

## 12. Developing Outreach in Small Group Bible Studies

In our past few topics, we have been talking about Bible study and fellowship groups (apostles' doctrine and fellowship groups). We said that the purpose of small group Bible studies can be summarized by the statement: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising from Acts 2:42-47. Today, we will be looking at the third purpose of Bible study and fellowship groups which is: Outreach.

In Acts 2:46-47, we read, "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." In these verses, we see several things that are keys in outreach. These include:

1. They were continuing daily in the temple – Acts 3:1 tells us that this happened at the hour of prayer so this points out that the first key to outreach is daily prayer – Do you have a list of people for whose salvation you pray every day?
2. They were breaking bread from house-to-house – The early believers were having communion in their homes which provided ideal opportunities to share the Gospel with extended family members that were not yet Christians.
3. They were eating their food with gladness and simplicity of heart – The early believers ate together which provided opportunities for other family members and friends to see how Christians related to one another in love.
4. They were praising God – The early believers were giving praise to God for what He was doing in their lives.
5. They were having favor with all the people – The people around them could see that the grace of God was working in their lives.
6. The Lord is the One who brought results – The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

In these verses, we see some of the results of Bible study and fellowship meetings. Since most of these were probably held in homes, they became ideal places of outreach to entire households as those in the family who were not yet Christians saw the changed lives of Christians and heard about the death and resurrection of Christ. (In the various church plants and churches that I work with that have home Bible studies, those churches will consistently have more non-Christians in the home Bible studies than they will have in the Sunday morning services of the church.)

One of the things you quickly see about the ministry of Paul, and the team that traveled with him, is that they always began by sharing the Gospel in the synagogue. However, their stay in the synagogue was usually very short as the Jews kicked them out of the synagogues. In Antioch of Pisidia, this happened after the second week. (Acts 13:42-47) In Iconium, this happened in a very short time. (Acts 14:2) In Lystra and Derbe, the synagogue is not even mentioned. In Philippi, they did not even have a synagogue. In Thessalonica, it happened after three weeks. (Acts 17:2-6) In Berea, it happened after a short time. (Acts 17:10-14) In Athens, Paul only stayed a short time. (Acts 17:16-17, 18:1) In Corinth, it happened after only a few weeks. (Acts 18:4-7) And, in Ephesus, they were forced out of the synagogue after three months. (Acts 19:8-9)

Once Paul and the other disciples were forced out of the synagogues, all outreach had to occur in homes, schools (Acts 19:9), marketplaces (Acts 17:17), and other public places. However, the fact that the Christians no longer had access to the synagogues (and there were no church buildings for three hundred years) did not stop or even slow down outreach. This is illustrated in both Corinth and Ephesus.

In Acts 18:6-11, we read, “But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook *his* garments and said to them, ‘Your blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I *am* clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain *man* named Justus, *one* who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.’ And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” In these verses, we see that:

- The Jews quickly hardened their hearts
- Paul began a Bible study in the house of a man named Justus
- The Lord later saved the ruler of the synagogue and his entire household
- The Lord called many others in Corinth to salvation
- Paul continued teaching Bible studies in the homes for the next eighteen months

The same pattern is clearly shown by Acts 19:9-10, where we read: “But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.” In these verses, we see that:

- ◆ The Jews in the synagogue quickly hardened their hearts
- ◆ The disciples moved from the synagogue to a school for Bible study
- ◆ The disciples had a daily Bible discussion in that school (The Greek society would take a break for a couple of hours in the middle of the day because of the heat, so that meant the school was available.)
- ◆ This daily Bible study lasted for a period of two years
- ◆ Those in this Bible study were taking the Gospel throughout Asia (a region nearly two hundred miles by two hundred miles)
- ◆ The result was that all who were in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks

Paul summarized his ministry in Ephesus, and the surrounding area of Asia, in Acts 20:19-21 and 27, where we read: “Serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; 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. ...<sup>27</sup>For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.” In these verses, we see that Paul:

- Provided an example by his life
- Taught all that was helpful

- Taught the people publicly
- Taught the people house to house
- Shared the message of repentance and faith as he taught both Jews and Greeks
- Declared the whole counsel of God

One of the key things that we see about outreach in these passages is that all of the Bible studies, whether they were held in public or in small group Bible studies in homes included the message of repentance and faith because there were people present who were not yet Christians. People who are not Christians yet and who are seeking God to learn more about Christ will come to the homes of those who are Christians.

This is illustrated by Peter and the team with him when they taught the Word of God in the home of Cornelius. In Acts 10:24, 44-45, we read, “And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. ...<sup>44</sup>While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.” In these verses, we see that:

- Cornelius had invited his relatives to come and hear the Gospel in his house
- Cornelius had invited his close friends to come and hear the Gospel in his house
- The Lord saved the entire group in the home
- The other Christians with Peter were amazed
- The other Christians thought the Gospel was only for the Jews (How many times do Christians feel that the Gospel is only for their own culture and refuse to go to the homes of other cultures to have Bible studies that include sharing the Gospel?)

Home Bible studies can be a key way to reach out to the extended family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other acquaintances of those who are already Christians. Encourage those in a home Bible study to begin praying for family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other acquaintances who are not yet Christians. (Before you have closing prayer as a Bible study group, you might set an empty chair out and encourage each one to pray specifically for a non-Christian relative or friend that they can bring with them to the next Bible study to fill that chair). Although they might never come to a church building, many people will come to the home of a family member, friend, co-worker, or other acquaintance to learn more about Christ.

May the Lord richly bless you as you help those in Bible studies learn to reach out to those they already know. The Lord wants to work through you to make an impact, for Christ, on the world around you.