

1. Healthy Churches Reproduce Themselves

In Acts 2:41, we see that the number of believers multiplied as the church began, on the day of Pentecost, with three thousand being saved. Then, in Acts 6:1 and Acts 6:7, we see that the number of disciples multiplied greatly, as Christians became equipped to lead a small group of people and help them in their spiritual growth. In Acts 9:31, we read, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” In these passages, we see a progression: Christians multiplied, disciples who were able to lead a spiritual household multiplied, and then, churches multiplied. Today, we are going to start a series of topics that will help your church become equipped to multiply itself.

In Acts 11:19-21, we see how the church in Antioch began. Those verses say, “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them, were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” In these verses, we see that the church in Antioch began because Christians from Jerusalem and Judea shared the Gospel wherever they went, when they were forced to leave Jerusalem because of persecution.

We also see that the church at Jerusalem took the responsibility to help those new Christians grow. Acts 11:22-24 says, “Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.” Here, we see that the church in Jerusalem had the concern of a parent and sent Barnabas to help those new Christians grow.

Next, we see that Barnabas realized the need to develop a leadership team, because he could not help all of the Christians in their spiritual growth. Acts 11:25-26 says, “Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So, it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” Barnabas had earlier encouraged Saul, as recorded in Acts 9:26-30. According to Galatians 1:21-24, Barnabas and the other leaders at Jerusalem had heard how the Lord was using Saul in Tarsus. Barnabas recognized that Saul had become equipped to help Christians grow and develop as leaders. As a result, Barnabas recruited Saul, later called Paul, to become a part of the leadership team at Antioch.

Barnabas and Paul focused on helping Christians grow and become disciples who were able to lead a spiritual household. These disciples grew so much in their spiritual lives that the people of Antioch even started calling them Christians (little Christs). This was probably originally meant as a term to mock the believers, but was recognized by the believers as a compliment, and we are still called Christians today. May it be our goal that our lives will be so transformed that the world

will recognize that we act like Christ also.

In Acts 13:1, we see that the leadership team in Antioch had grown from two to five as Barnabas and Paul helped three other men grow to the point where they became part of the leadership team. It is at this point that we see that the church at Antioch had become a healthy church that was able to reproduce itself. Acts 13:1-3 says, “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.”

These verses tell us several things about the leadership team in the church at Antioch. First, we see that this leadership team spent time praying and fasting, as they sought the will of the Lord. Second, this was a leadership team that had become multiethnic and multicultural. Third, Barnabas and Paul had trained the leaders so well that the Lord could now lead the team to send Barnabas and Paul out to do the same thing in other areas. Barnabas and Paul had helped these three men grow so much that they were now able to lead the church without the help of Barnabas and Paul. We see that a healthy church develops leaders that are able to lead the church with or without the original leaders.

By the time Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, a few years later, the three leaders who had been left had developed many others, to the point where they had become a part of the leadership team. Acts 15:35 says, “Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.” The leadership team that had been left at Antioch realized that their first priority was to develop additional leaders for the team so there would be additional leaders to help disciples continue to develop and become the heads of spiritual households.

The interesting thing we see is that Paul and Barnabas repeated this same process wherever they went. Acts 14:21-23 says, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’ So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” In these verses, we see the process that develops healthy reproducing churches. We see that Paul and Barnabas did the following things:

- They preached the Gospel.
- They helped those who became Christians grow, and become disciples that were able to lead spiritual households.
- They strengthened the souls of the disciples.
- They exhorted the disciples to continue in the faith.
- They prepared the disciples for much tribulation.
- They appointed leadership teams from among the disciples.
- They prayed for the leadership teams with fasting.

- They entrusted these new leadership teams to the Lord.
- They believed that the Lord would work through those new teams.
- They left the area to continue their ministry in other places.

Although Paul and Barnabas left this area, they did not forget these new churches. They continued to pray for them. Later, they came back to visit them and encourage them. Acts 15:36 says, “Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.’” The Lord led Barnabas to take Mark to go to visit the churches they had started in Cyprus. The Lord led Paul to take Silas to go visit the churches they had started in Syria and Cilicia.

We see that the churches Paul and Barnabas had started in other areas had also become healthy, reproducing churches. In Acts 16:1-3, we see that these churches now had one of their young leaders that they could now send with Paul and Silas to help them continue to start new churches in other areas. Those verses say, “Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.” Timothy had become a disciple who could lead a spiritual household, and he had a good report from cities that were forty miles apart.

However, Timothy was not the only leader these churches had developed to reach out and reproduce additional churches. Acts 16:4-5 says, “And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.” Here, we see that all of the churches were sending out part of their leaders to establish other churches in surrounding cities and communities. The result was that the number of churches was increasing every day.

Just as Paul told Timothy, in 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.”, we are also to develop godly reproducing Christians who are able to develop healthy reproducing churches. Godly leaders develop godly leaders. Christ has called each spiritual leader to develop other spiritual leaders and equip them to teach others also. If we are in any kind of spiritual leadership, one of our first priorities should be to develop other godly leaders as we take them with us and show them, by our example, how to be a godly leader. May the Lord richly bless you as you develop godly leaders who can help their churches reproduce.