

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Apples and Dandelions: God's Design For Kingdom Growth

by Dan Trygg

“And you will receive (take) power, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses, both in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and as far as the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

“...a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria....⁴ Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.” Acts 8:1-4

“While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” Acts 13:2

“Going about, disciple all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19,20

Life is always changing. Besides the everyday busyness of each day, there are changes in weather we have to adapt to, changes in circumstances, and changes due to our life cycle. We move from school to the work world, we marry and have children, then we help them get started in life. We move from single to married, to parent to grandparent. We move from the awkwardness of youth to the strength of our adult bodies, then we deal with the “battle of the bulge”, and eventually the diminishing of our abilities as we age. We also have to deal with the many changes going on in the lives of those around us. **Life is about discovery, learning, mastery, adaptation and adjustment.** These changes don't stop when we factor in our walk with God. If anything, **our faith adds another dimension of change and growth, but it also offers direction, priorities and purpose to guide us along the way.**

One of the challenging aspects of Kingdom purpose is the transience of relationships and the mobility of people. It can be difficult when people get knitted into the Body, ...knitted into *your* life..., and then God moves them along. It should *not* be surprising, but many times when people tell us the news of their pending move, it does catch us off guard. It can be bittersweet. You are glad for them, if they are moving to a more positive circumstance, but you are sad about the empty spot they will leave behind. **The United States is a particularly mobile society. People move here, on average, about every five years.** Most of us stay within the country, however. Other cultures are more adventurous. Many leave their home countries for a better future, ...or they have been displaced by war, natural disaster, and find themselves driven *far* from home. On both a national and world wide scale, many people are in flux, moving for one reason or another. We will all be impacted by this reality, both as individuals and as churches.

When we read the NT, we see that **Jesus gave His people the marching orders to bring the gospel to the far corners of the world. That was not going to happen unless someone travelled about, or uprooted from one place and set up shop somewhere else.** True, Pentecost provided a springboard for the gospel, because Jews from all over were in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples (Act 2). Many of them returned home as born-again Christians, starting home churches in their own houses. **We read of the expansion of the Jerusalem church, spreading like leaven within the community of Jerusalem** (Acts 2-6). As home groups became too large, they divided and the ministry moved into multiple homes. In those early days, however, this new group was just down the street, or within walking distance of the other, because the city was not that big. **When the persecution after Stephen's martyrdom began, the believers were scattered outside of the city, into the nearby region, and beyond.** Wherever they went, they preached the word, and gathered with other believers in homes. Thus, the persecution that was meant to *exterminate* the church, caused it to *dissipate* and *germinate* in an ever-widening ripple of new locations.

After the persecution, we also see a more purposeful effort on the part of the apostles and other leaders to visit new areas to preach the gospel. Peter preached along the Mediterranean Sea, moving northward and visiting communities like Lydda, Sharon and Joppa. While there, the Lord gave him the rooftop vision that prepared him to go to the home of the gentile centurion in Caesarea (Acts 10). **Through the activity of the Holy Spirit, the Jews came to see that God intended to bring gentiles to faith in Christ, expanding their minds and vision of the discipleship calling.** Shortly thereafter, God established a community of both Jews and gentiles in Antioch of Syria. It was there, **a couple of years later, that the Spirit set apart Barnabus and Saul for their first missionary journey.** They journeyed to the island of Cyprus, and then to the area of modern-day Turkey. On succeeding campaigns, Barnabus and Mark revisited Cyprus, while Paul, Silas, and Timothy revisited the mainland churches, and extended their reach into northern and southern Greece. On their return, they dropped off Priscilla and Aquila, friends from Corinth, at Ephesus, along the western edge of modern-day Turkey. On his third trip, Paul visited the older Turkish churches, and then spent nearly three years in Ephesus. After an initial imprisonment in Caesarea and Rome, Paul was released and possibly made it as far west as Spain. **Both Paul and Peter spent time ministering in Rome, finally meeting their**

end there. Meanwhile, other apostles went to Syria, Armenia, Persia, India, Egypt, Northern Africa, and Ethiopia, all spreading the gospel and starting Christian communities. Since the Roman Empire had established a system of good roads, and maintained order and peace over such a huge area, travel and commerce opened the way for the gospel to spread with few barriers. Anyone of means, or who had a trade to support himself along the way, could travel without restriction. **By the end of the first century, believers had been “seeded” throughout the Empire.**

When you read carefully the names of individuals in the book of Acts, and compare them with some of those mentioned in the epistles of Paul, you find an even further appreciation for the movement and mobility of people of that era. **The salutations and greetings of Paul reveal a host of individuals who he had met along the way, who had later relocated to other places.** Sosthenes was with Paul when he wrote I Corinthians (1:1). He was originally the leader of the synagogue in Corinth (Act 18:17), but later he was with Paul in Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila were originally from Rome, met Paul in Corinth, helped to start the church in Ephesus, went back to Rome, and apparently ended up in Ephesus with Timothy (Act 18:2,18-26; I Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3; II Tim. 4:19). Philip was a deacon in the church at Jerusalem, was used by the Lord to preach to the Samaritans, and to witness to the Ethiopian eunuch. He eventually settled in Caesarea (Act 6:5; 8:4-13,26-40). We find Paul’s first convert in Asia, Epaphroditus, later living in Rome (Rom. 16:5). Phoebe was a leader from the church in Cenchrea, who also came to Rome (Rom. 16:1). If the Rufus in Romans 16:13 is the same as mentioned in Mk. 15:21, then he is a transplant from Jerusalem, whose family had originally been from Cyrene in Northern Africa. It is amazing that Paul could greet over 20 other people living in Rome, when he himself had never been there (Rom. 16)! There are other traveling companions of Paul who also were people who freely traveled about from place to place (e.g., Luke, Timothy, Titus, Silas, Aristarchus, Sosipater, Mark). Not everyone had this kind of freedom. Over 60% of the people were slaves, and would not have been free to travel, unless with their masters. It was not uncommon for people with a trade to make a circuit, or for merchants to travel to find the goods they were to sell (e.g., Matt. 13:45,46). **This moving about, whether for commerce, health or pleasure opened up many doors to share the gospel with new people in new places.** When new people found Christ, they were organized into small home churches, to help each other grow, and to continue to reach others in that community.

It is important to recognize the powerful possibilities when people visit or move to a new city or town. The most powerful and expansive growth in the history of the church took place in those first few centuries of the Christian movement. A common language, good infrastructure and political freedom created an environment that was wide open for people to share their faith. We have those same ingredients available to us in our country today. In many parts of the world, this has not been the case. **It is important for those who travel, or move to a new setting, to see themselves as ambassadors for Christ coming to represent Jesus to an entirely new group of people.** They need to have a sense of purpose and expectation as they go. Jesus said, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you (lit., ‘placed you’) that you might go and bear much fruit...” (Jn. 15:16). **You are not where you are by accident. God has you there for a reason, and He will use you to touch the lives of people around you.** Note that I said we are to “represent Jesus”. We may not be called so much to *talk* as to *demonstrate* Jesus. Don’t get the cart ahead of the horse. **Don’t assume that you know how God wants to use you in a new setting. Allow Him to direct you.** Watch and listen to see the opportunities God may bring up.

It is also important for the home church, the “sending church”, to acknowledge that this person moving into a new community is an extension of their ministry. This brother or sister grew up among them. They were part of their fellowship, their church family. In an interactive NT church, they “did life” together. They got to know and love one another. The community supported, taught and invested in that individual, and that person also brought gifts, abilities, love and support to that church family. Just because they move away does not mean that we are “done with them”. No. Not at all! They *remain* part of our church family. They *still* need our support, and we should be prayerfully concerned for their wellbeing and success. One of the glaring realities of Paul’s lists of greetings to people at the end of his letters is that *he kept in contact with people*. He knew where they were, and what they were doing. He kept up on how the ministry was developing. He cared, and he communicated that by his detailed greetings.

There is both an apple and dandelion aspect to a Biblical philosophy of ministry. On the one hand, “an apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” is a popular adage that describes how a person tends to be very much like his or her parents or family system. This can be descriptive of a discipleship aspect of being part of a Christian community. A lot of what we become is modeled for us by others around us. It is more *caught* than *taught*. We become like those who influence or disciple us. **As Jesus said, “A disciple will become like his teacher”** (Matt. 10:26). **The second aspect, however, is that we are to be like the dandelion, whose seeds are carried by the wind to far distant places.** We take the investment and training we have received in our community, and bring it to an entirely new area. Jesus also said, “Going, disciple all the nations, baptizing them and teaching them to do all that I commanded” (Matt. 28:19,20). **There is a “go” in the “gospel”. People moving to new communities bring Jesus with them.** Pray that they will be able to share what they have learned of Him with others there, and expand the Kingdom.