

2. Developing Structure to Help New Christians Grow – Part 2

In our last topic, we saw that the disciples had been shown how to develop the basic structure to help new Christians grow. Christ had chosen the twelve to be with Him, so their thoughts and attitudes could be transformed by the love of Christ and the things He taught them. As the disciples spent time with Christ, they saw that He loved them, and they learned what He taught them. As Christ approached His death, He gave them a new commandment. John 13:34-35 says, “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.”

We saw, in our last topic, that a disciple is one who has become the head of a spiritual household. A head of a spiritual household is a Christian who is leading a small group of Christians, where they are learning to become like Christ, because they are being shown how to love and learning the things that Christ taught. It is so important that new churches are started with teams, since it takes time for new Christians to develop and become the head of a spiritual family. Notice how Paul helped new Christians grow as he, and those with him, started churches.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:1, we read, “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Then, in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12, we read, “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”

In these verses, we see that Paul, Silas, and Timothy worked as a team to help these new Christians grow. They provided three things to help these new Christians grow, so they would be equipped to lead small groups when Paul, Silas, and Timothy moved on to other cities. Paul, Silas, and Timothy provided the love of a nursing mother, the example of a godly father, and shared the teachings of Christ, so these new Christians would be able to walk to please God. In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Paul summarized their source of strength. That verse says, “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.” They provided love and example, and they taught in the power of the Holy Spirit. The following verses go on to tell how these things transformed the lives of the Thessalonians.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:6, we read, “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.” We see that the first key principle Paul mentioned, that helped the Thessalonians learn to become leaders of others, was that they became followers of them and of the Lord. People learn to follow the Lord by following the Lord’s people.

Growing Christian Leaders Series – Developing Effective Church Organization 2. “Developing Structure to Help New Christians Grow – Part 2”

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Paul, Silas, and Timothy took the new Christians with them as they ministered to others. As the new Christians went with the three, they learned the Word, so they knew what to teach. By watching the example of the three, they knew how to teach, and they learned how to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit. Those are the three things we teach potential small group leaders as we take them with us.

We see the results in the following verses. We see that the Thessalonian Christians became an example for others to follow. 1 Thessalonians 1:7 says, “so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.” In addition to becoming an example to the people in the city of Thessalonica, they became an example to people throughout the entire region of Macedonia (today, that area is Northern Greece) and Achaia (today, that area is southern Greece). The Thessalonians had learned, by the example of Paul, Silas, and Timothy, and so, they showed others, by their example, the transformation that Christ made in their lives.

The Thessalonians also learned what to share and how to share the teachings of Christ. 1 Thessalonians 1:8 says, “For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.” The Thessalonians shared the teachings of Christ wherever they went. Here, we see why it is so important to take people with you and show them how to share the Word of God, not just tell them to share the Word. People learn to do what they have been shown how to do by example.

The Thessalonians showed the difference Christ made in their lives. 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 says, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” Here, we see the impact of a changed life. People everywhere talked about the fact that the Christians had turned to God. They spoke of the fact that they had also turned from idols. Then, they talked about the fact that the Christians from Thessalonica were serving the living and true God and waiting for Christ to return. Here, we see the powerful impact of example.

One of the key things, in the development of a church, is when the people of the area begin talking and saying positive things about the people who are becoming Christians, because of the changes that are happening in their lives. Although the Jewish religious leaders were very upset about the ministry of the early believers in Jerusalem, they admitted that everyone was talking about what was happening. Acts 5:28 reads, “Saying, ‘Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!’” Everyone in Jerusalem talked about the words and changes that were happening in the lives of the new believers.

The same thing had happened in Thessalonica. In the verses mentioned above, we see that the people throughout the region talked about the changes in the lives of those who had become Christians in Thessalonica. The people saw differences in their lives, because the Christians were no longer worshiping idols. Instead of talking about the idols, they talked about the true and living

God. The fact that Paul, Silas, and Timothy had spent much time with them had equipped them to explain to others the changes that were happening in their lives. Even though Paul, Silas, and Timothy had left, the new Christians continued to meet together and share together, so they could become better equipped to share what the Lord had done for them. Then, they went out and shared that message wherever they went.

Paul gave some other keys to the development of the early Christians, in Thessalonica, in chapter five. 1 Thessalonians 5:11-13 says, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.” In these verses, we see that Paul, Silas, and Timothy had helped the believers, in Thessalonica, develop a basic structure for growth. They had appointed leaders who were leading the church and taking the responsibility for oversight of the church.

First, we see that the Christians got together in small groups. Paul said he was thankful to hear that they were comforting and encouraging each other as they gathered together. They also built each other up as they shared the things they had learned from Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Many times, in a group, one person will remind the others in the group of some of the things that others had forgotten. Then, others will share what they remember, and together, they teach one another. This especially happens when small groups of Christians get together and discuss the things they have learned. The Holy Spirit uses these discussions to teach new things to all who are involved.

Second, we see that leaders had been appointed to lead these new Christians. Although these leaders were new Christians themselves, Paul, and the team, had shown them the basics of leading small groups of Christians to help them grow. We see that those new leaders labored among the other Christians. The word that is translated “labor” is another form of the word used in 1 Thessalonians 2:9, where Paul spoke of how he and the team had labored among the Thessalonians. Paul, and the team, had taken potential leaders with them and shown them how to labor among the new Christians to help them grow. As a result, those new leaders also labored among other Christians to help them continue to grow. Paul encouraged the Christians to highly respect those new leaders and to also have peace among themselves.

New spiritual leaders grow quickly, in their own spiritual lives, as they help other Christians grow. The Lord will help you develop new leaders as you take growing Christians with you and show them how to help others grow. May the Lord richly bless you as you help Christians develop and become leaders of small groups of other Christians.