

Five-Fold Ministry Gifts Leaders for the Body of Christ

A HarvestNet International Position Paper

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This paper is one in a series of provisional position papers prepared for HarvestNet International. These papers are "provisional" in that while they represent some current thinking on the matters raised within the papers they are also subject to amendments, additions, and corrections coming from additional revelation and understanding. Because of this, we are pleased to receive comments and affirmations from those interacting with these papers. Although the councils of HarvestNet International have reviewed these papers and approved them for circulation, the content remains the responsibility of the author.

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Introduction

HarvestNet International fully affirms the present-day ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in accordance with Ephesians 4:11-16. In this paper, we want to present a brief perspective on the five-fold ministry as understood in this passage.¹

Most Christians would affirm the present-day validity of most or all of the Ephesians 4:11 ministry gifts. However, we find that many fail to see these gifts from the perspective of Scripture. Instead, people tend to view these ministry gifts through the lens of tradition (including church tradition), unbiblical presuppositions (such as the gifts of the Spirit or the role of apostles have ceased today), or one's culture. While not trying to proof-text every argument, we hope people will see the biblical foundations for our discussion of the five-fold ministries today.

Five-Fold Ministry Overview

Unlike the gifts of the Spirit which are Spirit-given *abilities* given to individuals within the church, the five-fold ministers are Spirit-empowered *people* given to the Body of Christ by *Jesus* (see Ephesians 4:11). Although we find a great diversity among these people, they will almost always have five things in common.

First, five-fold ministers have received a sphere of ministry (see 2 Corinthians 10:13-18). A sphere is an area of influence assigned to the five-fold minister by God. Each five-fold minister will have a unique sphere, although their spheres will often overlap. God may define each sphere by a variety of factors, including geography, culture, people group, age group, gates of society influence and so on. These ministry spheres are not static, but may expand or contract as determined by God.

Each five-fold ministry sphere tends to have one thing in common. These spheres are generally *translocal*, meaning that they go beyond serving one local congregation. Five-fold ministers may sometimes spend a majority of their time in one specific church, but their sphere of influence will generally go beyond that local church into their city, region, nation or beyond. Their sphere of influence may extend into the marketplace or a specific group of people. The translocal nature of five-fold ministry is one thing that distinguishes five-fold ministers from elders, who are normally called to serve one particular church for the duration of their eldership.

Second, five-fold ministers have received spiritual gifts to empower their roles supernaturally. Rather than having received one or two spiritual gifts, these ministers often have a mix of spiritual gifts uniquely suited for their sphere and their role within that sphere. Each one of the five-fold ministries has a • dominant gift that will be shared by everyone within that ministry.

For example, five-fold teachers will always have the spiritual gift of teaching. Five-fold pastors will always have the spiritual gift of shepherding. Five-fold evangelists will always have the spiritual gift of evangelism. Five-fold prophets will always have the spiritual gift of prophecy. While there is considerable debate about whether there is a spiritual gift of "apostling", we believe that five-fold apostles will always have the spiritual gift of faith.

While five-fold ministers will always have the spiritual gifts associated with that five-fold ministry, five-fold ministry cannot be reduced simply to a spiritual gift. For instance, simply because someone has the spiritual gift of shepherding does not mean that person is a five-fold pastor. Although we cannot reduce five-fold ministry to a spiritual gift, we do find that all five-fold ministers

¹ We would encourage people to read our position paper "Apostles for Today" for further background and understanding of the issues raised in this paper. Because we have discussed the five-fold ministry of apostles in that paper, we will not cover this extensively in this paper.

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will release the dominant gift into the lives of others associated with their ministry. For example, people who associate closely with a five-fold prophet will generally receive the spiritual gift of prophecy, at least temporarily.

Third, five-fold ministers have developed a temperament suited to their five-fold ministry. God is always active in the development of such temperaments. Our temperament includes the basic ways we are "wired", such as whether we are introverts or extroverts. Our temperament also stems from our culture, our background, our place in life, our education, and many similar things. We can see very clearly that five-fold prophets have very different temperaments than five-fold pastors.

Although we believe that one's temperament is important to five-fold ministry, we would reject any notion that reduces five-fold ministry simply to a temperament. There are many people who might have temperaments suited to a particular five-fold ministry simply are not five-fold ministers. Sometimes, people will begin to develop a five-fold ministry temperament simply by being around five-fold minister. For example, people who associate closely with a five-fold evangelist will naturally begin to develop a more evangelistic temperament.

Fourth, five-fold ministers have developed as leaders. These are people who are natural leaders or who have received a spiritual gift for leadership. "Natural" leaders are people who have a general propensity to lead. They find themselves leading know matter what context they find themselves in. If they are not natural leaders, than five-fold ministers have received a gift for leadership which allows them to lead in the context of their five-fold ministry. They may not lead as part of their natural disposition but they will lead in their sphere as gifted by God.

Although we believe that five-fold ministers are leaders, this does not mean that five-fold ministers are necessarily leaders of local churches. Biblically, the governing leaders of local churches called elders or overseers (see 1 Timothy 3:1ff and 1 Peter 5:1ff). Unless a five-fold minister is also an elder, the five-fold minister may not be a local church leader.

Finally, five-fold ministers have received faith to fulfill their responsibilities. Note 5-fold minister can serve without having faith. Often, five-fold ministers will have a gift of faith. But even if they do not have a spiritual gift of faith day will have faith sufficient unto their ministry responsibilities. In addition, they will have received grace from Jesus sufficient to fulfill their ministry responsibilities.

What Five-Fold Ministers Are *Not*

In order to understand five-fold ministers, we need to affirm what they are *not*. We need to counter some of the common misunderstandings.

First, *five-fold ministers are not "offices"*. Being a five-fold minister is not taking up an "office" in the Church.² They do not hold an "office", like that of governor or president. They are not "officers", as in the military (although sometimes military analogies might appropriately be used

² One cannot make a biblical case for "offices" in the Church, except possibly for the word *episkopos*, used for the position of overseer in the local church (see 1 Timothy 3:1, where the word "office" often found in English translations does not occur in the Greek). The other place people might point to would be Acts 1:17-23, where Peter quotes from Psalm 109:8 and says "Let another take his office". The better translation here, and the one that would more accurately reflect the Hebrew in Psalm 109:8, is the word "position". Even if one could make a strong case for this word being translated as "office" – and thus referring to apostles – then one would have to concede that essential qualifications for this "office" would be travelling with the original Twelve and having witnessed the resurrected Jesus. Thus, they would be making the cessationists' case for them.

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to describe how they function). They have no “authority” intrinsic to their being a five-fold minister other than that explicitly connected by God to their sphere of influence or that which is shared by all Christians (see below regarding authority). In this sense, being a five-fold minister does not mean that you have a formal “position” in the Body of Christ.

Second, *five-fold ministers are not the top of the church hierarchy*. They are not the highest authority in the life of the Church. They are not the rulers. They are not the five highest ranks in God’s “army”. They are not the roles to which all Christians should aspire. They are not salaried positions. By their very nature, they are merely servant-sons (men and women) of their heavenly Father. They certainly have a sphere of influence and the authority that comes with that sphere of influence, but having this sphere of influence does not mean they are on “top” of this sphere in any way.

Third, *five-fold ministers are not necessarily the leaders of local churches*. Biblically, the elders have the responsibility for the oversight of the church, not five-fold ministers (see 1 Timothy 3:1-7). At the same time, five-fold ministers are not disconnected from the local church. Some five-fold ministers might function full-time in a local church, while others may have itinerant ministries based in a local church. Throughout the NT, five-fold ministers were strongly connected with local churches, such as Peter in Jerusalem and Paul in Antioch. Five-fold ministers, such as Peter, might even serve as local-church elders (see 1 Peter 5:1), in which case they do share in the leadership of the local church in which they serve as an elder.

All these notions of five-fold ministry distort the role of five-fold ministers and weaken their impact in the Church.

Five-Fold Ministry Shared Purpose

Paul clearly states the purpose of the five-fold ministries in Ephesians 4:11-16:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:11–16 ESV)

Many times when the understanding of five-fold ministers becomes distorted, it is because people have failed to recognize their purpose in light of this passage.

Although this passage is rich in its content and imagery, space does not permit us to do a full exposition of the passage. However, we might point out several aspects of five-fold purpose from the passage –

- Equip the saints for the work of ministry
- Build up the Body of Christ
- Promote unity in the faith and in knowing Jesus relationally
- Promote maturity as measured by the person and works of Jesus
- Enable people to resist false teachers and the spirit of the age
- Promote growth of individuals within and as part of the Body of Christ
- Enable and release the Body to build itself up in love

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Many different things might be deduced from this list, but the list presents a good basis for understanding five-fold purpose.

Of course, we would not necessarily consider this passage exhaustive of five-fold purpose. Various other passages will help illuminate the purpose of various five-fold ministers. For example, 1 Corinthians 14 will help us understand the purpose of prophets. Various passages in Acts might help us understand the purpose of evangelists. We can learn the purpose of teachers by looking at the passages regarding false teachers. And these are just a few examples.

Five-Fold Ministry and the Local Church

It is important for us to understand how five-fold ministers relate to local churches. Misunderstanding this vital relationship has led to many problems in church history, including recent church history. Some people see five-fold ministers as nothing but employees of a local church. Others see five-fold ministers as transcending the local church and not subject to local churches whatsoever. In order for five-fold ministers to function effectively we need to understand how they interact with local churches.

First, five-fold ministers do not "govern" or "oversee" local churches unless they also serve as elders on a team of elders in the local church. The Bible reveals that God has appointed elders to oversee and govern local churches. Several passages point to this.

In 1 Timothy 3, Paul calls elders "overseers". This word, along with words like "manage" and "take care of", suggests the governing authority of elders in the local church. In 1 Peter 5, Peter calls the leaders of local churches "elders". Peter's use of words like "exercising oversight", and contrasting them with words like "not under compulsion" and "not domineering", again suggests the governing authority of elders in the local church. Paul's instructions to the elders in Acts 20 reinforces these other passages, while adding that the Holy Spirit is the one who makes people elders in the local church. Paul's use of the word "rule" with regard to the work of elders (see 1 Timothy 5:17) summarizes the governing authority of elders in the local church.

It is important to note that in all these passages, there is a plurality of eldership. In other words, each church has more than one elder and these elders govern together. In the Jerusalem church (see Acts 15), the apostles Peter and James served as elders in the church, thus sharing the governing leadership. Peter even refers to himself as an elder when instructing other elders in 1 Peter 5. So we can see that five-fold ministers are not excluded from local church leadership. They may often serve as elders in the local church.

Second, and continuing from above, five-fold ministers might relate to local churches by being called to serve a local church as a salaried leader or by being funded by a local church in their translocal ministry. Churches may call a five-fold minister to serve the church as a salaried leader alongside the elders. Most commonly people think of this today in terms of a church calling a "pastor". This is so common that many people call the paid leader of a local church the "pastor" whether or not that leader is a five-fold pastor. However, churches might call any of the five-fold ministers to serve as a paid leader in the local church. In these situations, the level of authority given to the five-fold leader by the church is usually found in the terms of the call to the local church.

Confusion sometimes arises because according to the Bible both five-fold ministers and some elders might receive financial support from churches for their service. Paul says that elders who serve well in preaching and teaching are worthy of "double honor" – meaning they get financial support (see 1 Timothy 5:17-18). Confusion may also arise because the responsibilities of elders and the responsibilities of five-fold ministers, especially pastors and teachers, sometimes overlap. Elders are

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told to “shepherd” the flock, which is also a responsibility of pastors. Elders are told to preach and teach as they are able, which is also a responsibility of teachers.

Not only may local churches call five-fold ministers to serve the local church, but also local churches may decide to support five-fold ministry financially, even when that ministry has little or no local church responsibilities. Local churches might support any of the five-fold ministers; in fact, the Bible would seem to suggest that they have a responsibility to do so (see 1 Corinthians 9:1-14). One way God has chosen to sustain five-fold ministry is through the financial support of local churches.

It is important to note that five-fold ministers are never “employees” in the traditional sense of that word. They are not “hired hands”. It is essential that five-fold ministers use their money responsibly. Their supporters have a right to know how their money is being used and to hold them accountable to good financial practice. Even so, five-fold ministers are not the same as employees or church staff.

Third, five-fold ministers will always be healthily connected to a local church, under the leadership of its elders, for relationship, growth and accountability. We see this pattern even in the lives of Peter and Paul, who were related to local churches in a healthy way, reporting to them and submitting to the leadership of the elders in those churches.

We would even go so far as to say that we should be very wary of any five-fold minister who does not have a visible and healthy connection to a local church. These local church connections should provide a meaningful place of accountability so that if problems arise in the five-fold ministry people might appeal to that local church for an investigation. These local church connections should also provide a place where the five-fold minister is fully known, “warts” and all.

Finally, five-fold ministers will always work together with local churches to advance the Kingdom of God. God has designed the local church to advance His Kingdom around the world. Five-fold ministers assist local churches in that Kingdom advancement. Five-fold ministers are not itinerant ministers who build up their own following or create parachurch organizations for the advancement of their ministry. They are not “lone ranger” ministers. They are not the only ones “doing the stuff” in a spectator-type arrangement. They equip God’s people for works of service so that the Body of Christ may be built up.

Five-Fold Ministers Defined

With the above in mind, we can proceed to develop a basic definition for each of the five-fold ministers. The five-fold ministers are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

Apostles are Christian leaders with their identity in Christ sent forth by the Father and the Son with a specified commission in service to the advancement of the Kingdom and the building up of the Church with the authorization from God to fulfill this commission so that people are united with God and His kingdom through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. The basic meaning of “apostle” is “sent one”. God gives each apostle a specific commission as He sends them to the target recipients.³

Prophets are Christian leaders given by Jesus who by direct inspiration and revelation proclaim and expound the mind, heart and will of God concerning historical, concrete, present or future situations. Even when the prophet brings a corrective word, the focus of the prophet is on exhortation, edification and comfort, giving insight and perspective regarding things difficult to understand. Prophets help people hear God for themselves and help people understand what God is

³ For more information and a fuller discussion of this five-fold ministry, see our position paper “Apostles for Today”.

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saying to them and their organizations. Prophets seek to know and express God's mind, heart and will. They are particularly attuned to God and His truth for today. They bring correction and challenge the dominant assumptions we inherit from our cultures, traditions, and backgrounds. They call the community to obedience.

Evangelists are Christian leaders who serve as messengers bringing a message of victory or other good news that causes joy. In a Biblical context, the word indicates a herald who announces God's loving rulership and His universal victory over the world. Evangelists draw people toward a relationship with Jesus through the Gospel. They serve as infectious communicators of the gospel, seeking to involve others in the process of leading people to Jesus. They always have a burden for those who are not followers of Jesus, wanting to see them saved by God. They call for a personal response to God's redemption in Christ, and also draw believers to engage the wider mission of the church.

Pastors⁴ are Christian leaders who tend a specific flock of sheep by setting the boundaries for the sheep and caring for the sheep, ensuring they are well fed and protected. Shepherds (another word for "pastor") are willing to lay down their lives for the sheep. Pastors nurture and protect, gathering people into community. As caregivers of the community, they focus on the protection and spiritual maturity of God's flock by cultivating a loving and spiritually mature network of relationships as they make and develop disciples. Pastors will raise up other shepherds for the flock as well to help them in their ministry.

Teachers are Christian leaders who are regularly engaged in the systematic training of others with knowledge and technical skills. The Greek word suggests the relationship between a master and an apprentice, with the expectation that the apprentice would one day become a master who himself has other apprentices. Teachers help create an environment for the development of Christlikeness. Teachers help others remain biblically grounded to better discern God's will, guiding others toward wisdom, helping the community remain faithful to Christ's word, and constructing a transferable doctrine. Teachers do not just communicate knowledge; they help people learn how to live in light of the Kingdom of God. The goal is personal transformation with the Word of God.

Varieties of Five-Fold Ministers

We believe that there is a greater biblical variety in five-fold ministry than most churches have realized. To understand how we have come to this conclusion, we need some background.

As we were considering the ministry of apostles today, we became aware that the New Testament presented four apostolic prototypes, not just one. For many, the apostle Paul has been the prototypical apostle, with an occasional nod to Peter and the original Twelve. However, according to Jesus, Peter would be the leader of the apostles, and in fact he was the leader of the apostles in Acts. This meant that there should be at least *two* prototypical apostles, Peter and Paul.

When we examined the NT further, we realized that not only are Peter and Paul given a lot of space – including writing letters and appearing in Acts – but also James (the brother of Jesus) and John have a lot of space – including their writings as well as their appearances. This led us to see that there are actually *four* prototypical apostles. Each one of these apostles has a different commission, a different ministry style, a different writing style, a different group of people to whom they minister and a slightly different purpose in their ministry.

⁴ Pastors and elders are not the same, as discussed above. However, their roles overlap in the life of a local church. Not all local churches will be led by five-fold pastors. Some are led by elders who perform their pastoral functions effectively for that church.

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Once we saw that there were four types of apostle, we begin to wonder whether there might be four types of the other five-fold ministers. From this we began to see that there could be four types of each five-fold ministry, with each primary type (prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher) having a secondary defining influence (apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral or teaching). This led us to the realization that the five-fold ministers have a greater diversity than we had seen at first. Instead of trying to “shoe-horn” every “pastor” (for example) into some limited, pre-defined notion of the five-fold ministry gift, we began to see that God had planned a greater diversity of five-fold ministry to grow the Body of Christ and extend His Kingdom.

We did face one challenge in this assessment. While we might logically discern such diversity from the NT’s teaching regarding apostles, we were not fully comfortable with such logical discernment alone. So we began to test our theory based on our perceptions of possible five-fold ministers in the world today. Quickly, in thinking of evangelists, we noticed that the role of Billy Graham seemed to be “apostolic”, while the role of Bill Hybels seemed to be much more “pastoral”. Although both are clearly five-fold evangelists responsible for many people coming into the Kingdom, their “styles” of evangelistic ministry were very different. Thinking further, we found that such diversity might be applied to each one of the five-fold ministers.

Based on the above, we would like to present a brief description of each variety of five-fold ministry. This understanding of five-fold ministry will undoubtedly lead us to affirm more and more people as five-fold ministers. We will outline a discernment process for this below. Each of the following descriptions are provisional in that we will want to continue refining the descriptions. Each of the following description is a subset of the basic definitions offered above for each of the five-fold ministers.

Apostle

We have already mentioned the four types of apostles above, but here is a fuller description.

Pauline Apostle – an apostle who functions after the model of Paul. These apostles function as church planters and missionaries. They have a commission from God to break new ground with the gospel and advance God’s Kingdom into new areas. Often they serve in cross-cultural ways.

Petrine Apostle – an apostle who functions after the model of Peter. These apostles have a commission from God to establish foundations in the Body of Christ so that it might grow healthily. They build up and extend the Church in cities, regions, nations and globally.

Jamesian Apostle – an apostle who functions after the model of James. These apostles lead significant resource center churches, similar to Antioch and Jerusalem in the NT. They may also be apostles of cities. Their commission is to establish major resource churches for the benefit of the wider Body of Christ. Their churches train, send and resource other churches.

Johannine Apostle – an apostle who functions after the model of John. These apostles serve as prophetic catalysts throughout the Body of Christ. They network people and churches. They build key relationships among the key leaders of God’s people, including other five-fold ministers. They serve as catalysts who engage in strategic-level spiritual warfare, weed out false five-fold-type ministries and receive God’s revelation for establishing God’s people in faith and advancing the kingdom strategically.

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Prophet

Prophets release prophetic ministry to others. They do not hold onto it for themselves. Prophets create an environment for people to hear God for themselves. We see four types of prophets.

Apostolic Prophet – a foundation-laying prophet who often engages in strategic level spiritual warfare and guidance for nations, regions, people groups, and cities. These are often the genuine “prophets to the nations”. They are easily mistaken for apostles.

Evangelistic Prophet – a strategic prophet who helps the Church fulfill the Great Commission by discerning the moving of the Holy Spirit over regions, people groups and cities. These prophets often serve as catalysts for revival.

Pastoral Prophet – a prophet that encourages, edifies and comforts people and churches while helping them overcome sin and the strategies of Satan against them. They are often known for giving personal words to individuals, churches and other organizations.

Teaching Prophet – a prophet that focuses on raising up other prophets or prophetically gifted people. They help mature the gift of prophecy throughout the Body of Christ and release more “prophets” into the nations.

Evangelist

Evangelists always share the good news in a way that invites response. They do not convert people, but the Spirit uses them to help bring people to the point of conversion. We see four types of evangelists.

Apostolic Evangelist – an evangelist that goes to whole cities, nations and people groups. These evangelists often hold large-scale events in stadia and similar venues. Billy Graham is a classic example.

Prophetic Evangelist – an evangelist who declares the gospel and opens people to Jesus by exposing the secrets of their hearts and revealing God’s will for their lives. They often equip other people to evangelize by using gifts such as the word of knowledge and prophecy as an evangelistic catalyst. Prophetic evangelists may often reveal a strategy from the Lord to increase the harvest in a give area or church.

Pastoral Evangelist – an evangelist who shares the gospel and opens people to Jesus by beginning with their felt needs and personal brokenness. They often equip other people to evangelize by using words of knowledge. They may also seem like relational evangelists as they focus on evangelizing by building relationships with unbelievers. Typically, they begin with where people are in their lives and then invite a response to the gospel.

Apologetic Evangelist – an evangelist who declares the gospel and opens people to Jesus by addressing arguments for and against Christianity. They will equip people to evangelize by showing them the reasonable basis for the Christian faith. They especially focus on areas such as logical arguments for Christianity, the problem of evil, the weaknesses of other religions, science and the Bible and similar things.

Pastor (Shepherd)

Pastors are often known by how effectively they build community, create a sense of care and disciple others personally. We see four types of pastor.

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Apostolic Pastor – a pastor to pastors, who helps pastors function more healthily in building healthier churches. They often raise up many pastors to serve individual churches.

Prophetic Pastor – a pastor who cares for and nurtures people and churches using the gift of prophecy to encourage, edify and comfort. They are usually very good pastors for prophetic people. They tend to build healthy communities of prophetic people. They are often very good worship leaders as well.

Evangelistic Pastor – a pastor who builds a community of people especially effective in evangelism and discipleship. They are especially gifted at nurturing new believers to become maturing disciples. Their churches are usually characterized by strong evangelistic and justice-oriented ministries.

Teaching Pastor – a pastor who builds a community of people by using preaching and teaching. They help create learning communities who mature as disciples by strongly Word-based ministries and activities.

Teacher

Teachers help people actually apply the Bible to life. They help people develop real wisdom, not just a knowledge base. Personal transformation results from effective five-fold teaching ministry. We see four types of teacher.

Apostolic Teacher – a teacher who often has an itinerant ministry of traveling around the Body of Christ to teach at conferences and larger events. They may also be teachers who write many books that explore various facets of the Christian faith in greater detail. They excel at raising up others to teach.

Prophetic Teacher – a teacher who focuses their teaching as led by the Holy Spirit, usually discerning the strategic learning needs of the body of Christ locally, regionally or globally. They may often help make sense of the prophet and the prophetic, breaking down revelation into discernible and learnable bits.

Evangelistic Teacher – a teacher who connects with unbelievers and new believers in ways that opens them up to the Gospel more fully. They may write books targeted at unbelievers. They differ from the apologetic evangelists in that their goal is not to make an effective argument for the Christian faith but to connect the Christian faith in practical ways to the lives of non-Christians.

Pastoral Teacher – a teacher who helps connect the Bible with the felt needs of people so that they learn to live more effectively as Christians. They often focus on what the Bible says about “practical” areas of life, such as money management, marriage, boundaries, effectiveness at work, etc. These may be the ones who write books about practical needs for people in areas such as marriage and family.

Discerning Five-Fold Ministers

In our attempts to discern who is a five-fold minister, we have typically focused only on the first type of five-fold minister in each list. So we have thought of apostles as being only like Paul, prophets being only apostolic prophets, evangelists being only apostolic evangelists, etc. So our challenge is to know how to discern whether someone is a five-fold minister or whether a person (or group of

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people) has a ministry that might be identified with a five-fold descriptor but is not a fully developed five-fold minister.

For example, planting churches is an “apostolic” ministry, but that does not mean that every church planter is an “apostle”. Five-fold pastors might plant churches very effectively. A “prophetic” person may be exceptionally gifted at leading worship, but that does not mean that every gifted worship leader is a “prophetic pastor”. If a church has a number of prophetically gifted people in its midst, we might call it a “prophetic” church, but that does not mean that the church is led by a “prophet”. These descriptive labels are useful in the Body of Christ, but they do not represent a genuine five-fold minister.

So how can we discern a five-fold minister? We have several criteria. First, five-fold ministers are “doing the stuff” related to their ministry. Prophets are prophesying; evangelists are evangelizing; apostles have a clear apostolic commission they are living out; pastors are shepherding; and teachers are teaching. If someone is not prophesying, then clearly that person is not a prophet. Not only will they be “doing the stuff”, but they will also be doing the stuff with a level of consistency, expertise and faithfulness. Leading a small group does not make one a pastor any more than prophesying once or twice makes one a prophet.

Second, and related to the first, five-fold ministers will be producing “fruit” in relation to their ministry. We will discern the fruit in light of Ephesians 4:11-16. In other words, the person will not only be “evangelizing” but they will be preparing God’s people for the work of evangelism. They will not only be “teaching” but they will be teaching in a way that promotes real unity of the faith. They will not only be “pastoring” but they will be pastoring people so that they become mature, more like Jesus. Discerning fruit takes time. Some fruit takes a long time to produce. But five-fold ministers will produce consistent fruit.

Third, five-fold ministers will themselves exemplify godliness and the character of Jesus in their lives. One cannot lead others to maturity in the faith if they do not have maturity in themselves. The standards by which we measure such maturity are Jesus himself and the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22ff). If people do not exhibit consistently the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, then they are likely not five-fold ministers.

Another measure of one’s character is how people repent and forgive. If someone does not clearly and openly repent of their sin, then we might question whether they are a genuine five-fold minister. If someone does not forgive readily and quickly, then we might again question whether they are a genuine five-fold minister. At the least, failing to repent and forgive quickly makes someone potentially dangerous as a five-fold minister.

Finally, five-fold ministers reproduce after themselves. This means that five-fold ministers will produce people who have a temperament or orientation suited to the five-fold ministry, even if they are not five-fold ministers themselves. So apostles will produce people who are apostolically minded, seeing the world through apostolic eyes. Evangelists will produce evangelistically oriented people, who have a heart for sharing their faith. And so on.

This also means that five-fold ministers will reproduce other five-fold ministers. Pastors may raise up other pastors. Teachers may raise up other teachers. One of the clearest ways to discern whether someone is a five-fold minister is how they are reproducing themselves in others.

Five-Fold Ministry Teams

Throughout the New Testament – and even in parts of the Old Testament – we notice that leadership among God’s people generally occurs in the plural and not the singular. In other words,

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God's design in the church is that leaders work in teams, whether they are teams of elders, teams of deacons, or teams involving five-fold ministers. We see these teams functioning primarily in three ways, but there is a great diversity in how teams might be organized.

First, we see what might be called "apostolic teams" where a team of five-fold ministers work together to advance the Kingdom and build up the Body of Christ. Paul always traveled in a team which certainly would have included prophets, teachers, pastors and the like. Apostles would always lead these apostolic teams.

Second, we see what might be called five-fold "ministry teams". These occur when groups of the same type of five-fold ministers would work together. In the Old Testament, the prophets would often travel together as prophetic teams. We could envision evangelists traveling together as an evangelistic team. These teams might include other five-fold ministers or those who were like-minded but not five-fold ministers, but the same five-fold ministers would tend to dominate team membership.

Similar to this might be a team of people led by a five-fold minister who engage in ministry related to that five-fold minister. A prophet might lead a team of prophetically gifted or inclined people to engage in spiritual warfare. A teacher might lead a team of teaching-oriented people to bring a conference to a community.

Third, we see what might be called a church-based team. This would occur when a five-fold minister worked as a team with local-church elders to bring a specific ministry into the life of the church. In this situation, the elders invite the five-fold minister into the church to release something specific in the life of the church.

Regardless of how the teams are organized or presented, five-fold ministers work in teams. In New Testament Christianity, there are no "lone rangers". Even the very purpose of five-fold ministers explained by Paul in Ephesians 4 suggests that they must work in teams.

The Authority of Five-Fold Ministers

We must take great care before we confirm people as five-fold ministers because they carry great authority in the Church, even though they do not hold an "office" *per se*. However, one of the biggest misunderstandings regarding five-fold ministry is the issue of authority. (When we talk about "authority" in this context, we will limit our discussion to the authority we have *before* the Second Coming of Jesus.)

Some seem to believe that five-fold ministers have the ultimate and highest authority in the Church. Others suggest that the five-fold ministers have authority by virtue of their "position" as five-fold ministers. This is often referred to as "positional authority". Still others assume that five-fold ministers have "governmental authority" to direct or rule over the affairs of the Church. Regrettably, most people base their assumptions regarding five-fold ministry authority on cultural or practical considerations instead of on what the Bible actually says. A biblical understanding of authority might reveal something quite different.

Governmental Authority

We would agree that the New Testament presents a case for "governmental authority", but we would argue that this authority does not apply to five-fold ministers. In the NT, "governmental authority" as commonly understood seems to reside in two groups of people.

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First, governmental authority applies to those people actually in civil governmental roles, such as kings, governors and officials (see Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Timothy 2:1-4). Governing authorities are those that God has delegated authority to exercise in the *civil* sphere, but not in the *church* sphere (see Luke 20:22-25). Christians have a responsibility to respect, pray for and follow such civil leadership as long as it does not call or cause them to violate the Bible as God's Word.

Second, one could make a case that church *elders* are the ones who have governmental authority in the churches. The words *episkopos* (overseer), “manage”, and “take care of” that Paul uses in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 certainly could suggest the idea of governing authority. The use of the word *presbuteros* (elder) by Peter in 1 Peter 5:1-6, along with the contrasting “not domineering” (ESV), could also possibly suggest “governing authority”. If this is the case, then the local church elders would be the only “governmental authority” that would exist in the church.⁵

To be sure, five-fold ministers would influence elders significantly. Initially, apostles would even appoint elders for newly established churches. Paul would appoint elders in places like Ephesus and he instructed Titus to do the same (see Titus 1:5). The apostles always appointed multiple elders, not just one, to have the governing authority in the churches. However, once elders were initially appointed and the churches became established, the elders became self-propagating, with elders appointing new elders and often with the concurrence of the people.⁶ After their appointment, they were told to “rule” (govern) the church (see 1 Timothy 5:17).

We would agree that five-fold ministers are called to lead and exercise their authority in that leadership. However, no where does the New Testament connect what would be rightly understood as governmental authority with the role of five-fold ministers. The only exception to this is what has already been mentioned – when five-fold ministers would also serve as elders in a local church.

Positional Authority

To some extent, we would agree that five-fold ministers have “positional authority”, but not in the way that many assume. We would argue that there are only two types of “positional authority” related to five-fold ministry in the New Testament.

The first type of positional authority is that shared by all believers in Jesus. God has raised *every* Christian up with Jesus and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (see Ephesians 2:6). *Every* Christian has the position of being seated with Christ in the heavenly places, and this would certainly include apostles. All believers share this positional authority, and there is no biblical indication that five-fold ministers are higher than any others.⁷

The second type of positional authority is a limited positional authority, but it is limited to the original Twelve Apostles (minus Judas, plus Matthias or Paul). Jesus told them that they would sit on thrones at Jesus' table judging the twelve tribes of Israel (see Luke 22.30). This is certainly a positional authority. Only the original Twelve will have this positional authority, but they will have it after the return of Jesus. It is in this sense only that we would say the first twelve apostles are unique and non-repeatable apostles. We might call them capital “A” Apostles.

⁵ One could make a case that an original church planting team – such as the one Paul led throughout Acts – would have the eldership authority initially until elders were appointed. However, it is clear that God intended this relationship to be *transitional* until the initial appointment of elders.

⁶ Early church documents such as the *Didache* reveal this pattern of self-propagation.

⁷ One might try to make a case that apostles and prophets have positional authority by virtue of their status as the “foundation” of the Church with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone (see Ephesians 2:20), but this would distort the meaning of this passage. In any case, the idea of “foundation” cannot be equated with “authority” in this context based on the sense of the passage.

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Positional authority cannot describe the particular authority held by five-fold ministers today, except as described above. Instead, we must delineate their authority as “relational authority”.

Relational Authority

Relational authority for five-fold ministry exists in the interplay of two relational dynamics: relationship with God and relationship with those in our sphere of influence.

Relational authority for five-fold ministry has two correlated components. First and foremost, the five-fold ministers’ authority depends on their relationship with God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Five-fold ministers must have an intimate relationship with the Father, whereby they understand themselves as “sons” of God (both men and women) by virtue of adoption.

Five-fold ministers need an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ as God’s Son. This includes being born again and living as a disciple, but much more. They need to know Jesus intimately so that their character reflects Jesus’ character and their works imitate Jesus’ works. They must follow Jesus as their Lord as well as their “elder brother”, who was fully pleasing to the Father. Jesus is the model of each five-fold ministry, so effective five-fold ministers will be molded in the manner of Jesus as the Son of God.

Five-fold ministers need an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit. They must be led by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit. The Spirit often reveals new aspects of their ministry and their sphere. They need the empowerment of the Holy Spirit generally, as well as receiving the various gifts of the Holy Spirit as needed from time to time. They need to have a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit that keeps them from offending the Spirit.

The second component of five-fold ministers’ authority comes from their relationship with the people in their sphere of influence. Every five-fold minister has a specific sphere of influence given by the Father. They are required to be about their Father’s business in the way that the Father specifically directs within that sphere. They represent the person of Jesus within that sphere. A sphere is the range of a five-fold ministers’ effective influence.

The authority of five-fold ministers is always limited by their God-given sphere. They never have the freedom to vary from their sphere, unless given by God in a way that is recognized by others. They do not determine their own sphere. That only comes from the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. They never have authority beyond their sphere, no matter how significant or gifted they are. Only as they remain properly related to their sphere do they have authority from the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.

Of course, God always has the right to expand or shrink the sphere of five-fold ministers. God often does both in five-fold ministry. If I serve well in London, He may increase my sphere to more of Europe. If I complete my ministry in my sphere in London, He may reassign me somewhere else with another commission. If I fall into sin, He may remove my sphere entirely. He may decide to retire me and let me retire to Scotland. Regardless, I would only have authority in relationship to my sphere.

The five-fold ministers’ sphere always includes the people within that sphere. So having a right relationship with our sphere means that we have a right relationship with those people within our sphere. People must willingly receive five-fold ministers. If they do not, then the five-fold ministers have no practical authority in the sphere. If people receive the five-fold ministers, then they will have authority with the people – providing they demonstrate love.

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Love is the muscle of spiritual authority. By love, we mean a zealous, self-giving commitment to others for their benefit. When five-fold ministers have and show love for the people to whom they are sent, those five-fold ministers will have genuine authority. To the degree that the five-fold ministers fail to love – perhaps through criticism, judgment, selfishness, greed, self-protection, etc. – the five-fold ministers do not have any real authority.

In order to have effective authority not only must five-fold ministers show love but also they must be received by the people to whom they are sent. Five-fold ministers may never force or coerce people into receiving them. God is the one who opens hearts to receive five-fold ministers by His grace. God alone has the right and ability to deal with those who refuse those whom He has sent. Whenever five-fold ministers try to force, coerce or pressure people to accept them, they always distort their ministry and diminish their authority and effectiveness.⁸

People must receive the love of the five-fold ministers and respond to them in a mutual relationship of love and respect. People must choose to respond to five-fold ministers on the basis of Hebrews 13:17. In this passage, we are told to obey our leaders and submit to their authority. Obedience and submission are the biblical response to five-fold ministry – as well as other church leaders, such as elders. However, the English translation does not really capture the meanings of obedience and submission.

The English does not really communicate the nuance here. The word “obey” might be translated as “allow yourself to be persuaded by”. This is not the obedience expected of a private in relation to a captain. The Greek word here expresses the notion that we might not fully agree with our leaders but, unless they are telling us to do something explicitly sinful, we need to allow them to persuade us. In other words, we choose to give them the benefit of the doubt and follow them, unless there is a biblically compelling reason not to do so – which rarely there is.

The idea behind “submission” is choosing to cooperate with others so that God’s best might be achieved in their lives. So wives submit by cooperating with their husbands so that they become the best husbands they can possibly be, which in turn is good for the wives. We submit to one another by cooperating with each other so that Jesus might be formed in our lives. Submitting to our leaders in this case is not blind obedience but rather working together with them so they might succeed as leaders. We choose to cooperate with them fully.

The goal of this passage is that we all might receive a benefit. If we allow ourselves to be persuaded by five-fold ministers and cooperate with their authority then the five-fold ministers will become effective leaders which will bring blessing to everyone within their sphere of influence. If the five-fold ministers have to struggle to fulfill their responsibilities then it will bring no benefit to anyone – especially those who struggle against the five-fold ministers.

The relationship of five-fold ministers with their spheres and the people in them is extremely important because it helps verify the authenticity of the five-fold ministry. When people receive a relationship with five-fold ministers, honor them and receive their calling as genuine, that becomes another verification of the genuineness of the five-fold ministers. To be sure, people will often receive false ministers, so this is not in and of itself the final proof of authenticity (see 2 Corinthians 11:12-15). However, without an open relationship with those within the five-fold ministers’ sphere, they have no practical authority whatsoever.

We need to make one final point here. Five-fold ministers must remember that relationships are always a gift of grace. When people choose to relate to us, they do so as an act of grace. Five-fold ministers cannot demand such grace, nor can they compel people to give such grace. Grace that

⁸ Even Jesus did not try to force the people of his hometown to accept him (see Mark 6:1-6).

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is compelled is no grace at all. Grace is a precious gift, whether from God who calls us to five-fold ministry or from the people who receive such ministry from us.

Men and Women Five-fold Ministers

At this point, we will take a risk and tread in dangerous waters. Many people wonder whether men and women might be called as five-fold ministers or whether this ministry is restricted to men. What I share here is simply the author's opinion and not the formal position of HNI.

We would first want to assert that since every church or organization in a relational network supports itself and governs itself, every church should establish its own internal policies based on the study of Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We believe that Christians of good conscience might differ on many things that historically the Church has considered "non-essentials" of the faith. What we write should in no way constrain anyone's conscience. The Holy Spirit is Lord of the conscience.

Traditionally, two passages are used primarily to exclude women from being five-fold ministers: 1 Corinthians 14:33b-37 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15. (We are aware of a couple others, but these two seem to be the dominant ones.) Space does not permit a detailed argument at this point, so we will provide a summary of why each passage should not be used to disqualify women from serving as five-fold ministers.

The context of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-37 is twofold. First, Paul is concluding a major discussion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, in which he is asserting that the Holy Spirit gives *everyone* in the Body – men and women – gifts of the Holy Spirit. He carries this argument throughout 1 Corinthians 12-14. Second, Paul is responding to a letter (or series of letters) sent to him by the church in Corinth to settle some disputes. At various places in 1 Corinthians, Paul quotes this letter and then responds to the quote.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul has just made the statement that the prophets should take turns speaking. This would have included both men and women prophets (see Acts 21:9 for women prophesying). From verse 33b to verse 35, Paul is most likely quoting from the Corinthian letter, stating their argument against what Paul is saying, which may have been why Paul wrote this section in the first place. This understanding makes sense of Paul's response in verse 36-40, where he challenges the Corinthians to acknowledge that what he has written them is from the Lord.

This means that the passage in question is part of Paul's argument *in favor* of women exercising spiritual gifts in the public meetings of the church. This means that we cannot preclude women five-fold ministers on the basis of this passage.

In 1 Timothy 2:8-15, Paul is talking about the behaviour of men and women as they grow in discipleship. In verse 11, Paul says that a women should be disciplined when she is at peace or rest and fully cooperating with the one discipling her. Paul is saying that women should be disciplined as men are disciplined, not in quarreling or contention.

Then Paul gives the word that causes such confusion: "I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, she is to remain quiet" (at peace). We need to remember the context: discipleship. The words translated "teach" and "exercise authority" are both words involving discipleship. Paul intentionally uses the *singular* of woman and man. Had he intended a general prohibition of women teaching he would have used the *plural* of each word. So Paul is effectively saying in this verse that he does not permit an *individual* woman personally to disciple an *individual* man. He is not making a blanket prohibition of women in ministry.

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Over the years, we have discovered that it is not generally healthy for a woman to lead a one-to-one discipleship relationship with a man. However, we have also seen men benefit from women teachers and prophets, for example. The key for Paul is the individual one-to-one relationship.

A few people will make the argument that women cannot be five-fold ministers from the next passage in 1 Timothy 3:1ff. They will argue that the way Paul discussed the role of elders indicates that he expected elders to be men and that he excluded the possibility of women as elders. However, as we have shown above, five-fold ministers are not necessarily elders in a local church. So a person could be an five-fold minister without being an elder. In that case, this would not exclude women either.

As an argument in favor of women as five-fold ministers, one could point to any number of women named in the New Testament as significant ministers. However, we would take another approach. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given by the Holy Spirit to whomever He would determine (see 1 Corinthians 12:7). The Holy Spirit gives gifts to both men and women. The five-fold ministers are people given to the Body of Christ by Jesus. Jesus gives the five-fold ministers as He determines. Jesus is free to give both men and women as five-fold ministers, and there is nothing in the Ephesians 4 text that would indicate otherwise.

Dangers in Five-fold Ministry

We would conclude this paper with some major dangers in five-fold ministry. We see at least five dangers five-fold ministers have often wandered into. If these dangers are not avoided, five-fold ministers might lose their ministry or their ministry effectiveness.

The first danger is the tendency for each of the five-fold ministers to read the Bible only through the lens of their ministry. When they only read the Bible through their ministry they distort the Bible to suit their own ends in ministry. They tend to emphasize some passages but neglect others.

For example, many evangelists cherish verses such as Romans 10:14 – “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” This makes it sound as if everything depends on the preaching of the evangelist. But many ignore verses such as John 6:44 – “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” Both verses are true, but emphasizing one while neglecting the other gives a very different picture of what the Bible says.

The second danger is the tendency to think that one’s own five-fold ministry is *the* ministry essential for making disciples. We often find this rising up in pastors and teachers who often feel at the bottom of the “five-fold totem pole”. Many apostles and prophets do not help this perception in the way they treat pastors and teachers. So we can try to make ourselves feel more important instead of recognizing that we are important already in God’s Kingdom.

The third danger is ministering out of rejection. All five-fold ministers may face this danger, but it is especially true of prophets and evangelists. Prophets and evangelists are the two five-fold ministries that some people and churches struggle to understand.

Prophets may seem on another plane of existence with their revelations from the Lord. Evangelists may be so consumed with winning the lost that they feel nothing else really matters. They might feel that if someone is not actively winning the lost with the same passion and fervor they have, then that person is not really doing God’s will.

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Churches may struggle with both mindsets, not understanding them or knowing how to work with them, so that eventually they just reject the prophet or evangelist. These will then begin to minister out of their rejection instead of health. All five-fold ministers are subject to this danger.

The fourth danger often comes from the third. Five-fold ministers may have a tendency to disconnect from local churches. Sometimes it might happen because of woundedness or rejection. Other times it happens because of the itinerant nature of some five-fold ministers. Some might become wrapped up into parachurch ministries. Others become discouraged with the failures of the local church. Local churches are God's strategy for advancing His Kingdom in the earth. Whenever five-fold ministers separate themselves from the local church they separate themselves from God's strategy. They also weaken the local church and its ability to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

The final danger is failing to work together intentionally with other five-fold ministers. Because each five-fold minister has a different gifting and a different perspective on what God is doing in the world, working together can be extremely challenging. It is very easy and tempting to "do our own thing", looking after our own ministry. However, when five-fold ministers align themselves with apostles, working together, they release a Spirit-filled dynamism that supercharges the expansion of the Kingdom of God.

As they work together, different five-fold ministers will exercise leadership of the team at different times, depending on the gifting of the minister and the needs of the moment. While apostles might coordinate the work of the team, they are not the sole leaders of the team. Every five-fold minister is called to leadership to build up the Body of Christ and advance the Kingdom of God.