

15. Developing Service 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 sixth purpose of Bible study and fellowship groups which is: Service.

In 1 Peter 4:10, we read, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." In this verse, we see several important principles about our spiritual service. We see that:

- Each of us has received one or more spiritual gifts
- Each of us is to use our spiritual gift or gifts to serve one another
- Each of us is to be a good steward of what God has given us by His grace

The small group Bible study provides an ideal place to learn how to use our spiritual gifts to serve one another.

Then, in Galatians 5:13 we read, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." In this verse, we see that:

- * We have been called to liberty
- * We are not to use that liberty to satisfy the evil desires of the flesh
- * We are to use that liberty to serve one another in love

In this verse, we see why the small group is a key in the development of our spiritual life and service to one another. Because we have been set free by Christ, we now have a desire to live to please Christ. This freedom also means that we are now free to live to please the Lord, because the Holy Spirit gives us His power as we yield to Him. We can see the changes that happen because of our spiritual life and learning to depend on the Holy Spirit in the following summary:

Before becoming a Christian, we were spiritually dead – Ephesians 2:1:

Desire – we had no desire to please Christ

Power – we had no power to please Christ

Once we become a Christian, we have been made spiritually alive – Ephesians 2:1:

Desire – we now have a desire to please Christ – Romans 7:19

Power – we have no power if we depend on our own strength – John 15:5

Once we realize we can serve Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit as we yield to Him:

Desire – we now have a desire to please Christ – 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

Power – we now have the power to serve Christ as we yield to Him – Philippians 4:13

As we learn to yield to the Holy Spirit, instead of depending on our own strength, we are able to serve one another in love. Paul spoke of this mutual service that happened as Paul and Timothy served the Lord together. Philippians 2:22 says, "But you know his proven character, that as a son

with *his* father he served with me in the gospel.” Here, we see that Paul and Timothy worked together as a spiritual father and spiritual son team. This verse mentions two things that happened in the life of Timothy as they served the Lord together:

- Timothy developed proven character.
- Timothy learned to serve together with Paul in the Gospel.

This verse shows us that one area in which we serve one another is by becoming a spiritual parent to a younger Christian. Paul took Timothy with him as he traveled to various places serving the Lord. Paul was able to help Timothy grow in godly character and effective ministry. At the same time, Timothy was able to help Paul with many things, such as: preparing meals; doing various things a younger man who has more physical strength is able to help with (like helping to carry their things as they traveled). Both men were able to help each other in many ways as they served the Lord together.

In a Bible study group, those attending the Bible study are also able to serve each other. Sometimes, this may involve physical service while at other times it may involve spiritual service. In addition, those in the Bible study group can work together to serve others. James 1:27 describes several ways that a group can minister as a team, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” Here, we see that a group can work as a team to:

- Help children who have lost one or both parents deal with their pressures
- Help widows deal with the things causing pressure and distress to them
- Help provide godly examples for both the children and widows to follow

1 Thessalonians 5:14 describes several ways that a Bible study group can help and encourage one another as well as other Christians. That verse says, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.” In this verse, we see that the group can work together to:

- Warn the unruly (“the unruly” was the word that the Greeks used to describe those who did not show up for work – we would call them the lazy)
- Comfort the fainthearted (encourage those who are easily discouraged)
- Uphold the weak (hold up and support those who are without strength)
- Be patient with all (provide an example of patience even when experiencing trouble and misfortune)

These verses all show us that service is reaching out to others in love so that others can see the love of Christ. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Then, Galatians 6:10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” In this verse, we see that:

- ◆ We are to look for opportunities to do good
- ◆ We are to look for opportunities to do good to all including those who are not yet Christians (sometimes, the Lord uses our service to draw others to Himself)
- ◆ We are to especially look for opportunities to do good to other Christians

In the verses between Galatians 5:13 and 6:10, we see that Lord tells us what to avoid and how to avoid those things as we serve one another in love. We see that we are to avoid the things of the flesh and to depend on the Holy Spirit to give us the power to show this love to one another. As we look at verses 5:13-6:10, we see that:

- * We are to serve one another in love – 5:13
- * We are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves – 5:14
- * We are to walk in the Spirit – 5:16, 25
- * We are to be led by the Spirit – 5:18
- * We are to bear the fruit of the Spirit – 5:22-23
- * We are to live in the Spirit – 5:25
- * We are to restore those who are guilty of sin – 6:1
- * We are to bear one another's burdens – 6:2
- * We are to share with those who teach – 6:6
- * We are to sow to the Spirit – 6:8
- * We are not to get tired of doing good – 6:9
- * We are to do good to all – 6:10

We can do each of these things in our personal lives. However, we can also do these things as a Bible study group. When we do these things as a group, they have an even greater impact than if we are doing them alone. This is due to the fact that as we do them as a group that all who see can see the difference that Christ makes in our personal relationships. Others see that Christ multiplies what we do as we work together as a team.

As you help a Bible study group learn to focus on serving others, you will see the Lord greatly multiply the ministry of that group. May the Lord richly bless you as you encourage Bible study groups to work together to serve the Lord and others.