

16. Developing Structure to Equip for Evangelism

In 1 Peter 3:14-16, we read, “But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. ‘And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.’ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.” In these verses, we see that Christians may suffer for the sake of righteousness. However, the important thing we see in these verses is that Christ wants Christians to make a difference in this world. This raises the question, “How do we develop Christians who make a difference?”

In these verses, we see that Christ uses two key things to draw people to Christ. First, Christ uses our actions to cause people to realize that life can be different. Second, we are to be ready at all times to explain the hope we have so others can hear why we have hope in a world that is without hope. In our last eight topics, we talked about eight characteristics of the early church, from Acts 2:42-47, that transformed the lives of the early believers. Christ wants that same transformation to happen in the lives of every Christian today. Only as that begins to happen will we see Christians who are making a difference in our world.

Christians will make a difference if they are transformed in three ways. First, Christians need to be transformed in their thoughts. Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Our minds are being transformed as we learn the Word of God, grow in our understanding of the Word of God, and then, apply the Word of God to our lives.

Second, Christians need to be transformed in their attitudes. James 1:2-3 says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” The word translated “count” means *to make a choice to consider it all joy even when we are going through times of testing*. That is not a natural choice, but a supernatural choice of yielding ourselves to God, so He can work in and through our lives through the things that are happening to us. Ephesians 5:20 says, “Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This shows us that attitudes are changed as we make a conscious choice to yield to Christ rather than depending on our own strength.

Third, Christians need to be transformed in their actions. The verse, that we mentioned in the first paragraph, 1 Peter 3:16, speaks of our good conduct in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” If we are led by the love of Christ, we will act out of love. If we are driven by our own fear, we will act out of that fear. We need to develop a structure that will help people to think Biblically, develop godly attitudes, and develop godly actions, if we want to develop Christians whose lives make a difference.

However, 1 Peter 3:15-17 gives a second key if we are going to develop Christians whose lives

are making a difference. Verse 16 says we are to “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.” This means that we need to develop a structure that both transforms our thoughts, attitudes, and actions, and also equips us to explain why we are different. That was common in the early church. In Acts 5:28, the religious leaders accused the apostles by “saying, ‘Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!’” Later, when persecution came, the apostles remained in Jerusalem, while the other Christians were scattered. Acts 8:4 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Here, we see that all of the Christians knew how to explain the hope they had in Christ.

Why is it that the early Christians all knew how to explain what the Word of God taught about the hope they had, while today, only a few Christians are equipped to explain the Word? The answer to that question can be learned from the example of Christ. We see, in Matthew 4, that Christ had been taking many people with Him for about a year. However, in Matthew 4:18-22 Christ told Peter, Andrew, James, and John, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” These men were going to now spend even more time with Christ. Matthew 4:23 then says, “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.” Christ said that if they went with Him, they would learn how to become fishers of men.

For the next nine months, Christ showed them even more about how to share the gospel. Several things happened during that time. Those men grew in godly character, as they saw the example of Christ. They learned what to share. They learned how to share what they learned. They learned the importance of prayer, as they saw the example of Christ. Mark 1:35 says, “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” Later, Christ told them to wait until the Holy Spirit gave them power and boldness to witness. Luke 24:49 says, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”

Finally, after about twenty-one months, Christ chose a smaller group of just twelve disciples. Mark 3:14 says, “Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach.” According to both Matthew and Mark, Christ had already taken the disciples with Him as He taught in the synagogues throughout Galilee. Now, He was going to send them out to preach and put into practice the things He had been showing them. Luke 9:1-10 tells how He sent out the twelve. Then, Luke 10:1-12 tells how He sent them out again as a part of a larger group of seventy.

These passages show that Christ developed a structure where He could train by example. He had the disciples observe for a year. Then, He told them what they would become as they continued to follow Him, and had them begin to participate. Later, He gave them on-the-job training and had them report back about what had happened. In John 17:4, Christ said, “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” That work was training His disciples. Then, in John 20:21, after His resurrection, Christ told them, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you’.” Christ told them that, just as the Father had sent Him to

train them, now He was sending them forth in the same way to train others.

The disciples followed that same pattern once the church began in Acts. They had learned from Christ to train others by example through observation, participation, on-the-job training, reporting back, further training, and dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit to give them boldness to speak. Acts 4:31 and Acts 8:4 show the results. Acts 4:31 says, “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” Acts 8:4 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.”

If we are going to both transform lives and equip people to give an answer for the hope that lies within them, we must make it our priority to train others in the same way Christ and the disciples trained others. Paul also said that was how he trained the leaders in the church at Ephesus. Acts 20:20-21 says, “How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul realized he would only equip people to be effective in sharing the Gospel by showing them how instead of just telling them what to do.

The Thessalonian Christians had only been Christians a few months when Paul wrote his first letter to them. Paul showed that he trained new Christians the same way he trained leaders. 1 Thessalonians 1:5-8 says, “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.” Paul had shown them how to share the Gospel, by his example, and now they were showing others how to follow the Lord by their example.

There are many ways to develop church structure. However, these passages show us that the most effective way to equip people to share the Gospel is to show them how by our example. If Christ made it His priority to train people by example, then, as we develop church structure, we want to develop the structure in such a way that our leaders will have the opportunity to show others how to do evangelism by their example. May the Lord richly bless you as you show others, by your example, how to share the Gospel effectively.