

Helper replies, “God will send some of them as witnesses for Christ to distant places, just as He did for Mr. Wise. This will take more time, money and effort, but I want our congregation to participate in every essential part of God’s work that you have taught me.”

“Very good!” Learner agrees. “God wants every people group and culture on earth to hear the good news about Jesus Christ. He rejoices in God’s grace that reaches to the ends of the earth.”

Practical Work

- Ask God to help your congregation recognize those who can start new congregations and set them apart with prayer, fasting, and laying on of hands.
- Recognize any group of new baptized believers that is gathering to worship and obey Jesus as a new congregation and appoint local leaders for it.
- If the new leaders are quite new in the faith, appoint them only as provisional shepherding elders, until they are proven.
- Mentor these new leaders behind the scenes. They may be provisional leaders for a few months or a year or so, until it is clear whom God has gifted for such responsibility.
- Teach the new leaders to obey all the commands of Christ first and above all else. Show them how to baptize, celebrate the Lord’s Supper and practice the basic elements of worship.
- Have the new leaders serve this way only if they are meeting with a more experienced leader who oversees their work and mentors them.
- If your congregation is too big to listen to everyone when they meet, and too big to be a loving family in which everyone serves the others, then form small groups. Keep the groups small enough that everyone can participate and serve one another in practical ways.

Ministry 5

Start New Congregations

After a worship service at Learner’s house, Mr. Foolish, with two women standing with him, tells Learner, “We must talk with you. We have decided that your student, Helper, should not start another church. Several people have left our church to attend it. It weakens our church. You must tell the people in Helper’s group to come back here. They are making a division. Helper should be working with you here, to serve us.”

“I understand your concern,” Learner replies, “but my brother, Helper, is doing what Mr. Wise and I asked him to do. He is visiting the many relatives of his wife Rachel, who live in that area. They are responding to the gospel. I do not want them to come here. That would limit the growth of the kingdom of God. Let Christ’s kingdom expand by multiplying congregations throughout our entire nation.”

“I do not agree,” one of the women says, “but if you do start a new congregation you must take over its leadership. Helper is too new as a believer to lead it.”

Learner says patiently, “Helper’s new group will soon be a strong congregation. It does not belong to me, but to Christ. I do not have time to lead every new congregation that we start. I am training Helper so that he can lead that congregation and train other shepherds. The Holy Spirit will guide Helper just as he has guided us.” He asks, “Do you want to hear How Paul Started Congregations?” One of the women says yes and a few men gather to listen and Learner invites them to sit down again.

Exercise

Find in Acts chapters 13 and 14:

- How the Antioch believers chose Paul and Barnabas and set them apart to start new congregations.
- How the task group presented the gospel in Pisidia, in Antioch and in Lystra?

- What they did when the Jews expelled them from some towns.
- What Paul and Barnabas did on their way back through the regions where people had come to faith through their message?
- What they did when they returned to their own congregation in Antioch?

Learner explains to the little group that gathered to hear what he was saying to Mr. Foolish. "While the congregation worshiped and fasted, they realized that God had set apart Paul and Barnabas for a special job. The leaders laid hands on them, prayed for them and sent them off as a team. Wherever they went, they found the receptive people and told them about Jesus. They told how Jesus, the anointed one that God had promised, was killed but rose again and many saw Him. They prayed for the sick and some were healed. In Lystra, they kept the people from worshiping them as gods and told them to leave their idols and turn to the one true God.



Two months later in Learner's woodworking shop, Helper reports what they have been doing. "The other new elders and I are following your counsel. We arranged for smaller groups to meet in homes all around the area. Some groups visit homes of unbelievers. Others focus on prayer or on sending workers to new places farther away. Most of them care for the needy in the community. They all look for ways to use their spiritual gifts to build up the congregation and the new cell groups. They all reach out to their own circle of friends with the gospel. I meet regularly with all the new small group shepherding elders, to pray, listen to their reports, deal with the problems and encourage them."

"Wonderful!"

"One group is visiting relatives that live quite far away. The elders and I plan to organize these groups as new congregations. They all come together once a month for united worship and celebration. Next time please come."

Learner cautions, "You must be careful if they all meet together in a large group. That is why the authorities forced Mr. Wise to leave here. Persecution often follows the growth of Christ's church."



Learner replies, "This is a common problem. The congregation has two main jobs, to bring people to Christ and to build them up as obedient disciples of Christ. You need to organize your congregation into smaller groups to do these jobs well. Here is a list of suggestions for How to Form Small Groups for the new small group leaders, who will meet with a few families in their homes." He writes:

Each small group or 'cell' is a New Testament congregation; it does everything a congregation should do, even though it is part of a larger congregational body. This is the way the apostles organized the congregations in the book of Acts. City churches had large numbers of people but they were made up of many congregations that met in small groups in homes, to pray, study the Word and celebrate the Lord's Supper.

- Avoid meeting in the leader's home if possible. People may think the group belongs to him, and we win more people to Christ by going to others' homes.
- The leader should not take care of the offering money from the group. Name someone else. Let the leader be free to shepherd the group.
- Do not simply preach to the small group but instead, study the Bible together with them. Ask questions about the passage you study. Let everyone talk about it. Encourage everyone to participate in worship and the teaching, according to their gifts.
- Include entire families in the activities.
- Do not eat a complete meal each time you meet. This will be a burden for the hostess, and can distract from the Lord's Supper, as Paul warned in 1 Corinthians 11.
- Do not allow strangers to teach the group. You and the other leaders must examine their lives and teaching first.
- Look for people to train as new leaders to help you with the group. Pass on everything you have learned to them. Encourage them to start their own groups as soon as possible. This keeps the movement for Christ growing.

"The Gentiles responded and many believed, but many Jews rejected the message. When they were expelled, Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet and went to another place. On their way back through these same towns, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders to lead each congregation and committed them to the Lord with prayer and fasting. Then they returned home to report to the congregation that had sent them out. This is what our congregation is doing, also, starting with Helper and his new flock." Mr. Foolish snorts like an angry horse and leads the two women away.

Starting New Congregations

Learner goes again to visit Helper to mentor and encourage him. He tells him, "Helper, Rachel's relatives responded to the good news quickly, like many gentiles in the book of Acts. Have you asked them all to repent, believe in Jesus and be baptized in His name?"

"Yes. What do I do next?"

"Show them how to worship God with the basic elements of worship that you learned from us in the mother congregation. Have Caregiver help you shepherd them. Do not forget the basic things. Teach them to pray, learn the Word of God, confess their sins and receive assurance of forgiveness, celebrate the Lord's Supper, give and have fellowship. Let everyone participate in some way. Teach them to obey the seven basic commands of Jesus above all else. Do you remember them?"

"I sing them," Helper answers. "I shall never forget." He sings the song, which lists them, repent and believe, be baptized, love, serve the Lord's Supper, pray, give, and make disciples. "God's Holy Spirit helps us do all of these."

"Good," Learner says. "When the group is meeting regularly, choose other good leaders and lay hands on them with prayer. You might fast, too, as the apostles did, although they did not command it. It is good to have more than one leader, just as Paul did in the new congregations he started. These leaders can be provisional. That is, you name them temporarily, to see how well they do. It takes time to see whom God has gifted for this responsibility. Help the leaders put the

seven basic commands of Christ into practice right away. Pass on to them what you learn from me. I will help you when you need it.”

Learner visits Helper two weeks later. Helper reports, ” I put into practice what you taught me. I visited more of Rachel’s relatives. Then I took them to visit their friends. Many received Christ. Everyone in my new congregation is putting into practice what you taught me to teach to them.”

A few weeks later Learner visits Helper again. Helper reports, “We started another new congregation. It meets in my father-in-law’s house. I laid hands on Rachel’s two uncles to commission them as provisional shepherding elders.”

“I rejoice to see the Holy Spirit at work here! We now have a granddaughter congregation. I have been studying the book of Acts. Let me tell you about How the First Church Started, so that you can teach the same things to Rachel's two uncles as you continue to train them.

Exercise

Find in Acts 1:

- Where did Jesus tell His disciples to take the good news, before He ascended into heaven?
- Where did their power come from?

Find in Acts 2:

- What happened when the Holy Spirit came on the disciples?
- What did Peter tell the crowd about Jesus?
- What things did the repentant people do that resulted in the birth of the first congregation?

Learner explains to Helper, in Helper's house, “Jesus commanded His disciples to take the good news to everyone, starting with those closest to us. He promised power from heaven, the Holy Spirit. He came on the Day of Pentecost and filled the disciples. Some call this the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit filled them with power. He does not do this simply to give us a feeling or personal experience. He does it to enable us to serve God and tell about Christ with power. The apostles told the good news to crowds of people in their own languages, which the Apostles had never learned. Peter proclaimed that Jesus proved with many miracles that He was the chosen one of God. After Jesus died to save us from our sins and was buried, He rose back to life.”

“I remember,” Helper says, “Three thousand people heard Peter and repented of their sins. The apostles baptized them and brought them into the church that same day. The new believers gathered daily to worship in homes and in the Jewish temple court. Immediately they began to practice all seven of Jesus’ basic commands, and the first church started in Jerusalem. They loved each other very much.”

Obeying Christ’s Command to Love and Give to One Another in Practical Ways

God blesses Helper’s congregation and it grows in the normal way as people tell their friends and relatives about Jesus. Helper comes to Learner's woodworking shop to tell him, “My congregation has grown too large for people to enjoy the fellowship and serve one another like they did at first. They just come and listen passively. They no longer all know each other, and they do not fit in my house. Our love for each other is growing cold because the group has grown big. People do not know each other. They do not all talk with each other. It’s no longer a big, loving family. They no longer evangelize as they did when the group was small. How can we keep our witness for Jesus and our fellowship strong?”