

# Ephesians 4 team: principles and practice

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What is the biblical basis for “Ephesians 4 ministries” and how should they operate to equip and build up God’s church? What should they focus on? How should they relate to local leadership?

## 1. Introduction

It’s vital that we building our understanding of apostolic ministry and Ephesians 4 ministries on the clear teaching of scripture, not just on the practice of the early church.

Ephesians 4:1-16 is the classic chunk of scripture that explains the purpose, call, nature and grace of some very different ministries within the Body of Christ.

The context of Ephesians 4 is the rest of Ephesians! Ephesians is all about God’s plans for the church. The ministries belong right in the context of the church, well connected to the church, and are for the church!

## 2. Key lessons from Ephesians 4

To summarise Ephesians 4:1-13

- 4:1-6 **The ultimate goal** of our life in Christ is deep-seated unity. A unity of heart, purpose, family and confession.
- 4:7-13 **The channel** God uses to build unity is through a diversity of ministries, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

These ministries are undeserved gifts of the risen and ascended Christ to His church.

The ascended Christ is engaged in a great and glorious task – to fill the whole universe with his presence. This is connected with Ephesians 4 ministries, and the maturing of the church.

1. The **focus** of Ephesians 4 ministries is:
  - (a) To fix God’s people so that they work/minister/function – v12
  - (b) To build up the Body of Christ
2. The **aim** of Ephesians 4 ministries is:
  - (a) That “we all” may reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the son of God (conviction and intimacy)
  - (b) That “we all” may become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (character and stature)
3. The **process** of this maturing and growth is (4:14-16):
  - (a) To stop being “blown about” through immaturity
  - (b) To grow up into Christ, by speaking the truth in love

In summary (4:16): the church needs:

<b>Direction</b>	from the Head, Christ	<i>the source of life</i>
<b>Connection</b>	relationship, through which everything is joined, held together, and strengthened. Ephesians 4 ministries are part of this relational strengthening	<i>the fostering of life</i>
<b>Function</b>	when every part works as it should, through the equipping of the ministries, the whole Body grows up	<i>the generation of life</i>

### 3. Ephesians 4 ministry in the New Testament

#### 3.1. *Ephesians 4 teams*

An Ephesians 4 team ('apostolic team') is a grouping of ministries, led by an apostle, that agree together under God to plant, service and support local churches who relate to them or who are planted and developed by them. (Acts 1, 2, 6, 13, 20)

1. The essential life force of the team is relational not organisational.
2. Their authority functions only where it is recognised! – by God and by local believers.
3. The sphere of that authority can be in region, a nation, or nations.
4. The team is led by an apostle who willingly harnesses his ministry with other five-fold gifts
5. (Ephesians 4:11 and 1Corinthians 12:28-29 ministries) to form a "construction team".
6. It's clear that women worked alongside men in ministry teams (e.g. Acts 18:1-4,18-19, Romans 16:3-5.)
7. It can also contain younger trainees: Timothy, Titus, John Mark, etc.

#### 3.2. *Apostolic bases*

The team can be drawn from one local church, e.g. Jerusalem, Antioch and Ephesus, which were all 'apostolic bases'. Or the team can be drawn from several churches ('translocal'), e.g. Paul and his mobile team (Acts 20:4), which had 10 members from a variety of Churches. This team, travelled throughout Asia Minor, and were all in Ephesus, then in Philippi, Greece and Troas, Macedonia.

**'Apostolic bases' are not buildings, but a sending church or group of churches, where an Ephesians team is based and from which it functions.**<sup>1</sup>

#### 3.3. *What did they do?*

Their job was wide and varied:

They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. Acts 14:21-23

(See also 1Corinthians 5, Galatians 3, Acts 20:17-30)

- Setting in elders
- Preaching the kingdom
- Moving in supernatural power
- Preaching Christ crucified
- Strengthening the brethren
- Ensuring good foundations biblically
- Dealing with major doctrinal and moral issues
- Encouraging development and releasing ministries
- Warning, exhorting and fathering their new their charges and churches.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of Ephesians 4 teams being based in and sent out from a church base is not unique to the New Church movement, e.g. the monastic movement, the minster church acting as a base to evangelise a region.

### 3.4. Six key areas of function for the Ephesians 4 team

The Salt & Light European Apostolic team have adopted the following way of categorising the function of the team, as a working definition:

<b>Extension by mission and breakthrough</b>	Fostering a vision for mission – i.e. keeping local leaders and churches focused on growth Resourcing church planting through training, on-the-ground-support, evangelism, etc.
<b>Imparting the supernatural</b>	Bringing a supernatural dynamic in ministry, preaching and teaching. Those in apostolic ministry are particularly to function in healing the sick, casting out demons and performing miracles! Apostles were often used in a special way to impart the power of God to other believers. Bringing correction when churches become weak in charisma
<b>Foundation laying</b>	Asking “what’s in place?” and “what’s missing” Advising at key points of development Teaching and envisioning Doctrinal and ministry foundations, including resources
<b>Leadership training and appointment</b>	Training leaders – initial and ongoing Identifying and appointing elders Ongoing help in identifying and training Timothy’s
<b>Problem solving, e.g. sin, doctrine</b>	Pastoral support and advice for the church leader Pastoral support and advice for the local team Regular communication (inc. minutes) Emphasis on ‘doctrinal problem solving’ rather than ‘centralised doctrinal definition’, avoids denominationalism
<b>Promoting unity</b>	Intervening in relational squabbles between leaders and people, that are unable to be resolved locally Fostering relationships to other networks and denominations

## 4. How does it work?

### 4.1. Relationship and flexibility

The apostolic is a ‘fathering’ ministry, working alongside church leadership to bring maturity of leadership. The apostolic takes risks. Biblically, we see the apostolic role not as a ‘super elder’, but as a ministry who comes in and impacts churches, helps them begin the necessary processes, then leaves the elders to work it out. (However, nor is the apostle simply a ‘consultant’ with no authority!)

Apostolic teams will be put together to serve local churches, either for an occasion, like the laying on of hands for Eldership, for a specific task or over an extended period of time. We are not looking for a one-size-fits-all model, but to find the mind of God for a particular church <sup>2</sup>.

The relationship between churches and the apostolic is a two-way relationship, and initiative must be mutual! The local leaders must ask for help, advice and input, and the apostolic will initiate regular input strategies.

In particular, the ministry needs of churches vary according the life-stage of that church:

- A new plant – which needs much more regular and on-the-ground investment and foundation-laying <sup>3</sup>
- A developing church – which needs eldership appointing and training to take proper responsibility

<sup>2</sup> Paul and his various teams spent long and short periods in towns; he sent envoys for various periods of time; he wrote letters and spoke positively of the work of other fivefold ministries who invested into ‘his’ churches.

<sup>3</sup> The nature of input also depends on whether the plant is (a) ‘new territory’, (b) ‘filling in a village’ (cell plant?) or (c) a homogenous (cell) plant within an existing town. (b) and (c) may be more connected to a particular local church than (a), which may require more intense apostolic support.

- A mature church – which needs ongoing provocation to ‘think big’ and to release Timothy-leadership to other settings
- A church in difficulty – which needs careful and hands-on help to find a way through whatever problems are being faced

## **4.2. Practical ideas...**

In practice, Ephesians 4 team input needs to be based upon the scriptural concept of ‘being amongst’ people (e.g. 1Thessalonians 1:5) – it should not be an annual fleeting visit but an ongoing fatherly relationship.

It may well include...

- Public ministry
  - Preaching – either one-offs (ideally as part of local series/strategy) or longer series
  - ‘Holy Spirit’ meetings – imparting the supernatural. In particular seeing breakthrough in ‘stuck’ situations.
  - Midweek church meeting or visits to small groups, or particular groups (e.g. youth).
- Ministry to leaders
  - Leaders’ meetings – It is more helpful to work team to team here rather than just to the senior leader. This may be a one-off or several visits working through a particular issue.
  - Meals with key members of the leadership team and/or church – an opportunity to build relationally and find out what is really going on, as well as offer one-to-one coaching and input on discovering the gifts and graces of members.
  - Ongoing communication and consultation about what we are doing across the family of churches. The apostolic teams should provide a special cohesive factor.
  - Leadership training. Recognising both need and particular gifting and ensuring this is consistently being trained into place.
- Support for particular seasons of development or extension
  - Apostolic reviews (or mini-reviews of one aspect of church life). This can include recognising ‘ministry gaps’ in a church which need filling by such gifts being regularly sent in with a view to raising new ones in that church.
  - Evangelistic work and support, e.g. ground-breaking work
  - Prayer for the church and its region. Both for new breakthroughs and in times of attack and crisis. Our God is a generous God, and he wants us to both experience this and pass it on to others. It’s easy to say ‘Amen!’ to that; but the extent to which we truly believe it is probably seen nowhere more clearly than in how we handle our finances.