

Developing Creative Christians

**Growing Christian Leaders Series
Manual 15**

by
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The “Growing Christian Leaders Series” is the result of weekly topics which were prepared and e-mailed over a period of years. This series is especially designed for those who are already Christian leaders; to give them Biblical principles for the development of additional godly spiritual leaders. Because they give Biblical principles for growth in spiritual leadership, they are also helpful for Christians that want to grow and become godly spiritual leaders.

Mark 10:43-45 says, “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” In these verses, Christ taught that godly spiritual leaders do not have the attitudes of leaders in the world. Worldly leadership is based on power and authority and is designed to benefit the leader and place him above others. In contrast, godly spiritual leadership is designed to help every Christian reach their full potential in Christ. The following three statements give a summary of three styles of leadership.

If we drive people, we will drive them until they can get out of our way.

If we lead people, we will be able to lead them as far as we have gone ourselves.

If we serve people, we will help each person develop their full God-given potential and equip each person for the ministry that Christ has prepared for every Christian.

In the world, people often measure success by the amount of things that they accumulate before they die. However, they are unable to take any of those things with them when they die. Mark 8:36-37 says, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Success produces rewards until we die, but it produces nothing for eternity.

In contrast, God measures effectiveness by our faithfulness and obedience. Matthew 6:19-21 says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Effectiveness produces eternal rewards. Mark 10:29-30 says, “So Jesus answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life.’” 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” The Growing Christian Leaders Series is designed to make your life count for eternity by bringing glory to God.

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1.

Choices, Consequences and Creativity – Part 1

When God created Adam, God created him so that he had great creativity. He was able to give names to all of the animals even though he had never seen any of them before. Genesis 2:20 says, “So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.” However, Adam sinned and that choice changed his relationships with God, with himself and with others. It also had five immediate consequences. Adam experienced separation from God. He had fear, guilt and shame within. He immediately blamed his wife.

We also see that sin began to twist and destroy the creativity of mankind. Instead of people using their creativity to bring glory to God, we see that they used their creativity to discover more ways to do evil. Genesis 6:5 says, “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Here we see that all that people thought about was evil. We still see creativity in children but they usually begin to limit their creativity because of fear. We will look at how creativity affects choices and consequences.

In the book of Daniel, we see that Daniel and his three friends were taken as captives to the land of Babylon. There they were placed under the supervision of Melzar to be trained to serve the king. Although Daniel was just a young man, he was a young man with a purpose in his life. Daniel 1:8 says, “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.” Here we see that Daniel had chosen to make it his purpose in life to bring glory to God.

Daniel made a choice to bring glory to God by what he ate and drank. Daniel 1:9-10 says, “Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, “I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king.” This choice by Daniel also forced Melzar to make a choice since Daniel refused to eat the food of the king and drink the wine of the king. Melzar could only see two choices because he was controlled by fear. His choices were to make Daniel and his friends eat and drink what the king provided or to lose his head. He shows that he had lost his creativity because he was acting out of fear.

In contrast, Daniel realized that there were other choices and showed his creativity by suggesting a third choice. He knew if he did what Melzar said he would not bring glory to God. He also knew that if he rebelled that he, his three friends and Melzar would all be killed and that would not bring glory to God. Because Daniel was not controlled by fear, Daniel realized that he could use his God given creativity and suggest a test to Melzar. He could have suggested a test lasting six months or a year since the training period was three years. However, Daniel suggested a test of only ten days so that God could use the test to bring glory to God.

Daniel 1:12-13 says, “Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants.” Melzar realized that he now had a third choice. A ten day test would still leave him with 2 years and 355 days regardless of what happened in the test. He could make the choice to accept this third choice without having to be controlled by fear.

Daniel 1:14-16 tells us, “So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days. And

at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.” The God given creativity that Daniel was able to exercise because he was not acting out of fear caused Melzar to see the way that God worked and it brought glory to God.

God honored the purpose of heart demonstrated in the life of Daniel and his three friends. Daniel 1:17 says, “As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.” Here we see that God honored the purpose of heart of Daniel and his three friends by giving them much greater understanding and creativity. When Christians are led by the love of Christ instead of the fear of people, they will see the Lord give them much greater wisdom, understanding and creativity.

After three years all of the young men were presented to the king so that the king could question them and see how they had developed through the training process that they had gone through. When the king questioned Daniel and his three friends Daniel 1:20-21 says, “And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm. Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.” Here we see the results of Daniel yielding his life to God so that God could develop his wisdom, understanding and creativity.

The fact that Daniel was able to exercise leadership until the first year of King Cyrus is a very significant statement. It meant that Daniel influenced two world empires – the Babylonian and Medo-Persian Empires. It also meant that this influence covered a period of nearly 75 years. This gave him many opportunities to bring glory to God as well as influence the decisions of several world rulers. This was all made possible by the fact that he had purposed in his heart not to defile himself with the king’s food. Because he did not fear the king, He could seek the wisdom of God for creative ideas that also allowed him to bring glory to God. He was led by the love of God instead of being driven by the fear of any people including the king.

This is illustrated by a very familiar event in the life of Daniel. Many people are familiar with the story of Daniel in the lion's den but not as many are familiar with the events leading up to that event. In 539 BC the Medes conquered the city of Babylon and took control of the Babylonian Empire. At that point Daniel had already been a leader with great influence in the Babylonian Empire for about 70 years and so he was probably at least 90 years old at the time the Medes conquered Babylon.

The Lord opened the door for Daniel to quickly begin to have influence with the Persian rulers. By Daniel 6:3 we read, “Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm.” Here we see that Daniel still had that excellent spirit in him that gave him wisdom, understanding and creativity even though he was more than 90 years old. It was during this period of time that the Jews that chose to do so were allowed to return to the land of Israel under the leadership of Ezra. Daniel probably provided much of the influence that made this possible.

The influence that Daniel had because of his wisdom and creativity caused the other leaders to become jealous. Instead of taking the opportunity to learn from Daniel and grow in wisdom and creativity themselves, these leaders decided to try and destroy Daniel so that they could get his position of influence. That was why they tricked the king into signing a decree that said no one could petition any other god or man except the king for thirty days. That decree did not stop Daniel from serving God because he was not driven by the fear of people but he was led by the love of God.

Daniel 6:10 says, “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.” Daniel continued to pray and make his petitions to God with the windows wide open so that these jealous leaders could watch him and listen to him pray.

The jealous leaders did get Daniel thrown into the lion’s den. Instead of being killed, the choice of Daniel brought glory to God. (Daniel probably even got to enjoy a nice soft lion pillow that night as he slept.) Two things happened as a result, first the jealous leaders were thrown to the lions and the lions did destroy them. Second, the king wrote a new decree. Daniel 6:26-28 says, “I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, And steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, And His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, And He works signs and wonders In heaven and on earth, Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”

Daniel is an excellent example of the fact that wise choices lead to good consequences and give Christians a great opportunity to develop our God given creativity so that the Lord can use that creativity to bring glory to God as well as have a powerful influence in the world around us. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders grow in godly wisdom and understanding so that they are able to develop their God given creativity in a way that will bring glory to God and have a powerful impact in the lives of others.

Choices, Consequences and Creativity – Part 2

In our last topic, we saw how creativity affected the choices and consequences that Daniel experienced in his life. Today, we are going to look at some key Biblical principles to help developing leaders learn how to develop their creativity. This will become increasingly important in the coming years. The world has tried to conform people to a worldly system ever since Adam sinned. Various cultures have used traditions and rules to get people to conform. Because people act out of fear they have become conformed to the world. The addition of modern technology has provided new ways to get people to conform to the world because they can see sin from all over the world.

First, if we are going to help those who become Christians restore their God given creativity so that they can bring glory to God, the place we must begin is the heart. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?” Mark 7:21-23 says, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.” These things will defile a person and destroy their God given creativity.

In contrast, Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.” Christians will see their creativity develop as they learn to focus on the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” In Part I of this topic we saw in Daniel 1:8a, “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank.” The last six Psalms focus on giving praise to God for what He has done and true praise must come from the heart. The final verse of those six Psalms says in Psalm 150:6, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!” True praise is the result of a commitment in the heart to bring glory to God in all that we do.

Second, to help Christians restore their God given creativity, we must focus on the mind. 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.” The process of renewing our minds will include hearing, reading, studying and memorizing the Word of God. However, the most important thing of all is learning to meditate on the Word of God. Joshua 1:8 says, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” As we meditate on the Word of God, we begin to view things in the world from the viewpoint of God rather than the viewpoint of the world.

In Isaiah 55:8-9 we read, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.” Here we see that the thoughts and ways of God are much higher than our thoughts and ways. As we learn to think His thoughts and follow His ways, we will begin to become more creative because we are learning the thoughts and ways of a Creator that has infinite creativity.

Psalm 1:1-3 tells us the results as people learn to think and act according to the thoughts and ways of a God with infinite creativity. Those verses say, “Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree

Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.” In these verses, we see that the person that is meditating on the Word of God will think the thoughts of God and become a fruitful person because the ways of that person demonstrate the creativity of God. Remember that God did not make any two mountains look exactly alike. They are all different. In the same way every Christian is different and can bring glory to God in different ways once his or her creativity is released.

Third, we can act with great creativity once our heart is focused on the glory of God and our thoughts are being transformed by the Word of God so that we are able to view things from the viewpoint of God rather than the viewpoint of man. For our actions to agree with our heart and our thoughts requires godly motivation. 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.” Here we see that to have actions that are in agreement with our heart and mind we must be motivated by the love of Christ rather than being controlled by the fear of people.

This happens as we learn to yield to the Lord so that we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit instead of depending on our own strength. Romans 6:16 says, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” Galatians 5:16 says, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Galatians 5:18 adds, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” This makes it possible to act in the freedom that we have in Christ. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

Some Christians see everything as black or white – right or wrong. (This can create great conflict in a church or other Christian organization.) Usually when this happens the people involved each think that their way is right and the other way is wrong. To develop our creativity, we need to begin to think in terms of choices and consequences. Instead of looking at just two ways to do something, we need to ask ourselves what are the six or eight possible ways that we could do this. That now gives us six or eight choices and sometimes more.

Once we have all of the possible choices, then we should list the consequences of each of those choices because every choice has consequences. Sometimes those consequences are good and sometimes those consequences are bad. Galatians 6:7-9 says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” Some choices will bring a harvest of corruption. Other choices will bring a harvest that will have eternal results. We want to make wise choices that bring glory to God and produce eternal results.

Once we have the six or eight possible choices and the consequences of each of those choices listed, then we have the knowledge to make wise choices. In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve looked at the choices that Satan presented and not at the consequences God had promised. Instead of looking at the choices, we can now look at the consequences and see the results of each of the six or eight choices. A couple of choices will be immediately eliminated because they do not bring glory to God. (Often the two choices that are eliminated are the two that the people saw as the black and the white choices as they both have bad consequences and do not bring glory to God.)

A couple of other choices are neither right nor wrong but they do not bring glory to God. That may leave two or three choices that each would have consequences that will bring glory to God. Since the remaining choices all have consequences that bring glory to God, any of the two or three

remaining choices will be good choices because any one of them will bring glory to God. As we pray the Lord will lead us to select one of the choices as our plan of action. If we are talking about a personal decision, we will experience the peace of God because we know that the decision will bring glory to God. If we are talking about a group decision in a church or other Christian organization, we will have a spirit of unity because we will know that God is going to get the glory from our choice of a plan of action. As 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

In addition to making wise decisions both as individuals and as a group when we are talking about a church, the process of helping a developing leader learn to focus on choices and consequences will have at least one other benefit. Romans 15:7 says, "Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God." Developing leaders will learn how to accept one another and not judge one another because the focus has moved from getting my way to seeking the glory of God. As an individual the person can accept the fact that every other person will do things in a different way because God has created each one a unique individual. As a church team, the focus will be on bringing glory to God rather than getting our way.

It is a great privilege to help developing leaders develop their creativity and appreciate the creativity of others as they learn the process to make wise decisions that will bring glory to God. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders restore their God given creativity that was largely lost through original sin.

3.

Choices, Consequences and Creativity – Part 3

In our last two topics, we have talked about “Choices, Consequences and Creativity”. Today, we will be focusing on some other aspects of this topic. In our last topic we mentioned that to help Christians restore their God given creativity that we must focus on the mind. 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.” Today, we want to look at some additional thoughts from this verse.

The phrase, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,” points to the fact that one of the keys to creativity is to learn to think in ways counter to the culture. Children and young people learn very quickly to conform to the culture around them. As young children they seek to gain the approval of their parents by conforming to the desires of the parents. As they grow they begin to try to look like their friends in appearance, think like their friends in their thoughts and act like their friends in their actions. In this way they gain the approval of their friends but they are losing their creativity. By the time they become adults most people have lost much of their ability to think creatively.

That is one reason why it is so important to help new Christians learn to transform their minds. Only as they choose to think in different ways from the culture in which they live will they begin to redevelop their creativity. A key Biblical principle here is to learn to see things from the viewpoint of others. Paul summarized this principle in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 where we read, “And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

In these verses, we see that Paul looked at the Jewish viewpoint when he was talking to Jews. He looked at the viewpoint of those under the law when he was talking to those under the law. He looked at the viewpoint of those without the law when he was talking to those without the law. He looked at the viewpoint of the weak when he was talking to the weak. In every situation he tried to look at the situation from the viewpoint of those to whom he was ministering. In addition, he always tried to look at every situation from the viewpoint of God. His purpose in looking at situations from a variety of different viewpoints was to bring glory to God by leading people to Christ. He knew that to lead other people he had to see and understand their viewpoint.

Christ demonstrated this same principle by listening to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. In Luke 24:17-24 Christ asked the two disciples to tell Him their viewpoint about the things that had happened in Jerusalem. Of course Christ knew their viewpoint already since He is God. However, He chose to listen to their viewpoint so that they could tell Him what they thought and felt about the things that had happened surrounding the death and resurrection of Christ. Then He could use their own thoughts and feelings to explain those same things from God’s viewpoint. Luke 24:27 says, “And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

Because Christ had been willing to listen to their viewpoint, they were ready to listen to Him as He explained those same events from the viewpoint of the Word of God. We see their reaction in Luke 24:32 where we read, “And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" That night the Lord lit a fire

in the hearts of those two disciples that burned for the rest of their lives.

Because Christ had taken the time to listen to their viewpoint, He was able to help them see those things from the viewpoint of God and it changed and transformed their thinking and actions so that they had to tell others immediately. Luke 24:33, 35 says, "So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together...And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread." Those two were probably never the same after that event because Christ had transformed their thinking and stirred their creativity into action.

Although the culture of the world conforms people to the culture, another key principle is to learn to use the word "and" instead of "or" when we are helping people learn to develop their creativity. We should not tell people, "You should just study the Bible and not the culture" because that is an "or" statement. Instead, 1 Chronicles 12:32 says, "...of the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do..." Here we see that the men of Issachar also had an understanding of the culture in which they lived so that they knew what to do. An "and" statement would be, we need to encourage people to study the Bible and also the culture in which they live so that the Lord can give them understanding of what to do to bring glory to God in this particular culture.

Nehemiah give us a similar illustration of an "and" statement. In Nehemiah 1, he prayed and in both Nehemiah 1 and 2 he planned. In Nehemiah 1 he prayed for four months about the situation in Jerusalem. However, at the same time he also developed a plan if the Lord would open the door for him to carry out that plan. In Nehemiah 2:1-3 we see that Nehemiah had the plan ready when the opportunity came. Those verses say, "And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. Therefore the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart." So I became dreadfully afraid, and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?"

The king gave a second statement in verse 4. We read, "Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven." Nehemiah had his plan ready but he again prayed before presenting his plan to the king. Then he gave the details of his plan. He asked for permission to go to Jerusalem. He told the king how long it would take. He asked for letters of permission to get to Jerusalem. He asked for the materials needed to rebuild the walls and the palace. Nehemiah 2:8b says, "And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me." Because Nehemiah both prayed and planned, God opened the door through the king for Nehemiah to carry out the plan.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he spent three days looking around to see the various choices that they faced. Then he went by night and surveyed the walls to see what needed to be done on the walls. Then Nehemiah presented the choices and the consequences to the people and the people made the choice. Nehemiah 2:17-18 says, "Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach." And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to this good work."

The people had been at the mercy of their enemies for nearly one hundred years because of the fact that the wall was broken down. In fact, Nehemiah 2:10 tells how the enemies felt when they heard

why Nehemiah had come. That verse says, “When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.” The enemies were very upset because someone had a concern to help the people of Israel. In fact, in chapters two through six we see that the enemies tried in every possible way to stop the building of the wall.

However, we see the results of choosing to both pray and plan on the part of Nehemiah. Nehemiah 6:15-16 says, “So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.” Because one man had the creativity to pray and plan, God was able to give Nehemiah that creativity. There were two results. First, a city that had been defenseless for nearly one hundred years now had a secure wall in only fifty-two days. Second, the enemies knew that God did this work so that all of the glory went to God.

It is a great privilege to help developing leaders develop their creativity by helping them to learn to see the viewpoint of others, helping them learn to understand both the Biblical principles and the culture in which they are ministering and also to learn to both pray and plan so that when the opportunity comes they will be able to bring glory to God. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to develop their God given creativity.

4.

Creativity and the Priesthood of Every Believer

In our last three topics, we have talked about Choices, Consequences and Creativity. Today, we want to talk about how creativity and the priesthood of every believer are directly related. Sin and its consequences caused most people to lose much of their creativity. Christ wants to restore that creativity and free every Christian to learn how to serve one another in love. That will be the focus of our topic today.

In Hebrews 8:4-5 we read, "For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." In these verses, we see that Moses was told to build the tabernacle according to the exact pattern that God had shown him on the mountain because it was the shadow of the heavenly tabernacle. If you are in a dark room and someone holds up a beautiful piece of fruit in front of a light so that the shadow of the fruit can be seen on the wall, would you rather try and eat the shadow of the fruit or would you rather eat the fruit itself?

Hebrews 9:7-8 goes on to tell us how the high priest went into the Holy of Holies once a year to take blood first as a covering for his own sins and then a second time as a covering for the sins of the people. Those verses say, "But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing." The people could not even enter into the court of the tabernacle but had to stand on the outside of the tabernacle. Only one priest on one day of the year could meet God in the Holy of Holies and he had to come with blood first for himself and then for the people.

In contrast, we see that the sacrifice that Christ presented in the heavenly tabernacle was much different. Hebrews 9:12-14 says, "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

That blood paid the penalty for our sin once for all and made many changes for us. We see one of those changes in Hebrews 10:16-18 which says, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin." Here we see that one result of Christ entering into heaven with His blood is the fact that God does not hold our sins against us any more. Another result is found in Hebrews 4:16 where we read, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Every time we pray we come directly into the heavenly Holy of Holies where Christ is sitting on the right hand of the Father making intercession for us.

These two things provide the foundation for the restoration of the creativity of every Christian. The verse we mentioned earlier, Hebrews 9:14 says, "how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" First, to restore our creativity we must learn to understand and

apply personally the fact that the offering of Christ was to cleanse our conscience from dead works. Many Christians have never been able to apply this principle personally to get rid of their baggage from the past. As a result, they continue to conform themselves to the thinking of the culture of the world instead of being transformed by the renewing of their minds.

Second, many Christians have never been able to understand and apply personally the fact that they have been set free to serve the living God. Galatians 5:1 says, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." Then Galatians 5:13 adds, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." Instead of being on the outside of the tabernacle like the Old Testament saints, we have now been set free both to come into the Holy of Holies in heaven through prayer and we have been set free to serve the Living God by serving one another in love. This is really the Biblical foundation for becoming servant leaders that are free to serve one another in love.

Christians that are in positions of spiritual leadership and understand these principles are now free to serve those that they lead in love. After verse 11 talks about spiritual leaders, Ephesians 4:12 says that spiritual leaders are set free, "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Since every Christian is to be set free from the past by having their consciences purged from dead works and then given freedom to serve Christ by serving one another in love, spiritual leaders help Christians become free from their past and equip them for spiritual ministry for the future.

Ephesians 4:14 tells us that spiritual leaders help to set us free from the past by growing beyond spiritual childhood. Ephesians 4:15 says that spiritual leaders equip us to serve one another in love by learning to speak the truth in love by depending on our head, Christ, instead of depending on ourselves. Ephesians 4:16 says that every Christian will become an effective, working part of the body if spiritual leaders will effectively equip them in these two ways. That verse says, "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

One other basic key to the development of the creativity of every Christian is learning to transform our thoughts so that we become counter culture in our thinking. 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." People that are not Christians and Christians that are still dealing with their baggage from the past often have their thoughts conformed to the thinking of the world. They see and interpret almost everything negatively.

As Christians are shown by the example of servant leaders how to follow the instructions of Scripture, they learn to see and interpret things from a thankful heart. Ephesians 5:20-21 says, "giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God." As we grow in thankfulness, we are able to interpret more and more things positively.

The second part of becoming counter culture in our thinking is given in Isaiah 55:8-9 where we read, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts." The more we replace our thoughts with the thoughts of God, the more creative we become in our lives. We are learning to view an increasing number of situations with the creativity of an infinite God.

A priest of God has two primary functions. He speaks to God for men. We have seen that we are

able to come directly to the throne of God with our prayers. We know that Christ is sitting at the right hand of God where He is interceding for us. Second, a priest of God speaks to men for God. We have already seen that this includes fulfilling the new commandment of serving one another as Christians in love. However, Christ summarized the entire Old Testament law in Matthew 22:37-40 where we read, "Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." Then Luke 10:25-37 defines our neighbor as any person in need and would include all non-Christians.

The priesthood of every believer means that godly leaders will equip every Christian that they lead to serve one another as Christians in love. It means that godly leaders will equip every Christian that they lead to clearly share the Gospel with those that are not yet Christians. As we help developing leaders learn to serve one another as Christians in love and learn to effectively share the Gospel with those who are not Christians, we are equipping them to be effective servants of Christ. May the Lord richly bless you, as you help developing leaders become effective servant leaders.

Creativity and the Uniqueness of Every Person

Christ talked to many people about their need for spiritual life. However, in every recorded instance in the Gospels Christ recognized the uniqueness of every individual by sharing the Gospel in the way so that each person would understand it clearly. The approach of Christ was to start with the viewpoint of the person to whom He was talking and help that person understand how to have forgiveness of sins and eternal life from the viewpoint of that person.

Today, many Christians do just the opposite. They have learned one way to share the Gospel and they share it the same way with every person. Many times when the Gospel is shared this way the person who hears the Gospel presented that way has no idea what the person is trying to explain. Instead of sharing the Gospel from the viewpoint of the person that is hearing the Gospel, the Christian shares the Gospel the one way that he or she knows whether the other person can understand or not. This is usually due to a lack of two things. First, it is due to a lack of knowledge of the Scriptures. Second, it is due to a lack of creativity on the part of the Christian because the Christian is only sharing from his or her viewpoint and not the viewpoint of the person hearing the Gospel.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Since all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God and all Scripture is profitable, it should be our goal to help each Christian become familiar with the entire Word of God as they grow spiritually. When Paul spoke to the leaders at the church at Ephesus, he was able to say to them in Acts 20:27, “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.” If Paul felt that it was important for every Christian leader, to know the whole counsel of God, we should have the same concern to help every developing Christian become familiar with the whole counsel of God.

As Christians are becoming familiar with an increasing amount of Scripture, they need to learn how to see things from the viewpoint of each person that is not yet a Christian so that they can share the appropriate Scriptures to help that person understand the Gospel. That requires that the Christian approach each person with a learner’s attitude so that he or she can quickly begin to understand how that person thinks. The Christian also has to have a servant’s heart so that he or she can serve the person that is not yet a Christian by explaining the Gospel in a way that person can understand.

Christ also understood that each of those that followed Him were also unique individuals. As a result, Christ also ministered to each of His followers in a way that each could best understand. This is illustrated so well the night before Christ was crucified. A study of John 13 and 14 shows that Christ spoke specifically to at least the following disciples at the Last Supper: Peter, John, Judas Iscariot, Thomas, Philip and the other Judas. In addition to speaking and teaching groups of people, we need to provide opportunities for people to ask their individual questions and give them opportunities for discussion.

Effective ministry to both Christians and non-Christians is most effective when the leaders have developed a learner’s attitude. The uniqueness of each individual means it is important to help developing leaders begin to develop the attitude of a learner. The most effective way to help people develop the attitude of a learner is by example. 1 Corinthians 11:1 says, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” One of the best ways to model a learner’s attitude is to ask questions of those that we are helping to develop. Christ demonstrated this so many times in His ministry.

In Matthew 16:13 Christ asked the question, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” The

disciples answered in Matthew 16:14, "So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Then Christ asked a second question in Matthew 16:15, "But who do you say that I am?" Christ was not really concerned about the opinions of the crowds. However, He was very concerned about the answer of the Twelve because that determined that they were ready to learn new things. The result of these questions is seen in Matthew 16:21 where we read, "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day."

A learner's attitude helps us to learn what other people know and what they do not know. However, there is a second reason why a learner's attitude is even much more important. Many of the most important things that we learn in life are learned from the people with whom we work. They have had many experiences in their lives that we have not had. These experiences have given them many things that they can teach us and will teach us if we will give them the opportunity. The man out of whom Christ cast a legion of demons illustrates this. Mark 5:20 says, "And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled." He was able to teach the people of his entire area many important things.

A second attitude that is essential if we recognize the uniqueness of each individual is a servant's heart. Rehoboam made a wrong choice in this area and he divided a great kingdom. 1 Kings 12:6-8 says, "Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, and he said, "How do you advise me to answer these people?" And they spoke to him, saying, "If you will be a servant to these people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever." But he rejected the advice which the elders had given him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him." The lack of a servant's attitude was shown by the way that he answered the people. 1 Kings 12:13 says, "Then the king answered the people roughly, and rejected the advice which the elders had given him." Then 1 Kings 12:19 concludes, "So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day."

A leader that has a servant's heart will have the people follow him and recognize his leadership. In contrast, a leader that answers people roughly will stir up rebellion in the people that he is supposed to be leading and will not be an effective leader. An effective leader with a servant's heart will recognize the uniqueness of each individual and equip that individual to serve the Lord according to the spiritual gifts of that individual, the heart of passion of that individual, the abilities of that person, the personality of that person and the experiences in life of that person. Taken together these five things define the unique "SHAPE" of that person.

A servant's heart causes a leader to recognize the uniqueness of each individual. Instead of getting the people to carry out the agenda of the leader, a leader with a servant's heart will make it his or her goal to help every Christian develop their full potential for Christ. As we serve others by helping them develop their full potential for Christ we are helping them learn to think and minister creatively. Christ helped a group of unknown fishermen, tax collectors and other individuals develop their full potential.

The religious leaders suddenly realized that Christ had transformed those unknown individuals into a powerful team. They saw it first with two of the fishermen. Acts 4:13 says, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus." Then they saw the same thing with the entire team that Christ had developed. Acts 5:28-29 say, "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!" But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

However, Christ also taught those men to minister to others with that same servant's heart. As a result, many other people had their uniqueness recognized and their lives transformed and were able to develop their full potential for Christ. Acts 9:31 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." These people in turn did the same with others. As a result, Acts 16:5 says, "So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily." Christ took a group of unknown men, served them by recognizing their uniqueness and released their full potential for ministry.

As the followers of Christ recognized the uniqueness of each believer, they developed those people and released their full potential for ministry. Acts 17:6 says, "But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too." Here we see that the Christians were accused of turning the world upside down. The Lord will allow us to become a part of this continuing process as we recognize the uniqueness of every Christian and serve them with a learner's attitude and a servant's heart.

The Lord has given us a great privilege to serve Him. He has also given us the opportunity to serve others by developing their full spiritual potential. May the Lord richly bless you as you serve other Christians by serving them and helping them develop their full potential for Christ.

6.

Creativity and Intentional Thinking

We have mentioned in other topics that we can think in at least three ways. We can think like the world, which thinks negatively because of sin, and we will be critical and judgmental like the world. We can learn to think positively by learning to obey Ephesians 5:20-21 which says, "Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God." Then we will think with a positive and thankful attitude. Third, we can learn to think Biblically. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts." We learn to think Biblically by meditating on the Word of God so that we think, understand and apply Biblical principles in our daily living.

It is this third way of thinking that truly makes us think counter culturally because the higher thoughts and ways of God cause us to think and act creativity. In Philippians 4:8-9 we read, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you." In these two verses we have some important keys in the development of Christians that are restoring their God given creativity.

Intentional thinking is thinking with a purpose. When the world thinks, the purpose is usually to satisfy self. Since the world thinks negatively, people in the world often spend much time thinking on the things that others have said or done to hurt them. At other times they think about things they can do to get their own way. 1 John 2:15-16 summarizes such thinking, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world." Such thinking if it has a purpose is to satisfy self and can only lead to sin. Many Christians still have their thinking conformed to the way the world thinks.

True intentional thinking is thinking with a positive purpose. Such intentional thinking will bring glory to God and not to self. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Here we see that we are to do all that we do to bring glory to God. That includes our thinking. Godly spiritual leaders must become intentional thinkers that are asking God to teach them Biblical principles and how to apply those Biblical principles to their lives and ministry. This kind of thinking will turn problems into opportunities to see God work in our lives and through our lives.

Christ gave Philip an opportunity to learn to think intentionally in John 6:5-6. Those verses say, "Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do." Instead of thinking intentionally, Philip thought negatively. His answer is given in John 6:7 which says, "Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little." Philip did not even answer the question because he could only think negatively at that point. As a result, he gave a financial report and said they could not afford to do anything.

In contrast, Andrew heard the same question and gave a very different answer. In John 6:9 Andrew said, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" Instead of looking at what they did not have available, Andrew chose to look at what they

had available and at who was asking the question. Andrew told Christ that they had a boy with a lunch and his lunch was available. Christ took that lunch and performed a miracle. John 6:12-13 tell us the results. Those verses say, "So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten." Andrew did some intentional thinking because he realized that they had a lunch and they had Christ.

Christ gave the disciples another opportunity for intentional thinking when He heard that their friend Lazarus was sick. Christ told the disciples that they were going to Judea again. John 11:8 shows the disciples were controlled by negative thinking again. That verse says, "The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?" Thomas shared a different thought but he also thought negatively. John 11:16 says, "Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." Christ went anyway and raised Lazarus from the dead. John 11:45 says, "Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him." The disciples saw the problems and Christ saw the opportunity to bring glory to God.

However as the disciples learned to depend on the Holy Spirit and grew in their spiritual lives, they began to become intentional thinkers. This transformed thinking caused them to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit to work through their lives. In Acts 3 Peter and John met a man more than 40 years old that had been crippled ever since birth. Acts 3:6-8 says, "Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them--walking, leaping, and praising God." Peter and John saw an opportunity for the Lord to work instead of seeing a problem.

When the religious leaders saw the man that was healed and heard what had happened, they put Peter and John in jail that night. Peter and John continued to pray and practice intentional thinking. Acts 4:13 shows the results, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus." The religious leaders then commanded them not to speak any more in the name of Christ. Because they were praying and being intentional in their thinking, Peter and John responded in Acts 4:19-20, "But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." They were certainly thinking and acting in a way that was counter to the religious culture.

Peter and John then showed all of the other disciples how to practice intentional thinking. Peter and John reported what the religious leaders had said. This immediately led to a prayer meeting. Their prayer shows that all the disciples had learned to think intentionally even though it meant going against the culture. Acts 4:29-30 says, "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." Instead of going into hiding, the disciples prayed that the Lord would help them to witness with boldness.

The answer to this prayer is shown in Acts 4:31, "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." The boldness with which they shared the Word of God eventually got them arrested again. The religious leaders said to them in Acts 5:28-29, "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!" But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men." The disciples were very intentional in their thinking and

were going to please God whether or not the religious leaders were happy.

The religious leaders were filled with negative thinking and were ready to kill the apostles. Gamaliel warned them that to do so they might be fighting against God. As a result we see what happened in Acts 5:40-42, “And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” Instead of conforming, the apostles gave thanks for the privilege of suffering for Christ. That is really countercultural in thinking.

They were intentional in their thinking so they just looked for new ways and new places to share the message about Jesus Christ. They did this daily in the temple. They did it daily in homes. They knew the difference between church work (doing the necessary things to help the church function) and the work of the church (taking the Gospel to people wherever they met them). As we help developing leaders becoming intentional in their thinking, they will also become equipped to do the work of the church by sharing the Gospel with people wherever they meet them. May the Lord richly bless you as you help Christians become intentional in their thinking so that they are able to do the work of the church in creative ways.

Creativity, Chaplains and Coaches – Part 1

Two of the most common types of leaders in churches and other Christian ministries are chaplains and coaches. However, very few of them have those titles. That is due to the fact that these two titles tell how they minister instead of where or to whom they minister. Chaplains are usually people that respond to crisis situations. This means that they are focused on what has already happened. Coaches are people that look to the future. They prepare people for what will happen in the future. They develop a goal and equip a team to reach that goal. Both may have great creativity. However, they will use their creativity in two very different ways.

Christ gives us an example of an individual that carried out both ministries effectively. Christ certainly showed His creativity in crisis situations when He healed the sick, cast out demons and raised the dead. In every one of those situations Christ was ministering to people that were in crisis. He brought great comfort and encouragement to all of these people in their different situations. Mark 1:32-34 says, “At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him.” Christ ministered to all of these people with great creativity as he healed those that were sick and cast out many demons. Christ responded to the crisis in the life of each of these people.

In that same chapter, Christ also showed great creativity as He prepared people for the future. In Mark 1:17 we read, “Then Jesus said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” Here we see that Christ was recruiting Peter and Andrew to become a part of the team that Christ was preparing for the future. Christ had already been doing things with these two men for about a year. Now he was inviting them to begin training to become part of the leadership team of the early church.

Christ gave them two things. He gave them an invitation to be on the team and He gave them a promise if they chose to become a part of the team. The invitation was to follow Him. The promise was that He would train and equip them to become fishers of men. A coach focuses not on what people are now but on what they will become as he helps them to develop and learn to work together as a team. These men were with Christ when He performed the miracles mentioned in Mark 1:32-34. They saw Christ heal the sick. They saw Christ cast out demons. Later they would see Him raise the dead. Christ was ministering to people in crisis but He was also coaching His team and equipping them for the future.

One of the tragedies today is that many Christian leaders have never learned to become both chaplains and coaches. As a result, they spend most of their time dealing with the past instead of equipping others for the future. We might say that they spend all of their time fighting fires and do not spend any time doing fire prevention. Christ showed that it is important to deal with the past but Christ also worked to prepare people for the future. A good coach will continually help people to become more effective.

In John 8:1-11, the religious leaders brought a woman to Christ that had been caught in the act of adultery. They wanted Christ to focus on her past. When they kept pressuring Christ, He finally responded. John 8:7 says, “So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” Then John 8:9 says, “Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.” Christ helped the religious leaders move their focus on the past from the woman’s past to their own

past. As a result, we see that Christ gave them a very creative answer.

However, Christ was not just satisfied to be a chaplain to the woman during her time of crisis. Instead, Christ also became a coach and helped her prepare for the future. John 8:10-11 says, "When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." Christ helped her to change her past by forgiving her and then served as a coach for her future by helping her to focus on what to do in the future.

Christ had given the disciples a promise in Mark 1:17 that He would prepare them for the future. A big part of that preparation for the future was training. Training starts with vision. Christ first showed them that vision begins with prayer. 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." The disciples found Christ praying and told Him that all of the people wanted Him. The people wanted a chaplain that would be available the next time they had a crisis. Here we see that the disciples saw the need for a chaplain for the people and forgot that Christ had promised to be a coach to them.

Mark 1:38-39 shows how creative Christ was in developing the vision of the disciples. Those verses say, "But He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth." And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons." Instead of telling the disciples about the needs in other areas, He took them with Him and showed them the needs in other areas. He also showed them what to say and what to do. In the process the disciples were being coached and shown how to become fishers of men. At the same time they were expanding their vision.

Christ also showed the disciples another lesson about being both a chaplain and a coach. In Mark 2:1-12 four men brought their friend that was paralyzed to Christ. First, the disciples saw a good example of teamwork. They also saw how teamwork and creativity go together. The men could not get their friend to Christ and so they became creative and went up on the roof and made a hole in the roof to get their friend to Christ. In Mark 1:29 it says that Christ was in Capernaum and went to the house of Peter and Andrew. Here in these verses they are again in Capernaum and it just says the house so it may have again been the house of Peter and Andrew. If so, the creativity of these men meant that Peter and Andrew had to do some roof repair. The disciples were being shown that people are more important than possessions.

Since Christ had promised the disciples that He would help them to become fishers of men, Christ showed the disciples how to be creative in ministering to the paralyzed man. Mark 2:5 says, "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." Christ was a coach by showing the disciples that the greatest way to change the past of any person is through forgiveness of sins even if that person is paralyzed. He was coaching them by showing them that the basic need of all people is forgiveness of sins. Christ also showed the disciples how to be a chaplain and minister to the physical needs of the man.

In Mark 2:14-15 Christ expanded their vision to the people that the other religious leaders rejected. In fact, Christ even added one of the rejected group to His team. Those verses say, "As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him." Here we see that Christ was showing the disciples how to build relationships with those that the religious leaders rejected. People will listen as we share the Gospel if we have built a relationship with them.

The religious leaders decided that they better try to conform the disciples to their ideas of good and bad. Mark 2:16 says, "And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" Here we see that the scribes and Pharisees were trying to get the disciples to conform and act like them. In contrast, Christ said in Mark 2:17, "When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Christ again coached the disciples by showing them that the basic need of all people is repentance and forgiveness of sins. Christ expanded the vision of the disciples by showing them how to reach the people that society rejected. Christ had also shown that eating with tax collectors and sinners was a creative way to build relationships with them.

Christ calls us to help people deal with their past through forgiveness instead of continuing to dwell on their past. Otherwise they will constantly be in a crisis. That is why an effective leader must be both a chaplain and a coach. Once a person places his or her trust in Christ, we want to help them learn to let go of the past as quickly as possible. At the same time we want to help them develop a vision for the future. Once they begin to have a vision for what Christ wants to do in their lives and through their lives in the future, we need to invite them to become a part of the team. We need to promise to give the training needed to all that join the team. In doing this we coach and equip them to reach the goal that Christ has for their lives. As you are a chaplain to those you lead in their times of crisis and as you are a coach and train them to reach the full potential that God has given them in their lives, the Lord will richly bless you and multiply your ministry through the lives of those that you coach.

Creativity, Chaplains and Coaches – Part 2

In our last topic, we talked about the difference between chaplains and coaches. A chaplain can be very creative as he ministers to people in their times of crisis. However, if he is only a chaplain the focus will always be on the past. As a result, he will only develop his own creativity. In contrast, a coach helps people to focus on God given goals and then trains the whole team to become creative in reaching the goals. This produces at least two results. First, the team is able to lead people toward God given goals. Second, the whole team is able to develop their creativity and the full potential that God has placed in their lives because their focus will be on bringing glory to God instead of satisfying self.

Today, we will be looking at some more of the ways that Christ coached His disciples and equipped them to become fishers of men. After Christ chose the Twelve to become His leadership team in Mark 3:13-15 we see that the crowds following Christ became very large. Mark 3:20-21 says, "Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind." The friends of Christ thought that Christ had lost His mind because there were so many people following Him. However, in spite of the crowds, we are going to see that Christ focused on the development of His team.

First, Christ helped the team understand that they had a new relationship to Him. The mother and brothers of Christ came to Him and wanted to talk to Him. Christ used that opportunity to tell the team that they had a new relationship with Him. Mark 3:33-35 says, "But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother." Christ let this team of twelve men know that they now had the same relationship with Him that He had with His physical family.

Since Christ had told His disciples that He would train them and equip them to become fishers of men, we see that Christ did many things to equip them to reach others. In Mark 4 we see that there was a huge crowd gathered around Christ and so He began to teach them in parables. Mark 4:1-2 says, "And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching." These parables were just stories to the crowd. However, to the Twelve, Christ was going to use these parables to explain to them how to become fishers of men.

After the crowd left, the twelve asked Jesus why He spoke to the crowd in parables. In Luke 8:9-10 Christ gave a summary of why He spoke in parables, "Then His disciples asked Him, saying, "What does this parable mean?" And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.'" Then Christ explained the meaning of the parable to them.

In the parable in Mark 4:3-8 Christ had spoken about a man planting seed in a field. This probably just sounded like an interesting story to the crowd. However, Christ had promised to help the disciples become fishers of men. For them that story had a much greater meaning. Christ explained the meaning to the disciples as a part of coaching His disciples and preparing them to share the Word of God. He helped them to understand that the seed was the Word of God.

As the disciples shared the Word of God in the future, Christ coached them to show them that there would be at least four different responses by different people. Mark 4:14-20 tells us that

some would hear the Word and immediately forget it. Some would hear the Word of God, get all excited but draw back and not believe in Christ when they saw that responding to Christ would bring suffering. Some would hear the Word of God, but would be so involved with their problems or their desire for riches and the things of this world that they would not believe in Christ either. Those who would believe in Christ and follow Him are described in Mark 4:20. There we read, “But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

Christ was coaching the disciples so they would learn at least three things from this parable about fishing for men. First, they would only become fishers of men if they shared the Word of God and not their own opinions with people. They needed to understand that the Word of God is living and powerful. Second, many of those who heard the Word of God would not respond to the Gospel because of the things that were going on in their own lives. They needed to be prepared for people to reject so they would not get discouraged. Third, those who did respond to the Word of God and place their trust in Christ would have their lives changed and they would become fruitful. They needed to understand that true faith produces changed lives.

Christ immediately followed the explanation of that parable with another parable. Mark 4:21-22 says, “Also He said to them, “Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light.” Later on the disciples would learn that the price that Christ would pay for their salvation was shedding His blood for them on the cross. Christ was coaching the disciples to help them understand He was not purchasing their salvation for it to be hidden. He was purchasing their salvation to set them free so that they could have the privilege of serving the Lord by providing light for others to receive forgiveness of sins.

Then Christ gave a third parable to show how the seed (the Word of God) grows in the lives of those who hear it. Mark 4:26-29 says, “And He said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.” A person will only become a fisher of men by being like a lamp and sharing the Word of God so that people can hear how to put their trust in Christ.

However, the disciples also needed to understand how the Father would cause that Word of God to work in the lives of those that heard it to draw them to Christ. In John 6:44 Christ said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” This parable about how the seed grows was to help the disciples understand the process of growth that would happen as they shared the Word of God. The first responsibility of the disciples in order to become fishers of men was to scatter the seed (share the Word of God with people). We are not effective fishers of men just because we live a godly life for people to watch. Christ coached the disciples and helped them realize that an effective fisher of men is one that is continually sharing the Word of God with people that are not yet Christians.

Second an effective fisher of men needs to know that the Word of God will take root and grow in the lives of some of those that hear it. In Isaiah 55:11 God said, “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” God says that His Word will accomplish its purpose when it is shared. God will accomplish what He pleases through that Word as it is shared. As fishers of men, we do not always know at first what God is accomplishing as we share His Word. Christ was coaching the disciples to keep on sharing the Word of God even though they did not see immediate results.

Third, the disciples had to be coached in the fact that leading a person to Christ is a process that usually takes a period of time and is not just a one time event. There will be times when a person will respond to the Gospel immediately but it will be because others have been faithful in sowing and watering the seed of the Word of God. However, in most cases an effective fisher of men will have to share the Word with people many times over a period of time before that person even begins to show a real interest. This is illustrated in Acts 17:11-12, "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men." These verses show us that faithful sharing of the Word of God produced a great harvest.

Fourth, the disciples had to be coached so that they would recognize that there is an orderly process that happens before there is a harvest. Mark 4:28 says, "For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head." A person who tries to get a decision before there is a full understanding of the Gospel is like a person that tries to harvest the crop before the fruit has developed. An effective fisher of men will make sure that the person understands the Gospel clearly. People need to clearly understand the meaning of repentance and faith.

Fifth, the disciples had to be coached so that they would recognize when a person was ready to place his or her trust in Christ. Christ says that it is harvest time and it is time to gather the harvest. We need to help a person understand clearly what they need to do to become a Christian so that they can even become a Christian on their own in the middle of the night if that is the time that the Father draws them to Christ.

Just as Christ invited some men to follow Him and promised them that He would teach them how to become fishers of men, we need to invite other Christians to go along with us so that we can show them how to become fishers of men. Then it is our privilege to be a coach to them and show them how to become effective fisher of men in the future. May the Lord richly bless you as you invite people to follow you so that you can show them how to become fishers of men.

Creativity, Chaplains and Coaches – Part 3

In our last two topics, we looked at the fact that Christ promised to become a coach to the disciples by helping them learn how to become fishers of men. Many people responded and learned how to become fishers of men. Today, we are going to see that Christ chose a leadership team to lead all of those that would become fishers of men. In Mark 3:13-15 we read, “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, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.” Here, we see that the first reason why Christ chose these twelve men was to be with him. Second, he chose them so that He could send them out to preach and minister to others.

Luke 6:12-13 gives us a little more detail about the selection of these twelve men. Those verses say, “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles.” Here we learn an important lesson about how Christ chose those who would be on the leadership team. We see that He spent an entire night in prayer. Then He called all of the disciples that were learning how to become fishers of men. Then from that larger group (possibly the 70 of Luke 10:1 or even the 120 of Acts 1:15), Christ chose twelve whom He also called apostles.

Several things were true about the team of twelve that Christ chose to begin training to become the leadership team. At least most of them had already gained experience as a part of some team before Christ chose them to be a part of the twelve. Mark 1:16-20 shows us that Peter, Andrew, James and John were all part of the same fishing team. Mark 2:15 shows us that Matthew was part of a team of tax collectors. John 1:43-46 show that Philip and Nathanael were already friends.

These same passages show that these men responded to the opportunity to learn how to lead others to Christ. Unless a team leader is leading people to Christ, he will never be effective in showing his team how to lead others to Christ. Christ had seen these men introduce Him to their families, friends, co-workers, neighbors and other acquaintances. He knew that it was their desire to learn how to become more effective as fishers of men.

These same passages in Mark also show us a third thing about these men. All of them were working when Christ invited them to follow Him. Christ had already shown that leadership is hard work. In Mark 1:35 He got up a great while before day and went out and prayed. In Luke 6:12 He spent the entire night in prayer before choosing the twelve. The first thing a person with many problems will begin to neglect is prayer. The first thing a lazy person will begin to neglect is prayer. As a result, Christ chose men that were working to begin to train for His leadership team rather than just choosing anyone that volunteered.

In Mark 5:1-20 Christ cast the Legion of demons out of a man. Here we see that Christ was a chaplain to a man in crisis. Verse 18 says that the man begged Christ to let him follow Christ. He had not been a part of a team. He had not yet brought any others to Christ. He was not working when Christ met him. He was not ready at that point to become a part of a team of leaders being developed. As a result, Christ said to him in Mark 5:19, “However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.” He needed to begin telling people about Christ before he could be given the opportunity to begin to receive training for the leadership team. In his case he did become a great witness.

Even within the leadership team of twelve that Christ was training there were three smaller teams. By studying every list of the twelve in the New Testament, you will notice one other very interesting thing. The disciples listed first, fifth and ninth are always the same: Peter, Philip and James, the son of Alphaeus. The three names that follow Peter are always Andrew, James and John although they are not always in the same order within that smaller team. The three names that follow Philip are always Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas although they are not always in the same order. The three names that follow James the son of Alphaeus are Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite and Judas Iscariot.

Mark 13:3 shows us one of these smaller teams discussing their questions with Christ. Mark 13:3-4 say, "Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?" This is the smaller team that Christ spent even more time with than the other two teams. This passage may give us a hint as to why that was true. This smaller team asked more questions than any of the men on the other teams. This is an indication that they may have had more of a learner's attitude than the other teams. We see that in the book of Acts they exercised more leadership than the other two teams.

We also see more creativity develop in the team of Peter, Andrew, James and John than in the other smaller teams. In John 6:5 we read, "Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" Philip gave a financial report and said that they could not afford to do anything. Andrew heard the same question and focused on what they had. They had a boy with a lunch of five rolls and two fish and they had Christ. Although he did not know how Christ would work, He knew that Christ could take what they had and provide a creative solution.

In John 12 some Greeks came to Philip and wanted to see Christ. John 12:20-22 says, "Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus." Philip did not come with a creative solution to get these men to Christ. As a result, it was Andrew that brought them to Christ. Christ had coached him and shown him how to become a fisher of men and he had learned how to bring people to Christ. As we go to the book of Acts, we continually see Peter and John doing creative things to bring glory to Christ.

Christ spent time with the multitudes. He spent more time with believing followers. He spent even more time with the seventy. However, Christ spent much of the last year and a half concentrating on the twelve and especially the one smaller team of Peter, Andrew, James and John. The results show us the greatest difference between one that is a chaplain only and between a person that is both a chaplain and a coach. A chaplain can have a very effective and creative ministry as he ministers to people in crisis. However, when he comes to the end of his life he has trained no one to carry on the ministry.

A spiritual leader that is both a chaplain and a coach will help people during their times of crisis. However, he will usually have part of the team that he is training with him so that he can help them learn to minister to others in times of crisis in the future. The primary focus of one that is both a chaplain and a coach will be to help a team of people focus on the vision that God has for each one individually and the vision that God has for the team as a whole. He will spend much time training the team and he will take the team with him as he ministers. He will then discuss with the team what they are learning from what they see happen as they minister together. As a result, they will be continuing to improve in the effectiveness of their ministries.

Because a person that is a godly coach encourages the team to ask as many questions as possible

and teaches them how to apply Biblical principles in a variety of situations, the team will also grow in their creativity. This in turn will help them begin to do the same with the team that they begin to train. 2 Timothy 2:2 says, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

Here we see that true creativity will help a developing leader begin to think of four spiritual generations: Paul, Timothy, faithful men and others also. Leaders train leaders by stretching their vision to that fourth spiritual generation. (Direct leadership) Effective leaders train leaders to train faithful men. (Indirect leadership leading to leadership multiplication) Very effective leaders train their Timothys to train faithful men to train others also. (Leadership multiplication that produces a multiplying ministry) May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to minister to people in crisis (chaplains) but especially as you train them to train faithful men to teach others also (become effective coaches of others).

Creativity and Vision

In our last topic, we concluded by pointing out the fact that creativity will cause a person to be able to have a vision for the development of a third and fourth spiritual generation. Today, we will focus on how the early church helped people develop that kind of a vision. In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul said, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” In this verse, we see Paul, Timothy, faithful men and others also. In this last letter to Timothy Paul was continuing to remind Timothy to have a vision for a third and fourth spiritual generation.

We have already seen how Christ expanded the vision of the twelve by helping them develop a vision for the next towns, by taking them with Him as He traveled throughout Galilee, by taking them with Him to Jerusalem, Judea, and to many other places. Matthew 15:21-28 also tells us how Christ also took the disciples to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Today, we want to see how the apostles and others helped other Christians to develop a vision for spiritual reproduction.

Christ expanded the vision of the 120 disciples by gathering devout Jews from many different nations in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost. The disciples were even given the ability to share the Gospel in the languages of all of these people that day. In addition to sharing the Gospel with these Jews from many parts of the world, the Lord expanded the vision of the disciples to reach people from other countries that they did not even know. Christ certainly used a very creative way to expand the vision of the disciples to the spiritual needs of Jews in other countries. When persecution scattered the Christians to many different places, many of them had already met people from those places as a result of the Day of Pentecost and the following period of months.

In Acts 10 the Lord led Peter to go to the house of a Gentile by the name of Cornelius who lived in the city of Caesarea. Later Peter was questioned by many of the Christians for going to the home of a Gentile and eating with him. Peter carefully explained how the Lord led him to the house of Cornelius and the early Christians rejoiced to see that God was concerned for the salvation of the Gentiles. This was one of the ways that Peter used this occasion to expand the vision of the disciples in Jerusalem.

However, Acts 11:12 tells us about a second way that Peter expanded the vision of some of the disciples. That verse says, “Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.” One thing that we see from this verse is that Peter had learned from the example of Christ how to expand the vision of others. He had his vision expanded so that he saw the needs of people in many areas by going with Christ to those areas. Now he took six brothers with him when he went to take the Gospel to the Gentiles to help them expand their vision. They saw how God worked in the lives of the Gentiles and saw that God could use Jews to share the Gospel with the Gentiles.

What happened in the lives of these brothers is summarized in Acts 10:44-45 where we read, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.” These six brothers would never be the same after that event because their vision had been expanded to include the Gentiles.

Because the Jews in Jerusalem had their vision expanded to the needs of other people groups, we see the results when persecution forced the early believers to flee from Jerusalem. After the stoning of Stephen, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem. However, the rest of the Christians were scattered. Acts 8:4 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” The

rest of Acts 8 tells how the Gospel spread to the Samaritans and to a man from Ethiopia as well as to the entire surrounding region. Acts 9:31 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.”

Some of the Jews fled even further than the surrounding regions. Acts 11:19 says, “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.” Here we see that these Jews had their vision expanded but it was only expanded to the point where they shared the Gospel with other Jews who were originally from Judea or Galilee.

However, the Lord was about to expand their vision to other people. Acts 11:20-21 says, “But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews), preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” Some of the Jewish believers were not from Jerusalem. They were Jews that had grown up in the Gentile regions of Cyprus and Cyrene. As a result, these Jews had a vision for the Hellenists. Again God honored their vision and a great number of Hellenists turned to the Lord.

When the church in Jerusalem heard what had happened, they immediately sent one of their leaders that had also grown up in Cyprus (Acts 4:36). Since Barnabas was a Jew from Cyprus, he made a perfect bridge to the Hellenists because he understood their culture. Barnabas immediately recognized the need for another teacher that would also understand the Gentile culture. As a result, Acts 11:25-26 says, “Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” Here we see that the Lord is beginning to assemble a team in Antioch that had a vision for the Gentiles because they had lived among Gentiles and were now seeing Gentiles become Christians.

The Lord then expanded the vision of the leadership team in Antioch. Acts 13:1-3 says, “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.” The church immediately sent out the original two leaders of the leadership team to take the Gospel to other regions. Since Barnabas was from Cyprus and Saul (Paul) was from Tarsus, both of these men had grown up in the Gentile world and had a vision to reach the Gentiles.

In each place where they went, they began by sharing the Gospel with the Jews in the synagogues. They began there because many Gentiles went to the Jewish synagogues to learn more about God. Acts 13:42-43 says, “So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.”

A proselyte was a Gentile that wanted to learn about God and so went to the Jewish synagogue to hear the Old Testament taught. These were Gentiles that were bridges between the Jews and the Gentiles because they were Gentiles that had become familiar with the Old Testament. The next Sabbath day the Jews turned against Paul and Barnabas because they saw the interest of the Gentiles. As a result, Acts 13:46 says, “Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.” Because God had given Paul and Barnabas a vision for the Gentiles, they now made their primary ministry to the Gentiles.

Later Paul and Barnabas took other Jews with them to help them expand their vision. Acts 15:39 says Barnabas took Mark with him to Cyprus. Acts 15:40 says Paul took Silas with him. Then in Acts 16:1-3 we see that they added Timothy who was half-Jewish and half Gentile to the team to help him develop a vision for the Gentiles. From that point on Paul continued to add both Jews and Gentiles to the team to give them a vision for the world. Acts 20:4 says, “And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia--also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.” Here we see that Paul was multiplying the number that were taking the Gospel to other Gentiles by taking them with him to expand their vision.

Christ wants us to use our creativity to expand the vision of others to help them see the needs of people who do not know Christ. As we help them expand their vision by helping them to see the need of people who are without Christ and without hope, many will begin to use their creativity to share the Gospel with people of other cultures, other religions and other ethnic groups. People that are led by the vision of Christ will learn to cross barriers by building bridges to share the good news of forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. Many the Lord richly bless you as you help other Christians learn to cross barriers and build bridges to share the Gospel with people that are without Christ and without hope.

Creativity and Spiritual Qualifications

One of the most important questions that we can ask ourselves as it relates to Biblical qualifications is, “Does Scripture give spiritual qualifications to disqualify people or to help qualify people?” The way that you answer that question may give you a better understanding of your own creativity at the present time.

One of the most common complaints of pastors is that they pastor a church that does not have enough qualified leaders and some in small churches will say that they have no qualified leaders. When I hear that statement, I will sometimes ask the question, “What are you doing to help people become qualified spiritual leaders?” Whether such pastors realize it or not, in many cases they are using spiritual qualifications to disqualify people in their minds. These pastors need to realize that they did not meet the qualifications for spiritual leadership at the time that they became Christians. One or more people helped them develop and become qualified. These people that helped them develop were probably creative and used a variety of ways to help them develop and mature.

In Titus 1:5-9 Titus was given a list of spiritual qualifications for spiritual leaders. However, when people study this list, they often begin with verse 6 instead of reading verse 5, the verse that puts the whole passage in context. Titus 1:5 says, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” Paul had not been on the island of Crete long enough to develop these qualifications in a group of men in each city. As a result, he left Titus to complete the work of developing a godly leadership team in every city. Titus was to use this list of qualifications to help additional men become qualified.

Titus 1:6-9 says, “If a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.” This meant that Titus was to spend time working with men to help them grow in godliness so that they would become qualified for spiritual leadership.

We might summarize these verses by saying that the primary responsibilities of Titus were to:

- ◆ Help potential leaders develop a respected life
- ◆ Help potential leaders develop a healthy marriage
- ◆ Help potential leaders develop a healthy family relationship
- ◆ Help potential leaders become Christ centered and not self centered
- ◆ Help potential leaders deal with former sinful habits
- ◆ Help potential leaders learn to use their homes for ministry
- ◆ Help potential leaders develop godly character
- ◆ Help potential leaders learn to teach the Word of God
- ◆ Help potential leaders learn to correct those who contradict

This list of the primary responsibilities of Titus is actually a primary part of the job description that God gives to every spiritual leader. The night before Christ was crucified, as He prayed to the Father, He said in John 17:4, “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” Christ had not yet gone to the cross. Yet Christ could say that He had finished the work that the Father had given Him to do. That work was the development of the leadership team that would lead the church when the church began on the Day of Pentecost. Christ knew that His most important work before He went to the cross was to develop the leadership team that would lead the church. Leaders develop leaders.

The effectiveness of any leader is best seen when the Lord takes that leader to heaven. If that leader has devoted his life to leading people to Christ and then helping them grow in their spiritual lives to become qualified for spiritual leadership, that leader has been effective. If Titus carried out the primary responsibility that Paul had given him, by the time Titus left Crete he had developed a team of godly leaders in every city to lead the churches. Those leaders in turn were equipped to multiply their ministry by helping potential leaders develop these qualifications.

Creativity is a key element in the development of potential leaders because no two potential leaders have the same spiritual gifts, heart or passion, abilities, personalities or experiences in life. In addition, no two are at the exact same spot in their spiritual development. The leaders of the early church knew that they would develop potential leaders the same way that Christ developed them. Christ had developed them in a small group where they could discuss His teachings with Him and get their questions answered. He walked along side them and gave them an example to follow as they grew in their spiritual lives.

Even the Jewish religious leaders were forced to recognize that Christ had helped unqualified men become qualified for spiritual leadership. Acts 4:13 says, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus." The religious leaders could not deny what Peter and John did and taught. They chose to try and threaten them. Peter and John gave their answer in Acts 4:19-20, "But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." The disciples had become like the One that had walked along side them and given them an example to follow.

The early church leaders used the same pattern to develop the 3,000 people that became Christians on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:42 says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." Here we see that every Christian became involved in a small group Bible study. These groups were small enough so that they could enjoy fellowship. These groups were small enough so that they could discuss the teachings of the apostles. They were also able to eat together and pray together. The apostles knew how Christ had developed them and so they used the same pattern to develop others.

As Peter approached the end of his life many years later, Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:21, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps." Peter did not point to his own example. Instead he pointed to the example of Christ. Peter had walked with Christ. Peter has also suffered for Christ. As Peter had walked through life with other Christians, he had said and done what Christ had said and done. Now Peter could point to the example of Christ and say to follow His steps.

Paul had done the same thing with Timothy, Titus and others. After leading them to Christ and helping them grow, Paul gave them the opportunity to walk through life with him as he walked with Christ. Paul could write to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4:17, "For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church." Timothy had walked with Paul and had seen how he walked with Christ. He had listened as Paul taught others. Now Paul could say that Timothy would remind them of his ways or actions that were the result of walking with Christ.

Paul, Silas and Timothy also walked with new Christians and helped them grow. They were showing these Christians by their example how to walk with Christ. When they wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica we see that the Thessalonians had also learned to walk with Christ and show others how to walk with Christ. 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10 says, "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. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

The Thessalonians had watched the example of Paul, Silas and Timothy and had learned to walk with Christ. Now they were walking with Christ and showing others how to walk with Christ. In fact, people in other places were telling Paul and the team about the impact that the Thessalonians had in their lives as they showed others by example how to walk with Christ. The creativity demonstrated by Paul and the team had helped the Thessalonians develop a creative ministry in the lives of others. They were now showing others how to become qualified for spiritual leadership.

The Lord will use your life to make a great impact for eternity if you will make it the focus of your life to walk alongside others and help them grow and develop and become qualified for spiritual leadership. That will make it possible for you to multiply the impact of your spiritual life. May the Lord richly bless you as you focus on helping people become qualified for spiritual leadership.

Creativity and Effective Listening

Christ uses our God given creativity to help us make a great impact in the lives of others if we are sensitive to His leading and walk through the doors that He opens for us to minister to others. One of the key things that Christ uses to help us become more creative is to help us learn to become more effective listeners. The more accurately we hear what a person is saying, the more effective we can be in ministering to that person.

In James 1:19-20 we read, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God." The word that is translated "hear" means, "to attend to, to consider what has been said, to understand or to perceive the sense of what is said". The same word is used in 1 John 5:14-15 to talk about the way that Christ hears our prayers. Those verses say, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." We know that Christ hears and answers our prayers when we pray for those things that the Bible says are His will.

In order to answer our prayers, Christ listens to us and understands what we are saying in our prayers. He knows exactly what we have said for two reasons. First, He is God and knows all things. Second, He listens carefully because He loves us and is concerned to answer our prayers. Careful listening is one of the results of love because it is essential to be able to know how to most effectively minister to others.

Christ showed that He was already a careful listener very early in His life. When Christ was twelve years old, His parents took Him to Jerusalem and then left the city without Him. When they realized He was missing, they returned to Jerusalem. Luke 2:46-47 says, "Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers." First we see that Christ carefully listened. Second, Christ asked questions. Only then did Christ begin to share with those gathered there. As a child, Christ was able to be an effective teacher to adults because He had focused on listening and asking questions

Years later Christ showed the disciples the importance of listening by carefully listening to them throughout His ministry. In fact, Christ even listened to the questions that people asked His disciples. In Mark 2:16 we read, "And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" Verse 17 shows that Christ both heard and answered this question, "When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Christ did not spend all of His time talking. Here we see that He chose to listen to the scribes and Pharisees talk with His disciples.

Christ also chose to listen carefully to the disciples as they reported what they said and what they did. Christ sent out the twelve to minister. When they returned, Mark 6:30 says, "Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught." Christ showed love by asking them to tell what they had done. He showed love by asking them to tell what they had taught. He gave them as much time as they wanted to talk about what they had said and done. He even took them aside so that they could rest and talk together some more. Mark 6:31 says, "And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat."

Christ also chose to listen carefully to others when they talked with Him. In Mark 12:28-34 we see that a scribe asked Christ what was the first commandment of all. After Christ answered, the scribe said in verses 32 and 33, "So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Christ listened carefully to what the scribe said because verse 34 tells us, "Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him." Christ could recognize by his answer that this was one scribe that was thinking carefully about the teachings of Christ.

Luke 24 tells us that Christ also chose to listen carefully to His disciples after the resurrection. Christ showed two disciples that He wanted to listen to them by the question that He asked in Luke 24:17. That verse says, "And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" Christ recognized both their words and their feelings by listening carefully. One of them answered in Luke 24:18, "Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?"

Although Christ knew exactly what had happened, He chose to listen carefully to the two so that they could tell Him what they felt about what had happened. Christ asked a second question. Luke 24:19-24 says, "And He said to them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see." Christ chose to listen carefully and then answer them from the Word of God.

Christ teaches a key lesson about careful listening. If we listen carefully, we can share the appropriate Scriptures that will meet the needs of a person. Luke 24:25-27 says, "Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Christ chose to answer them by sharing the Scripture. We see the results in Luke 24:32, "And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" By answering from the Scriptures, Christ built a fire in the hearts of these men that burned for the rest of their lives.

In fact, these men show that Christ caused them to become creative so that they could share with others what they had learned. Luke 24:33-35 says, "So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread." They became creative witnesses for Christ because Christ had taken time to listen carefully to them.

James shows us why he had become the leader of the church in Jerusalem by the way he listened. In Acts 15 the Jerusalem Council came together to discuss the question of whether the Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. There was not immediate agreement on this issue.

In fact, Acts 15:6-7 says, "Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe." Here we see that there was much dispute before any of the leaders even spoke.

Then Peter spoke and told what had happened at the house of Cornelius. Paul and Barnabas told what God had done among the Gentiles. Finally James spoke and summarized everything that had been said. He then showed that the Old Testament prophets were in agreement with what Peter had said. Only after doing all of those things did James suggest a creative solution to the dispute.

Acts 15:19-22 says, "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren." James listened carefully to all that each person said, shared the Scriptures that applied and presented a creative solution that pleased everyone. The entire leadership team reached a creative solution that still impacts the church today.

The Lord wants to use your creativity to help others grow and mature in their spiritual lives. That will happen increasingly as you continue to develop your listening skills so that the Lord can use you to teach Biblical principles and help people find creative solutions to the things that they face in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you!

Creativity and Effective Ministry – Part 1

In our last topic, we talked about the relationship between effective listening and creativity. Today, we will be talking about the relationship between creativity and effective ministry. Christ is our example of One who showed tremendous creativity and also showed us how to develop effective ministry.

In Matthew chapters 5-7, we have the passage known as the Sermon on the Mount. Those three chapters are concluded with the statement in Matthew 7:28-29, “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” The scribes spent much of their time quoting what others had said about the law instead of teaching the Word of God. Instead of teaching the Word by letting the Word of God speak for itself, the scribes told what others said they thought the Word meant. Needless to say, just quoting what others have said in the past shows a complete lack of creativity.

Today, many people teach the same way. They spend all of their time quoting what others say instead of letting the Word of God explain itself. As a result, they teach the opinions and convictions of others to back up their own opinions and convictions. Paul explained to the Corinthians how he taught in 1 Corinthians 2:13. That verse says, “These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” Instead of quoting the opinions and convictions of other people, Paul taught Biblical principles and used the Word of God to illustrate those principles.

We will look at the teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount and see what made the teaching of Christ so different from the teaching of the scribes. Matthew 5:1-2 says, “And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying.” Chapter 4 concludes with large crowds of people coming to hear Christ teach because He had been teaching in their synagogues. The first thing we see here is that Christ found a place to teach where He was not limited by the size of the building. Second, we see that Christ went up to a mountain to teach. There His voice would carry so that all that wanted to listen could hear Him. Third, we see that the concern of Christ was to teach His disciples and if others wanted to listen they were free to do so.

Matthew 5:3-12 gives us what are known as the Beatitudes. Christ said that the people with the following attitudes are blessed: the poor in spirit; those that mourn; those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; the merciful; the pure in heart; the peacemakers; and those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. Instead of quoting anyone, Christ began by challenging His disciples to examine the attitudes in their own hearts. Only as people examine their own hearts will there be changes that will transform their lives.

In Matthew 5:13-16 Christ told His disciples that they were salt and light. He helped them to realize that it would not matter what they said if their lives did not agree with the things that they were saying. First, Christ pointed out that they had a choice. They could be the salt of the earth or they could just be useless salt that was worthless. Second, they could be a light that shined out to the world around it or they could be like a light that was hidden. Then Christ told them how to be a light in Matthew 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” They could have a purpose in life that would give their lives meaning if they made a choice to be a light to the world by doing good works that brought glory to the Father.

In Matthew 5:17-20 Christ said that He came to fulfill the law and the prophets not destroy them. Christ again gave His disciples a choice. They could follow His example or they could choose to follow the example of the scribes and Pharisees. If they followed His example, they would fulfill the law. If they followed the example of the scribes and Pharisees, they would be teaching the people to break the law by their example. Matthew 5:19 says, "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." If the disciples wanted to be great in the kingdom, the disciples had to provide an example of obedience to the Word so that they both lived and taught the Word of God.

As Christ went on in the sermon, He took three of the Ten Commandments to illustrate exactly what He was saying. Christ pointed out that we have killed if we have anger in our hearts that causes us to offend others by what we say or do. Christ said that we have committed adultery in our hearts if we look on another person with lust. Christ said that we have lied and perjured ourselves if we make an oath by things over which we have no control. Christ then pointed out the fact that the people twisted the meaning of the law to give themselves an excuse to get even. In actual fact, the verses that they quoted were out of context and showed the judicial punishment that was to be given to one that broke the law.

Then Christ went on to explain the true way to fulfill the law as He contrasts what they said with the real meaning of the law. Matthew 5:43-44 says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." The scribes and Pharisees said that the law gave them an excuse to hate their enemy. Christ showed that the real meaning of the law was to minister to their enemy in love. They would actually fulfill the law if they loved their enemies, blessed those who cursed them, did good to those that hated them and prayed for those who persecuted them. Christ would tell His disciples later that He would send the Holy Spirit to give them the power to love as He loved.

Christ then gave another area where the disciples would have to make a choice. The scribes and the Pharisees did the things that they did to be seen by people. This was illustrated in three different ways. They gave to the needy only when everyone was watching so that people would talk about their generosity. They prayed in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people would talk about their prayer life. They disfigured their faces to let people know that they were fasting so that people would praise them. Christ said they got their reward from the praise of men but they would not get any reward from God. Christ told the disciples that they were to give, to pray and to fast but they were to do those things secretly because they were serving the Lord.

Christ also told the disciples that they would have to make a choice about where they wanted their reward. They could have their reward on earth by seeking the riches of the earth or they could have their reward in heaven by serving the Lord. Christ said that the place where they chose to gather their treasure would show the condition of their hearts. Matthew 6:24 says, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (money)." Christ also promised them seven reasons why they would not need to worry if they chose to focus on heavenly treasures.

Christ began chapter seven by saying in Matthew 7:1, "Judge not, that you be not judged." Again the disciples were given a choice. They could choose to judge others and they would be judged or they could choose to accept others and they would not be judged. They were also encouraged to talk to God about their needs because as a loving heavenly Father He would provide what they needed. Then Christ summarized the Old Testament by saying that if we are following the Lord we will treat others like we want to be treated. That means that our heart attitudes and our actions will be controlled by love for others because we have yielded the control of our lives to God.

Christ then told His disciples that they must make a choice. Matthew 7:13-14 says, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." The disciples could choose to follow the example of the scribes and the Pharisees. However, they would find that that way led to destruction. Second, the disciples could choose to follow Christ and they would be on the way that leads to life. Christ knew that most people would choose the road to destruction.

Christ said there are false teachers and there are true teachers. Christ said that there are people who make a false profession of faith and there are those who make a genuine profession of faith. Christ said those who made a false profession of faith were people that heard the Word of God and did nothing about it. Christ said that those who had a genuine faith would both hear His Word and also obey His Word. Christ made it very clear that day that everyone that was listening were facing a choice that day. The choice that they made that day would have eternal consequences. Many would choose to reject and experience judgment. Some would choose to accept and obey and receive eternal life.

Creativity will give us an effective ministry of evangelism because we will choose to follow the example of Christ and help people to clearly see their choices. We will have an effective ministry of evangelism if we live a life that provides an example and also teaches people how they can have forgiveness of sins and receive eternal life. May the Lord richly bless you as you yield your life to Christ moment by moment so that He can work in your life and through your life and words to draw others to Himself.

Creativity and Effective Ministry – Part 2

In our last topic, we talked about creativity and effective ministry in the area of evangelism. We saw that Christ was very creative in the way He shared with the people the fact that they had choices to make and that the choices that they made would have either good consequences or bad consequences. Today, we will be focusing on creativity and effective ministry as we follow the example of Christ in our ministry to others.

In Matthew 8:1 we read, “When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him.” The crowds had followed Christ up the mountain and listened to Him teach. Now they followed Christ down the mountain and were going to observe what He did. The first person Christ met as He came down the mountain was a leper. Matthew 8:2 says, “And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.'” In that day leprosy was a disease that brought great fear to people. Lepers were forced to live away from the other people and call unclean when others came close to them.

Here, we see that this leper came to Christ and worshiped Him. He also recognized that Christ had a choice. Christ could ignore his need or Christ had the power to choose to heal Him. Christ made the choice to minister to a man with a need. Matthew 8:3 says, “Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.'” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” Many people would have made it their first concern to protect their own health. No one wanted to touch a leper for fear of catching leprosy. Christ could have just spoken the word and this man would have been healed. Instead Christ chose to touch him. Christ knew that this man needed the personal touch of Christ in his life as well as healing. Christ chose to have an effective ministry.

As they came to the town of Capernaum, a Roman centurion met Christ. This centurion had heard about Christ. The centurion had come to Christ because he had a servant that was experiencing great suffering because he suffered from palsy. The centurion showed his concern for his servant by telling Christ about the servant. We read what happened in Matthew 8:7-9, “And Jesus said to him, 'I will come and heal him.'” The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it.”

The centurion felt ashamed to have Christ come to his home to heal his servant. He knew that most Jews would never enter the home of a Roman soldier. However, he also recognized that Christ was God and had the power to heal just by speaking the word. Christ used that opportunity to speak to the crowd of people that were following Him to explain the meaning of faith. Christ also honored the Roman soldier by honoring his request not to go to his home. Instead Matthew 8:13 says, “Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour.” Christ chose to honor the faith of the centurion by doing exactly what the centurion requested.

The next event happened in the home of Peter. When Christ came to the house of Peter, the mother-in-law of Peter was lying in bed because she was sick with a fever. Matthew 8:15 says, “So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them.” Here we see that Christ chooses to have an effective ministry to the family of Peter. First, Christ visited the home of Peter. Second, he saw a need when he entered the home. Third, Christ did what needed to be done to meet that need. Christ went to the mother-in-law, touched her hand, and immediately the fever left her. Fourth, Christ also ministered to this woman in another way. Christ gave this woman an opportunity to show her love by serving Him. Christ realized the importance of both ministering to

others and letting them minister to Him.

However, ministry to people is not just meeting needs. We see that Christ had an effective ministry by ministering to people in many different ways. Matthew 8:19 says, "Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." Instead of just inviting the man to go with Him, Christ told the man what it would cost him so that the man could make a choice. Matthew 8:20 says, "And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Christ did not just expect people to follow Him blindly. He helped them to understand the cost so that they could make a choice. In this case we never read that the man ever followed Christ.

Christ showed His creativity in ministry in some very different ways in Matthew 9. Instead of just focusing on physical needs, Christ showed the importance of focusing on spiritual needs. In Matthew 9:1-8 some men brought their friend to Christ because he was paralyzed. Christ did heal the man of his physical need. However, Christ chose to focus on his spiritual need. Christ told the man that his sins were forgiven. This caused the scribes to become very upset. However, it showed that Christ was focused on the eternal need of the man and not just on his physical needs.

Next Christ showed His creativity by accepting a dinner invitation to the house of Matthew. Christ invited Matthew to follow Him as Matthew was collecting taxes. The Jews considered tax collectors and their friends to be great sinners and wanted nothing to do with them. In contrast, Christ gladly accepted the dinner invitation of Matthew because Christ knew that would give Him the opportunity to meet the friends of Matthew. Matthew 9:10-11 says, "Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Christ knew that accepting the dinner invitation of Matthew would be a creative way to meet his friends.

Christ also used creativity to show the religious leaders that He did not come to make their old religion better. In Matthew 9:16-17 Christ said you could not patch old clothes with new material or it would make a worse tear. Then He said that you do not put new wine in old wineskins because it will break the wineskins and the wine will be lost. Christ came to give new life. He did not come to patch up the religion of the scribes and Pharisees because their religion was based on works instead of offering a message of forgiveness from sin. With these creative illustrations Christ showed that works will never change the lives of people. Instead trying to change through their own works will only make people worse.

In Matthew 9 Christ also used several other events to teach about faith. Matthew 9:18 says, "While He spoke these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped Him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her and she will live." Christ chose to show creativity by honoring the faith of this man by raising his daughter from the dead. Christ ministered to this family even when the people around Him were laughing Him to scorn.

On the way to raise the daughter from the dead, Christ chose to honor the faith of another woman by calling attention to her faith. The woman showed her faith by touching the garment of Christ with the result that she was healed. Christ could have said nothing and no one else would have even known because there were large crowds around Him and many people were touching Him. Instead Christ chose to call attention to her faith. Matthew 9:22 says, "But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, "Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well." And the woman was made well from that hour." Christ chose to use a creative statement to honor her faith.

Christ showed creativity by healing two blind men in a very unusual way. The blind men asked Christ to show mercy to them also. Instead of healing them immediately, Christ went into a house

and waited until the blind men came to Him. Then Christ asked them a question. Matthew 9:28-29 says, "And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you." Christ chose to focus on faith just as he had done in each of the other miracles in this chapter. Christ shows us the importance of meeting physical needs but helps us to see that our main focus should be the spiritual needs.

Christ later showed creativity by helping his disciples to develop vision for the people around them. Matthew 9:36-38 says, "But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Christ knew that if the disciples were led by vision that they would serve Him regardless of whether He was present or not. We also want to help people learn to be led by vision because vision inspires people to trust the Lord to work through them.

Christ was able to use many creative ways to minister to people because He chose to spend much time with them. In the same way, we will see many opportunities to be creative in our ministry to people if we spend time with them so that we gain an understanding of where they are in their lives at the present moment. May the Lord richly bless you as you continually become more creative in your ministry to others.

Creativity and Effective Ministry – Part 3

In our last two topics, we have talked about the creativity of Christ as He showed the disciples creative ways to share the Gospel and creative ways to minister to others. Today, we are going to see the creativity of Christ as He trained the disciples for effective ministry.

In Matthew 4:18-22 Christ promised four disciples that if they would follow Him that He would equip them to become fishers of men. Then Matthew 4:23 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 showed the disciples what to share and how to share it by taking the disciples with Him so that they could observe what He shared and how He shared. Today, many Christians have never learned how to creatively share the Gospel because they have been told how to share the Gospel but then have never been shown how to share the Gospel so that they could see both what to share and how to share it.

The disciples traveled with Christ for about 21 months before He first sent them out to minister on their own. During this time they saw the prayer life of Christ and began to realize the importance of daily fellowship with the Father in order to be effective in ministry. In Matthew 6:9-10 Christ taught them, “In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In this part of what we call the Lord’s Prayer, we see that Christ taught the disciples the importance of recognizing their relationship with God “Our Father”, His holiness, “Hallowed by Your name”, His work “Your kingdom come”, and His will “You will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. Only when we begin to pray for God’s work and God’s will to be done will we become effective in ministry.

As we help people develop in ministry, we need to help them learn how to cross four barriers:

- ◆ The barrier of their own fear (their Jerusalem)
- ◆ The barrier of making contacts with strangers (their Judea)
- ◆ The barrier of another culture, religion or ethnic group (their Samaria)
- ◆ The barrier of language (their uttermost part of the earth)

Christ had spent 21 months showing the disciples what to share and how to share it and the importance of learning to depend on the Father through prayer. Those things were important to help the disciples learn to cross the barrier of their own fear.

Now as Christ sent out the twelve to learn to make contacts with strangers, He gave them very specific instructions. Matthew 10:5-6 says, “These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Christ gives us an example of creativity by showing us how to equip people for ministry. The lesson that we see here is to teach people to cross one barrier at a time. Christ specifically told the disciples not to cross the barrier of language. He also told them not to cross the barrier of another culture, religion or ethnic group. This first time on their own Christ only wanted the disciples to cross one barrier, the barrier of learning to make contacts with other Jews.

Christ also told the disciples exactly what to say. Matthew 10:7 says, “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Matthew 4:17 shows that was the exact message that Christ had been preaching, “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” The disciples had traveled with Christ for 21 months hearing Him share that message. Later Christ would give them a new message. Luke 24:46-49 says, “Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to

all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. 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.” This is the message that we are to show people how to share.

Christ also told the disciples how to minister to physical and spiritual needs as they preached. Matthew 10:8 says, “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.” The disciples had observed Christ as He did each of these things so they knew what Christ had done. Christ also wanted to make sure that they did not follow the example of false teachers and that was the reason for the final instruction in this verse. False teachers did what they did for self-gain. Christ had given to the disciples freely. Now the disciples were to give to others freely. They were to serve others and not seek to be served.

Christ also promised to supply their needs. Matthew 10:9-10 says, “Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.” Here we see that Christ chose a very creative way to help the disciples learn to depend on Him to supply their needs. He sent them out with nothing extra. They had to first learn that the Lord was their source of supply and not men or they would have spent time in the future worrying. They needed to know that they could depend on the Lord to supply.

Christ also told the disciples how to make their initial contacts in a new city or town. Matthew 10:11 says, “Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out.” The first thing the disciples were to do was find out who was worthy. This meant that they had to ask a variety of people who the people considered to be a family that was respected in the city or town. A respected family will always have many other contacts because they have a network of relatives, friends, coworkers, neighbors and other acquaintances. Since one of the purposes of this ministry trip was to help the disciples learn to make contacts, they were taught a principle that would help them many times in the future.

Christ also told them how to begin to build a relationship with that family. Matthew 10:12-13 says, “And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.” Here we see that the first thing the disciples were to do was to greet the family joyfully. To greet a family means to take time to get acquainted with the family. It shows that you are interested in them and not just using them to get what you want. Many times as you get acquainted with a family, you will also have the opportunity to meet other relatives and friends in their home.

Christ also gave the disciples specific instructions about how to handle rejection. Matthew 10:14-15 says, “And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!” The disciples needed to know that they would be rejected in some places and that they were to just accept the rejection and go on to the next city. The Lord said He is the One that will handle the rejection.

Christ also helped the disciples realize that they were totally dependent upon Him as they went to different cities. Matthew 10:16 says, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” A sheep has no form of defense to protect himself. The only thing that protects a sheep is the shepherd. One of the key lessons that Christ knew the disciples needed to learn was to depend on the Lord and not to depend on their own strength. That is still the most important lesson today as in John 15:5 Christ said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” People will accomplish nothing in their own strength.

However, this verse also teaches a second lesson. Christ told the disciples to be as “wise as

serpents and harmless as doves.” It was important for the disciples to learn to exercise wisdom as they followed the Lord. James 1:5 says if we lack wisdom we are to ask God and He will give us wisdom. Wisdom produces both wise attitudes and wise actions. The attitudes are shown in James 3:17-18. Those verses say, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” James 3:13 shows the actions of a wise person. That verse says, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.” As we help people to develop these attitudes and actions, the Lord will help them to develop a very creative ministry.

It is a great privilege to help people learn to develop their God given creativity so that the Lord can give them a very effective ministry. Christ took time to show the disciples what to share and how to share it. Then the first time He sent them out, He sent them with very specific instructions so that they would know exactly what to do. Later on all He had to do was focus their vision on Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth because they had been shown what to say and do and how to do it wherever they went. May the Lord richly bless you as you show people what to say and do to serve the Lord effectively. Once people have been shown these things, then the main that you do is serve them by encouraging them to carry out the vision that the Lord has given them for effective ministry.

Creativity and Problem Solving

Romans 1:21-23 shows what happened to mankind as a result of sin. Those verses say, “Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.” These verses summarize that fact that sin destroyed much of the creativity of mankind and what creativity remained was used to find creative new ways to sin. These verses show us that:

- Mankind no longer glorified God
- Mankind was no longer thankful to God – and often no longer thankful to others
- Mankind had their thoughts become futile (foolish or empty)
- Mankind had their understanding darkened
- Mankind exchanged godly wisdom for worldly wisdom and foolishness
- Mankind changed the image of God into the image of man or other things (people try to create gods like themselves or try to satisfy themselves)

The combination of foolish or empty thinking, the understanding darkened and the turn from godly wisdom to worldly wisdom and foolishness meant that any creativity that man had left was now used to satisfy self rather than to bring glory to God. That is the condition of every person before a person becomes a Christian. This means that all those who are not Christians and also all Christians that depend on worldly wisdom will handle problems in a worldly way. That is illustrated so well by the way that Adam handled his sin.

In Genesis 3:8 we see that Adam handled his sin by trying to hide from God. When God kept calling, Adam described what he was feeling in Genesis 3:10 where we read, “So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” Adam was experiencing fear – I was afraid. Adam was experiencing shame – I was naked. Adam was experiencing guilt – I hid myself. These three things are still the things that people feel when they face problems in a worldly way.

However, the next response of Adam shows how people try to deal with problems when they are depending on their own strength. God asked Adam if he had committed the one sin that he could commit. Genesis 3:11 says, “And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” The only sin that Adam could commit prior to this event was to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). Adam could have admitted his sin. Instead, Adam chose to handle his problem in a very different way. Genesis 3:12 says, “Then the man said, “The **WOMAN** whom **YOU** gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.”

Adam gave us an example of the way that people have tried to solve problems even since that time. The most common way that people try to solve problems when they depend on worldly wisdom is not to solve the problems at all. Instead they choose to try and blame someone or something else for the problem. First, Adam chose to blame Eve for his sin. Second, Adam was actually blaming God for his sin because he blamed God for giving him the **WOMAN**. In the case of Adam, he did not even identify the problem because the problem was his own disobedience to God.

Today people still handle problems the same way. Problems are not always the result of sin. There may be problems for many other reasons. However, instead of trying to solve problems, most people including many Christians try to deal with problems by blaming others for the problems.

Instead God calls us to solve problems and not blame others. To solve problems we must choose to yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit. Then we let Him teach us the Biblical principles that apply. We then pray that He will give us godly wisdom to know how to apply the Biblical principles. That makes it possible for us to carry out the work of God by doing the will of God.

This is illustrated by the way that the apostles solved the first recorded problem in the early church. That problem is defined in Acts 6:1 where we read, "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." This was a problem that was caused by the rapid growth of the church and not be any intentional sin. The first thing that we notice is that the apostles did not try to determine who to blame for the problem. Instead they recognized that there was a problem and they immediately began to seek a solution.

First, since Acts chapters 2 through 5 show that they were continually giving themselves to prayer, the apostles were choosing to yield to the Holy Spirit daily. Second, we see that the apostles chose to involve the whole church in seeking a solution by calling the church together to explain the problem. Third, they defined what their own Biblical priorities should be as apostles. Fourth, they offered a creative solution to the problem, look for qualified men to take this responsibility. Fifth, they got the people involved in reaching a solution by having them select the men to take this responsibility. Sixth, the people recommended the seven men. Seventh, the apostles took the men recommended and prayed for them. Eighth, the apostles laid their hands on the seven men to show their approval of those men.

Acts 6:7-8 tell us the results of finding a creative solution to the problem. Those verses say, "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. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people." The creative solution allowed the Word of God to continue to spread. It made it possible for the number of disciples to multiply greatly. It caused many priests to become obedient to the faith. It developed a new leadership team among the Hellenists. That made it possible for the Gospel to spread to other cultures in Acts 8. Then the Gospel continued to spread further. In Acts 9:31 we see that the Gospel had spread to Judea, Galilee and Samaria. Then in Acts 10 the Gospel spread to the Gentiles and in Acts 11:19-26 to other geographical regions.

In Acts 15 we see another problem arose in the church. Acts 15:1 says, "And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Here we see that certain Jews began to try and create problems among the Gentiles that were turning to the Lord. Instead of continuing to spend time arguing with these men or trying to blame someone for the problem, the church in Antioch developed a plan of action to solve the problem. Acts 15:2 says, "Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question." The church at Antioch chose to solve the problem by sending leaders to meet with the apostles and elders at Jerusalem so that together they could define the Biblical principles involved and find a solution.

Acts 15:7-29 describes that meeting and the solution that resulted. Acts 15:7-11 says, "And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they." Here we see that Peter summarized the

Biblical principles that had guided him when he first went to the Gentiles.

Acts 15:12 told what was happening among the Gentiles. That verse says, “Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.” James then gave the summary in Acts 15:19-21. We read, “Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” The apostles and elders had spent time in discussion and prayer and had defined the Biblical principles that were involved. As a result, they were now ready to apply those principles to the problem.

Acts 15:22-23 says, “Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia.” Acts 15:25 adds one other thing about this decision. That verse says, “It seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul.” In this verse, we see that the leaders after discussing, praying and studying the Biblical principles involved were now in one accord about how to apply those Biblical principles to the Gentiles everywhere.

God does not call us to follow the worldly pattern by trying to find someone to blame for a problem. Instead, God calls us to study and apply Biblical principles to find creative solutions to problems. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn how to find and apply Biblical principles to problems so that they will lead others to Biblical solutions rather than trying to blame someone else for problems.

Creativity and Peace Making

Matthew 5:9 says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.” In this verse, we see that God says that He blesses those that are peacemakers. Today, we will see that as Christians we have been given creativity by the Lord to become peacemakers. That is one of the things that helps to give our lives great meaning and purpose as Christians. As a result, as we ask the Lord to develop His creativity in our lives, we will see that our lives begin to have a great impact in the lives of others.

To understand what it means to be a peacemaker, we must first define the difference between peacekeeping and peacemaking. The world focuses on peacekeeping because the world has no understanding of the meaning of peacemaking. In recent years there have been many conflicts in nations and between nations. Often the world has responded by sending in military troops to get between the two groups that are fighting in an effort to stop the conflict. Such efforts provide a temporary peace between two groups but they do not make peace. In fact, the soldiers in the middle may get attacked from both sides. We call these soldiers peacekeepers because they try to keep peace but they are unable to make peace between the two sides.

In contrast, Ephesians 2 describes what it means to be a peacemaker. Ephesians 2:12-13 describes the fact that Christ is the true peacemaker and that He is the one that calls us to be peacemakers. Those verses say, “That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” We were separated from God. We were separated from the promises of God. We were separated from the Jews who had the promises of God in the Bible.

We needed a peacemaker to make it possible for us to make peace with God. We see that Christ became that peacemaker by bringing us to God by His blood. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Christ had never sinned. However, He was willing to have our sin placed on Him as He hung on the cross. This verse tells us that Christ did that so that it would be possible for Him to place the righteousness of God on us. As a result, every Christian now has peace with God because as the Father looks at us He sees the righteousness of Christ instead of our sin. Christ became the peacemaker to make it possible for us to have peace with God.

However, what Christ did also makes it possible for us to have peace with others. Ephesians 2:14-18 says, “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” Christ reconciled both the Jews and the Gentiles to God and created a new group of people called Christians. In Christ it no longer matters whether we are Jews or Gentiles because Christ has made us One in Him thus making peace.

However, we see that Christ did more than just make peace for us. Matthew 5:9 shows us that Christ also calls us to become peacemakers. This is a great privilege because it means that Christ is inviting us to follow in His steps and have a part in His ministry of making peace. It is the privilege of every Christian to become a peacemaker because Christ says that peacemakers are

called the sons of God. We will become peacemakers if we yield our lives to the Lord so that His creativity can work in our lives and through our lives so that we can begin to create opportunities to lead people to Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 gives us the foundation for this creativity. Those verses say, "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." Colossians 2:6-7 says we are to be rooted and built up in Christ. Ephesians 3:17-19 says that we are to be rooted and ground in love. First, we see that as we grow in our understanding of Christ and His love, we see that His love places such a strong urge in our hearts that we cannot keep quiet. (Christians that can keep quiet about Christ and His love are showing that they have never learned how to take root in Christ and His love and need a spiritual parent to walk alongside them and help them learn to really take root in Christ and His love.)

Second, in addition to the love of Christ placing this strong urge in our hearts (inspiring us), we see that we are also dead with Christ. Romans 6:4 says that we were buried with Him and raised up by Christ so that we are given the power to walk in newness of life. This newness of life is the creativity of Christ working in our lives and giving us the creativity to live a new life. 2 Corinthians 5:17 describes this new life by saying, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." Christ recreated our lives so that we now have the creativity that Adam had before He sinned. As we yield the control of our lives to Christ moment by moment, this creativity given by Christ will impact the lives of those around us.

Third, we see that this creativity will give us a desire to live for Christ instead of living for ourselves. 2 Corinthians 5:18 tells us that this creativity gives us a purpose for life that changes and transforms our lives. That verse says, "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation." The word "reconcile" means to bring back together. We realize that as we yield the control of our lives to Christ that our lives will become very creative because of the fact that Christ has given to us the ministry of reconciliation and we are able to help others be brought back into a right relationship with Christ. This is the ministry of a peacemaker. Christ gives us the privilege of following in His steps and having an eternal impact in the lives of others as we share with them how they can be reconciled to God.

Then we see how this principle works itself out in a practical way in 2 Corinthians 5:19. That verse says, "That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation." Christ gave us the word of reconciliation. That word is the Word of God. Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us why we will carry out the ministry of reconciliation by sharing the Word of God instead of sharing our own words. Those verses say, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts." The more thoughts of God that have taken root in our hearts (not just our heads) through memorization, meditation and personal application, the more creative we will be able to be in sharing this message of reconciliation with others.

In fact, 2 Corinthians 5:20 says, "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." An ambassador is one who speaks for another and speaks the words that the other person wants him to say. Since every Christian is called to be an ambassador for Christ, we are given the freedom to speak for Christ to others. We choose to speak the words that He wants us to speak because we long for others to be reconciled to God. We realize that the message that we are sharing with others has the power to make an eternal impact in their lives so that they can be reconciled to God for eternity.

To know what to share we need to carefully listen and observe the people to whom we will be talking. In Acts 17:23 Paul said, “For as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.” In this case Paul recognized that he must begin with Creation because the people had no understanding of God or the fact that He is the Creator.

In Acts 17:11 Paul began with Clarification, “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” These people were familiar with the Old Testament and so Paul used the Old Testament to help them understand how to be reconciled to God. In John 4 Christ used Compassion to show the Samaritan woman how to have peace with God. In John 3 Christ used Confrontation as He talked with Nicodemus because Nicodemus thought he could be right with God through his own efforts.

Studies say that only about 3% of Christians have ever led someone else to Christ. That means that 97% have never been shown how to let the creativity of Christ work in their lives so that they have led people to Christ. They need to let the love of God work in their lives and flow through their lives as they learn to yield to Christ. Christ wants to use His creativity to help you lead others to Christ so that they can be reconciled to God. Christ also wants to give you the privilege of showing others by your example how the creativity of Christ can work in their lives so that they can also become peacemakers. May the Lord richly bless you as you are a peacemaker and as you show others by your example how they can become peacemakers.

Creativity and the Worship of Christians

In Psalm 150:6 we read, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!” In this verse, we see that everything that has breath is to give praise to God. The word that is translated breath was first used in Genesis 2:7 where we read, “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” Here, we see that God breathed His breath into the nostrils of man and man became a living being. Then in Psalm 150:6 we see that it is the desire of God that all people that have breath will give praise to the Lord.

In order to give true praise to God, we must worship Him. In John 4:23-24, Christ told the Samaritan woman, “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” In these verses, we see that true worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. The word translated “spirit” here is talking about the human spirit. As a result, true worship must come from our human spirit as our human spirit is yielded to the Holy Spirit.

Second, we see that we must worship in truth or according to truth. Christ said in John 14:6 that He is the Truth. Then in John 17:17 as Christ prayed to the Father, Christ said that the Father’s Word is truth. Christ also promised several times in John 14, 15 and 16 to send the Spirit of Truth (Holy Spirit). In order to have true worship then we must have a right relationship with the One that is Truth (Christ and the Holy Spirit) and worship according to truth (the Word of the Father). In 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, we see that sharing the Word of God will cause those who are not Christians to worship, “But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.”

In this verse, we see that it says that if all prophesy (to prophesy is to speak what is written down in the Word of God), the unbeliever will be convinced of all and convicted of all. He will have the secrets of his heart revealed. The Word of God is living and powerful. The Holy Spirit uses the Word to convince the unbeliever of the sin of unbelief (John 16:9), of the fact that Jesus Christ is the Righteous One (John 16:10) and of the fact that Satan has already been judged and that those who continue to follow him will share in his judgment (John 16:11). The Word will cause an unbeliever to fall down before God in repentance and become a true worshiper of God.

The verses in 1 Corinthians 14 show us that worship includes both the reading of the Word of God and the explaining of the Word of God. This passage explains what happened in the early church services. The phrase “But if all prophesy” means that in any service of the early church that there were several different individuals that read passages of Scripture. The context goes on to explain later that there were also several that explained passages of Scripture in each service. 1 Corinthians 14:31 says, “For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.” It was this reading and explaining of the Scriptures that caused unbelievers to fall on their face in true repentance and begin to worship God.

The early church shows us that it was very creative in the variety of ways that it shared the Word of God as a part of their worship of God. 1 Corinthians 14:26 says, “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.” The first thing we notice about this creativity is that each of the men got involved in the sharing of passages of Scripture. Notice the following phrases: verse 24 – all prophesy; verse 26 – each one of you has; verse 29 – let the prophets speak two or three; verse 31 – you may all prophesy one by one.

In a worship service of the whole church, like the service described in 1 Corinthians 14:23-40, we see a very different service described than the typical service in most churches today. Since John 4:23-24 says that we are to worship God in spirit and in truth, it means that a worship service is God centered and not man centered. In a worship service God is the audience and we are the participants. We worship God by reading and explaining the Scriptures because we are expressing His worth. The early church services were patterned after the synagogue services where seven to nine men read the Word of God in each service. This meant that each of the men that would be reading or explaining Scripture was to come with his spirit yielding to the Holy Spirit. Each man was to share the Word of God and not his own words.

We also see that the early church allowed creativity in other ways in their worship services. 1 Corinthians 14:29-30 says, "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent." The early church allowed other men to explain things more clearly when someone was having trouble making the Scripture clear. This allowed the early church to demonstrate humility as individuals invited others to correct their understanding of the Word of God so that it was clearer both to them and to the whole congregation.

We see that 1 Corinthians 14:31-32 gives another purpose for this kind of worship service. That verse says, "For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." I often ask men who learns the most in a sermon. The answer that I always get is the one who has spent all week preparing what he is going to say. If two or three have spent all week preparing, that means several Christians have learned much. This is due to the fact that their spirits are to be subject to them and that requires careful study throughout the week.

These two verses mention another way that a worship service provides opportunities for creativity. The Word of God encourages all of those who hear it. When several people share different passages of the Word of God, one passage will encourage some of the people while a different passage will encourage others. However, the result will be that all will be encouraged because a number of different passages have been shared from the Word of God. One person may use his creativity to share a call to worship. Another may use his creativity to lead a responsive reading where all have the opportunity to participate. Others may read different Scriptures throughout the service. The result is that the worship of God is centered on the Word of God instead of the words of men.

There is also another result of such a worship service. Those who have learned to share the Word of God with other Christians are also being equipped to share the Word of God when they talk to those who are not Christians. 1 Peter 3:15 says, "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." Every Christian is to become equipped to share the Word of God with those that are not Christians. One of the best ways to learn to do that is to learn to share the Word of God with Christians first and have them help you learn to explain clearly those things that you did not make clear.

Luke 4:16 says, "So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read." Here, we see that it was the custom of Christ to read and explain the Scriptures in the synagogue. In fact, that had been His custom at least from the age of twelve years old. Luke 2:46-47 says, "Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers." Actually it was the custom of all the Jewish boys and men to learn to read the Scriptures in the synagogue services. As a result, all of the disciples of Christ had this as a part of their

background before they even followed Christ.

Just as one of the goals of the Jews was to equip every boy and man to read and explain the Scriptures publicly, that should also be one of the goals of every church. This is necessary in order to equip each Christian to be prepared from Scripture to make a defense of the hope that we have within us as Christians. In Acts 8 we see that the Christians were all scattered by persecution. Acts 8:4 tells what happened, "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word." The entire church got involved in ministry to the world and not just the leaders of the church.

This was true because the early Christians were also involved in Bible studies where they could ask questions and discuss the Scripture. Acts 2:42 says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." Christ had shown the disciples how to use the Old Testament to explain the resurrection in Luke 24:45-48, "And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things." The new Christians were shown how to do these same things in the Bible studies mentioned in Acts 2:42. As a result, all of the Christians had become creative in sharing the Gospel.

Worship is explaining the worth of God both to Christians and to those that are not yet Christians. That happens as Christians learn to yield their spirit to the Holy Spirit and learn to explain the Word of God. Every Christian should be equipped for that kind of worship. May the Lord richly bless you as you help Christians learn to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Creativity and the Ministry of the Holy Spirit

In Genesis 2:19-20 we read, “Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.” In these verses, we see that Adam had tremendous creativity. He was able to see the animals, the birds and all of the other creatures that God had created and immediately give them a name. That was true for at least two reasons. First, Adam was in perfect fellowship with God. Second, Adam had not sinned.

The next time we see the creativity of Adam was when he no longer had perfect fellowship with God because he had sinned. Genesis 3:7 says, “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.” Here we see that Adam was using what creativity that he had left after he sinned to try and cover his sin. He chose to use fig leaves. Fig leaves dry up very quickly and fall apart. As a result, Adam was much less creative and he was using his creativity to try and cover his sin.

The same passage shows that Adam tried to use his creativity again. Genesis 3:12 says, “Then the man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” Here we see that Adam now uses his creativity to try and blame someone else for his sin. First he tried to blame Eve, “The **WOMAN** whom You gave to be with me.” Second he tried to blame God, “The woman **whom YOU gave to be with me.**” Ever since that time, the people of the world have used their creativity to do these same two things: try to cover their sin and blame others for their sin. That was not the plan of God. Instead the plan of God was to give man great creativity so that man could use that creativity to bring glory to God as Adam did before he sinned.

Christ did two things to restore that creativity in our lives when He saved us from sin. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we read, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” When God created Adam, he was without sin. When Christ made us a new creation, he forgave our sin: past, present and future. Second, Christ put the Holy Spirit in our lives. In Mark 1:8 John the Baptist said, “I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Ephesians 1:13-14 says that the Holy Spirit is the down payment and guarantee of our salvation. Those verses say, “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Adam had great creativity that made it possible for him to see different animals and immediately give names to them. That creativity has now been restored in our lives as Christians. However, there is one basic requirement for us to demonstrate that creativity. We have to yield the control of our lives to the Holy Spirit. This involves three things: know, reckon and present or yield. Romans 6:6 says, “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” We are to know that our old man was crucified with Christ and that as a result we are no longer slaves to sin. As we saw, sin caused Adam to immediately misuse his creativity to cover his sin and begin to blame others.

Romans 6:11 says, “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The word “reckon” is an accounting term. It means to put something to an account and then act accordingly. If someone puts money to your bank account, you can act accordingly by writing checks for that amount and you will not overdraw your bank

account. Christ has made us dead to sin. That means that sin no longer has control over us. We are to begin to act as a person that is no longer controlled by sin. We can choose to sin or we can choose to obey God. That brings us to the third word.

Romans 6:13 says, "And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." Then Romans 6:16 says, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" We are to stop presenting ourselves as instruments of unrighteousness to sin. We are to instead make the choice to present ourselves to God for obedience so that we can carry out the righteousness of God. As we present ourselves to God, we are able to act in the power of the Holy Spirit instead of acting in our own strength.

Ephesians 5:18 says, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." The words "be filled with the Spirit" mean to continually be filled with the Spirit as a general habit or a life-style. This is our life-style if we do not allow unconfessed sin in our lives. That is why 1 John 1:9 tells us, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:7 says that is what makes it possible for us to walk in the light as Christ is in the light because the blood of Jesus Christ is continually cleansing us from sin.

A Christian who understands and applies these principles continually in his life will find that the Holy Spirit gives that person tremendous creativity. That person will be inspired to serve Christ because that person has taken root in the love of 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." Galatians 5:13 tells how that freedom will affect our ministry to other Christians. That verse says, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." Here we see that a Christian will use his or her creativity to serve other Christians.

Acts 4:12-13 shows how Peter and John used this creativity to serve the Jewish religious leaders, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus." Then the prayer of the early Christians shows how the Lord used this creativity to minister to all that were not Christians. Those verses say, "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." 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." This creativity allowed the early Christians to share the Word of God with boldness to those that were not Christians.

Galatians 5:16 tells us how to walk if we want to experience the creativity of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. That verse says, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Then Galatians 5:18 adds, "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." We can choose to walk in the Spirit and be led by the Spirit instead of having to depend on ourselves. That is what makes it possible for Christians to act with great creativity because they are able to think and act in the power of the Holy Spirit instead of thinking and acting in their own wisdom and strength.

Galatians 6:7-10 tells us that we can have good results from our service if we sow to the Spirit. Those verses say, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will

also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” These verses show us that the Lord will minister through our lives because the Lord creates many opportunities for us to serve Him. He will give us opportunities to minister both to Christians and also to those who have not yet trusted Christ.

Every Christian can have a great impact for the Lord if that Christian presents his or her life to the Lord so that the Lord can work through their life. We are all able to minister with great creativity as the Holy Spirit works in our lives and through our lives. That is due to the fact that we are allowing the Holy Spirit to demonstrate His creativity through our lives. Many Christians have not yet experienced what the Lord can do through their lives as they present themselves to Him and allow Him to work through their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing Christians learn to let the Holy Spirit work in their lives and then through their lives.