

20. Developing Structure to Develop Spiritual Leadership Teams

Timothy became a part of the spiritual leadership team Paul developed. 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 that Timothy, and every other spiritual leader, needed at least two different kinds of spiritual relationships. Every Timothy needs one or more very mature Christian, like Paul, who helps them to continue to grow and mature. At the same time, they need a group of faithful men they are continuing to help grow and mature in their spiritual lives.

However, this also raises a different question. Who helps the people like Paul to continue to grow and mature? Who provides them with encouragement when they are faced with difficult times? That is an important key to understand. In John 15:15-16, Christ told the eleven, “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” Christ chose the eleven to become a part of His leadership team and said that He had shared with them all that the Father shared with Him. He elevated them from servants to friends. Later, in John 20:17, Christ called them friends. Then, in John, 20:21 we read, “So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” Christ shared His plans and then made them full partners in ministry.

In fact, Christ even asked three of the disciples to minister to Him. Matthew 26:37-38 says, “And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.’” Even though they failed that night, Christ recommissioned them a few days later. John 21:15-17 says, “So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Feed My lambs.’ He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Tend My sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep.’” Christ recognized them as full partners and left them to carry on His ministry when He returned to heaven.

Paul did the same thing. He led people to Christ, helped them grow in godly character, taught them, and showed them how to minister with him. Then, he gave them opportunities to minister with him and to him. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, Paul said he was sending his spiritual son, Timothy, to remind them of his actions, so they could imitate his life. Paul described Timothy as his faithful and beloved son in the Lord. This was not talking about a physical son, because Acts 16:1 says that his physical father was a Greek. Instead, it meant that Paul had taken the personal responsibility to help Timothy grow and mature in his spiritual life, and he had become part of the team that ministered with Paul, and to Paul, as they served the Lord together.

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Paul also spoke of another spiritual son, in 2 Corinthians 7:5-6. “For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.” Paul was going through a difficult time, and Titus ministered to him. We see that Titus and Timothy had become adult spiritual sons who ministered with Paul, and to Paul. This should be the goal of every spiritual leader. We help people grow and mature and become adult spiritual sons and a part of the leadership team. In turn, they minister with us, and to us. In this way, even individuals like Paul have a spiritual team to minister to them as they minister to others. When a team like this is developed, the team will be equipped to carry on the ministry without the ministry struggling when the Lord takes one of the leaders to heaven.

The reason for this is explained in the last part of 2 Timothy 2:2, “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.” Timothy was to help faithful men grow and mature so they could help others, just as he was helping them. The proof of the effectiveness of Paul and Timothy was the fact that these faithful men would be fully equipped to develop others, just as Paul had developed Timothy and Timothy had developed them. Every healthy church will develop a leadership training structure that develops godly leaders and equips them to develop and equip other godly leaders. This means that the leadership team of every healthy church develops a structure that will train a third generation (faithful men) and fourth generation (others also) of spiritual leadership.

Notice that it does not say that the third generation of spiritual leadership “might” be able to develop others also. Instead, it says that the third generation of spiritual leadership “will” be able to develop others also. The most important ministry of the spiritual leadership team, in any church, is to develop godly leaders who are able to develop that third and fourth generation of spiritual leaders. In our last topic, we talked about developing spiritual families. We saw that a disciple is the head of a spiritual family. If we are going to obey our commission to “Make Disciples”, we must be focused on developing that third and fourth generation of spiritual leaders.

We saw in Acts 11:25-26, that the church in Antioch had a leadership team of two – Paul and Barnabas. Then, in Acts 13:1, we see that the leadership team had grown to five. In Acts 13:2-3, the Lord sent the original two, Paul and Barnabas, out to develop other churches. An important question to ask is, “What had happened in Antioch by the time Paul and Barnabas returned?” That question is answered in Acts 15:35, where we read: “Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.” Here, we see that the leadership team of three, that had been left in Antioch, had developed many others during the years Paul and Barnabas were gone. Just like the church in Jerusalem, the church in Antioch had developed a structure that produced reproducing spiritual leaders who were training faithful men to equip others also.

In Acts 14:23, we see that Paul, and the team with him, developed a leadership team in every church. That verse says, “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Paul made it clear that

he followed the same pattern wherever he went. 1 Corinthians 4:17 says, “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.”

In cases where Paul was forced to leave an area before he finished developing a leadership team, he would leave part of his team there to complete the ministry of developing a leadership team. Titus 1:5 says, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” However, Titus was not just to appoint men. His ministry was to help men become qualified, and then appoint them. In fact, Titus 1:6-9 give us the qualifications he was to develop in each of the men who would become a part of the leadership team in each church. Our purpose is to qualify men not disqualify them.

Since these men were going to be training the people that would be the heads of the spiritual families in each city, most of these qualifications deal with godly character. As a result, Titus was to develop godly leaders in the same way Christ and Paul developed godly leaders. He was to take men with him so they could see his godly character and learn to follow his example. At the same time, he was to teach those men, as they went with him, what to teach (Biblical principles) and how to teach what they learned (ministry by example and by word). The primary ministry of spiritual leadership is to develop godly men who will be able to reproduce themselves in the lives of others as they model godly character, discuss how to apply Biblical principles, and provide an example of how to minister to others.

In physical families, the next generation is to be fully equipped to carry on all the older generation did by the time the older generation dies. The same is true in spiritual families. In spiritual families, the godly leadership team is to fully equip the next generation of spiritual leaders, by the time the older generation dies. This actually means that the leadership team will grow and multiply its ministry as each member of the team equips a number of others to reproduce themselves.

What is your most important ministry if you are a spiritual leader? As we look at the example of Christ, the example of Paul, and the example of many others in the New Testament, we see that each of those leaders felt that their most important ministry was to develop the next generation of godly leadership by taking faithful men with them and showing them how to grow in godly character, teaching them how to teach and apply Biblical principles in their own lives and the lives of others, and showing them how to do effective ministry. May the Lord richly bless you as you make these your priorities in your spiritual life and ministry.