

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc dantrygg@msn.com Today's Date: October 26, 2008

A Balanced Regimen For Growth

by Dan Trygg

"They were steadfastly attending to the apostles' teaching and to the sharing/participation, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. ⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all the ones believing were being *upon the same thing* and were having all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ Day by day both devoting themselves one-passionedly in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals with gladness and openness of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding the ones being saved day-by-day *upon the same thing*." Acts 2:42-47

"What therefore is it, brothers? Whenever you might come together, each one has a song, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation; let all things come to be toward edification." I Cor. 14:26

The passage in Acts 2:42-47 is crucial for our understanding of what a gathering of believers is to be all about. These verses give us a glimpse into the culture of the early church, ...what it was like, ...what they did when they met, and why. It is important to realize that **the apostles had never led a community like this before**. In one day, they had 3,000 new believers in Jesus who were looking *to them* for guidance, ..."Brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37,41). **How did they know to organize this multitude into the regimen for growth that they did?** How did they know what things to do with them, once they gathered them into meetings? Obviously, the answer is that **they drew heavily upon what they had experienced and learned from Jesus**, their own Master and Mentor. Jesus had dealt with crowds of thousands. They themselves had once been among the multitudes that had followed Him. They had seen Him teach, observed His methods, and could remember both the content of His instruction and the style of His delivery. They had been privileged to be among His inner circle of friends, and had been privy to His rationale and explanations for what He did. Furthermore, **they themselves had been purposely chosen and trained for this very moment, and they put into practice immediately *the dynamics of training* from which they themselves had benefited.**

It is important to note that **they did not do exactly as Jesus had done**. Rather, they understood *why* He had done what He had, ...especially why He had trained *them...*, and **they instituted *His vision***. You see, **Jesus was only one person with crowds of people to deal with. He was vastly outnumbered. So, what did He do? He chose twelve men to train, so that they could, in turn, become the leaders of a new generation.** There were also many others who had benefited from close relationship with Jesus, many who had followed Him closely for years, had traveled with Him, and some who even sat in on some of His intimate times with the twelve (e.g., Lk. 8:1-3; 10:1-20,38-42; Acts 1:21,22). We know that there was even one group of 500 disciples to whom Jesus showed Himself after His resurrection (I Cor. 15:6). These would also be able to be witnesses of His resurrection, along with the apostles (Acts 10:40-44). Given that there were 120 serious-minded, fairly well equipped people gathered in the upper room at Pentecost, when this first 3,000 converts came to believe in Jesus, we should not be at all surprised at the way in which the twelve responded. Since there were many more laborers available to handle this wave of new converts than Jesus had available to Him when He started out, **the apostles were able to enfold these new believers into a very similar training environment as Jesus had structured for *their* growth.** From the get-go, they employed an interactive, small group setting for developing these new believers and meeting their needs.

What did they do? Basically, they divided the overwhelming number of followers into home groups that could replicate the kind of experience that Jesus had given to them. Yes, for a time they also met in the back porch of the Temple, which gave them the opportunity to teach a large group, as Jesus had preached to the crowds. However, this large-group dynamic lasted only a short time, three-to-five years at most, ...until the persecution that started with the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7). By that time, **the number of believers who were trained in the basic teachings of the apostles, and who had grown up under the small-group dynamic Jesus had modeled, literally consisted of thousands.** They had been trained in relational, practical, hands-on, living laboratories of love, ...small communities where they had gathered to learn, share, pray, and minister to one another in the power of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, when the persecution came, and they were scattered, they brought their experience with them, and **they instituted home groups wherever they went.** The persecution that was meant to destroy them actually served to spread their influence. Because these everyday Christians knew how to walk with God *and* how to meet together, they started reaching out to those they met in the same practical, loving ways, openly sharing honestly from their hearts, as they had learned to do in their home groups. They were stepping into opportunities God was giving to do "Kingdom ministry", often including the miraculous, such as they themselves had experienced, and had come to

expect (vs. 43). It wasn't long before they had assembled little groups of believers in the communities to which they had traveled, and the "leaven of the Kingdom" was expanding throughout the Roman Empire.

What is important to see is that they had learned how to "do church" in a way that was healthy, effective, and had equipped them to reduplicate what they had experienced. That is God's plan. He wants to train up people to become mature enough to be capable of doing the work of the Kingdom wherever they are, and who could reduplicate the "learning laboratory dynamic" wherever they might be.

So, what is this formula for success in Christian maturity? What is the dynamic that "grows up" healthy Christians, and healthy "communities of love"? **Is there a regimen that, when followed, will help us rediscover normative, Biblical Christianity, and will mature us, both as individuals and as a group?** Is there a way of "doing church" that will meet everyone right where they are at, no matter how new and uninitiated they may be, or how mature and "schooled" they might be? **Yes, there is, and it is described for us in simple terms in Acts 2:42-47.** Notice the phrase, "upon the same thing" in verses 44 and 47 of my translation at the top of this handout. (Some translate this phrase as "together" in vs. 44, but it is clear from the context that they meeting in a *multitude of houses*.) I think the phrase is strategically placed at the beginning of this paragraph, which describes the activity of the new believers in Jerusalem, and then again at the end of vs. 47 to show that *additional converts were directed into the very same activities*. That is, all were occupied in doing the same things, the things summarized in vs. 42, and expanded upon in vss. 44-47a.

I believe that the book of Acts presents these activities as the normal regimen for growth, but our English translations have unfortunately obscured that fact.

I believe we have laid out for us the fundamentals of healthy discipleship and Body-life in these verses. What is described here, is only expanded upon in other portions of the New Testament. If these principles and dynamics are followed, in submission to God's leading and in proper balance, bringing in these expanded insights from other portions of the NT, I believe that healthy New Testament Christianity will be the result. The core, the fundamentals of discipleship and healthy church life, are right here in these verses.

What is a regimen? Why refer to it in that way? **A regimen is like a diet or plan for growth, which when systematically followed will generally produce the skills and maturity being sought for.** There are fundamental principles, exercises or skills described here in these verses which, when repeatedly followed, will form a sound foundation for healthy growth. They are not the end in themselves, but they provide a sound strategy for developing new disciples. **As we incorporate these activities into our lives, they will move us into deeper levels of maturity.**

Also, like the word "regimen" implies, **there are several aspects to this plan for growth described here. They must all be exercised, in order for healthy growth to develop.** Skipping some aspect will only be counterproductive. It will inevitably hinder, or stunt development, if not bring it to a complete halt.

What is the NT regimen for spiritual growth? What was the dynamic to which these early Christians were devoting themselves? There were several ingredients:

(1.) They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles. They applied themselves to learn what these representatives trained by Jesus had to say.

(2.) They devoted themselves to sharing. The word in Greek encompasses not only fellowship, but close mutual relationship and involvement with one another, a joint participation in a mutual interest, and a willing sharing of goods and possessions. We see evidence for the full extent of this common sharing in these verses.

(3.) They devoted themselves to taking meals together. Table fellowship can be a significant tool in opening up relationships. By doing this, they regularly designated time to spend with one another in an informal and unhurried setting. Meals also can engender a positive emotional experience, creating an atmosphere of thanksgiving and enjoyment, even merriment. This devotion of time together in this kind of setting allowed people to open up their hearts to one another, another key reason for this exercise. *Agapē* love and healthy Body-life grow best out of intimacy and sharing, and cannot happen without time spent together. The intimacy would open up areas of concern or need, as well, opening up opportunities to share in practical ways (e.g., goods), or to instruct, or to pray for the person.

(4.) They devoted themselves to seeking God in prayer and praise. They related everything to God, bringing the needs of the individual people, and the community, to Him in prayer, ...and praising Him for His goodness in supplying their needs. This is again a participatory thing. **They were devoting themselves to praying with and for one another.** They were doing it, not just following someone else's lead. (As a side-bar, the praise they were doing was spontaneous and informal. It was done in private homes, with small groups of believers. There is an intimacy with God and with one another that develops in such a setting. No big-group worship leader, or worship team, ...just simple, living room stuff, ...from the heart.)