

10. Transforming Lives Through Outreach

In our last two topics, we said that our goal, in developing a church structure, is to develop a structure that will transform the life and thinking of each person. We saw that was the goal of the early church, from the day that it began, in Acts 2. New believers continually began to meet in small groups to begin that life transformation. Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” In Acts 2:41-47, we saw that those small groups focused on at least eight things. Those can be summarized by saying that those small groups were FLOCKS that were praying and praising. FLOCKS stands for:

F - fellowship

L - leadership development

O - outreach

C - caring

K - knowledge

S - service

Today, we will look at the Biblical principles that apply to help transform each person in the group and equip them for outreach to those who are not Christians. Here, we see that we follow the example of the way Christ trained the disciples to become fishers of men. When a person becomes a new Christian, I give the person the diagram entitled “Love Motivates” (see diagrams www.sveq.org). That diagram immediately helps the new Christian realize that he can begin praying for the salvation of his relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other acquaintances. In a follow-up Bible study group, give a copy of this diagram to each person in the group.

As the group spends time in prayer each time they meet, begin to pray for the salvation of these relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other acquaintances. In addition, begin taking those in the Bible study group, in teams of two or three, to visit the homes of those they are personally praying for. Christ said, in Matthew 4:19, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” At least three things happen as you take these teams with you.

First, you are taking the team to share the Gospel with a person or family you have already been praying for as a group. This prayer should include praying that the Lord will prepare and open the hearts of those you are praying for. Acts 16:18 says that the Lord opened the heart of Lydia. When we pray, and ask the Lord to open hearts, He will be preparing them even before we share the Gospel with them. In Ephesians 6:19, we see that Paul gives us an example of at least one other thing to include in our prayer for others. That verse says, “Pray...for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.” We need to help the entire group pray for boldness as we go as teams to share the Gospel.

Second, take the team to visit the people that are on one of their prayer lists. Since you are visiting a relative, friend, or co-worker of one of the team, that member of the team already has a relationship with the person, or people, you are going to visit. That person is able to introduce the other team members as friends, so the whole team will immediately have a relationship with the

person, or family, who is not a Christian. This often saves many weeks or months spent in building relationships before you even have the opportunity to share the Gospel. Since your goal, at this point, is to show the team how to become fishers of men (lead people to Christ), you want to start with people they know. Later on, you can show them how to make contacts with strangers, people of other cultures, and people of other languages.

Third, you are showing the members of the team what to share and how to share it. As you pray before you make each visit, you are showing them the importance of praying for the Lord to open the opportunity to share the Gospel with relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other acquaintances. I often read John 16:8-11 and explain that we are learning how to work with the Holy Spirit as we visit their relatives or friends. I point out that the Holy Spirit convinces people of the sin of unbelief. The Holy Spirit convinces people of the fact that Jesus Christ is the Righteous One who could pay the penalty for sin. The Holy Spirit convinces people of the fact that, because of the death and resurrection of Christ, Satan has already been judged and those who continue to follow him will share in his judgment. I point out that as we share Scripture, the Holy Spirit speaks and convicts people from those Scriptures because the Word is living and powerful.

Since each person in the Bible study usually has several relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other acquaintances who are not Christians, this will provide you with many opportunities, over the next several months, to show each one in the Bible study what to share and how to share it. In fact, you will probably have the opportunity to visit most people several times, because most people will have many questions they need answered before they are ready to become Christians. This allows the team members to see how you answer those questions from Scripture. The goal is to help each one in the Bible study learn to share the Gospel with others as they watch you share the Gospel with their network of contacts.

A second way you show those in the Bible study how to do outreach is to show them how to do outreach in their own homes. Acts 2:46 says, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” One thing that we see in this verse was that these Bible studies were being held in the homes of the various people and included Bible study and communion. They went to their various houses and also ate meals together. This can be a very important key in evangelism if some of the members of the family are not yet Christians. Through the years, I have had many young people, and other family members, tell me that they listened to the Bible study from their room, even though they did not come and sit with the group for the Bible study.

We see that the fact the Christians gathered in homes for Bible study and communion had a powerful impact on the families of those who had become Christians. The next verse, Acts 2:47 says, “Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Here, we see that the Lord was adding extended family members to the church every day, because family members were becoming Christians as a result of those Bible studies being held in their homes.

Cornelius also shows us another way to use these home Bible studies to reach family and friends

for Christ. Acts 10:24 says, “And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.” Cornelius had not even put his trust in Christ, but was already inviting his friends to come to his house to hear how to become followers of Christ. In the same way, new Christians can often invite family, friends, or co-workers to their home for a Bible study, even though they do not yet know how to explain the Gospel themselves.

In fact, this was very common in the ministry of Christ. As soon as Andrew met Christ, he introduced his brother to Christ. John 1:41-42a says, “He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus...” Philip brought his friend Nathanael to Christ. John 1:45-46 says, “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ And Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’”

Matthew showed how he used his house to introduce his co-workers to Christ immediately after he followed Christ. Matthew 9:9-10 says, “As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him. Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.” When Christ visited the home of Peter and Andrew, Mark 1:33 says, “And the whole city was gathered together at the door.” In many cultures, we see that extended members of a family may live in the same house. Christ shared with the extended family, and the entire town, by going to the house of Peter and Andrew.

Our goal is to equip every Christian in the Bible study by showing them what to share and how to share the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. We see that we can train the Bible study members how to share the Gospel most effectively as we share in their homes and the homes of their relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other acquaintances. By doing this in teams, you will have the opportunity to show several people in the Bible study each time you take a team with you to visit their network of contacts. In some cases, as people come to Christ, the contact will be ready to start a Bible study with the new Christian. In other cases, the new Christian can become a part of the Bible study group you are leading.

What a privilege it is to become a part of the team the Lord uses to transform lives. Those in the Bible study will never be the same once they see how the Lord has used them to help reach people, within their network of relatives and friends, for Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you develop those in a Bible study so that they become reproducing Christians who are leading others to Christ.