

9. Healthy Churches Become Sending Churches

Paul and Barnabas planted churches in the cities on the island of Cyprus and in the cities of Pisidia and Galatia, such as Antioch, Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium during their first missionary trip. Acts 15:39-40 says that these men began a second trip. On the second trip, Barnabas took Mark and went to Cyprus. Paul took Silas and went to the cities of Galatia. In Acts 16:1-3a, we read, “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...” Here, we see that, in a few short years, a strong young leader had developed in Galatia.

We see several key things about this developing young leader. This was a young man who was already having an impact throughout the region (Derbe and Iconium were forty miles apart). He was a disciple who was able to lead others in their spiritual growth. He had a background that was both multiethnic and multicultural. He had a good report from the leaders in the various churches of the area. Paul recognized that this young man had great potential to help develop churches in new areas. Paul wanted Timothy to go with him and Silas so Timothy could become a part of the church planting team.

One other thing these verses show us is the vision that was present in the new churches that were being established. These churches had also developed a vision to plant churches in other areas and were willing to send one of their best young men to help in the planting and development of new churches. Certainly, these churches could have continued to use a young man like Timothy to help them in their development. However, they had developed a vision that extended far beyond their own cities. They were prepared to send one of their best to help plant churches in other regions of the world. As a result, the leaders told Paul and Silas about this young man and told them about the effectiveness of his ministry in the local area. As a result of their recommendation, Paul wanted this young man to become a part of the church planting team.

This brings us to a key question. How do churches develop people in their churches so that the Lord can lead those churches to send some of those people so that the Lord can use them to develop churches in other areas around the world? We see that Timothy had been developed through the ministry that he was given in his local area. First, we see that Timothy was helped to grow in godly character so that his life became an example. 1 Timothy 4:12 says, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” In this verse, we see that we help people develop by helping them grow in godly character.

We also see that Timothy gained experience in the churches, in Lystra and Derbe, and was able to continue to minister because of that experience. 1 Timothy 4:13 says, “Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” Timothy was to keep on doing the things he had done as a young Christian. The church had given Timothy opportunities to read the Scripture in the church services. He had been given the privilege, and opportunity, of explaining the Scripture to others in the local church services. He had been given opportunities to explain the doctrines that Scripture teaches as he taught in the local church. Today, young Christians need to be given opportunities

to do these same things in church services.

Timothy had also developed his spiritual gift and had that spiritual gift recognized by the leaders of the church where he was serving the Lord. 1 Timothy 4:14 says, “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.” The local church gave Timothy the opportunity to develop his spiritual gift. They also recognized that spiritual gift and commended him to the work of the Lord, by laying their hands on him and praying for him, as he went out to serve the Lord in various ways, including the exercise of that spiritual gift. We need to recognize the spiritual gifts of Christians and commission them to use those gifts in their service for the Lord.

Timothy was encouraged to keep his focus on serving the Lord and not get sidetracked by other activities. 1 Timothy 4:15 says, “Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.” Timothy was to continue to think about the things he had learned. He was encouraged to keep letting his life make an eternal impact by devoting himself to serving the Lord wherever he went. Timothy was also assured that, if he would do these things, his progress in his life and ministry would become evident to everyone. In the same way, those who look for opportunities to serve the Lord will have their spiritual progress recognized by others.

Timothy was also encouraged to continue to grow in his understanding of the teaching of the Word of God. 1 Timothy 4:16 says, “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” Here, we see that Timothy was to pay attention to his own spiritual growth. Paul told Timothy that making this the focus of his life would benefit both Timothy and those who heard him teach the Word of God. This indicates that the things Timothy had learned as a young man, in Derbe and Lystra, were to continue to be a part of his life and ministry wherever he went.

In these verses, we see that Paul was encouraging Timothy to keep on doing the things he had been doing at the time Paul first invited him to go with him. The local church had made it their priority to help Timothy develop in his spiritual life so that the Lord could use him wherever the Lord led him. He had served the Lord in his home area. The report of what he had done in his home area was what caused Paul to invite Timothy to go with him. Here, we see that Paul encouraged Timothy to keep on doing those same things as he helped spiritual leaders and churches develop in the region of Ephesus.

Here, we see the impact of the churches in Derbe and Lystra. The leaders in the churches there had helped Timothy develop and become a spiritual leader. Instead of keeping the best of their spiritual young leaders for themselves, the churches sent one of their best young men to help churches develop in other regions and among other cultures. Later on, we see that this same church would send another of their young men as a part of the team that ministered with Paul. Acts 20:4 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.” In this verse, we see that Gaius had also come from Derbe. This verse shows that he was now part of the team that was ministering with Paul in Macedonia, Greece, and Asia.

In fact, this verse also shows that the churches in several other cities had sent some of the spiritual leaders, that had developed in their churches, to travel with Paul and spread the Gospel to other areas. Sopater was from the city of Berea, and he became a part of the team. Aristarchus and Secundus were both from the city of Thessalonica. Tychicus and Trophimus were both from the province of Asia, although the particular city is not specified. These verses remind us that healthy churches develop leaders to send out to minister in other areas. These leaders were some of their best leaders, because they were able to cross ethnic, cultural, and language barriers. Today, many churches measure their success by the number of people in their church, instead of measuring their effectiveness by the number of people they have developed, trained, and sent out to take the Gospel to people in other parts of the world.

We see that local churches in other places also sent some of their best young men to take the Gospel to other cultures and countries. In Acts 16:8, we read, “So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.” In this verse, we see that Paul, and those traveling with him, came to Troas. Then, in Acts 16:10, we read, “Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.” Here, we see that there is a change from “they” in verse 8 to “we” in verse 10. This is an indication that Luke joined the team at Troas. Here, we see that the local Christians in Troas sent one of their choice young men to help take the Gospel to Macedonia and Greece.

Throughout the book of Acts, we see that churches in various areas sent people from their churches to take the Gospel to people in other areas and from different cultures. This is one of the keys of a healthy church, because it shows that the church has a desire to obey Christ and carry out the commission Christ gave to make disciples of all nations. We can truly say that a healthy church reproduces itself.

Today, the Lord also wants to help you become personally involved in spreading His church around the world. That may mean that Christ wants you to help develop those leaders in your church. It may mean that Christ wants you to take the lead in encouraging your church to send out some of its best leaders to take the Gospel to other regions of the world. It may even mean being willing to become a part of a church planting team and help plant churches in a new area yourself. The plan of Christ is to spread His church to the ends of the earth. He gives us the privilege of being a part of that plan. May the Lord richly bless you as you ask Him in what ways He wants you to be involved personally in helping spread His church to every culture, language, and ethnic group in the world.