

11. Developing Leadership in Small Group Bible Studies

In our past few topics, we have been talking about apostles' doctrine and fellowship (small group) Bible studies. We saw in Acts 2:41-47 that those verses give us at least eight purposes for small group Bible studies. We said those could be summarized by the phrase: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising.

Fellowship

Leadership development

Outreach

Caring

Knowledge

Service

Praying

Praising

In our last topic, we discussed the topic of building relationships. That is essential if we are going to enjoy true fellowship. Today, we will be looking at the topic of leadership development in the small group Bible study.

In Exodus 18:19-21, Moses was given five priorities for effective leadership. Those verses tell us, "Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. "And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them *to be* rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens." In these verses, we see that Moses was to:

1. Pray for the people
2. Teach them the Word of God
3. Show them the way to walk
4. Show them the work to do
5. Share the work

However, in the process of sharing the work, Moses was to develop leaders of tens, leaders of fifties, leaders of hundreds, and leaders of thousands. No one will become a leader of fifties, hundreds, or thousands until he has learned how to lead a group of ten. That is why the small group Bible study is such an important key in the development of leadership.

The world has many definitions of leadership, but Christ gave the following definition of leadership in John 10:3-5, where we read: "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

In these verses, we see that a leader:

- ◆ Calls his own sheep by name
- ◆ Leads his sheep

- ◆ Goes before his sheep
- ◆ Is followed by the sheep, because they know his voice

We might use this list to give the following definition:

A leader spends time with people so that they recognize his voice. He gets to know them by name and leads them rather than driving them. The result is that people follow him because they know and trust him.

As you can see, these are the very kind of things that happen in a small group Bible study. In a small group Bible study, one of the things we want to do is help those in the Bible study learn to share in the leadership of the group so that they are learning how to lead other small group Bible studies. Some verses that we looked at when we were talking about meetings of the whole church are also very applicable to small groups. In 1 Corinthians 14:29-32, we read, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.” In these verses, we see the following:

1. Two or three may share the Word of God
2. The others are to judge – listen and give judgment whether the explanation agrees with the Word of God as a whole
3. Allow someone else to explain more clearly if needed
4. Let the original speaker listen to the explanation
5. Let each person have the opportunity to explain the Word of God at different times
6. The one who does the explaining is the one who learns the most
7. The others are encouraged as they hear the Word of God explained
8. The ones who do the explaining are to come prepared so that their spirits are prepared
9. The ones who do the explaining are to be in submission to the other people in the Bible study

People are growing in spiritual maturity as they study the Word of God and learn to explain it to the group. They are developing their leadership as they learn to explain the Word of God to others. They are also developing their leadership as they learn to show a submissive attitude toward one another. We want to help the group learn to encourage and help one another in their explanation rather than have a critical spirit. Then, they will be encouraged as they see one another growing in their understanding of the Word.

A key thing that needs to be emphasized regularly in the small group Bible study is that we are learning how to explain the Word of God to others so that we can all be obedient to 1 Peter 3:15. That verse tells us, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” This verse tells us that every Christian is to become equipped to be ready to share the Word of God with those who are not yet Christians in answer to their questions. This is an ideal time to help people realize that the Lord wants them to be equipped to share the Gospel with relatives (John 1:41-42), friends (John 1:43-46), co-workers (Matthew 9:9-10), neighbors and other acquaintances (Mark 1:30-33).

As a part of the Bible study, we want to give each person a variety of experiences so that each

person is becoming equipped to lead a Bible study in the future. In our personal families, we expect our children to grow and become adults. Once they are married, we begin to look forward to enjoying grandchildren. The same should be true in the spiritual family. We are helping each person in the Bible study grow and become mature so that each one can take the leadership of a Bible study in the future. That is the process of helping them learn to become leaders of groups of ten.

When David was made the king of Israel, 1 Chronicles 12:32 tells us, “the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...” One of the characteristics of effective leaders is that they understand the times and know what to do. Helping future leaders begin to understand the times in which we live and know what we need to do in these times is a key part of helping them develop as effective leaders. Paul reviewed, for the leaders in the church of Ephesus, what he had done to help them understand the times so they knew what to do. Acts 20:20-21 says, “how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” In these verses, we see that Paul had:

- Shared all that was helpful
- Patiently explained things until they were clearly understood
- Taught them publicly
- Taught them from house to house (on the job training)
- Taught them how to explain repentance to both the Jews and the Gentiles
- Taught them how to explain true faith both to Jews and Gentiles

As we take developing leaders with us as we minister, they are learning where people are hurting and are being shown how to minister to those people. This is part of the process of helping developing leaders to understand the times and know what to do.

One final thing we want to help developing leaders learn is the importance of yielding to the Lord so that the things that we do are done in the Lord’s strength, not our own. Christ told the disciples, in John 15:5, “Without me you can do nothing.” An effective leader is one who is learning to depend on the Lord’s strength, not his own.

The Lord uses Bible study and fellowship groups to develop spiritually mature leaders, as those in the group learn the Word of God and learn to depend on the strength that the Lord provides to share the Word with others. May the Lord richly bless you as you use Bible study and fellowship groups to develop godly leadership.