

# APEST

## Roles for Equipping Everyone in Disaster Response

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The NIV translation was used unless noted otherwise.

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God designed the equipping of His Church to enable His people to not only endure but also to be fruitful in times of crisis, disaster, and suffering. What are some ways God sets up His Church for success in response to suffering? While in prison in Rome, Paul writes to the church of Ephesus and shares how the giftings of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher were given for the equipping of the Church (Eph. 4:10-11). We can easily forget that this was written in the context of years of persecution, natural disasters, and political upheaval.

In a recent article in *Mission Frontiers*, “Equipping Disciples for Ministry as Kingdom Priests,”<sup>1</sup> Curtis Sergeant described these five equipping roles:

1. **Apostles** equip God’s people by empowering them to advance the kingdom.
2. **Prophets** equip God’s people to hear and see God’s Word and work by the Holy Spirit and Scripture.
3. **Evangelists** equip God’s people to show compassion by demonstrating and proclaiming the Good News in word and deed.
4. **Shepherds** equip God’s people to build unity, and encourage and care for one another.

5. **Teachers** equip God’s people to establish lifelong patterns of learning and teaching others.

The equipping of everyday, ordinary believers and simple churches in these abilities prepares them for crisis response. Before Paul went on his first missionary journey, while he and Barnabas were teaching the disciples in Antioch, a prophet came from Jerusalem. *Through the Spirit [he] predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea* (Acts 11:28-29). The disciples helped prepare the churches across Judea in advance of the disaster, with the help of a prophet (Agabus), an apostle (Paul), and a shepherd (Barnabas), at the same time persecution was happening: the martyring of other leaders Stephen and James the brother of John, and the imprisonment of an evangelist—Peter (Acts 11-12).

Years later, after living through several crises himself, Paul writes an equipping reminder in his apostolic letter to Titus: *Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good in order to respond to urgent needs and not live unproductive lives* (Titus 3:14). From Paul (1<sup>st</sup> generation) to Titus (2<sup>nd</sup> generation), to the people Titus was caring for (3<sup>rd</sup> generation), to those who would be reached through their response to urgent needs (4<sup>th</sup> generation), the

1 [www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/equipping-disciples-for-ministry-as-kingdom-priests](http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/equipping-disciples-for-ministry-as-kingdom-priests)

preparation to respond to the urgent needs of others multiplied in the fruitfulness of generations.

To facilitate effective disaster/crisis response by God's people, the five-fold APEST gifts need to be fully functioning. Together, these gifts build up the Church in many ways: releasing the priesthood of the believers, facilitating decentralized structure, and discipling biblical responses to suffering. God has provided these gifts to equip His children to reflect the image of Christ amid the brokenness of this world.

For example, the Horn of Africa has experienced persecution, famine, war, tribal conflicts, and terrorism across many regions where the Church is multiplying rapidly. As people come to Jesus in this context, they are discipled, discovering their identity in Christ and their gifts, as they obey Jesus. As each person does their part, they are making an impact together. This has created a culture of honor and collaboration across the different giftings as APEST teams advance Kingdom Movements amid the crises.

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:12, *Those who try to live a godly life because they believe in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.* Suffering is the norm, not something unusual. Each of the APEST gifts are intended to equip the Church for getting into new places while suffering, hearing the Lord while suffering, sharing the Good News while suffering (1 Thess. 1:6-7), caring for others while suffering, and teaching the Word of the Lord while suffering (Isa. 50:4). Building up the Church toward unity and maturity doesn't happen only in the absence of suffering or after suffering but also as we go through suffering.

Most believers around the world do not have the option to obey the Scriptures apart from suffering. Nearly all of today's Kingdom Movements exist in contexts full of chronic and/or acute crises. We see the giftings of the Church to equip one another happen as Matthew 24:7 is fulfilled, with *kingdom against kingdom, nation against nation, earthquakes, and famine.* The Bible provides abundant examples of crises presenting opportunities to respond in ways that glorify God. Consider just a few: Noah's flood, Joseph during Egypt's famine, Jehosaphat heading into battle, many of Jesus' miracles, and Paul in prison.

As APEST roles *equip [God's] people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up* (Eph. 4:11), every disciple can get prepared during the readiness phase with physical, trauma-healing, and spiritual tools. Before a disaster hits, it is helpful to have a broad framework of the disaster phases to better understand the potential APEST roles. When an acute disaster hits, the relief phase aims initially at rapidly preventing more people from dying and stabilizing people and places in the first few weeks. It is incredibly fast-paced, with the most urgent needs and opportunities to collaborate. In follow up to relief, the recovery phase runs through the months following—processing the trauma, physically healing, getting things running in the new normal, and spiritually often searching for community. Rebuilding lasts through the years that follow—restoring what was damaged, preferably in redemptive ways with Jesus. As ordinary disciples and churches respond to crises, it impacts the reputation of Jesus and His followers in the affected communities, amid some of the most memorable and formative moments in people's lives.

The issue of when to transition to the next response phase is critical to loving others well in Jesus' name.

Transitioning well also helps to avoid common mistakes such as functioning too long in relief or not long enough in trauma recovery. The leadership of the APEST roles working together is crucial to identifying where the people and community are in the process, in order to love well in response.

In disaster contexts, APEST gifts can help in various ways:

## Apostle

- Going to the unreached: gaps of people or places, through strategies adjusted to fit the phases of crisis readiness, relief, recovery, and rebuilding.
- Helping others identify where the gaps are and equipping them to care in trauma-informed ways to strengthen the Church's response to suffering.
- Getting in first, together with the prophet, giving direction and laying the foundation for longer-

term outcomes of disaster response (physically, emotionally, and spiritually), in the fast-paced urgency of the limited window of opportunity.

## Prophet

- Discerning receptivity, spiritual warfare, and listening to the Lord on spiritual dynamics at work during disaster-response phases, to inform strategic intercession and direction.
- Helping others to hear God, to whom they cried out during the worst of the disaster.
- Warning of upcoming disasters such as Acts 11:27-28 where prophetic intelligence led to apostolic action.

## Evangelist

- Offering compassion by sharing the Gospel with every person through word and action; helping them do the same with people around them to meet their needs in a trauma-informed, loving way.
- Sharing, and equipping others to share, in the window of receptivity with reproducibility before the situation renormalizes. (This is a shorter window than most think. However, trauma affects the body and mind, not just emotions. Often, sharing the Gospel—after the basic relief and emotional shock needs are met—can physiologically help people truly hear the Good News.)
- Rallying and mobilizing people to help both financially and in person to respond to the crisis.

## Shepherd

- Caring for people and equipping them to care for others in the physical, emotional, and spiritual changes through the different response phases.
- Walking alongside people in trauma healing that multiplies into disciples and simple churches who care for the community.
- Providing hands-on help for people who have no place to go by finding homes and basic resources.

## Teacher

- Teaching relief, recovery, and rebuilding skills—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—and helping others to teach those skills.
- Along with shepherds, caring by walking alongside people in the long journey to recovery and rebuilding; equipping the hurting to walk alongside others who are hurting.
- Helping analyze the damages and survey the needs to communicate to others in the response efforts.

It is important to note the ripple effect that happens or unintentional harm that can be caused, when the APEST roles function poorly in disaster readiness and response (such as going too fast or slow through the various physical, emotional, and spiritual needs). If APEST-gifted leaders don't use their gifts to equip *others*, they will centralize disciples around their leadership, intentionally or unintentionally, as new communities form out of the disasters. Multiplying through equipping others in their gifting is a part of our obedience and purpose, which can help bring healing from the trauma. In fact, the APEST gifts don't only equip disciples to respond to suffering. They also equip new disciples and churches from the disasters to grow in their giftings, as the Church locally, nationally, and globally.

The APEST equipping gifts, alongside all the other spiritual gifts listed in Scripture, work together through the phases of readiness, relief, recovery, and rebuilding—to recover God's designs of redemption out of destruction as described in Isaiah 61. Equipping ordinary believers to respond to urgent needs with long-term efforts can establish new, multiplying, and sustaining churches out of disasters. The ability to equip disciples to respond can lead to some of the greatest opportunities to join God in crisis and the advancement of His kingdom. 