

Developing Effective Meetings & Ministry

Growing Christian Leaders Series
Manual 4

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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.

Three Types of Meetings in Acts 2

In the book of Acts, we find that all of the major churches mentioned went through five stages of Biblical Church Development. Those five stages are illustrated very well in the churches of Galatia in Acts 14:21-23 and Acts 16:1-5. (a diagram of these five stages is available on our website: www.aibi.org under diagrams) These five stages were developed in a progressive order in each of the major churches in the book of Acts. Those stages are:

1. Stage One: Initial contacts
Goal: Evangelism
2. Stage Two: Group Meetings
Goal: Stable Christians
3. Stage Three: Church Beginning & Leadership Development
Goal: Spiritual trained leadership
4. Stage Four: Church Organization
Goal: Independent churches
5. Stage Five: Church Extension
Goals: Sending churches (sending people to other cultures)
Sister churches (planting other churches in nearby communities)

The growth topics, so far, have related to reaching people for Christ and helping them grow to maturity. Today, we are going to begin a series on Biblical principles for group meetings given in the Word of God. As you can see, these topics will relate to stage two of Biblical church development. A healthy church will continue to practice all of the stages as they are developed. A healthy church plant will begin with stage one of reaching people for Christ and as people are reached it will become a church plant with stages one and two. As it develops, it will then have stages one, two and three. When it gets ready to organize it will be practicing the first four stages. Finally, if it is a healthy church all five stages will become a part of its life.

In Acts 2:41-47, we have three types of church meetings mentioned. These three are:

- Bible study and fellowship meetings – Acts 2:42
- Temple meetings – Acts 2:46
- House to house meetings – Acts 2:46

These three types of meetings were all very important to the early church and they are also very important today. However, each type of meeting has some different purposes. Over the next several topics, we will be learning more about each of these types of meetings and their purposes in the planting and development of a healthy church.

Today, we will just introduce the three types of meetings mentioned in Acts 2:41-47. In Acts 2:46, we see that it mentions that they were meeting from house to house. The only two places, the phrase “house to house” is mentioned in the book of Acts, are Acts 2:46 and Acts 20:20. The passage in Acts 20:20 shows that Paul took the leaders of the church at Ephesus and trained them by taking them with him as he taught both publicly and from house to house. We might call the house to house type of meeting a one-to-one meeting because we see that it involved going to the home of one individual or family to share the Word of God with that individual or family.

Acts 2:42 mentions a second type of meeting when it talks about Bible study and fellowship meetings. We might call this a small group meeting where the focus is on four things which help Christians to grow and build healthy relationships with one another. These four things are:

- * Bible study

- * Fellowship
- * Breaking of bread
- * Prayer

Small group meetings are places where people share their lives together as they help one another grow. In the physical family, we see that the extended family gets together and share their lives as families. In a similar way, every Christian needs to become a part of an extended spiritual family. A Bible study and fellowship group provides a spiritual family in which each Christian who is a part of it can grow and mature in their spiritual lives and in their relationships with other Christians.

Acts 2:46 also mentions a third type of meeting as it says they were continuing daily with one accord in the temple. We quickly notice two things in this verse about meetings in the temple. First, they were meeting in the temple daily. Second, they were meeting with one accord. These are two keys to understand about the early meetings in the temple.

In Mark 11:17, we see that Christ said, “Then He taught, saying to them, ‘Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations”? But you have made it a “den of thieves.””” In this verse, we see that the purpose of the temple was to be a place of prayer. Then in Acts 3:1, we see that is exactly how the early Christians were using the temple, “Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth *hour*.” This causes us to realize that any church or church plant has to be a praying people if they are going to be an effective church. Prayer is often the first area that Christians begin to neglect.

In Acts 1:14, we see that, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” Here we see that one of the characteristics of the early church was that they were in one accord as they prayed. Christians will only be in one accord when Christ is the center rather than people wanting to be in the center. Groups of Christians will have times when the focus shifts to needs and then there will be complaining as we see 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.” In the following verses, we see that the apostles immediately took action to correct the problem but were careful to make certain that they did not change their priorities.

As we think about the three types of meetings in Acts 2:41-47, we see that these same types of meetings are just as important today. We need meetings in the homes of people or in other places where we can meet together in one-to-one meetings or just a few people. Second, we need meetings where we gather together in small groups for Bible study and fellowship. Third, we need meetings where we gather together to seek the will of God in prayer. May the Lord richly bless you as you focus on why we have meetings rather than just having meetings.

Meetings of the Whole Church

In our last topic, we talked about three types of meetings in Acts 2. Today, we will be looking at another type of meeting that we see in the New Testament. That is a meeting of the whole church. Although there are several passages that mention meetings of the whole church, only one passage gives an extended description of what a church does when it comes together as a whole church. That passage is 1 Corinthians 14:23-35. We will look at that passage today.

As we begin, we might ask a question that people need to think about when they talk about worship. When we gather together as a whole church to worship, who is the audience and who are the participants? The answer that you give to that question will reflect what you have learned about meetings of the whole church from the culture in which you have lived. Often what the culture has taught you is not what the Bible teaches. From the Word of God we see that when the whole church gathers together:

- ◆ God is the audience - 1 Chronicles 16:29; Psalm 96:9; John 4:24; 1 Corinthians 14:24-25
- ◆ We are the participants – 1 Corinthians 14:23-35
 - Verse 24 - all prophesy
 - Verse 26 - each of you has a Psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation
 - Verse 27-28 - in another language the number of speakers is limited to two or three and only with an interpreter
 - Verse 29 - let two or three prophets speak and let the others judge
 - Verse 31 – you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all be encouraged

The services of the early church were patterned after the services in the Jewish synagogues. In the Jewish synagogues, they would have prayer (Matthew 6:5), seven to nine readings from the Word of God in each service (Christ read the Word as was His custom – Luke 4:16-20), then they would have two of three explain the Word to give words of encouragement (Acts 13:15) and a time of praise and thanksgiving (Nehemiah 9:5). The Christians added to this the breaking of bread - communion (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34).

In the city of Jerusalem, it is estimated that there were about 400 synagogues. The fact that there were so many synagogues meant that everyone had a synagogue within a short distance from their home. We also see that there were different synagogues for the different languages and cultures in Acts 6:9 - the synagogue of the Freedmen (descendants of Jewish slaves captured by Pompei and taken to Rome), the synagogue of the Cyrenians and Alexandrians (Jews who had returned to Jerusalem from North Africa), and Jews from Cilicia and Asia (the area that is now Turkey).

Once the Christians were no longer welcome in the synagogues, they moved their services to homes (Acts 18:7) or other buildings (Acts 19:9). Most churches actually met in homes for the first 300 years of Christianity and their services were very much like the service mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:23-35. It was only after the Roman emperor Constantine adopted Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire that buildings and cathedrals began to be built. When that happened, the church quickly began to make the transition from God being the audience and the Christians being the participants to a very different style of service. The rise of the Roman church resulted in the priests being the participants and the people becoming the audience or spectators. The rise of the Protestant church in the Reformation continued to follow the Roman pattern instead of returning to the Biblical pattern.

As a result, today we see many churches where the emphasis is very man centered rather than God centered. This has become especially true in many of the churches that are known as seeker driven

churches. The focus has shifted from the worship of God to the immediate felt needs of the people. This has resulted in services where:

- The audience is the people
- The participants are the professionals on the platform

This change often causes people to measure “success” in worldly terms “nickels and noses” rather than seeking to please God by developing healthy reproducing Christians. Success is measured by the number of people in the audience rather than the number of Godly reproducing Christians that the church has sent out to minister to the world without Christ.

As we come to 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, we see a key statement about what should be happening when the whole church comes together. That verse tells us, “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.” The word prophesy speaks about the written Word of God. The word “prophesy” means to read or quote what has already been written down in the Word of God. It is the second of these words which is used in this verse.

Here we see that all are encouraged to read or quote the Word of God. This can include both reading as a group and individuals reading passages of Scripture. Notice that it is the Word of God that convicts the unbeliever or the one that is unlearned. As we read the Word alone or as a group we are worshiping God by proclaiming that His Word is more important than our opinions. Something else also happens as an individual gets in front of a group and reads or quotes the Word of God. That person is learning to become comfortable first reading and later reading and explaining the Word of God publicly to those in the service. This is an important step to helping a person learn to become obedient to the instructions of 1 Peter 3:15, “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.” A person who has learned to trust the Lord to give him the strength to read the Word of God publicly will also learn that God will give him the strength to read and explain the Word to one or a few individuals privately.

Verse 26 goes on to tell us various ways that we share the Word of God in a meeting of the whole church. Some may:

- * read a Psalm
- * explain a doctrine
- * read a passage in another language (there are instructions which limit this type of reading in verses 27 and 28)
- * have a revelation (instruction to explain a truth)
- * have an interpretation (this is explanation of a passage to make the meaning of the passage clear and understandable – verses 29 through 33)

In verse 29, we notice that it was common for more than one to explain the Word of God in a service. The early church did not limit the explaining of Scripture to one person. Instead, two or three would explain the Scripture and the others would listen to make certain that they were explaining the passage clearly. Verses 30 and 31 show that if a person was not explaining the Word clearly, others could add their comments of explanation. In this way, all were learning and all were being encouraged.

Verse 32 and 33 show that those who were explaining the Word were to come prepared to explain the Word clearly. This meant that they were to study throughout the week so that they were allowing their spirit to be led by the Holy Spirit. Part of our worship of God is thorough preparation so that we will explain the Word of God clearly to others. This will help to prevent confusion and produce peace.

Today, many churches complain because they lack men. Verses 34 and 35 tell us why that was not a problem in the early church in most places. The women chose to submit and let the men exercise the leadership in worship. They also encouraged their husbands by asking them questions about the Word of God at home. However, this was apparently not true in the church at Corinth. When Adam and Eve sinned, Genesis 3:16 tells us that man was given the responsibility for leadership. When Adam failed to exercise spiritual leadership in Genesis 3:6 (the verse tells us that he was with Eve) he is the one that God held accountable. God still holds men accountable for spiritual leadership as these verses show us. When men do not take their God given responsibility to lead their families and the church in worship, they do as Adam did when he blamed Eve.

A church where the men are active participants rather than just spectators will usually attract additional men. We might say, "We either use them or we lose them." In 1 Corinthians 14:23-35 we see that men are to take the responsibility to read and explain the Word of God so that they are active participants and not just spectators. That is a part of their worship of God. This also gives them an opportunity to lead their family by example.

Meetings of the whole church are important as we gather together to worship God. As we do so, we need to remember that God is the audience (we are worshiping Him) and we are the participants. May the Lord richly bless you as you help others learn to, "Worship God in spirit and in truth." – John 4:24

3.

Sharing One to One

In our last two topics, we have talked about the three kinds of meetings mentioned in Acts 2:41-47 and meetings of the whole church from 1 Corinthians 14:23-35. One of the types of meetings that we discussed in Acts 2 was meetings from house to house. Another title we might use for such meetings is one to one meetings. We will use this title because:

- ◆ They do not always happen in homes (Christ met the woman of Samaria beside a well).
- ◆ There may be more than one person coming to share (Peter took six brothers with him when he went to the home of Cornelius – Acts 11:12).
- ◆ There may be more than one person in the home (Cornelius had gathered his relatives and near friends – Acts 10:24).
- ◆ There may be an emphasis on salvation – (Christ talked to Nicodemus about his need for repentance – John 3:1-21).
- ◆ There may be an emphasis on further instruction (Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos home with them and explained to him the way of God more perfectly – Acts 18:26).
- ◆ There may be an emphasis on training though on-the-job training (Paul had Timothy join him and Silas – Acts 16:1-5)

However, all of these meetings mentioned above have one thing in common. They all provide an opportunity for one person to answer the questions of another person so that the second person could grow in his or her understanding of how to build a Biblical relationship with God and learn to serve Him. One to one Bible studies can be divided into many different types of Bible studies like:

- ⇒ Evangelistic Bible studies - John 3 and 4
- ⇒ Follow-up Bible studies - Acts 18:24-26
- ⇒ Growth Bible studies - Luke 10:39
- ⇒ Ministry equipping Bible studies - 2 Timothy 2:2
- ⇒ Specialized training Bible studies and many others - Acts 28:30-31

Each person who is not a Christian has questions that he or she needs to get answered in order to come to an understanding of what it means to become a Christian. Usually those questions must be answered before that person is ready to trust Christ. That is why an evangelistic Bible study can be so effective. Acts 17:11-12a tells us, “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.” These verses give us a pattern for evangelistic Bible studies whether they involve one person or a group. The focus needs to be on searching the scripture to find out whether these things are so.

When we get together to talk with another person, our talk and discussion will usually focus on one of three things once we get into a serious discussion about life. We will tend to share one of the following:

- My opinions
- My convictions
- Biblical principles

The New American Standard Version translates Romans 14:1, “Now accept the one who is weak in the faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.” We all enjoy giving our own opinions. In fact, I had a teacher who used to say that if we get two people together we will have three opinions. That is why we are to accept the opinions of one another whether we agree with them or not. Many Christians struggle when they try to witness to non-Christians because they are not willing to accept the opinions of the non-Christians. The Christian would rather say, “You are wrong,” instead of just listening to the opinion of the other person. Listening to another

person does not mean that we agree with the person. Rather, listening indicates that we respect and accept that person and give him the right to share his opinion.

However, our opinions will seldom make a lasting impact on another person because we are just sharing opinions and the other person is sharing his opinions. In fact, the sharing of opinions can often lead to arguments if we are trying to persuade the other person to adopt our opinion. In that case, we may win the battle of words but we will lose because we have just created a new barrier between that person and Christ.

The second thing we may choose to share is our convictions. Joshua gives us a good example of how to share our convictions in Joshua 24:15, “And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” In this verse, Joshua did share the convictions which he had for himself and for his family.

However, Joshua made it very clear to the people that they had to make their own choices. Each person had to choose who he was going to serve. We see that Joshua actually helped the people to understand that they had at least three choices:

- They could serve the gods of their fathers
- They could serve the gods of the Amorites
- They could choose to serve the Lord

One of the key things that helps people to make wise choices is to ask them to write out the four or five possible choices they have about a decision. Then ask them to list the consequences of each choice below the choice. Some consequences will be good and some consequences will be bad. Ask them if they would like to eliminate the choice which has the worst consequence or sometimes the two choices which have the worst consequences. Then let them know that they are the ones to decide which of the other choices with its consequences they want and let them make the choice not you. That is exactly what Joshua did as he talked to the people.

When we are in a discussion about the issues of life, we can also ask a person what Biblical principles might apply. In cases where they are not yet Christians we may share the Biblical principles and explain how those Biblical principles can be applied in life. As we explain Biblical principles to those who are not yet Christians, it forces them to think and allows the Holy Spirit to work in their lives.

An illustration might be from Genesis 3:7-13. In those verses we could ask a person how Adam’s sin changed his relationships. Then we could help him to discover from those verses that it changed his:

- Relationship with God – there was separation
- Relationship with himself – there was fear, guilt and shame
- Relationship with others – blame

At that point we can then ask if those are the same five things that motivate all people today. Then we could ask how those relationships can be changed so that we are no longer motivated by separation, fear, guilt, shame and blame. Their answer will usually provide an opportunity to share the Gospel.

When we are talking to a Christian, we can share a Biblical principle and then ask how that principle can change our life and help us in our spiritual growth. For example to illustrate this, we might take Romans 7:14-25 (the passage on “I” trouble) and compare it with Romans 8:28-39 and ask why many Christians experience Romans 7:14-25 when God wants Romans 8:28-39 to be our

experience. After letting the person give their thoughts and opinions, you might mention that in the first seven chapters of Romans the Holy Spirit is only mentioned once while in chapter 8 the Holy Spirit is mentioned 19 times. This provides the opportunity to help him understand the Biblical principle that each time we depend on our own strength we experience Romans 7:14-25. Each time we yield to the Lord we will experience Romans 8:28-39.

Then we can go back to Romans 6:1-16 and show that those verses give us three key things that we do each time we are faced with a choice (we may face several hundred choices every day). In those verses we see that:

- ◆ We must know certain things – verse 6 – our old man has lost his power
- ◆ We can then make the choice to act on what we know – verse 11 – reckon is an accounting term which means we have the power to act because of the fact that the old man has lost its power
- ◆ We can choose to yield to sin or we can choose to yield to God as a Christian – verses 13 and 16. If we choose to yield to sin, we will experience Romans 7:14-25. If we choose to yield to God, we will have the power of the Holy Spirit working in us and the love of Christ flowing through us because we are experiencing Romans 8:28-39 at that moment. That power and love will last as long as we continue to yield to God moment by moment (our problem is that most of us stop yielding after the first choice or two and then try to handle the next group of choices in our own strength and fail).

The more time we spend sharing Biblical principles rather than our opinions or personal convictions, the more we will see non-Christians examining their lives and the more we will help new Christians grow because they are learning to yield to God instead of trying to act in their own strength. May the Lord richly bless you as you work with others in your one to one times together with them.

Sharing One to One for Evangelism

In our last topic, we gave a general introduction to sharing one to one (meetings from house to house). We mentioned that there are several types of one to one Bible studies:

Evangelistic Bible studies - John 3 and 4

Follow-up Bible studies – Acts 18:24-26

Growth Bible studies – Luke 10:39

Ministry equipping Bible studies – 2 Timothy 2:2

Specialized training Bible studies and many others – Acts 28:30-31

Today, we would like to focus on the first type of one to one Bible study mentioned above – the evangelistic Bible study. One of the things that we see in the ministry of Christ is that He spent a lot of time in the homes of people. Christ went to the homes of people with all types of backgrounds. These included:

- A fisherman – Mark 1:29-34
- A house whose owner is not named – Mark 2:1-12
- A tax collector (Matthew) – Mark 2:14-17
- A man whose home was in the tombs – Mark 5:1-20
- A certain ruler – Mark 5:21-43
- A house among the Gentiles – Mark 7:24-30
- A home of a Pharisee – Luke 7:36-50
- The home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus – Luke 10:38-42
- The home of one of the chief Pharisees – Luke 14:1-6
- The home of Zacchaeus – Luke 19:1-10
- The home where Christ was staying – John 1:35-42
- The home where a wedding was being held – John 2:1-11
- The home where Nicodemus visited Christ – John 3:1-21

In addition to this list, Christ visited many other homes. These are just some of the homes where Christ was making His first recorded visit. That meant that in each of the above homes Christ was visiting these homes for the purpose of evangelism.

One of the things we notice about many of these visits to homes is the fact that Christ has some of His disciples with Him as He visited these homes. This meant that Christ had a double purpose as He visited these homes. For those that He visited, Christ had the opportunity to share the Gospel with people in their homes. However, for the disciples who were going along with Christ, they were being trained how to share the Gospel with people in their homes.

Peter learned from the example of Christ the importance of training others for evangelism by taking them with him when he went to share the Gospel with others in their homes. In Acts 11:12 we read, “Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house.” Peter took six brothers along with him when he went to share the Gospel in the house of Cornelius. That gave the six brethren the opportunity to see how Peter shared the Gospel with the Gentiles and helped to prepare them for the opportunities that they would have in the future to share the Gospel.

The book of John gives us two examples of Christ having an evangelistic Bible study with one individual. There are many lessons that we can learn from the way that Christ shared the Gospel with Nicodemus and with the Samaritan woman at the well. In John 3, we see that Christ used confrontation as He shared the Gospel with Nicodemus. In John 4, we see that He used compassion as He shared the Gospel with the Samaritan woman.

In John 3:1, we see that Nicodemus came to Christ at the place where Christ was staying. The first thing that we notice is that he came by night and alone. Many people are interested in learning about Christ but will never show that interest publicly because of fear (in the case of Nicodemus it was fear because of his position – he was a ruler of the Jews). If we do not meet such people in their homes or some other private place, they will never hear the Gospel because they will not go to a church service where they will be seen by others. If we do not go to such people where they live, work or spend their free time, they may not have the opportunity to hear the Gospel.

We also see that Nicodemus recognized that God was with Christ. Since Nicodemus was a religious leader who knew the Old Testament but was depending on his own efforts to be right with God, Christ confronted him by telling him that, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” – John 3:3 By this statement Christ aroused the curiosity of Nicodemus which caused him to ask two questions, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” In this verse, we see that Christ was helping Nicodemus understand that he was separated from God.

Christ took the questions and used them to explain the difference between physical birth and spiritual birth. Christ pointed out to Nicodemus that he must have both a physical birth and a spiritual birth in order to enter into the kingdom of God. Christ also used a very common illustration which any person could understand – the wind. (In using illustrations, we want to choose something that the other person understands and can relate to, not just an illustration that we understand.) This caused Nicodemus to ask another question, “Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

Christ then used a Biblical illustration from Numbers 21:5-9 to introduce the love of God for Nicodemus and for the whole world. This illustration showed Nicodemus that only through Christ, the only begotten Son of God, would Nicodemus be saved and have eternal life. Christ also told him that He did not come to condemn the world but rather that He came to save it. Then Jesus concluded this evangelistic Bible study by helping Nicodemus to realize that He had a choice – He could believe and escape condemnation or he could remain in his state of being condemned already.

In John 4, we see that Christ had an evangelistic Bible study with the Samaritan woman. The first thing that we notice is that Christ chose to meet her in a public place. Since Christ was talking alone with the woman, He chose to talk in a place where others could see them and there would be no question of His integrity and character.

Christ began their conversation with a request for a drink of water. The first response of the woman displayed the hostility of the Samaritans toward the Jews. Christ showed her that He accepted her by accepting her opinion about the Jews. However, Christ also used her response to offer her living water (verse 10 and verse 14). This caused her to become curious and she started to treat Christ with respect since He had shown respect to her.

When the woman asked for that living water, Christ did not rush for a quick decision. Instead, Christ told her to get her husband so that both of them could hear how to have eternal life. (We also need to keep our focus on reaching the whole family not just one individual.) The woman immediately answered, “I have no husband.” Instead, of condemning her for her lifestyle, Christ twice complemented her for telling the truth. At the same time He also helped her to realize that He knew all about her and still accepted her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ ‘for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.’” (verses 16-18)

The woman immediately tried to change the subject by asking which was the right place to worship

(today people question which church is the right church). Christ answered that question by showing that it is not where we worship but who we worship as verses 23 and 24 say, “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.” That gave Christ the opportunity to introduce Himself as the Messiah.

As the woman went back to the town to get others to come and meet Christ, He took the opportunity to help the disciples who had returned to expand their spiritual vision. He helped them to see that the Samaritans also needed Christ. (verses 27-38) Notice again that Christ used this both as a time to reach the woman and many other Samaritans and also as a time to train His disciples and expand their vision. We will also accomplish both as we take others with us as we go to the homes of people to share the Gospel with them.

The result of this evangelistic Bible study is seen in John 4: 41-42 where we read, “And many more believed because of His own word. Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard *Him* and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” What began as a one to one evangelistic Bible study resulted in the Gospel being shared with a whole town plus an expanded vision for the disciples.

The Lord will use you as you go to the homes of people and pray that the Lord will give you opportunities to have evangelistic Bible studies with them. May the Lord richly bless you as you yield yourself to the Lord and allow Him to work through your life to reach others for Christ through evangelistic Bible studies.

Sharing One to One in Follow-up Bible Studies

In our last topic, we talked about sharing one to one in evangelistic Bible studies. A second type of one-to-one Bible study is a follow-up Bible study. That will be our focus today. A follow-up Bible study is a Bible study with a new Christian to help him or her to begin growing as a Christian. Most new Christians need a follow-up Bible study for a period of time because they have many questions that need to be answered in order to help them in their spiritual growth.

In Acts 2:46 we read, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” The early church leaders were going from house to house to help the new Christians grow in their understanding of their new life in Christ. In this verse, we see that the church leaders were going from house to house to have communion with the families that had become Christians. This provided an ideal opportunity for them to teach what Christ had taught them about communion in Luke 22:19-20, “And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, “This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.” This also gave them the opportunity to answer questions and have follow-up Bible studies with these new Christians.

Aquila and Priscilla also realized the importance of follow-up Bible study with Apollos. In Acts 18:24-26 we read, “Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”

In these verses, we learn several things about one to one follow-up Bible studies. Apollos had a good Biblical background before he met Aquila and Priscilla but he still needed personal Bible study. We see that he:

- had great speaking ability
- knew the Old Testament well
- had been instructed in the way of the Lord
- was fervent in spirit
- was even quick to teach others what he knew
- did not know about the death and resurrection of Christ

Aquila and Priscilla quickly recognized this lack in his knowledge. Instead of criticizing him for wrong teaching, they chose to spend time with him in Bible study. What they did teaches us some important lessons about follow-up Bible studies. We see that they:

- ◆ listened to what Apollos was teaching
- ◆ recognized that he did not understand certain things
- ◆ did not criticize him in front of others
- ◆ took him aside (probably invited him over to their house)
- ◆ explained to him about the death and resurrection of Christ
- ◆ helped him develop an accurate understanding of the way of God

The results of this follow-up Bible study are clearly seen in verses 27 and 28. We read that, “And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted

the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.” As a result, of the follow-up Bible studies with Apollos, we see the impact that Aquila and Priscilla had on the life of Apollos. We see that their influence also greatly helped the church in Corinth and the surrounding area of Achaia, the area from which they had just come – Acts 18:1-19. Because of that time of follow-up Bible study, Apollos:

- * had a vision for the area of Achaia
- * developed a good testimony among the disciples in Ephesus
- * greatly helped many Christians in Achaia
- * was able to refute the unbelieving Jews in public meetings
- * was able to show from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Christ

Aquila and Priscilla had already learned the value of home Bible studies from Paul when they had lived in Corinth. In Acts 18:1-3, we see that Paul had lived with Aquila and Priscilla for a period of time, “After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.” Paul had lived with them and worked with them in their business in Corinth. In these verses, we see that Paul used the combination of living and working with them to:

- reach them for Christ
- answer their questions
- use their home as a base to reach out to the city of Corinth

This had a great impact on the lives of Aquila and Priscilla. They developed a vision of reaching out to others similar to the vision of Paul. As a result, when Paul left Corinth, he took them with him and left them in Ephesus to help start the church there as we have already seen in what we learned about their ministry to Apollos. Later the Lord used them to start another church in the city of Rome – Romans 16:3-5.

Another example of a follow-up Bible study in a home is seen in Acts 16:14-15 where we read, “Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us*. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged *us*, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” So she persuaded *us*.” Once Lydia and her household became Christians, she realized that she and her household needed to know more about Christ so she invited Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke to stay at her home. This provided daily opportunities for the four of them to share with the various members of the household to help them grow in their new life in Christ. Even when Paul and Silas were beaten, thrown in jail and forced to leave town, they returned to the home of Lydia to have one more home Bible study to encourage Lydia and the rest of the brethren in their new life in Christ – Acts 16:40.

Christ also taught informal Bible studies in or near the homes of those who followed Him. One of the great passages on the resurrection was taught in an informal Bible study with Martha following the death of her brother in John 11:20-27. That ministry and the events that followed also gave Christ the opportunity to show that family and their friends how much He loved them. In fact, John 11:36 says, “Then the Jews said, “See how He loved him!” Christ taught another informal Bible study in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus a few weeks later that is recorded for us in John 12:1-9. Christ used that opportunity to teach about His coming burial.

Perhaps one of Christ’s greatest Bible studies occurred after the resurrection. That Bible study started along the road and ended up around the table as Christ ate together with two in the town of Emmaus. That Bible study is recorded for us in Luke 24:13-32. That Bible study had a life changing impact on those two individuals because it included a summary of all the Old Testament

taught about Christ. That life changing impact is recorded for us in Luke 24:32-35 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?” 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.”

The Bible study with the two on the road to Emmaus did several things for the two:

- ◆ It caused their hearts to burn within them
- ◆ It caused the Scriptures to be opened to them
- ◆ It changed their immediate priorities (they immediately headed for Jerusalem)
- ◆ It changed their long-term priorities (they became witnesses of the resurrection)
- ◆ It equipped them to share what they had learned with others

These five things will also happen as we have one to one follow-up Bible studies with others. May the Lord richly bless you as you have follow-up Bible studies with others.

If you have never taught a follow-up Bible study or you do not know what materials to use, visit our web site at www.aibi.org and look at the following manuals:

New Life in Christ (Building our relationship with God)

New Life in the Family of Christ (Building our relationship with one another in the family of Christ)

Feel free to download these manuals and make as many copies as you need for follow-up Bible studies. If you do not have Internet access, contact us and we can make these materials available to you in other ways.

Sharing One to One in Growth Bible Studies

In our last topic, we focused on sharing one to one for the purpose of follow-up. Today, we will continue our focus on sharing one to one. The focus today will be sharing one to one in growth Bible studies. Evangelistic Bible studies are designed to reach people for Christ. Follow-up Bible studies are designed to give those new Christians a basic foundation for growth. Growth Bible studies are Bible studies that build on the foundation of evangelistic and follow-up Bible studies because growth Bible studies move the focus to helping people grow and mature by helping them become familiar with the entire Word of God.

Many growth Bible studies today happen as two and sometimes more Christians get together for Bible study while they are having breakfast or lunch or in some other Bible study. Christ taught two growth Bible studies on the day of His resurrection. One of these was with the two on the road to Emmaus and the other was a larger group growth Bible study that evening with the disciples.

In Luke 24:27 we read, “And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” In this verse, we see some key lessons about growth Bible studies. We see that:

- The focus was on the Word of God not a book about the Word of God
- The teaching was progressive because it started with the books written by Moses
- The teaching was a thorough summary of the entire Old Testament
- The purpose was to give the two a better understanding of what the Scriptures taught about Christ
- The Bible study covered all of the key passages that talked about Christ

In Luke 24:44-45 we read, “Then He said to them, “These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me.” And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” We see that:

- ◆ This Bible study included a review of what had been taught earlier
- ◆ This Bible study showed how Christ fulfilled the things that were written in the Old Testament
- ◆ This Bible study included a summary of the entire Old Testament
- ◆ This Bible study was designed to open their understanding of their minds both of the Word of God and of the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Christ (The word that is translated understanding is the same word that is translated mind in Romans 12:2 where it says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”)
- ◆ This Bible study was designed to help them comprehend the Scriptures (The word that is translated comprehend is the same word that is translated understand in Ephesians 5:17 where it says, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*.” This word shows us that true Bible study should produce understanding of the will of God.)

When Paul gave his final instructions to the leaders of the church at Ephesus he talked about some of the things that he had done at an earlier time to help those leaders at the time that they were growing. Acts 20:20 says, “How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house.” In this verse, we see that Paul had earlier had Bible studies with these men and that he had:

- Shared all that was helpful (All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable...2 Timothy 3:16) to help them in their growth
- Made known (translated proclaimed in verse 20 and to declare in verse 27) the Word of God to them - In John 16:13-15 this word is used three times to show that the Holy Spirit is the One who is the real source of revealing the truth that we teach from the Word of God.

- Done this in public Bible studies.
- Done this in Bible studies from house to house.

Then in Acts 20:27 Paul summarized the extent of his Bible teaching when he said, “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.” In this verse, we see that Paul:

- ◆ Was not timid about sharing the Word of God (shunned means to be timid and draw back from sharing the Word).
- ◆ Taught the Word so that the Holy Spirit could give them understanding.
- ◆ Taught the whole counsel of God. (Paul taught the entire Word so that they would know the full purpose of God.)

However, growth Bible studies do not stop when they have helped a person know the Word of God. The true purpose of growth Bible studies is to help people learn to obey what they have learned. In Matthew 28:19-20 we have what we call the Great Commission, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*” Amen.” This verse contains one command: Make Disciples. Then it gives three participles that tell us how to carry out this command. The three participles are:

1. Going (evangelism happens as we are going not as we wait for people to come to us – Acts 8:4, 11:19-21)
2. Baptizing (there are eight kinds of baptism in the New Testament and all have one thing in common – identification)
3. Teaching them to observe all things (the word that is translated observe is used seven times in 1 John to speak of keeping Christ’s commandments – 1 John 2:3, 4, 5, 3:22, 24, 5:2, and 5:3 which says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”) We have only really taught people the Word of God when we have taught them how to obey it or put it into practice in their daily lives.

Most Christians today know a lot more of the Word of God than they know how to put into practice. The reason for that is the fact that the western world has largely adopted the Greek style of learning rather than the Hebrew style of learning. The Greek style of learning is to put people in a classroom and give them formal instruction primarily by lectures. The Hebrew style of learning was illustrated by Christ when He said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

In a lecture, it does not matter whether you have ten people or ten thousand people as long as you have a sound system that makes it possible for all to hear. When Christ had large crowds come to hear him speak, He would often use a hillside or speak from a boat so that the hill or the water provided a natural acoustics system. In Mark 4:1-32, we see one of these situations where Christ taught from a boat. We see that He spoke to the multitudes in parables. Christ spoke to the multitudes in parables so that they would not understand (Luke 8:10) because they were not ready to understand and obey.

However, when Christ was alone with the disciples, He would explain the parables to them. Mark 4:33-34 says, “And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear *it*. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.” When your goal is to help people understand and learn how to obey, it usually requires explanation one to one or in a small group.

As the disciples were following Christ, they heard Him teach. Then they heard the teaching explained in a small group. In addition, they were also being shown how to obey what they were having explained. A third thing that happened as the disciples followed Christ is that He was able to help them grow in godly character as they saw how he handled rejection. Luke 9:54-56 says, “And when His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command

fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?” But He turned and rebuked them, and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. “For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save *them*.” And they went to another village.”

Christ also showed the disciples how to minister by example rather than through a lecture as He took the disciples with Him as He went to minister. Christ showed the disciples how to minister to children (Mark 10:13-16), to a young man (Mark 10:17-22), to a foreign woman (Matthew 15:21-28), to a dishonest tax collector (Luke 19:1-10) and to many others.

Many times we are so busy preparing our sermons and our lectures that we fail to spend time with people where they live, work and spend their free time. As a result, they may know the Word of God but many do not know how to apply what they know to their daily living. As the parable of the two builders in Matthew 7:24-27 so clearly illustrates, the foolish are those who hear the Word of God and do nothing about it. The wise are those who hear the Word of God and obey it. As we have one to one and small group growth Bible studies, we have the opportunity to help people learn how to obey what they are learning. May the Lord richly bless you as you show people how to obey the Word of God by your example.

One to One Ministry Equipping Bible Studies

In our last several topics, we have talked about various forms of one to one Bible studies to reach people for Christ and to help them grow. Today, we will be talking about another form of one to one Bible study – the ministry equipping Bible study. In 2 Timothy 2:2, we read, “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 four spiritual generations:

1. Paul
2. Timothy
3. Faithful men
4. Others

In this verse, we see that Paul commissioned Timothy to equip faithful men who would be able to teach others also. Paul was delegating to Timothy the responsibility to train faithful men so that they in turn were equipped to teach others. This was the same thing that Christ did with the disciples when He said to them in John 20:21, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” The thing that He was sending them to do was to Make Disciples among all the nations (ethnic groups). The same form of the word that is translated Make Disciples in Matthew 28:19 is also found in Matthew 13:52 where we find the Biblical definition of a disciple. That verse tells us, “Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure *things* new and old.” In this verse, we see that a disciple:

1. Has become a disciple
2. Is like the head of a spiritual household (has one or more spiritual children)
3. Has a treasure (the Word of God)
4. Brings out of that treasure things that are new (is continuing to learn and grow)
5. Brings out of that treasure things that are old (can teach the basics of Christianity)

That Biblical definition of a disciple is a key to understand the meaning of one to one ministry equipping Bible studies. A one-to-one equipping Bible study is a Bible study designed to equip a person to be the head of a spiritual household, who has a treasure, is continuing to learn and grow and is able to teach others the basics of Christianity. These things do not happen automatically.

Christ and Paul both give us ideal examples of a ministry equipping Bible study. In Mark 1:17, Christ said, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” Paul did exactly the same thing with Timothy as Acts 16:2-3a tell us, “He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him.” In both of these passages we see that a ministry equipping Bible study is actually on-the-job training where the student goes with the teacher as the teacher ministers to others. This is probably the most neglected form of Bible study today as the church has focused on telling people how to minister instead of showing people how to minister.

A perfect illustration of a one to one ministry equipping Bible study happened right in the middle of Christ teaching the five thousand. In John 6:5b-7, we see Christ giving Philip a ministry equipping Bible study, “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. Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.” There were five thousand people gathered around Christ and He was teaching Philip a personal lesson. Philip failed to answer the question and gave a financial report instead. He told Christ that they couldn’t minister to those people because they did not have the money. Christ saw the opportunity and Philip saw the problem.

One of the lessons that Philip had to learn in order to serve the Lord effectively was to depend on the Lord instead of himself. In fact, Christ later told all of the disciples in John 15:5, “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.” Philip learned that day that if he would see the opportunity that Christ would show how to solve the problem.

Christ also used ministry equipping Bible studies to help expand the vision of the disciples. It was in Samaria that Christ said to the disciples in John 4:35, “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and *then* comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!”

Later in Samaria Christ taught another short equipping Bible study to expand the vision of His disciples. That Bible study is recorded in Luke 9:52-56 where Jesus, “sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His face was *set* for the journey to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?’ But He turned and rebuked them, and said, ‘You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. ‘For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save *them*.’” And they went to another village.” The disciples were able to expand their vision and begin to see people as Christ saw them because of these equipping Bible studies.

Paul also developed others by having ministry equipping Bible studies with those he took with him in his travels. This is illustrated so well in 1 Corinthians 4:15-17 where Paul says, “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do* not *have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. 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.” Paul knew what Timothy would teach because they had discussed these things as they traveled together.

Jesus also taught the disciples how to minister to children through a ministry equipping Bible study. Again this happened as Christ taught the disciples a specific lesson while a larger crowd of people was present. Christ showed the disciples how to minister to children in Matthew 19:13-15 where we read, “Then little children were brought to Him that He might put *His* hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” And He laid *His* hands on them and departed from there.”

One of the things you notice about ministry equipping Bible studies is that they usually happen in the process of ministry. Through the years, I have often taken one or two men with me as I have gone to share the Gospel with people in their homes. Then on the way home, we would stop for a coke or a cup of coffee and discuss the Biblical principles that had been demonstrated that night. That was also a common way that Christ taught His disciples. In Mark 4:33-34 we read, “And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear *it*. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.” Christ did not explain the parables to the crowds. However, when He was alone with the disciples, He would explain all things to them.

Paul gave the elders of Ephesus a summary of his ministry equipping Bible studies when he said to them in Acts 20:20-21, “How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, “testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul did have public equipping Bible studies with the men who became the leaders in Ephesus. However, he also took them with him from house to house so that he could show them how to minister effectively to people where they lived,

worked and spent their free time.

Today, the most neglected form of Bible study is probably the ministry equipping Bible study to show people how to minister to others. People have heard the Bible taught but they have not been shown how to minister to other people where they live, work and spend their free time. This form of Bible study was the focus of the ministry of Christ. Mark 3:13-14 tells us, “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.” Luke 6:12 tells us that this happened after Christ had spent the entire night in prayer. From these two passages we learn some important lessons about ministry equipping Bible studies. We see that:

- ◆ Christ prayed to the Father about the men in whom He would invest His time to carry on His work
- ◆ Christ called those men to Him
- ◆ Christ asked them to spend an increased amount of time with Him
- ◆ Christ chose them so that they might be with Him
- ◆ Christ chose them so that later He could send them out to preach

In whom are you investing your time in ministry equipping Bible studies by taking them with you and equipping them to minister by example? Those individuals who travel with you will become your Timothys. May the Lord richly bless you as you focus on developing individuals through ministry equipping Bible studies that happen as your Timothys travel with you in ministry.

8.

Bible Study and Fellowship Meetings

In our last several topics, we have been talking about various types of one to one meetings. As we saw, those meetings may involve more than one person and may even have a large crowd in the surrounding area. However, we saw that one to one meetings or house to house meetings can include some of the following types of Bible studies:

1. Evangelistic Bible studies
2. Follow-up Bible studies
3. Growth Bible studies
4. Ministry Equipping Bible studies
5. Specialized training Bible studies and many others

Today, we will begin looking at a second form of meetings that are mentioned in Acts 2:41-47 - Bible study and fellowship meetings. Acts 2:42 tells us, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." In this verse, we see that the apostles' doctrine (Bible study) and fellowship are linked together. This is due to the fact that Bible study and fellowship meetings are a very important part of our growth as Christians. Bible study helps us grow in our relationship with God while fellowship allows us to grow in our relationship to one another. A Bible study and fellowship meeting allows us to grow both in our relationship with God and with one another at the same time. Another title for this form of Bible study would be a small group Bible study.

Christ created an ongoing small group Bible study when He chose the twelve to be with Him. As Christ and the twelve traveled together, ate together and just spent time together, they were learning how to build their relationships with each other. This helped people who were from totally different backgrounds and totally different interests to learn to understand and accept one another. Before Matthew followed Christ, he was a tax collector working for the Roman government. Before Simon the Zealot followed Christ, he was a Zealot which was a group of radicals who were trying to overthrow the Roman government. By traveling together with Christ and spending time learning the Word from Christ, they were being transformed so that they learned to work as a team rather than being in total opposition to one another.

It is in our relationships with one another, especially in a small group, that we learn how to put the one anothers of Scripture into practice. Scripture gives twelve one anothers that we are to avoid in our relationships with one another. God tells us:

- * Let us not judge one another any more - Romans 14:13 (to assume the office of judge and condemn another)
- * Do not go to law with one another - 1 Corinthians 6:7 (to have lawsuits)
- * Stop depriving one another - 1 Corinthians 7:5 (in marriage, to use sex as a weapon to get even with one another rather than as a way to meet the needs of one another)
- * Do not bite one another - Galatians 5:15 (to wound the soul with words)
- * Do not devour one another - Galatians 5:15 (to make a habit of wounding the soul)
- * Do not consume one another - Galatians 5:15 (the last act of swallowing down - the process of "bite-devour-consume" speaks of the process which destroys a relationship)
- * Do not challenge one another - Galatians 5:26 (to call forth as a contest, hence to stir up what is evil in another)
- * Do not envy one another - Galatians 5:26 (envy is the feeling of displeasure produced by hearing of or witnessing the advantage or prosperity of another)
- * Do not lie to one another - Colossians 3:9 (to deceive by telling lies to one another)
- * See that no one repays another with evil for evil - 1 Thessalonians 5:15 (used to speak of the reverse of doing good to one another)

- * Do not speak against one another - James 4:11 (to speak against or slander)
- * Do not complain against one another - James 5:9 (to groan, used of an inward, unexpressed feeling of sorrow)

A small group Bible study where we regularly spend time together provides the opportunity to learn how to avoid these things in our relationships with one another in the body of Christ. In a sense, a small group Bible study provides the opportunity to learn how to develop healthy spiritual family relationships, instead of practicing these things which destroy relationships.

That is why Scripture also gives us 31 things that we are to learn to do in our relationships with one another in the family of Christ. God calls us to:

1. Accept one another - Romans 15:7 (to take to oneself, signifying a special interest or welcome on the part of the receiver)
2. Admonish one another - Romans 15:14; Col. 3:16 (instruction which is primarily a warning against things that are wrong)
3. Bear one another's burdens - Galatians 6:2 (to bear the weights that are pressing down on another)
4. Bear with one another - Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13 (to hold up against a thing so as to bear with or endure)
5. Build up one another - Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (to promote the spiritual growth and development of character of believers, by example and by teaching, suggesting such spiritual progress is the result of patient labor)
6. Care for one another - 1 Corinthians 12:25 (to have a great concern for others which causes us to share ourselves with one another)
7. Comfort one another - 1 Thessalonians 4:18, 5:11; Hebrews 10:25, 3:13 (to come to the side of another and provide comfort, encouragement or exhortation)
8. Be comforted together through faith in one another - Romans 1:12 (to encourage one another by the mutual faith that we have in one another as well as our mutual faith in the Lord)
9. Have compassion one of another - 1 Peter 3:8 (to suffer with another)
10. Confess you sins to one another - James 5:16 (to confess openly and freely)
11. Be devoted to one another - Romans 12:10 (to have a tender love for one another such as the love of parents for children and children for parents)
12. Fellowship with one another - 1 John 1:7 (the sharing together of our lives)
13. Forgive one another - Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13 (to bestow a favor unconditionally so that things from the past are not held against the other person. The failure to forgive one another is one of the greatest hindrances to spiritual growth and development)
14. Seek what is good for one another and for all men - 1 Thessalonians 5:15 (that which is good in its character and beneficial in its effects)
15. Greet one another - Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14 (to greet, welcome and make feel comfortable)
16. Be hospitable to one another - 1 Peter 4:9 (to show love to a guest)
17. Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another - 1 Peter 5:5 (to make yourself low of mind and show respect to one another)
18. Be kind to one another - Ephesians 4:32 (to be good, pleasant and gracious even to those who are ungrateful and evil)
19. Be members one of another - Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:25 - (members are parts of the body and we are called to have the same relationship to each other as parts of the body)
20. Be of the same mind one to another - Romans 12:16, 15:5 (to have the same concern and regard for one another that we have for ourselves)
21. Be at peace with one another - Mark 9:50; 1 Thessalonians 5:13 (to bring to peace, to reconcile or to make peace)
22. Pray for one another - James 5:16 (keep continuing to pray for one another)
23. Regard one another as more important than self - Philippians 2:3 (esteem one another)
24. Serve one another as a slave - Galatians 5:13 (to serve as a slave, viewed as a relationship to his

master)

25. Employ your gift in serving one another - 1 Peter 4:10 (to be a servant, attendant, to serve, wait upon, minister, viewed as a relationship to his work)
26. Stimulate one another to love and good deeds - Hebrews 10:24-25 (a sharpening of a feeling or action which causes a greater desire to love and do good deeds)
27. Submit to one another - Ephesians 5:21 (to place yourself under the authority of another)
28. Teach one another - Colossians 3:16 (to give positive instruction)
29. Wait for one another - 1 Corinthians 11:33 (to make sure that all share equally in the love feast (potluck or covered dish dinner) and none are left out by the selfishness of others)
30. Wash one another's feet - John 13:14 (speaks of service to one another that will produce a feeling of acceptance and comfort)
31. Love one another - John 13:34-35, 15:12, 17; Romans 13:8; 1 Peter 1:22, 1 John 4:7, 11, 12; 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 4:9-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 3:11, 23; 2 John 5 (this speaks of the kind of love that Christ showed by His self sacrifice and obedience to God. It is primarily a decision of the will instead of a feeling.) Notice how many times this one another is repeated.

One very practical way to help a group learn to put these one anothers into practice is to take a few minutes in the Bible study each week to discuss and share one of the 31 positive one anothers. Then the group can discuss ways that they can put that particular one another into practice both in their relationship to others in the group and also in their relationship with other people. May the Lord richly bless you as you help Christians learn to build a healthy relationship with one another.

Bible Study and Fellowship Meetings – FLOCKS

In our last topic, we introduced the topic of Bible study and fellowship meetings. We mentioned that small group Bible studies provide an ideal opportunity to build our relationships with one another by avoiding the 12 negative one anothers and learning to practice the 31 positive one anothers. Today, we will be discussing some other important things we learn from Acts 2:41-47 about some of the purposes of small group Bible studies.

A very easy way to summarize some of the purposes of the small group Bible study is by the phrase FLOCKS that are praying and praising. That phrase gives us eight purposes of a small group Bible study. We will see what Scripture teaches about each of those eight purposes in Acts 2:41-47. For now we can use FLOCKS to give the following summary:

F fellowship
 L leadership development
 O outreach
 C caring
 K knowledge
 S service
 That are:
 P praying and
 P praising

One purpose of a Bible study and fellowship meeting is fellowship. Fellowship was a very important part of the life of the early church as they gathered together in small groups. Acts 2:42 tells us that they continued in the apostles' doctrine (Bible study) and fellowship. Then Acts 2:46 tells us that they continued daily in the temple and from house to house. The early Christians gathered in small groups for Bible study and fellowship. They also scattered from house to house where they could minister to one another. Every Christian needs both fellowship with God and fellowship with other Christians – 1 John 1:3-7.

A second purpose of a Bible study and fellowship meeting is leadership development. Leadership development was a very important part of the early church. This development of leadership was occurring on at least three different levels. One-to-one (house to house) meetings gave Christians opportunities to discuss and answer the questions of individuals. Small groups gathered for Bible study and fellowship which provided opportunities to learn to lead small groups. Larger groups were meeting in the temple, which helped large group leadership to develop.

The results of this leadership development can be seen in the early verses of Acts 8 and Acts 11:19-21. In Acts 8:1-4, we see that there was a great persecution against the church. Although the apostles stayed in Jerusalem (verse 1) most of the rest of the Christians were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria and some as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch – Acts 11:19. Acts 8:4 tells us, "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word." Then Acts 11:20-21 tells us, "But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord." The leaders stayed at Jerusalem but because the Christians had been given opportunities to develop as spiritual leaders in Jerusalem they were able to preach, teach and lead people to Christ wherever they went.

A third purpose of Bible study and fellowship meetings is outreach. In Acts 2:47, we see that people were being added to the church every day. As we have already seen in the previous paragraph, the Christians went everywhere preaching the Word that they had been taught in Bible

studies. In fact, Acts 9:31 tells us that this caused the churches to multiply throughout the region, “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.” Within a few more years, Acts 16:5 tells us, “So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.” The equipping of people for outreach is one of the key purposes of Bible study and fellowship meetings.

A fourth purpose of Bible study and fellowship meetings is caring. In Acts 2:44-45, we see that caring for the needs of others was also an important part of the life of the early church. Those verses tell us, “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” The early church realized that everything belongs to the Lord. Christ had taught that His followers were to be good stewards of the things that He had entrusted to them. As a result, they looked for opportunities to meet the needs of others.

A fifth purpose of Bible study and fellowship meetings is knowledge. Knowledge of Christ and His Word is very necessary in order for a new (or older) Christian to become obedient to the Word. As the believers gathered together it was for Bible study and fellowship. As they learned the teachings of Christ and became obedient to them, verse 42 tells us that it caused them to focus on the death and resurrection of Christ as they broke bread together. This growth in knowledge of the Word of God was accompanied by obedience to what they were learning.

A sixth purpose of Bible study and fellowship meetings is service. Serving one another was one of the ways that the early Christians showed their love for God and for one another. They were together. They ate meals together. They invited one another into their homes. There was a singleness of heart that was shown by their actions to help one another.

A seventh purpose of Bible study and fellowship meetings was prayer. In Acts 2:42, we see that they spent time praying when they gathered together for Bible study and fellowship. Prayer was an essential part of the life of the early church. In chapter three, we see in verse one that Peter and John were on their way to the temple for prayer. In Acts 4:29-31, we see that they handled threats against them through prayer, “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.”

An eighth purpose of Bible study and fellowship meetings is praise. Praise was a vital part of the life of the early church. The word that is translated “praising” always speaks of praise to God so praise was God centered rather than man centered as they gave all glory to God. Today, many churches have made felt needs the primary focus both of their church services and their small group Bible studies. This often changes the focus from Bible study to a focus on the ideas of men so that it is no longer a study of the apostles’ doctrine. The result is a loss of true praise that gives all the glory to God.

Today, there is a great need for small group Bible studies that focus on these eight purposes. New Christians need a spiritual family where they can grow and mature in their spiritual lives. A small group Bible study with the eight purposes listed above provides a spiritual family where a new Christian can experience healthy spiritual development. In the last three generations, we have moved from the extended family (grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins) to the nuclear family (parents and children) to the fractured family (an increasing number of children growing up in one parent homes). As a result, when many people become Christians, they have no sense of family.

Scripture says that we are to be the family of God. A small group Bible study with the purposes we have mentioned provides a spiritual family where healthy spiritual growth can occur. Without such a spiritual family, many Christians will fail to mature and will remain spiritual toddlers like those mentioned in 1 Cor. 3:1-3, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?” The word that is translated babes speaks of a young child who does not have the ability to speak clearly (a toddler). It is not God’s plan to see Christians remain as toddlers. A small group Bible study provides a spiritual family where Christians can grow and mature.

As you think about the purposes for small group Bible study that we have mentioned above, it might be good to think of Christians who need to get into such a Bible study where they can grow and mature. May the Lord richly bless you as you help new and struggling Christians find a spiritual family (a purpose led small group Bible study) where the new or struggling Christians can experience healthy spiritual growth.

Building Healthy Relationships in Small Group Bible Studies

In our last topic, we talked about eight purposes of small group Bible studies that are given in Acts 2:41-47. We saw that those eight purposes can be summarized by the phrase: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising. Today, we would like to focus on how the Lord uses small group Bible studies to build healthy relationships between Christians.

When Adam sinned, it changed all of his relationships. We see that the consequences of sin:

Changed his relationship with God – there was separation – Genesis 3:8, 10

Changed his relationship with himself – there was fear – Genesis 3:10, guilt – Genesis 3:7, 11 and shame – Genesis 3:7, 10, 11

Changed his relationship with others – there was blame – Genesis 3:12

These five things – separation, fear, guilt, shame, blame – now control every person in their relationships with God and others before they become Christians. As a result, all non-Christians develop fear based relationships. They:

1. Have relationships that are controlled by fear
2. Erect barriers between themselves and others
3. Create shells to protect their feelings
4. Develop relationships lacking trust
5. Develop relationships with little or no true communication

We received many things at the moment of salvation. Acts 26:18 alone gives us a list of five things that we received at the moment of salvation. Christ told Paul that He was sending Paul to the Gentiles, “to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” In these verses, we see that salvation:

Opened our eyes

Turned us from darkness to light

Turned us from the power of Satan to God

Caused us to receive forgiveness of sins

Gave us an eternal inheritance

In addition, Christ also placed the Holy Spirit in our lives as the down payment and guarantee of our salvation – Ephesians 1:13-14.

These changes and others now make it possible for us to see the Lord begin reversing the effects of original sin in our lives. In the physical family, the entire family gets involved in the process of helping a new child grow and develop. The same should be true in the spiritual family. Every new Christian needs a spiritual family to help that person experience healthy spiritual growth. As we see in Acts 2:42 the Bible study and fellowship meetings provided an ideal family for the early Christians to experience healthy spiritual growth. The same should be happening today in small group Bible studies. Those small group Bible studies provide a spiritual family where each new Christian has an opportunity to experience healthy spiritual growth.

In 1 John 4:18 we read, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” Here we see that love will begin to replace fear as a new Christian has a healthy environment for spiritual growth. As a result, the small group Bible study and the spiritual family in that Bible study provide the opportunity for the new Christian to learn how to develop love based relationships instead of fear based relationships. In healthy relationships:

1. Relationships are controlled by love

2. Barriers have been replaced by acceptance
3. Shells have been replaced by openness
4. Trust is a characteristic of relationships
5. Communication is direct

In our topic on Bible study and fellowship meetings, we discussed the 12 one anothers that Christians are commanded to avoid and the 31 one anothers that Christians are commanded to practice in their relationships with one another. The ideal place to learn how to put these things into practice is in the small group Bible study where Christians are learning to care for one another. One very practical way to put the one anothers into practice is to take one each week and take a few minutes during the Bible study to discuss how we can put that particular one another into practice in our relationships with one another during the coming week.

In Hebrews 10:24-25, we read, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” In these verses, we see several things that we are to do which will help us develop healthy relationships. We see that we are to:

1. Consider one another – the word translated consider means to “observe, understand, to consider attentively, and to fix one’s eyes or mind upon”. In this word we see that we are to be good listeners who place our full attention on what the other person is saying so that we can understand that person clearly.
2. Stir up love in one another - here we see that what we share should help others to have a greater love for each other and help them understand ways to share that love.
3. Stir up good works in one another – here we see that what we share should help others to understand ways in which they can better serve one another in love.
4. Get together – we cannot help others to grow in love and good works unless we are spending time together.
5. Exhort one another – we are to share thoughts that will comfort, encourage and strengthen one another.

Within the spiritual family (small group Bible study) we are also to help one another learn to walk in Christ. Colossians 2:6-7 says, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” In these verses, we see that we are to help one another learn how to:

Walk in Christ

Become rooted in Christ

Be built up in Christ

Become established in the faith

Learn to abound in thanksgiving

These things help us to build a healthy relationship both with Christ and with one another. These things do not happen automatically. Instead, they happen as we focus on how to help one another in our spiritual growth.

In order to be able to help one another, we learn to follow the example of Christ by learning to think of others first instead of ourselves. Philippians 2:3-4 says, “*Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” In these verses, we see that we develop healthy relationships as we:

Confess any selfish ambition or conceit to the Lord

Learn to develop lowliness of mind (have a humble opinion of ourselves)

Learn to esteem others better than ourselves (learn to think of others as better than ourselves)

Learn to not be so concerned about our own interests

Learn to become concerned about the interests of others.

As you can see, many of the things that help us to build healthy relationships with others relate to moving from pride to humility. James 4:6 says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” A Christian who is controlled by pride is a Christian who is still controlled by fear and needs help in his or her spiritual growth. That is why every Christian needs a spiritual family that will help him in his growth because the Biblical values are exactly the opposite of the world’s values.

In Mark 10:35-45, James and John asked Christ if they could sit on His left hand and right hand. Christ reminded the disciples that in the world people want to exercise authority and lordship. Then Christ said in Mark 10:43-44, “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.” In these verses, we see that the way to greatness is learning to serve one another. The small group Bible study provides an ideal place to learn how to serve one another in love. In the process, those in the Bible study are also learning how to develop godly character and values.

We help Christians build healthy relationships as they learn to serve one another in love rather than being focused on their own interests. We also help them develop godly character. May the Lord richly bless you as you use Bible study and fellowship groups to help those in each group to develop healthy relationships and develop godly character.

Developing Leadership in Small Group Bible Studies

In our past few topics, we have been talking about apostles' doctrine and fellowship (small group) Bible studies. We saw in Acts 2:41-47 that those verses give us at least eight purposes for small group Bible studies. We said those could be summarized by the phrase: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising.

Fellowship

Leadership development

Outreach

Caring

Knowledge

Service

Praying

Praising

In our last topic, we discussed the topic of building relationships. That is essential if we are going to enjoy true fellowship. Today, we will be looking at the topic of leadership development in the small group Bible study.

In Exodus 18:19-21 Moses was given five priorities for effective leadership. Those verses tell us, "Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. "And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them *to be* rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens." In these verses, we see that Moses was to:

1. Pray for the people
2. Teach them the Word of God
3. Show them the way to walk
4. Show them the work to do
5. Share the work

However, in the process of sharing the work, Moses was to develop leaders of tens, leaders of fifties, leaders of hundreds and leaders of thousands. No one will become a leader of fifties, hundreds or thousands until he has learned how to lead a group of ten. That is why the small group Bible study is such an important key in the development of leadership.

The world has many definitions of leadership but Christ gave the following definition of leadership in John 10:3-5 where we read, "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. "And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. "Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." In these verses, we see that a leader:

- ◆ Calls his own sheep by name
- ◆ Leads his sheep
- ◆ Goes before his sheep
- ◆ Is followed by the sheep because they know his voice

We might use this list to give the following definition:

A leader spends time with people so that they recognize his voice. He gets to know them by name and leads them rather than driving them. The result is that people follow him because they know and trust him.

As you can see, these are the very kind of things that happen in a small group Bible study. In a small group Bible study, one of the things that we want to do is help those in the Bible study learn to share in the leadership of the group so that they are learning how to lead other small group Bible studies. Some verses that we looked at when we were talking about meetings of the whole church are also very applicable to small groups. In 1 Corinthians 14:29-32, we read, “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. 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.” In these verses, we see the following:

1. Two or three may share the Word of God
2. The others are to judge – listen and give judgment whether the explanation agrees with the Word of God as a whole
3. Allow someone else to explain more clearly if needed
4. Let the original speaker listen to the explanation
5. Let each person have the opportunity to explain the Word of God at different times
6. The one who does the explaining is the one who learns the most
7. The others are encouraged as they hear the Word of God explained
8. The ones who do the explaining are to come prepared so that their spirits are prepared
9. The ones who do the explaining are to be in submission to the other people in the Bible study

People are growing in spiritual maturity as they study the Word of God and learn to explain it to the group. They are developing their leadership as they learn to explain the Word of God to others. They are also developing their leadership as they learn to show a submissive attitude toward one another. We want to help the group learn to encourage and help one another in their explanation rather than have a critical spirit. Then they will be encouraged as they see one another growing in their understanding of the Word.

A key thing that needs to be regularly emphasized in the small group Bible study is that we are learning how to explain the Word of God to others so that we can all be obedient to 1 Peter 3:15. That verse tells us, “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.” This verse tells us that every Christian is to become equipped to be ready to share the Word of God with those who are not yet Christians in answer to their questions. This is an ideal time to help people realize that the Lord wants them to be equipped to share the Gospel with relatives (John 1:41-42), friends (John 1:43-46), co-workers (Matthew 9:9-10), neighbors and other acquaintances (Mark 1:30-33).

As a part of the Bible study, we want to give each person a variety of experiences so that each person is becoming equipped to lead a Bible study in the future. In our personal families, we expect our children to grow and become adults. Once they are married, we begin to look forward to enjoying grandchildren. The same should be true in the spiritual family. We are helping each person in the Bible study grow and become mature so that each one can take the leadership of a Bible study in the future. That is the process of helping them learn to become leaders of groups of ten.

When David was made the king of Israel, 1 Chronicles 12:32 tells us, “the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...” One of the characteristics of effective leaders is that they understand the times and know what to do. Helping future leaders begin to understand the times in which we live and know what we need to do in these times is a key part of helping them develop as effective leaders. Paul reviewed for the leaders in the church of Ephesus what he had done to help them understand the times so that they knew what to do. Acts 20:20-21 says, “how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, “testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” In these verses, we see that Paul had:

- Shared all that was helpful

- Patiently explained things until they were clearly understood
- Taught them publicly
- Taught them from house to house (on the job training)
- Taught them how to explain repentance to both the Jews and the Gentiles
- Taught them how to explain true faith both to Jews and Gentiles

As we take developing leaders with us as we minister, they are learning where people are hurting and are being shown how to minister to those people. This is part of the process of helping developing leaders to understand the times and know what to do.

One final thing we want to help developing leaders learn is the importance of yielding to the Lord so that the things that we do are done in the Lord's strength and not our own. Christ told the disciples in John 15:5, "Without me you can do nothing." An effective leader is one who is learning to depend on the Lord's strength and not his own.

The Lord uses Bible study and fellowship groups to develop spiritually mature leaders as those in the group learn the Word of God and learn to depend on the strength that the Lord provides to share the Word with others. May the Lord richly bless you as you use Bible study and fellowship groups to develop godly leadership.

Developing Outreach in Small Group Bible Studies

In our past few topics, we have been talking about Bible study and fellowship groups (apostles' doctrine and fellowship groups). We said that the purposes of small group Bible studies can be summarized by the statement: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising from Acts 2:42-47. Today, we will be looking at the third purpose of Bible study and fellowship groups which is: Outreach.

In Acts 2:46-47 we read, "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." In these verses, we see several things that are keys in outreach. These include:

1. They were continuing daily in the temple – Acts 3:1 tells us that this happened at the hour of prayer so this points out that the first key to outreach is daily prayer – Do you have a list of people for whose salvation you pray every day?
2. They were breaking bread from house to house – The early believers were having communion in their homes which provided ideal opportunities to share the Gospel with extended family members that were not yet Christians.
3. They were eating their food with gladness and simplicity of heart – The early believers ate together which provided opportunities for other family members and friends to see how Christians related to one another in love.
4. They were praising God – The early believers were giving praise to God for what He was doing in their lives.
5. They were having favor with all the people – The people around them could see that the grace of God was working in their lives.
6. The Lord is the One who brought results – The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

In these verses, we see some of the results of Bible study and fellowship meetings. Since most of these were probably held in homes, they became ideal places of outreach to entire households as those in the family who were not yet Christians saw the changed lives of Christians and heard about the death and resurrection of Christ. (In the various church plants and churches that I work with that have home Bible studies, those churches will consistently have more non-Christians in the home Bible studies than they will have in the Sunday morning services of the church.)

One of the things you quickly see about the ministry of Paul and the team that traveled with him is that they always began by sharing the Gospel in the synagogue. However, their stay in the synagogue was usually very short as the Jews kicked them out of the synagogues. In Antioch of Pisidia this happened after the second week – Acts 13:42-47, in Iconium this happened in a very short time – Acts 14:2, in Lystra and Derbe the synagogue is not even mentioned, in Philippi they did not even have a synagogue, in Thessalonica it happened after three weeks – Acts 17:2-6, in Berea after a short time – Acts 17:10-14, in Athens Paul only stayed a short time – Acts 17:16-17, 18:1, in Corinth after only a few weeks – Acts 18:4-7 and in Ephesus they were forced out of the synagogue after three months – Acts 19:8-9.

Once Paul and the other disciples were forced out of the synagogues, all outreach had to occur in homes, schools – Acts 19:9, marketplaces – Acts 17:17 and in other public places. However, the fact that the Christians no longer had access to the synagogues (and there were no church buildings for 300 years) did not stop or even slow down outreach. This is illustrated in both Corinth and Ephesus.

In Acts 18:6-11 we read, "But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook *his* garments and

said to them, “Your blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I *am* clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain *man* named Justus, *one* who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; “for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” In these verses, we see that:

- The Jews quickly hardened their hearts
- Paul began a Bible study in the house of a man named Justus
- The Lord later saved the ruler of the synagogue and his entire household
- The Lord called many others in Corinth to salvation
- Paul continued teaching Bible studies in the homes for the next eighteen months

The same pattern is clearly shown by Acts 19:9-10 where we read, “But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.” In these verses, we see that:

- ◆ The Jews in the synagogue quickly hardened their hearts
- ◆ The disciples moved from the synagogue to a school for Bible study
- ◆ The disciples had a daily Bible discussion in that school (the Greek society would take a break for a couple of hours in the middle of the day because of the heat so that meant the school was available)
- ◆ This daily Bible study lasted for a period of two years
- ◆ Those in this Bible study were taking the Gospel throughout Asia (a region nearly 200 miles by 200 miles)
- ◆ The result was that all who were in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks

Paul summarized his ministry in Ephesus and the surrounding area of Asia in Acts 20:19-21 and 20:27 where we read, “Serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; “how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, “testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ... For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.” In these verses, we see that Paul:

- Provided an example by his life
- Taught all that was helpful
- Taught the people publicly
- Taught the people house to house
- Shared the message of repentance and faith as he taught both Jews and Greeks
- Declared the whole counsel of God

One of the key things that we see about outreach in these passages is that all of the Bible studies whether they were held in public or in small group Bible studies in homes included the message of repentance and faith because there were people present who were not yet Christians. People who are not Christians yet and who are seeking God to learn more about Christ will come to the homes of those who are Christians.

This is illustrated by Peter and the team with him when they taught the Word of God in the home of Cornelius. In Acts 10:24, 44-45 we read, “And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends...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.” In these verses, we see that:

- Cornelius had invited his relatives to come and hear the Gospel in his house
- Cornelius had invited his close friends to come and hear the Gospel in his house
- The Lord saved the entire group in the home
- The other Christians with Peter were amazed
- The other Christians thought the Gospel was only for the Jews (How many times do Christians feel that the Gospel is only for their own culture and refuse to go to the homes of other cultures to have Bible studies that include sharing the Gospel?)

Home Bible studies can be a key way to reach out to the extended family, friends, co-workers, neighbors and other acquaintances of those who are already Christians. Encourage those in a home Bible study to begin praying for family, friends, co-workers, neighbors and other acquaintances who are not yet Christians. (Before you have closing prayer as a Bible study group, you might set an empty chair out and encourage each one to pray specifically for a non-Christian relative or friend that they can bring with them to the next Bible study to fill that chair). Many people will come to the home of a family member, friend, co-worker or other acquaintance to learn more about Christ although they might never come to a church building.

May the Lord richly bless you as you help those in Bible studies learn to reach out to those that they already know. The Lord wants to work through you to make an impact on the world around you for Christ.

Developing Caring in Small Group Bible Studies

In our past few topics, we have been talking about Bible study and fellowship groups (apostles' doctrine and fellowship groups). We said that the purposes of small group Bible studies can be summarized by the statement: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising from Acts 2:42-47. Today, we will be looking at the fourth purpose of Bible study and fellowship groups which is: Caring.

In Acts 2:44-45 we read, "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need." In these verses, we see that the early church had a great concern for one another. They both saw needs and determined how to meet those needs. Sometimes needs are physical and other times needs are spiritual. We become aware of these needs most commonly when we meet together in small groups. In these verses, we see several keys to knowing and meeting the needs of others.

- The early believers were meeting together
- The early believers saw themselves as stewards rather than possessors (they realized that all they had was given to them by the Lord)
- The early believers were concerned about every believer
- The early believers were willing to make sacrifices
- The early believers were willing to share
- The early believers met genuine needs

As we think about the one anothers given in the New Testament, many of them relate to meeting the needs of one another. An illustration of this is found in Galatians 6:2 where we read, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." The word that is translated burdens speaks of something that is a heavy weight, burden or trouble. Many Christians have burdens. Some may be physical while others are spiritual. To bear those burdens has the thought of taking it with our hands and carrying it. Here, we see that we are to help carry the things that burden another Christian. One of the places where we most commonly learn about such burdens is in small groups as we pray for one another.

However, we should not just stop with prayer. Sometimes there is a need for additional help. James 2:15-16 says, "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit?" Here we see that we are to help one another with basic necessities. (This does not mean that we are to meet every need but rather basic necessities because 1 Timothy 6:8 says, "And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content." 2 Thessalonians 3:10 gives the other side if people are unwilling to work, "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.") Sometimes people need food but also need counsel about how to manage their finances in the future.

People also need help with their spiritual burdens. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all." In this verse, we see several areas where people need different kinds of help:

- Warn the unruly – this word was used in Greek society for those who did not show up for work
- Comfort the fainthearted – those who are fearful and doubting need to be encouraged and made bold
- Uphold the weak – those without spiritual or moral strength need to be held up so they do not fall
- Be patient with all – this includes those who say or do things without thinking

There are many things besides burdens where we need to show care as Christians. In 1 Corinthians 12:22-25 says, “No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable *parts* have greater modesty, but our representable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another.” In these verses, we see that we are to look out for the needs of each other just as the various parts of our physical bodies care for each other. Those members of the body of Christ who need special care include:

- ◇ Those who are weaker
- ◇ Those who we think are less honorable
- ◇ Those who are deformed (physically or spiritually)

Today, there are many Christians who are weak. Sometimes this weakness is due to the lack of spiritual parents for new Christians. This was the situation in Corinth. 1 Corinthians 4:15-17 says, “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. 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.” We help these Christians by providing a spiritual parent who can walk beside them and help them in their spiritual growth.

Sometimes, Christians are weak because of wounds to their spirit which produce a broken spirit. Proverbs 15:13, 17:22 and 18:14 all talk about these wounds to the spirit, “A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken... A merry heart does good, *like* medicine, But a broken spirit dries the bones... The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit?” In Luke 4:18, Christ said the Father sent Him, “To heal the brokenhearted”. We help these Christians by helping them to forgive those who broke their spirits and then helping them to become strong in spirit.

The passage from 1 Corinthians 12 also points out that the parts that we think are less honorable need special care. The word that is translated honorable speaks of the price paid for a person who was bought or sold in that day. Applying this to Christians means that some Christians think their lives have little or no value. Since value is based on the price paid for something, we need to help such Christians grow in their understanding of the fact that Christ viewed their lives as having infinite value and that is why He shed His blood for them.

The third group 1 Corinthians 12 mentions that need special care are those who are deformed either physically or spiritually. This points out the need for us to show special care to those who are physically handicapped. It also points out the fact that some have been deformed spiritually due to false teaching or sinful living. Ephesians 4:14-15 says, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—”. In these verses, we see that some Christians are deceived by false teaching. We also see that the way to show special care to such Christians is to help them grow up in all things in Christ.

As you think about each of the things that we have mentioned in relation to caring, each of these things are best done by a group of caring Christians who will help those Christians who are weaker. This kind of care should be a part of the ministry of a Bible study and fellowship group. Ephesians 4:16 points out the fact that our goal is to help every Christian become an effective working part of the body of Christ. That will only happen as we provide the kind of care that will help struggling Christians grow and mature. May the Lord richly bless you as you help Bible study and fellowship

groups learn to care for the struggling parts of the body of Christ.

Developing Knowledge in Small Group Bible Studies

In our past few topics, we have been talking about Bible study and fellowship groups (apostles' doctrine and fellowship groups). We said that the purposes of small group Bible studies can be summarized by the statement: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising from Acts 2:42-47. Today, we will be looking at the fifth purpose of Bible study and fellowship groups which is: Knowledge.

2 Peter 3:18 says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen." In this verse, we see that Christians are to grow both in grace and in our knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Growth in grace refers to our growth in spiritual maturity. An excellent summary of what it means to grow in grace is given in 2 Peter 1:2-11. In those verses, we see that:

- ◆ God has already given us all things that pertain to life and godliness through His divine power
- ◆ God has also given us exceedingly great and precious promises
- ◆ God says that we have become partakers of the divine nature (We have become partners with God because He has placed His divine nature in us)
- ◆ God tells us that we are to add virtue to our faith (Virtue speaks of moral excellence such as modesty and purity)
- ◆ God tells us to add knowledge to our virtue
- ◆ God tells us to add self-control to our knowledge
- ◆ God tells us to add perseverance to our self-control
- ◆ God tells us to add godliness to our perseverance
- ◆ God tells us to add brotherly kindness to our godliness
- ◆ God tells us to add love to our brotherly kindness

Then 2 Peter 1:8 says, "For if these things are yours and abound, *you will be* neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." One very interesting thing that we see here is that true knowledge produces growth in godly character. In other words, we are not just to study the Bible to learn new facts. Instead, we are to study the Bible to transform our character and life.

One of the great problems in the lives of many Christians is that they have a lot of Bible knowledge but that knowledge has made no changes in their character. 2 Peter 1:9-11 then tells us, "For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." This verse shows us that if Bible knowledge does not develop godly character that something is drastically wrong and the person needs to make certain that he or she has truly repented and placed his or her faith in Christ.

This means that our goal when we use the word knowledge is not just knowing facts about the Bible. Instead, our goal is a transformed life. That is why the Great Commission tells us in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.' Amen." In the Great Commission, we have one command: Make Disciples. That command is to be carried out by three participles:

Going – We are to share the Gospel wherever we go.

Baptizing – We are to help those who place their trust in Christ identify with His body, the church.

Teaching – We are to teach them how to obey all things that Christ has commanded.

From this we see that the purpose of gaining knowledge through Bible study in Bible study and fellowship groups is to teach one another how to obey all of the commands of Christ so that our lives are being transformed. Christ made the area of obedience a key when He said near the beginning of His ministry in Matthew 7:24-27, “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: “and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: “and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” Transformation comes in our lives as we both hear the Word and learn how to obey it. Discussing how we obey and put into practice what we are learning should be a key part of any Bible study.

Romans 6-8 teaches us about how we grow in our Christian lives so that we are able to obey what we are learning from the Word of God. Romans 6 gives us three key words:

Know – Romans 6:6

Reckon – Romans 6:11

Yield – Romans 6:13, 16

Romans 6:6 tells us, “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.” In order to learn to obey what Christ has commanded us, we need to know that our old man was placed on the cross with Christ and crucified with Him. That means that we are no longer a slave to our sin nature. We have been set free from our slavery to sin and are now free to make choices.

Romans 6:11 tells us, “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 word which means that we are “*to recognize what is real*”. This verse says that reality for the Christian is that we are dead to sin so we are no longer slaves to sin. This verse also says that reality for the Christian is that we are alive to God and so we have His power working in us which gives us the power to obey the commands of Christ.

Romans 6:13, 16 tell us, “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... 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?” To present ourselves to God is to make a decision in our will. Each moment that we present ourselves to God or yield to God we have the power to carry out the commands of Christ. In contrast, each moment that we try to do things in our own strength we will fail (John 15:5).

One of the key things that we want people to learn in Bible study is that as Christians they do have the power to do what Christ commands as long as they are presenting themselves to God to do His will. However, when they stop presenting themselves to God and try to do things in their own strength, they will fail. This failure is summarized in Romans 7:14-25. In those verses, count the number of times that the words “I”, “me”, “my” and “myself” are used. Then, read the verses again and see the problems that “I” trouble cause for the Christian.

In the first seven chapters of Romans, the Holy Spirit is only mentioned one time (Romans 5:5). In contrast, Romans 8 mentions the Holy Spirit 19 times. At any time that we are yielding to the Holy Spirit, His power gives us the strength to do what the Lord has commanded us to do. That means that we can depend on our own strength and do nothing (John 15:5), or we can yield to the Holy Spirit and accomplish the Lord’s work in the power of the Holy Spirit (Philippians 4:13). We make the choice whether to try to do things in our own strength or whether we choose to yield to the Holy

Spirit and do what we do in the power of the Spirit. This is one of the most important lessons that all Christians need to learn because it affects every area of our lives.

The Lord uses small group Bible studies to help Christians grow both in their knowledge of the Word of God and also in helping them learn how to apply what they are learning. Small group Bible studies also provide the encouragement that many Christians need to become obedient to the Word of God. May the Lord richly bless you as you help other Christians grow in their knowledge of the Word and obedience to the Word through small group Bible studies.

Developing Service in Small Group Bible Studies

In our past few topics, we have been talking about Bible study and fellowship groups (apostles' doctrine and fellowship groups). We said that the purposes of small group Bible studies can be summarized by the statement: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising from Acts 2:42-47. Today, we will be looking at the sixth purpose of Bible study and fellowship groups which is: Service.

In 1 Peter 4:10, we read, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." In this verse, we see several important principles about our spiritual service. We see that:

- Each of us has received one or more spiritual gifts
- Each of us is to use our spiritual gift or gifts to serve one another
- Each of us is to be a good steward of what God has given us by His grace

The small group Bible study provides an ideal place to learn how to use our spiritual gifts to serve one another.

Then, in Galatians 5:13 we read, "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." In this verse, we see that:

- * We have been called to liberty
- * We are not to use that liberty to satisfy the evil desires of the flesh
- * We are to use that liberty to serve one another in love

In this verse, we see why the small group is a key in the development of our spiritual life and service to one another. Because we have been set free by Christ, we now have a desire to live to please Christ. This freedom also means that we are now free to live to please the Lord because the Holy Spirit gives us His power as we yield to Him. We can see the changes that happen because of our spiritual life and learning to depend on the Holy Spirit in the following summary:

Before becoming a Christian (we were spiritually dead – Ephesians 2:1):

Desire – we had no desire to please Christ

Power – we had no power to please Christ

Once we become a Christian (we have been made spiritually alive – Ephesians 2:1):

Desire – we now have a desire to please Christ – Romans 7:19

Power – we have no power if we depend on our own strength – John 15:5

Once we realize we can serve Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit as we yield to Him:

Desire – we now have a desire to please Christ – 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

Power – we now have the power to serve Christ as we yield to Him – Philippians 4:13

As we learn to yield to the Holy Spirit instead of depending on our own strength, we are able to serve one another in love. Paul spoke of this mutual service that happened as Paul and Timothy served the Lord together. Philippians 2:22 says, "But you know his proven character, that as a son with *his* father he served with me in the gospel." Here we see that Paul and Timothy worked together as a spiritual father and spiritual son team. This verse mentions two things that happened in the life of Timothy as they served the Lord together:

- Timothy developed proven character.
- Timothy learned to serve together with Paul in the Gospel.

This verse shows us that one area in which we serve one another is by becoming a spiritual parent

to a younger Christian. Paul took Timothy with him as he traveled to various places serving the Lord. Paul was able to help Timothy grow in godly character and effective ministry. At the same time, Timothy was able to help Paul with many things such as preparing meals, doing the various of things where a younger man who has more physical strength is able to help such as helping to carry their things as they traveled. Both men were able to help each other in many ways as they served the Lord together.

In a Bible study group, those attending the Bible study are also able to serve each other. Sometimes this may involve physical service while at other times it may involve spiritual service. In addition, those in the Bible study group can work together to serve others. James 1:27 describes several ways that a group can minister as a team, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” Here we see that a group can work as a team to:

- Help those children who have lost one or both parents deal with their pressures
- Help the widows deal with the things causing pressure and distress to them
- Help by providing godly examples to follow for both the children and the widows

1 Thessalonians 5:14 describes several ways that a Bible study group can help and encourage one another as well as other Christians. That verse says, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.” In this verse, we see that the group can work together to:

- Warn the unruly (the unruly was the word that the Greeks used to describe those who did not show up for work – we would call them the lazy)
- Comfort the fainthearted (encourage those who are easily discouraged)
- Uphold the weak (hold up and support those who are without strength)
- Be patient with all (provide an example of patience even when experiencing trouble and misfortune)

These verses all show us that service is reaching out to others in love so that others can see the love of 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.” Then Galatians 6:10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” In this verse, we see that:

- ◆ We are to look for opportunities to do good
- ◆ We are to look for opportunities to do good to all including those who are not yet Christians (Sometimes the Lord uses our service to draw others to Himself)
- ◆ We are to especially look for opportunities to do good to other Christians

In the verses between Galatians 5:13 and 6:10, we see that Lord tells us what to avoid and how to avoid those things as we serve one another in love. We see that we are to avoid the things of the flesh and to depend on the Holy Spirit to give us the power to show this love to one another. As we look at verses 5:13-6:10 we see that:

- * We are to serve one another in love – 5:13
- * We are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves – 5:14
- * We are to walk in the Spirit – 5:16, 5:25
- * We are to be led by the Spirit – 5:18
- * We are to bear the fruit of the Spirit – 5:22-23
- * We are to live in the Spirit – 5:25
- * We are to restore those who are guilty of sin – 6:1
- * We are to bear one another’s burdens – 6:2
- * We are to share with those who teach – 6:6
- * We are to sow to the Spirit – 6:8

- * We are not to get tired of doing good – 6:9
- * We are to do good to all – 6:10

We can do each of these things in our personal lives. However, we can also do these things as a Bible study group. When we do these things as a group, they have an even greater impact than if we are doing them alone. This is due to the fact that as we do them as a group that all who see can see the difference that Christ makes in our personal relationships. Others see that Christ multiplies what we do as we work together as a team.

As you help a Bible study group learn to focus on serving others, you will see the Lord greatly multiply the ministry of that group. May the Lord richly bless you as you encourage Bible study groups to work together to serve the Lord and others.

Developing Our Prayer Life in Small Group Bible Studies

In our past few topics, we have been talking about Bible study and fellowship groups (apostles' doctrine and fellowship groups). We said that the purposes of small group Bible studies can be summarized by the statement: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising from Acts 2:42-47. Today, we will be looking at the seventh purpose of Bible study and fellowship groups which is: Prayer.

In Acts 2:42, we read, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." In this verse, we see that one of the primary things that the early Christians did as they gathered together was spend time praying together. Then in Acts 3:1 we read, "Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth *hour*." This verse shows us that at least part of the early believers got together daily for prayer. Acts 4:31 tells us about the results of a group prayer meeting when the early Christians were persecuted, "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."

We see that the early church also gathered together for prayer when Herod was getting ready to kill Peter. Acts 12:5 says, "Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church." The Lord answered their prayers and when Peter was released he knew where to go to find a group of Christians praying together. Acts 12:13 says, "So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying." From these verses we see that the early church did not handle problems the way many people handle them today. When there was a problem, the early church held prayer meetings to ask God to solve the problem.

However, the early church did not just gather for prayer when there were problems. Instead, prayer was a key part of their life together in Christ. In fact, a look at prayer in the book of Acts will show us that the early church frequently spent time together in prayer. In fact, that church began in a prayer meeting. Acts 1:14 says, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." Acts 2:1-4 tells us what happened after ten days of prayer, "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Later, as the church grew, the apostles said that although there were many good things that the church needed to do, there were two priorities that were most important for them as the leaders of the church. Acts 6:3-4 says, "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." The apostles delegated all except two of their responsibilities to other Christians. However, as leaders they realized that there were two priorities for them and those were to be their focus. The apostles said they would:

- Give themselves continually to prayer
- Give themselves continually to the ministry of the Word

That same day the apostles also prayed as they committed seven men to the ministry of caring for the needs of the widows in Acts 6:6. Acts 6:7 tells us the results of making prayer the first priority, "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." Here we see that one of the results of having proper priorities as leaders was that the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.

As leaders, we set the example by our prayer life.

Many Christians limit their prayers to physical needs. It is important to pray for physical needs. Peter demonstrated this when he prayed for Tabitha in Acts 9:40, “But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.” However, we see that there are many other things that we should pray for as we gather together for prayer. We will mention just a few from the book of Ephesians:

- ◆ We should pray that God would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ – Eph. 1:17
- ◆ We should pray that God would enlighten the eyes of our understanding – Ephesians 1:18
- ◆ We should pray that we will know the hope of God’s calling – Ephesians 1:18
- ◆ We should pray that we will know the riches of the glory of His inheritance – Ephesians 1:18
- ◆ We should pray that we would know the exceeding greatness of His power – Ephesians 1:19
- ◆ We should pray that God will strengthen us with might in the inner man – Ephesians 3:16
- ◆ We should pray that Christ will dwell in our hearts by faith – Ephesians 3:17
- ◆ We should pray that we will be rooted and grounded in love – Ephesians 3:17
- ◆ We should pray that we will know the love of Christ that passes knowledge – Ephesians 3:18
- ◆ We should pray that we will be filled with all the fulness of God – Ephesians 3:19
- ◆ We should always pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit – Ephesians 6:18
- ◆ We should pray for boldness to speak the Word of God – Ephesians 6:18-19

One of the ways to help a group learn how to expand their prayer life is to encourage them to list the things that are mentioned in the various prayers in the New Testament. We have just illustrated that by the prayers of Paul and his requests for prayer mentioned in the book of Ephesians. Some other prayers or requests for prayer that you could discuss with the Bible study group include:

Romans 1:9-10, 10:1, 15:30-33

2 Corinthians 1:8-11, 5:20, 13:7

Philippians 1:9, 4:6

Colossians 1:9-12, 4:2-4, 12

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, 5:17, 23, 25

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, 3:1

1 Timothy 2:1-4

James 5:13-16

In addition to these verses, the Gospels and the book of Acts also list many other spiritual needs that we should include as we pray for one another. As people learn to pray for spiritual needs as well as physical needs, they will see a growing maturity both in their own spiritual life and in the lives of those for whom they are praying. That is one reason why it is so important to help Bible study groups learn to pray for one another and for others.

In Ephesians 4:15-16 we read, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 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.” In these verses, we see that Christ wants every Christian to:

- ◆ Learn to speak the truth in love
- ◆ Grow up in all things into Christ, our Head
- ◆ Learn to function as a part of a healthy body
- ◆ Be joined and knit together by what every joint supplies
- ◆ Work effectively as every Christian learns to do His share

Christ says when these things are happening the body will be building itself up in love. These things will only happen as we really learn to pray for one another and with one another.

The Lord wants every Christian to learn to pray. People learn to pray best as they observe and listen to others pray. That is illustrated for us so well in Luke 11:1 where we read, “Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, *that* one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” The disciples heard Christ pray and that caused them to want to learn to pray. As you pray in Bible study and fellowship groups, others are learning how to pray and really communicate with God. May the Lord richly bless you as you help people grow in their prayer life.

Developing Praise in Small Group Bible Studies

In our past few topics, we have been talking about Bible study and fellowship groups (apostles' doctrine and fellowship groups). We said that the purposes of small group Bible studies can be summarized by the statement: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising from Acts 2:42-47. Today, we will be looking at the eighth purpose of Bible study and fellowship groups which is: Praise.

In Acts 2:47, we read that the early church was, "Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." The very first thing that we notice about praise is that their praise was directed to God. This is important to note in the day and age in which we live because the focus in many churches today is entertaining in order to compete with the world. We need to remember that we are not in competition with the world, with other churches or with anything else. When we express our praise, that praise is to God for who He is and for what He has done.

The book of Psalms teaches us many things about expressing our praise to God. In Psalm 147:1, we see that we express praise to God through singing, "Praise the LORD! For *it is* good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, *and* praise is beautiful." However singing is not the only way that we can express our praise to God. In Psalm 150:3-5, we see that we can praise God with musical instruments, "Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals!"

Music is only one of many ways to express our praise to God. In Psalm 9:1, David said, "I will praise *You*, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works." In this verse, we see that praise must begin in the heart. Unless we have praise in our heart, our words will be meaningless. However, we also see something else about praise in this verse. David said that he would praise the Lord by telling of all of the marvelous works of God. Praise is expressed as we speak about what God has done. When we talk about God sending Christ to die for our sins, we are expressing praise to God for His provision of salvation.

We also express praise to God in prayer. This is illustrated in Psalm 67 where we have a prayer for the salvation of the people of the nations. Psalm 67:3-5 says, "Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, And govern the nations on earth. Selah. Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You." According to 2 Peter 3:9, it is not the desire of God for anyone to perish. As a result, when we pray for the salvation of others, we are expressing praise to God because prayer is focused on the desire of God for the world.

We also see that praise is an attitude as we come before God. Psalm 100:3-4 says, "Know that the LORD, He *is* God; *It is* He *who* has made us, and not we ourselves; *We are* His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, *And* into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, *and* bless His name." In these verses, we see that praise recognizes God as the provider of all. As a result, our response is an attitude that gives thanksgiving, praise and blessing to Him for who He is.

Psalm 107:8, 15, 21 and 31 all say exactly the same thing. Each of those verses tell us, "Oh, that *men* would give thanks to the LORD *for* His goodness, *And for* His wonderful works to the children of men!" In these four verses we see why we should give praise to the Lord. We are to:

- Give thanks for His goodness
- Give thanks for His wonderful works

In Bible studies we can help those in the Bible study to develop an attitude that should be present in their lives throughout the day and not just when they are in Bible study. Psalm 113:1-3 says, "Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, Praise the name of the LORD! Blessed be the name of the LORD From this time forth and forevermore! From the rising of the sun to its going down The LORD's name *is* to be praised." In these verses, we see that our goal in helping people learn to praise the Lord is to see them begin to understand that they can praise the Lord throughout the day. This includes both the good times and the difficult times. In Acts 16:25, we see what Paul and Silas did when they were put in prison in the stocks after they had been beaten, "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."

Psalm 145 teaches us that people of all ages can praise the Lord together. Psalm 145:3-4 says, "Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness *is* unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, And shall declare Your mighty acts." In these verse we see that praise expresses the greatness of the Lord. However, we all see that the various generations are expressing praise to God together. Today, we live in a world that has many homes where children are lacking one or both parents. As a result, in the world, children are often not learning to relate to the older generations and the adults are not learning to relate to children. Here, we see that when praise to God is placed in its proper place, it will bring the generations together.

Psalm 147 tells us many times to express praise to the Lord. However, right in the middle of these expressions of praise is a very key statement. Psalm 147:3 says, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." Here we see that praise to God causes healing to those wounds that a person may have in their spirit. Proverbs 17:22 says, "A merry heart does good like a medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones." As Christians gather together and give praise to God, the Lord uses these times to bring healing to the inner spirit. Praise to God helps us to focus on the One who heals instead of focusing on the hurts caused by people.

Individual and group praise have a powerful impact on the lives of those who are giving praise to God. One of the things that praise does is begin to develop a thankful attitude in our hearts. Before we became a Christian, our spirit caused us to be negative and critical because our human spirit was controlled by fear, guilt and shame (Genesis 3:9). When we become Christians, that does not automatically cause us to become thankful. However, as we give praise to God for who He is and for what He has done in providing salvation and all of its benefits, we start to become thankful. Ephesians 5:20 says, "Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." In this verse, we see that:

- * We are to give thanks at all times – always
- * We are to give thanks for all things – both the good and the bad
- * We are to give thanks to the Father – He is the source of all good things
- * We are to give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – He is the One who brought us into a relationship with God when we placed our trust in Christ

As Bible study groups learn to praise God together for who He is and what He is done, that attitude will begin to carry over into the daily lives of those who are in the Bible study. That will develop a thankful attitude rather than a negative and critical attitude. Philippians 4:6-7 tells us, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." As we bring our requests to God with thanksgiving, God says that:

- ◆ We will experience the peace of God
- ◆ We will realize that the peace of God is far beyond our understanding
- ◆ We will see that the peace of God guards our hearts
- ◆ We will see that the peace of God guards our minds

The Lord wants every Christian to experience His peace. That peace will only happen as Christians learn to praise the Lord and become thankful. May the Lord richly bless you as you help Bible study groups learn to praise the Lord.