

1. Developing Structure to Help New Christians Grow – Part 1

When Christ chose the twelve disciples, Mark 3:13-14 says, “And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach.” The very first reason Christ chose the disciples was so they might be with Him. Then, in John 20:21, Christ said to the disciples, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” In the period between those two statements, of Christ, we see that the thinking and attitudes of the disciples had been transformed by being with Christ. As a result, the disciples had been shown how to transform the thinking and attitudes of others, by spending time with them.

In Acts 1:14-15, we read, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said.” Here we see the group that Christ was going to use to develop the church included about one hundred and twenty disciples. A disciple is defined in Matthew 13:52, where we read: “Then He said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.’” A person who has been instructed (has become a disciple) is defined as the head of a spiritual household (has a spiritual family), one who has a treasure (the Word of God), one who is able to bring out of that treasure new things (a learner’s attitude), and one who is able to bring out of that treasure things that are old (teach the basics of Christianity).

When the church began on the Day of Pentecost, we see that the church immediately grew from one hundred and twenty to three thousand one hundred and twenty. Acts 2:41 says, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” Suddenly the church faced a real challenge, how could one hundred and twenty disciples help three thousand new Christians grow? The hundred and twenty disciples suddenly had to become exactly what Matthew 13:52 defines a disciple to be. Each one had to become the head of a spiritual family. With three thousand new Christians, each of the one hundred and twenty disciples had to take the responsibility to help about twenty-five new believers grow in their understanding of Christ and His teachings. How did that happen?

Acts 2:42 tells us that the church immediately began doing four things when the church grew from one hundred and twenty disciples to three thousand one hundred and twenty believers. That verse says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” The apostles’ doctrine was what the disciples had been taught by Christ. That would be the teachings we now have in the New Testament. However, a key thing to notice is that the teaching of the apostles’ doctrine was combined with three other things.

We see that the apostles’ doctrine was combined with fellowship. The word “fellowship” speaks of a small group doing things together so they could share their lives together. We are not told whether these were all adults or if part of them were children and young people. If they were all adults, each disciple probably led two groups of about a dozen to help them in their early spiritual

growth. As a result, each of the hundred and twenty disciples were able to follow the example of Christ and lead either one or two groups of about twelve adults in their spiritual growth to help their thinking and attitudes become transformed.

The fact that this is what the early church did is further indicated by Acts 2:46. That verse says, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” In this verse, we see that the early Christians met both in the temple and also house-to-house. When they met in the temple, Acts 5:12 says, “And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.” We see that the Christians met in Solomon's Porch when they gathered in the temple.

The Court of the Gentiles was the large court surrounding the temple. This court was about twelve hundred feet in length and about eight hundred feet in width. Around the outside edge of this entire court was a large covered porch about forty-five feet in width and supported by fifteen hundred pillars. A Jewish teacher would sit next to one of these pillars, and a small group of people would gather around that teacher to hear him teach. In Acts 22:3, Paul said, “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.” Gamaliel taught Paul, and a few others, for a period of years near one of those pillars.

The eastern side of the Court of the Gentiles was the area known as Solomon's Porch. That meant it was a covered area more than twelve hundred feet long by forty-five feet wide with a roof that was held up by more than four hundred pillars. Many Jews came to the temple each morning and evening for the hour of prayer. Acts 3:1 says, “Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.” Acts 3:11 says that the lame man, that was healed in Acts 3:2-10, immediately went to Solomon's Porch. Acts 3:11 says, “Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed.” The times of morning and evening prayer provided two times each day when small groups of believers could get together into the temple for prayer, fellowship, and the discussion of the apostle's teaching together near one of these pillars.

However, Acts 2:46 also says, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” Here, we see that these small groups also got together in homes, where it would be possible to break bread together. In the early church, the breaking of bread included a communion service as part of a meal, so it provided a real time of fellowship as well. The early believers immediately began meeting in homes so they could eat meals together and have communion, along with Bible study, fellowship, and prayer. As a result of the combination of these prayer times, the study of the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, along with the meeting in homes for these purposes, plus breaking bread, the early believers were spending a lot of time together just as Christ had spent a lot of time with His disciples. These small groups were becoming spiritual families with a tremendous concern for one another.

However, these meetings of spiritual families in homes also produced another result. Many times, a physical household would also include members of extended families. As a result, extended family members that were not Christians were having the opportunity to see how spiritual families functioned. Acts 2:47 tells the result. That verse says, “Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Curious people would ask their questions of a small group gathered in Solomon’s porch. Curious family, and extended family members, had the same opportunity as the believers shared in homes. The result was that there were people becoming believers every day, either in the temple or in the homes.

Christ had shown the disciples the basic structure for helping people have their lives transformed as they discussed their questions with Christ. The structure was very simple. Get together in small groups where people could discuss the teachings of Christ, enjoy fellowship, pray together, and share meals and communion together. It was something all believers could do in their own homes. The hundred and twenty had become disciples who were equipped to lead such discussions, because Christ had answered their questions and shown them His love.

The word “disciples” is not used between Acts 1:16 and Acts 5:42. However, Acts 6:1 begins, “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.” Then, Acts 6:7 adds, “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.” There is a six or seven year period between Acts 1 and Acts 6, so we see that it took the early church time to develop more disciples who were able to lead spiritual families.

However, the multiplication of disciples (heads of spiritual households or small group leaders) made it possible for the church to begin to spread and multiply. When persecution came, Acts 8:4 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Here, we see that the growing Christians were equipped to share the Word of God wherever they were scattered. Acts 9:31 gives the results, when it says, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” Here, we see that when disciples multiply, the result is that churches multiply.

The Great Commission, in Matthew 28:19-20, has one command. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.” That command is to Make Disciples. May the Lord richly bless you, and give your life an eternal impact, as you help people become disciples who can lead small group Bible studies.