within, calls apostles, “weeping fathers.”²⁴ The apostle weeps for people like Jesus wept for Jerusalem in Luke 19:41 and like John Knox wept for Scotland, reportedly asking God “Give me Scotland, or I die!” Their fathers’ and

²³ Bruno Bayer, “What the Apostolic will look like in the future,” Antioch Starfish Conference (November 2009).

²⁴ Wolfgang Simson, *The Starfish Manifesto* (Kandern: Starfish Publishing, 2009), p.244.

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mothers' hearts actually caused many apostles to die. If church history is any indication, the early apostles showed this willingness to pay the price in the very manner of their deaths:

“In his book, F. L. Potter summarizes this, describing that almost all apostles died unnatural death as martyrs and followed Christ even in the way they died: Philip, after a revival happened in Phrygia, was imprisoned, bound and hanged there. Matthew was reportedly martyred in Ethiopia. Andrew was preaching in Asia, and ended up crucified by order of Algenas, proconsul of Achaia. Mark was sent to Egypt, planted a church in Alexandria, and was dragged to death, says Eusebius. Peter, according to tradition, died in Rome, crucified head downwards. Paul died in Rome, and Jude, some early writers say, was crucified in Jerusalem. Thomas allegedly died a martyr in India, killed by a spear. Luke was probably hanged from an olive tree in Greece; Simon (the Zealot) preached in Africa, and was later crucified in Britain. John, as an exception, died a natural death in Patmos and the age of 98. Timothy, bishop in Ephesus, was martyred, Barnabas killed by Jews in Syria.”²⁵

The price is great because the task is great: the very mission of Jesus is at stake. And this apostolic forerunner died for the whole world – showing his very willingness to also pay the price as a weeping father. Apostles after Jesus have indeed followed in His large footsteps throughout history as there have allegedly been more martyrs in the last two centuries than all the previous centuries put together. I suspect that when we get to heaven, we will discover that many of these martyrs were, in fact, apostles or the spiritual sons and daughters of real-deal apostles as Timothy was to Paul. May their tribe increase for what is yet left to do for the discipling of all nations of the earth!

²⁵ Wolfgang Simson, *The Starfish Manifesto* (Kandern: Starfish Publishing, 2009), p.231.

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Appendix 1

What about the apostolic people gifts? Here are some gaping holes we see in today's church through the systemic neglect and/or rejection of **God's apostolic people gifts**.

- Without apostolic drive, we stop at evangelistic addition — not multiplication. Salvation stops at the individual as we fail to see how God often doesn't just reach one but many in the social network through that one Luke 10 "person of peace" who is a doorway to an entire community.
- Without apostolic action, we fail to experience the promised presence of Christ and spiritual authority that comes when we go as "sent ones" who disciple all nations. Often times, we are mired in confusion and disillusionment as we only go as far as our human resources of staffing and money and curriculum take us. To hide the disappointment, we continue to rationalize that the powerful and miraculous stories in Scripture are for a different time and that the current stories coming in from overseas will never happen where we are.
- Without apostolic clarity, the REASON FOR OUR EXISTENCE becomes murky. We don't strategically think about culture and DNA — the underlying value systems and core ideologies that define a community. Corporate identity is thus "accidentally" stumbled upon instead of strategically realized, reinforced and spread to new groups of people. Organizations that don't know what they are about often remain stuck in maintenance mode and full of uninspired people.
- Without apostolic modeling, we miss out on a culture/spirit of "releasing" and "empowering" and have to contend instead with a spirit of management and control. In an effort to be helpful, we over-manage and control processes and people meant to be openly and temporarily guided — not permanently gripped. And in so doing, we inadvertently short-circuit all momentum and movement as we corral the simple and small things that, if left to themselves in God's economy, would naturally spread and multiply.
- Without apostolic parenting, the multi-generational mentoring and leadership development that the N.T. models and teaches rarely happens and is replaced by a "learned dependence" on first generation, clergy-led ministry. Like scaffolding that sticks around beyond its usefulness, leaders often default on staying longer in their role for the sake of "ministry quality" that ends up severely limiting the net quality and quantity of workers in the harvest.
- Without apostolic accountability, we don't ask the obvious questions of sustainability behind our "best practices:" do we REALLY need to have million dollar budgets, seminary educated leaders and 50-100 Christian people to start a church? Do we need to have land and a building to be the church? How

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sustainable are buildings and staff salaries — especially in this economic downturn and especially if the downturn continues?

- Without apostolic imagination, we fail to ask questions of scalability. We opt to “go big” or “launch large,” assuming that many different things need to be in place before new disciples, leaders or churches can be launched. And in doing so, we miss out on the power of small things like germs, dandelion seeds and rabbits that can reproduce and thrive even in hostile environments.
- Without apostolic vision, we fail to ruthlessly ask the questions of reproducibility and transferability. We so complicate the message and training process that few know it and few are able to pass it on to others. In stark contrast is the elegant simplicity and agility of Alcoholics Anonymous where anyone with little to no resources can go anywhere and everywhere across the globe and start a chapter.
- Without apostolic passion, we fail to embrace our role in the big picture of Kingdom mission. We busy ourselves with our isolated and small ministry goals for our personal organizations alone instead of embracing our embeddedness in a global movement of the Kingdom that focuses on the transformation of the planet and the mandate to disciple all unengaged and unreached people groups that remain.

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