

3. Developing Ministry Skills Through Participation

In our last topic, we talked about the fact that Christ took the disciples with Him for about a year so they could observe what He taught and how He taught. We saw that the primary way they participated, during that first year, was by baptize others (John 4:2) who became followers of Christ. In addition to observing what Christ did and taught, something else was also happening which was even more important. As they observed the character of Christ, He was beginning to develop that same character in their lives.

We also develop character in the lives of those who spend time with us as they observe our lives. Our example of godly character is probably the most important thing they will learn from us. That is even more important than the ministry skills they will develop as they go along with us when we minister. They will become what we are, whether that is good or bad. In fact, this is one of the great weaknesses in the Christian world today. Most new Christians never get the opportunity to spend time in a variety of situations with a mature Christian.

After the disciples had spent about a year observing Christ, He gave them a second call. In Matthew 4:19, we read, “Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’” Here, we see that Christ said He would show them how to become fishers of men as they followed Him. In Mark 1:32-33, we see that one of the first ways these fishermen began to participate was by having people into their home, so they could meet and hear Christ. Mark 1:29 and 32-33 says, “Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John...At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city was gathered together at the door.”

We see, in Mark 2:14-15, that the same thing happened with Matthew. Mark 2:13-15 says, “Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. As He passed by, He saw Levi the *son* of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him. Now it happened, as He was dining in *Levi’s* house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him.” We learn some key things about participation from these passages:

- ◆ Christ spent time in the homes of those who became His disciples
- ◆ Christ gave the disciples the opportunity to have their relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other acquaintances meet Christ in their homes
- ◆ Christ recognized that some people, because of their past, would be afraid to come to hear Him, so He gave Matthew the opportunity to invite co-workers and others, who were rejected by society, to his house, where they could be introduced to Christ
- ◆ Christ gave the disciples the opportunity to reach out, in this way, to many people who might never have come to Christ otherwise
- ◆ Christ gave the disciples the opportunity to lead many others to Christ by participating with Christ in their homes

Here, we see a key way to give new and growing Christians the opportunity to participate both in

sharing the Gospel and also in seeing their network of relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other acquaintances come to Christ. Since we train growing Christians how to share the Gospel with others by showing them how to share the Gospel, the ideal place to do that is in their own homes. Through the years, I have personally met more non-Christians in the homes of their relatives, friends, or co-workers than any other single way.

I encourage every new Christian to begin praying daily for the salvation of relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other acquaintances. Then, I tell them that, as these individuals begin to show an openness, I will be glad to either come to their home to meet these relatives and friends or go with them to the homes of these individuals to share the Gospel with them. In this way, new Christians begin to participate in sharing the Gospel with people who are in their network of acquaintances. At the same time, they are seeing the Holy Spirit work in the lives of the people in their network.

The first person Andrew introduced to Christ was his brother, Peter (John 1:40-42). The first person Philip introduced to Christ was his friend Nathaniel (John 1:43-46). In fact, this is a very effective way to help those who are interested, but not yet Christians, begin to participate in sharing the Gospel. Peter had the opportunity to share with the relatives and friends of Cornelius in his home. Acts 10:24, 27 says, “And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends...And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.” Because Andrew, Philip, and Cornelius participated with Christ, all of these relatives and friends came to Christ.

We also see other ways the disciples began to participate in the ministry of Christ. In Mark 2:16, we see that the scribes and Pharisees came to the disciples, rather than Christ, with their question. That verse says, “And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, ‘How *is it* that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?’” Here, we see that because the disciples were with Christ, others began to ask them questions.

In this case, Christ answered the question, so the disciples learned how to answer this question if it was asked in the future. Mark 2:17 says, “When Jesus heard *it*, He said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance.’” As we take people along with us as we minister, we will see that those we take will also begin to be asked questions. We can either give them a Biblical answer to share with the one who asked the question, or we can go to the person with them and answer the question from Scripture. Either way, the one who goes with us is participating and also learning how to answer that particular question from Scripture.

John 6:1-14 also shows us a couple of other ways Christ got the disciples participating in the ministry. First, Christ raised a question for the disciples to try to solve. In John 6:5-6, we read, “Then Jesus lifted up *His* eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?’ But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.” Instead of answering the question, Philip gave a financial report. He said

they did not have enough money to buy food for all the people. In John 6:7, “Philip answered Him, ‘Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.’”

In contrast, Andrew saw a boy with a lunch and brought him to Christ. John 6:8-9 says, “One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, ‘There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?’” This is the second time we see Andrew. The first time was in John 1:40-42, where he brought his brother Peter to Christ. Andrew was participating by learning to bring people to Christ. The only other time Andrew is mentioned in the book of John, we see that he is bringing some Greeks to Christ. That is recorded in John 12:20-22.

Christ took that lunch and performed a miracle by multiplying it, so that there was enough food to feed the entire crowd. However, Christ got the disciples participating in the miracle by having them distribute the food to the people. John 6:10-11 says, “Then Jesus said, ‘Make the people sit down.’ Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed *them* to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.” We see that Christ performed the miracle, and the disciples carried out the ministry.

Christ also helped the disciples to participate by gathering the food that was left over after everyone had eaten. John 6:12-14 says, “So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.’ Therefore they gathered *them* up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.’” This participation caused the disciples to learn two things:

- they learned to conserve the results of what they did
- they learned that Christ was the promised Prophet

We have seen that Christ helped the disciples to learn to participate in ministry both in their homes and in public places. By participating in these areas, they were seeing that Christ could use them any time they made themselves available to Him. That is a key today, because many people only learn to lead inside the walls of the church building and are not able to lead people spiritually where they live, work, or spend their free time. May the Lord richly bless you as you help others develop ministry skills.