

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Seeing Yourself On The Way To Mission

by Dan Trygg

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Come follow Me, and I will make you *come to be* fishers of men.’”

Mark 1:17

“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to *faithful people* who will be able to teach others also.”

II Timothy 2:2

“Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but *our sufficiency is from God*,⁶ who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit.”

II Corinthians 3:5-6

“And we might *consider one another* toward stirring up unto love and good deeds.”

Hebrews 10:24

“According as *each person has received a gracious-gift*, employ it in serving one another as *good stewards* of the diversified grace of God.”

I Peter 4:10

“...to *equip the saints for the work of ministry*, ...for building up the body of Christ...,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the experiential-knowledge of the Son of God, to mature adulthood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, *we are to grow up in every way into Him* who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ from whom *the whole body*,

...joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly,
...*makes the body grow* so that it builds itself up in love.”

Ephesians 4:12-16

I have been reading *The Complete Book of Discipleship* by Bill Hull, published by NavPress. It is one of the best books I have ever read. I came across a principle observed by Richard Myers of the Church Federation of Greater Indianapolis, later corroborated by other studies on small groups. Myer's Law says that **the church grows, both numerically and in meaningfulness to its members, as the number of face-to-face groups increase.** Hull writes, “In other words, **churches don't grow by getting more people into the same class or small group; they grow by adding more classes or small groups.**” This principle was supported by a study conducted by Fuller Theological Seminary. The study divided a large number of pastors into two groups. Half of the pastors consolidated all of their adult Sunday school classes into *one large group*, while the other half *kept multiple adult Sunday school classes* in place. After a period of time, attendance in the churches with the consolidated class declined; while the churches with multiple Sunday school classes not only increased, but *virtually all of the small groups reported numerical growth*, as well. **This is a further extension of one of the most documented principles of church growth: Whenever a new church is started, new people will come to know Christ.** The principle seems to hold true, whether as a new church plant, or as a separate group within an existing church or ministry. **New groups attract new people.**

The other important point, however, is that **new groups demand new leadership.** New leaders must be trained and entrusted with ministry. **The mistake we often make, however, is that we want people to be experts before we trust them with ministry.** Or, to personalize that statement: *We expect that we need to be experts before we can be involved in leading others.*

This does not square with the examples we see in the NT. At Pentecost, 3,000 people made the choice to follow Jesus as their Messiah (Acts 2:41). Immediately, the disciples organized people into home groups. First century Jerusalem houses were not typically nearly as large as most modern homes. It would be reasonable to think that most home groups would have been 10-15 adults, maybe less. If this were true, then there would have been 200-300 home groups meeting *every day!* Cf. Acts 2:42-47. Certainly, the 11 apostles could not possibly have covered the leadership demands of that many new home congregations. Even the 120 that were in the upper room when the Spirit came could not have met with two to three home congregations every day. **Others had to be recruited and entrusted with ministry. There was no time to train people extensively,** or send them to school. **They were thrust into hosting or facilitating a home group ...because the need was so great!**

If that were not enough, **within a short time Peter and John publicly healed a lame beggar in the Temple, and 5,000 more came to Christ.** The text specifies that this number included *only the men* (Acts 4:4)! When you account for women and children associated with them, the Jerusalem church could easily have multiplied *four-fold* in just that one day. Again, the apostles organized them into small home groups that met daily. **There is no way that the apostles could begin to address the needs of 8,000-15,000 new believers by themselves.** There were no Bible colleges or seminaries to train pastors, ...nor had there been sufficient time to put the Pentecost converts through some kind of “official training program”, such as we might require or expect today. **Clearly, Pentecost converts must have been recruited to lead some of these new groups.** Most of them had never known Jesus in the flesh. They were like us, only knowing Christ by faith and through the indwelling of His Spirit. Nevertheless, **just months from their own conversion, they were helping to incorporate other, younger believers into home groups.**

Then, again after just a matter of months, or a year or two, the Jerusalem church came under persecution, and many of these believers were scattered elsewhere. They went about preaching the word wherever they went (Acts 11:19f.). The book of Acts recounts that in Antioch of Syria, **they led others to Christ and established a thriving community of home groups there *with no apostolic oversight, at all!!*** In fact, the apostles heard about it *after the fact*, and sent Barnabus to check things out. Aside from recruiting Saul (Paul) to help address the need for teaching, **Barnabus found the Church in Antioch to be healthy and doing well. Why? Because the Christians from Jerusalem were reproducing the home group dynamic they had learned in this new setting.** Large numbers were coming to the Lord, because of the vibrancy of the lives of the believers in Antioch.

After a year at Antioch, the Holy Spirit sent out Saul and Barnabus on a preaching tour to Cyprus and the regions of Pamphilia, Pisidia and Lyconia (Acts 13,14). In each town, the apostles would go to the synagogue to preach about Jesus. **When people responded, they organized them into home meetings, and *shortly left town!*** They came by later to check on them, and to appoint elders (Acts 14:21-23; 15:36), but **these new believers were pretty much left to grow and develop on their own.** Granted, these were mostly Jewish converts, so they had a basic understanding of God and the OT scriptures. Once they understood that Jesus was the fulfillment of OT prophecies, and they had been taught *how to have a home church meeting*, they were left to God and the message of His grace, which they felt would be sufficient to lead them to maturity in Christ (cf. Acts 20:32). Again, there was *no* extensive education prerequisite for hosting a meeting or becoming a church leader. There still were no colleges or seminaries. **These new converts were given responsibility to host and oversee meetings, and to expand the gospel impact in their locality and their larger region.**

When we read the New Testament, we find that the teachings and practices of Jesus and the early church were centered on two fronts: (1.) Personal growth and care in small group settings; and (2.) Learning to serve and minister to others in small group settings. **The message to new Christians from the very beginning was that they were going to be trained to serve and reach others.** They were reared in an environment where they learned how to run a meeting, they learned the apostolic doctrine, how to respond to needs, how to pray for others and offer practical help in love. **Everyone expected that they would mature, ...that they would grow up as a Christian..., that they would be able to answer questions, and that they would learn to be led by the Spirit and would be able to reach out to minister to others.** In fact, this was the purpose for their meetings, to help each other mature, get equipped and to practice ministry skills by serving each other through truthful words of love and thoughtful acts of grace. **Church meetings were nothing like what we are familiar with.** They were very informal and *interactive*. **A church was a small group of believers gathering to help one another grow, deal with personal growth issues, support and encourage each other, and to prayerfully watch for opportunities to share the message of God's love and the opportunity to know Him personally.** They knew and expected that following Jesus meant that *they would learn to "fish for people"*. They saw that as part of *their mission and responsibility* as a Christian. They knew and expected that *to be faithful to Christ meant to pass along to others what they learned about God.* They knew and expected that *they* could not do this on *their own*, but that **God had, indeed, made them capable of ministry** by virtue of the Holy Spirit living in them. They knew and expected that *they were responsible to pray and think about each other in their home group*, considering how they could stir up and encourage one another to love and good deeds. They invested time in doing this. They knew and expected that **God had given them unique abilities** through His Holy Spirit. These gifts and abilities were entrusted to them as stewards. **They were responsible before God to use them according to His purposes, ...to serve others for Christ**, especially those in the Body of Christ. They knew and understood that *they were responsible to learn how to minister to their brothers and sisters in Christ*, to do their part to encourage growth and to strengthen one another. **They invested time and effort to grow into Christ in every area of their lives, so that they could learn to be effectively directed by Him to serve others.** They knew and understood that *their active ministry in the Body was central to God's plan for reaching the world.*

These early Christians saw themselves as active participants in God's kingdom. From the very beginning they saw themselves as on the way to fulfilling God's plan for their lives. **God had intervened in their lives, and they now saw themselves as on mission for Him, or in preparation and training for that mission. We, too, desperately need to see ourselves as on the way to mission.** Having mission as our objective, gives purpose, direction and order to our lives. Without it, we tend to relax and lose ourselves in the activities and busyness of the world around us. **Seeing ourselves as being readied for mission will radically change our perceptions about who we are, and what life is all about.** Just as most of us mature and set up our own households, to have our own children and help them grow up and move on to have their own families, **in God's kingdom strategy we are being trained to help others grow up. We are to become the leaders and facilitators of tomorrow's small group communities.**