

## ***How To Disciple An Immature Apostle (APEST Series)***

**Written by Ben Sternke: <https://gravityleadership.com/disciple-immature-apostle/>**

Have you ever noticed how some people are just wired up to *start* things? They're always thinking about building something that doesn't exist yet, and what it would take to get it off the ground.

They often gravitate toward entrepreneurial endeavors, like starting new businesses and planting new churches. These are people the Bible calls **apostles**, and as wonderful as they are, they can also make a terrible mess, especially if they're *immature* in their gifting. It's important for us as leaders to be able to recognize the immature apostles among us, and disciple them to maturity so they can fulfill their ministry in the Body of Christ.

But discipling an apostle is a lot different than discipling someone gifted in another way, so let's talk about the unique challenges and opportunities of discipling immature apostles.

### ***Five gifts for the church***

We get the term "apostle" from the Apostle Paul. It's what he calls them in Ephesians 4:11-13, where he is laying out five different gifts that God gives his church. These gifts are actually *people* that God has gifted and then given to the church to build it up and bring it to maturity and unity. (This is sometimes called **APEST** – Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds, Teachers. Search "Alan Hirsch APEST" for more.)

Paul's assumption is that the church needs to grow into the fullness of her identity in Christ, and that these five gifts are crucial to that happening. In other words, we *need* apostles in our churches if we're going to grow into maturity. The problem is that mature apostles don't grow on trees. Apostles normally come to our churches immature, in need of encouragement and shaping. How can we do this faithfully and effectively?

### ***You might be an apostle if...***

Before we talk about *immature* apostles, let's just talk about apostles. How are they Christ's gift to the church?

The word apostle signifies someone sent as a delegate or messenger on behalf of someone else. Apostles are "sent ones," gifted to establish the church in new places.

#### **Here are some signs of apostles in general:**

- They have big ideas—a lot of them.
- They don't give up easily.
- They see the frontier and want to take new ground.
- They have a history of starting things, especially churches, ministries, or businesses that advance the kingdom of God.
- They see opportunity everywhere.

- They tend to attract a lot of people to their vision.
- They can easily envision how to build organizations and people.

I have a friend who is gifted as an apostle. She has seventeen new ideas before breakfast each day. She is always thinking about what to build next, how to extend the kingdom of God into new places. She networks with leaders all over the country. She's awesome!

### ***Signs of an immature apostle***

But apostles don't come from the factory mature and ready to lead. Like all of us, they start out immature, and their greatest strength is also their greatest weakness. My apostle friend also struggles to focus on one idea instead of chasing new ones just because they're new. She often makes hasty decisions in an effort to "keep moving." She has a hard time relaxing and being with people when there's no agenda.

**Here are some signs of an immature apostle:**

- They can't discern between good ideas and "God ideas," between the constant flood of innovative thoughts and the ones that God is giving them to do.
- They jump around from one idea to the next, unable to stay focused on one thing.
- Eventually, people stop following them because they don't want to give their time and energy to something that will probably change in a few weeks on the apostle's whim.
- They can't "turn it off" (i.e., take a day off).
- They have trouble being part of a group they're not leading.
- They tend to have very little patience with needy people or those who won't "get on board."
- Their projects tend to produce relational carnage; people often feel hurt and used by an immature apostle.

Perhaps you know a couple people like this. (Maybe you *are* someone like this?) One temptation we encounter with immature apostles is to simply *use them* for their energy and capacity. We know we can rely on them to "get things done" and it's tempting to ignore the immaturity to keep the productivity flowing. The other temptation is to *reject* immature apostles. When we recognize their ability to make messes in our churches, it's easy to just marginalize them, keep them out of leadership, just stop responding to them and hope they leave your church.

But instead of *using them* or *rejecting them*, we *disciple them*. That's what Jesus did with his immature followers...

### ***How do we disciple immature apostles when we find them in our churches?***

In some ways, what apostles need to grow in discipleship is the same thing that everyone needs: **an abundance of both grace and truth** (this is one of the main competencies we train for in our coaching). We calibrate grace in discipleship by offering connection and compassion in an authentic relationship. We calibrate truth in discipleship by holding *reality* in front of others non-anxiously.

This calibration looks different for an apostle than it does for a shepherd or prophet. The grace and truth they need takes on a certain shape.

## What does grace and truth look like for apostles?

Here are a few things I've learned about bringing *grace* to an apostle in discipleship:

- Apostles need an environment where **failure is OK** and expected.
- Apostles need to know they aren't just being pacified, but truly **welcomed and released**.
- Apostles need an environment where **new ideas aren't a threat**.
- Apostles need a **low-control environment**. Do not micro-manage them.
- Apostles need a **"big vision" atmosphere**. They need to know that they're involved in something significant.
- Apostles need **real, honest, tough critique** of their ideas (yes, this feels like *grace* to them – it shows you're taking them seriously).
- Immature apostles don't realize they need it, but they need to know that you **value them for who they are**, not just what they do.

And here are a few things I've learned about bringing *truth* to an immature apostle:

- Apostles need to learn **compassion**. Challenge them to care for others as they lead.
- Apostles need a **high-accountability environment**, especially when it comes to following through on their ideas.
- Apostles need to learn to **wait for the "God idea"** in the midst of the sea of merely *good* ideas.
- Apostles need to learn to be **patient and trust that God is working**, even when they're not.
- Most apostles will need accountability to **take a weekly Sabbath** (yes, that means a 24-hour period where they do no work – this is remarkably difficult for immature apostles to embrace).
- Apostles need to learn to **disciple and develop people** while they are working on *projects* (their tendency will be to *use people* to accomplish the project, rather than *use the project to develop people*).