

7. Jesus Showed How to Develop Spiritual Life – Part 2

In our last topic, we saw that John wrote the books he wrote nearly sixty years after Christ returned to heaven. The very first thing he wrote about, in 1 John, was the need for fellowship with the Father and with Christ. The second thing John wrote about was the need to have fellowship with one another in the body of Christ. 1 John 1:7 says, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” A key part in the development of the spiritual life of new Christians is to learn how to enjoy fellowship with other Christians in the body of Christ. As a result, we want to show developing spiritual leaders how to help new Christians learn to develop their fellowship with other Christians.

In Acts 2:41-42, we read, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Here, we see that the apostles helped the new Christians learn to focus on four key priorities to develop their spiritual life. In this verse, we see that Bible study and fellowship are placed together because Bible study should include fellowship, and times of fellowship should include sharing what the Lord is teaching us from His Word.

The question this immediately raises is “How could the apostles immediately get three thousand new Christians all involved in Bible studies and fellowship?” This takes us back to the way Christ developed His disciples and the apostles. Throughout the first half of His ministry, Christ was continually inviting people to become His disciples. About a year after Christ met His first disciples, in John 1, Christ invited some of those disciples to spend more time with Him, so He could begin to train them for ministry. In Mark 1:14-20, Christ invited the four fishermen, who had already gone many places with Him, to come with Him and learn how to become fishers of men. In Mark 2:14, Christ said to Matthew, “Follow Me.”

Then, about six to nine months later, 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 6:12-13 records this same event, but describes it this way, “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles.” The twelve apostles were chosen from the larger group of disciples to be witnesses of the resurrection – Acts 1:21-22.

Here, we see that there was a larger group of disciples, but only twelve of them were chosen to be apostles. This larger group had already been traveling various places with Christ during that first year (to a wedding in Cana – John 2:1-12, to the Passover in Jerusalem – John 2:13-25, to ministry in Judea – John 3:22, 4:1-3, to ministry in Galilee – John 4:4-42). In Luke 9:1-10, Christ sent out the Twelve two-by-two to give them experience in ministry. In Luke 10:1-12, 17, and 23, we see that Christ sent out the seventy two-by-two to give part of this larger group of disciples experience in ministry. In Acts 1:15, we see that this larger group of disciples included one hundred and

twenty people.

Christ gave the definition of a disciple in Matthew 13:52, where we read: “Then He said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.’” The word that is translated “instructed” is the same word Christ used in the Great Commission, in Matthew 28:19-20, where it is the command to “Make Disciples”. Matthew 13:52 says that a disciple:

- has been instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven
- is the head of spiritual household
- has a treasure (the Word or God, or as it is called in Acts 2:42, “the apostles’ doctrine”)
- is able to bring out of that treasure things that are new – continuing to learn
- is able to bring out of that treasure things that are old – teach the basics of Christianity

Christ had developed both the apostles and the larger group of disciples the same way. He had taken them with Him as He ministered – Luke 8:1-3. He had explained His parables to His disciples. Luke 8:9-10 says, “Then His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘What does this parable mean?’ And He said, ‘To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’” The context makes it clear that Christ had a larger group of disciples, than just the twelve, with Him at this time. As we have already mentioned, Christ later sent out the seventy in teams of two.

This background helps us to answer the question mentioned earlier, “How could the apostles immediately get three thousand new Christians all involved in Bible study and fellowship?” By Christ’s definition, in Matthew 13:52, the one hundred and twenty disciples were equipped to lead a spiritual household and teach the basics of Christianity. This meant that each disciple would have only had to lead two Bible study groups of twelve or thirteen and all three thousand of the new Christians would have been in a Bible study and fellowship group.

When the disciples followed Christ, one of the things they had to learn was how to resolve conflicts between themselves. We see how two of the disciples had caused one of these conflicts in Matthew 20. Matthew 20:20-21 and 24 describes this conflict, “Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, ‘What do you wish?’ She said to Him, ‘Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom’... ²⁴And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.” This could have made it very difficult for the disciples to learn to work as a team.

Christ handled this conflict by teaching the disciples the nature of spiritual leadership. Matthew 20:25-28 says, “But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’” He taught the disciples to

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apply Biblical principles to their conflicts. Then, He showed them how to apply this Biblical principle by His own death on the cross.

Christ also let the disciples hear His prayer as He prayed both for them and also for us. John 17:20-23 says, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” By His example, Christ showed the importance of praying for oneness in the body of Christ. Because Christ gave the disciples many examples of how to handle conflict in the church, they learned to solve conflicts.

Acts 6:1-4 gives an example of how the apostles showed all of the believers how to resolve a conflict. Those verses say, “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. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 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 focused on Biblical principles and Biblical priorities. The same thing happened in Acts 15.

Christ also showed, by His example, the importance of learning to love one another. He demonstrated it throughout His ministry so that He was able to say in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” The disciples learned, from the example of Christ, that Christians can solve conflicts in love as they fellowship together.

Acts 2:44-47 show that the disciples taught the same things to the new believers by example. Those verses say, “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. 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.” Fellowship with the body became a key in the development of the new Christians.

The Lord will use your ministry as you help developing leaders learn to help new Christians learn to fellowship with other Christians. May the Lord richly bless you as you help Christians learn to fellowship with one another.