

6. Healthy Churches Help People Learn to Develop Vision

Christ was preparing and developing the disciples to develop healthy reproducing churches. As a result, early in His ministry to the disciples, Christ began to help them begin to expand their vision. Soon after Christ met part of His disciples, He went with them as they traveled to the Passover in Jerusalem. Christ used that opportunity to talk to Nicodemus, in John 3. Jesus, and the disciples, then stayed for a while longer in Judea, so Jesus could teach the people in that area. The disciples were from Galilee, but Christ was showing them the importance of reaching out to the city of Jerusalem and the surrounding area of Judea.

Then, instead of taking the usual route home from Judea to Galilee, John 4:4 says, “But He needed to go through Samaria.” Christ needed to go through Samaria for two reasons. First, He needed to go through Samaria to reach a whole group of people in the city of Sychar. Second, Christ needed to go through Samaria to expand the vision of the disciples. Christ sent the disciples into the city to buy food. The disciples got the food, but they had no vision for the people. As a result, Christ said, in John 4:35, “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” They found food, but they did not bring anyone to Christ.

While the disciples were in the city, Christ had also given a woman a vision for the people of her own city. The woman did not bring food, but she did bring many people to meet Christ. John 4:39-41 says, “And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’ So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His own word.” Christ had expanded the vision of the woman beyond her own needs, and many people believed in Christ as a result. Christ showed the disciples, by example, His vision for the Samaritans. We help Christians develop a vision for people of other cultures as we take them with us as we share the Gospel with people of other cultures.

Christ also expanded the vision of the disciples by taking them with Him as He preached throughout Galilee. Immediately after Christ invited the disciples to follow Him and promised them that He would make them become fishers of men, in Matthew 4:18-22, verse 23 says, “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.” Jesus was showing the disciples how to teach and preach, and at the same time, He was expanding their vision. The disciples developed a vision for the entire region of Galilee. We help Christians develop a vision for the entire region as we take them with us when we share the Gospel in other cities in the region.

We also help people develop their vision for the spiritual needs of people by encouraging them to see the needs around them and begin to pray for laborers to reach these people. Matthew 9:36-38 says, “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.’” In these verses, we see that Christ did several things to develop

the vision of the disciples:

- He showed them that He was moved with compassion as He saw people
- He showed them that people are faint and scattered abroad, because they are like sheep without a shepherd
- He explained, to the disciples, that the harvest is great
- He explained, to the disciples, that the laborers are few
- He encouraged the disciples to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers

Then, after asking the disciples to pray, in the very next verses, Christ sent them out to gain experience through on-the-job training. Christ sent out the twelve with some very specific instructions. Although Christ was expanding their vision, Christ knew they would be trained best to share the Gospel by beginning with people of their own culture. As a result, Christ said, in Matthew 10:5-6, “These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’” We help people develop vision as we help them pray for people they know and show them how to share the Gospel with those people.

Christ also had the twelve give a report of their ministry so He could further expand their vision. Mark 6:30 says, “Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught.” Christ wanted them to learn by giving them the opportunity for on-the-job training. However, He also wanted to expand their vision as they told Him what they had said and what they had taught. As a result, Christ showed His compassion for the multitudes, let them see the multitudes, encouraged them to pray for laborers, let them gain on-the-job experience preaching, and then, had them report what they had done. The whole process was designed to expand their vision.

Then, in Luke 10:1, Christ sent out a larger group of seventy disciples so He could develop the vision of a larger group of disciples. That verse says, “After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.” Luke 10:17 says that they returned and gave a report of what the Lord had done through their lives. That verse says, “Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.’” Vision is also expanded as people begin to realize that Christ can work through their lives. Many Christians have never realized that Christ can work through their lives. They will see how He works in them, and through them, as we give them opportunities to serve with us and show them how to serve the Lord.

After complimenting them, Christ also helped them refocus their vision on what was most important. Luke 10:20 says, “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.” These people had their vision expanded, because they saw that Christ could work through their lives. At the same time, Christ guided their vision, so they developed the right priorities. The reason for sharing the Gospel with others is not to demonstrate our own power and persuasiveness. Instead, we want to help people develop a vision for the lost, because they understand Christ’s love for them. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then

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all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” This should be our real motivation. As we are motivated by the love of Christ, instead of our own fear, we will rejoice for the privilege of showing others how to share the Gospel with their world.

As Christ returned to heaven, His final words were designed to expand the vision of His disciples to the entire world. Acts 1:8-9 says, “‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” Many people remember the last words spoken by a close relative or friend. The last words of Christ, on this earth, were to expand the vision of His disciples to the world. If a vision for the world caused Christ to make those instructions His last words, certainly a healthy church will continue to do everything possible to develop that same vision for the world.

The disciples developed that same vision in new Christians. When Peter returned to Jerusalem, after sharing the Gospel in the house of Cornelius, he told how he had expanded the vision of six men from Joppa by taking them with him as he shared the Gospel with the Gentiles. Acts 11:12 says, “Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.” These men were shown, by the example of Peter, the importance of having a vision for the Gentiles.

Paul was continually adding people to his team and giving them a vision for the world. Nearly forty people are listed as traveling with Paul at different times, although there may have been quite a number of additional people who are not listed. Acts 20:4 tells how Paul expanded the vision of a group of men to include the Roman province of Asia. That verse says, “And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia--also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.” We help people expand their vision by taking them with us as we share the Gospel with others in other places.

People do develop vision as they take root in the love of Christ and are shown the power of the Gospel to change lives. As we have said in the past, Acts 8:4 shows that the early believers went everywhere preaching the Word. They did this because they had been shown the importance of praying that the Lord would give them boldness. The results are seen in Acts 9:31, where 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.” The churches multiplied throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, because the early Christians had been shown what to share and how to share the Gospel with others. At the same time, they were motivated, by the love of Christ, to share that message wherever they went. May the Lord richly bless you as you help Christians develop a similar vision for the world around them.