

12. Transforming Lives Through Knowledge

In our last four 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 to grow in their knowledge of the Word of God and in their knowledge of Christ. Many times, when people think of growth in knowledge, they only think in terms of helping people learn the Word of God. However, that is only a part of growth in knowledge. People learn in three stages. First, they gain knowledge. Second, they gain understanding. Third, they apply what they have learned and understood to their own lives. However, a second area of growth in knowledge is described in 2 Peter 3:18. That verse 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 we are to help people grow in their knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. That will be the focus of the second part of this topic.

A small group Bible study is an ideal place to help people grow in their knowledge of the Word of God, because it provides a place where they can get their questions answered. In a large Bible study, or church service, people having questions or lacking understanding cannot ask their questions. As a result, they either forget their questions, or they do not know where to get their questions answered. Acts 2:41-47 shows that the early church focused on helping new believers get their questions answered. In Acts 2:42, they met in small groups for Bible study and fellowship. In Acts 2:46, they met both in the temple and from house-to-house. As they met together in homes, they were able to ask their questions and get them answered.

Even in the temple, they were able to get their questions answered. Around the outside of the temple court was a large covered porch. This porch went all the way around the outer court of the temple and was supported by fifteen hundred pillars. When the lame man was healed, in Acts 3, we see that many people quickly gathered in Solomon's Porch. That porch stretched the entire length of the east side of the temple court, so, it was about forty-five feet wide and twelve hundred feet long. It would have been supported by about four hundred of the fifteen hundred pillars. Groups of Christians gathered near different pillars every day, at the time of the morning sacrifice

and the evening sacrifice, for prayer. Most people probably had a favorite pillar where they gathered. In addition to prayer, this also provided a place for discussion, and an opportunity to get questions answered by other Christians.

Sermons provide an opportunity to grow in our knowledge of the Word of God. However, it is in small group that people get their questions answered. It is as Christians get their questions answered that they grow in their understanding of the Word of God. This understanding is essential before most people can begin to apply the Word of God to their daily living. As a small group discusses a passage together, each member of the group, including the one leading the group, grows in understanding. Then, the group can discuss together how they can apply what they are learning to their daily lives. The application of the Word of God to daily living is what results in life transformation.

This means that, in a small group Bible study, we want to help people learn to study the Bible until they understand. 2 Timothy 2:15 says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Since our goal is to help everyone in the Bible study learn to lead a Bible study, we want each one to understand how to rightly divide the truth, not just pick verses out of context. That means they must be shown how to study, and view each verse within the context of the entire chapter and of the entire book. If you are working with someone who has never led a Bible study before, seven key words to give them to develop good discussion questions are: Who, What, Where, When, Why, How, and Explain.

In addition to helping people grow in their knowledge, understanding, and application of the Word of God, we also want to help each one in the Bible study grow in their knowledge of Christ. There is a great difference between knowing what the Bible says about Christ, and knowing Christ. You can know about any historical person by reading a book about that person. However, that does not mean that you know the person. In Philippians 3:10 Paul said, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” Here, we see that Paul wanted to know Christ in four ways.

First, Paul wanted to really know Christ. We get to know a person as we talk to that person and they talk to us. We get to really know Christ as we talk to Him in prayer and ask Him to reveal Himself to us. Then, we need to listen as the Lord speaks to us through His Word. Samuel gives us an example of what it means to have the Lord speak to us, and reveal Himself to us, through His Word. 1 Samuel 3:7-10 says, “(Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him.) And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. Then he arose and went to Eli, and said, ‘Here I am, for you did call me.’ Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, ‘Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, “Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.”’ So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ And Samuel answered, ‘Speak, for Your servant hears.’”

We also need to pray and ask Christ to reveal Himself to us. He will do so through the Word of

God. In 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, we read, “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” Here, we see that the entire Trinity gets involved in helping us get to know Christ. The Father prepared things for us to learn to get to know Christ. The Father then reveals them to us through His Spirit. The Spirit helps us to know Christ as the Spirit teaches us.

The second thing Paul wanted to know, as he got to know Christ, was the power of His resurrection. Paul realized that he could not serve the Lord in his own strength. Romans 7:14-25 gives a summary of what happens when a Christian tries to serve the Lord in his own strength. Romans 7:24 summarizes the uselessness of depending on our own strength, when it says: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” In contrast, Paul understood what Christ would do through his life, as he yielded himself to Christ. Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 3:10 shows that Paul understood that he needed to get to know Christ even better, so that he understood the full power of the resurrection.

The third thing Paul wanted to know, as he got to know Christ, was the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. It is when we are suffering, for the sake of Christ, that our understanding of Christ grows in depth. That is why it is important to help every future Bible study leader realize that he or she will experience suffering, because that is how Christ develops the depth of our fellowship with Him. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” We see, in Acts 14:22, that Paul prepared the disciples by telling them, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

Fourth, Paul wanted to be conformed to the death of Christ. Paul understood that to really know Christ, he had to die to his own desires and seek the will of God in every area of his life. Paul said, in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” In the same way, we want to help every Bible study leader learn to live by faith. As Bible study leaders get to know Christ in these four ways, their lives will become examples that others can follow. That should be our goal in our own life, and that should also be the goal we have for each person in a Bible study group. As they grow in their relationship with Christ, they will become effective leaders of others.

God has given us a great privilege to help new Christians grow and become mature reproducing Christians. This will only happen as we invest our lives in them. However, each Christian who becomes a mature reproducing Christian will multiply our ministry. May the Lord richly bless you as you show others how to become mature reproducing Christians.