

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Finding a Foothold

by Dan Trygg

“And into whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it; and abide there until you go away.” Matthew 10:11

“...from there [we went] to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. ¹⁴ A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. ¹⁵ And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.’ And she prevailed upon us.”

Acts 16:12-15

“After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, ³ and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. ⁴ And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. ⁵ But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. ⁶ But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ ⁷ Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. ⁸ Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.”

Acts 18:1-8

When you understand the real nature of the church, that it is *an assembly of people who meet together to build each other up* and encourage each other to know and serve God, then you can begin to understand the evangelistic strategy of the first century Christians. *They needed a place to meet, yes, but it was generally a simple gathering in a home.* There was no church art or religious furniture, because there were no religious buildings to furnish or decorate. There was no church office, no sanctuary, no lectern, organ, or piano. There were no microphones, no chairs or pews, no hymnbooks, no expectation of Sunday school or youth programs (not “invented” until the 1800’s). There were no vestments, choir robes, or special clothing to wear. There were no utilities, maintenance or mortgages to pay. Because the gatherings were informal, “unofficial” or even “underground”, in that they were unrecognized gatherings of people, there were no zoning requirements to adhere to, no special rules of assembly to observe. In fact, it was often desirable to keep meetings somewhat out of the public eye, to avoid negative repercussions of those who would be opposed to the Christian movement. **NT Christianity was generally a lean, fluid, informal movement, meeting in the privacy of peoples’ homes.** That is not to imply that any of these other “trappings” of religious meetings in our time are “wrong” or “evil”. They do, however, complicate things. Some would argue that the payback in outreach, conversions and equipping of the saints far outweighs the cost. Like the Proverb, “Where no oxen are, the manger is clean, *but* much increase comes from the strength of the ox.” Even Paul chose to meet in the “school of Tyrannus” for the purpose of public proclamation of the Gospel. We have no idea what terms he may have had with Tyrannus to make this possible, but we know that it was an effective venue, for he was teaching and reasoning daily there for a period of two years, and “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:9,10). Nevertheless, **there has never been a time in church history that has rivaled the percentage of growth produced by the church of the first two centuries. Simpler is easier to reproduce, and these home groups were multiplying and spreading through cities all over the Roman empire, infiltrating every conceivable social class and ethnic group.**

Finding people interested in meeting, and finding a place to meet, are two essential components for establishing a mission outreach in a new community or setting. Jesus taught about this, and showed us by example, how ministry opportunities can easily be turned into a foothold for a larger community ministry (e.g., Jn. 4:28-42). We see it over and over again in His ministry. His mission was *not* to plant churches, however, so He often He bypassed these opportunities. He was aware of what He was doing, but **Jesus instructed His disciples, who were called to plant churches, to establish a base of operations in each community they visited.** They were to look for a “worthy” person, someone who was willing and capable of hosting them while they were in town, and would make their home a base of operations. **We see this strategy used by Paul repeatedly on his missionary journeys.** He would come to a town and go to the synagogue, or other meeting place of the Jews, so that he could tell the Good News to them, the fulfillment of the OT promises. **When people identified with his message, and the Jews became resistant, he would start a church meeting in the home of one of these new converts. This home meeting became the foothold for further ministry**

outreach in that community. As the home meetings became too large, it was natural to split the group and start an additional meeting in another neighborhood.

As we have experimented with reproducing home groups in our ministry, one of the first things we have seen is that when you have a new meeting in a new location, invariably new people will come. They may be people from the neighborhood, or people who would be comfortable with a smaller group, rather than the larger group. Or, God may just bring some new evangelistic opportunities to a new group. *This is one of the most strongly documented principles of church growth: A new meeting in a neighborhood or community will attract new people.* **The second principle we have observed is that this reproduction of groups causes people to take on new responsibilities.** This encourages people to serve, which deepens their faith commitment and their investment in Jesus and the people in the group. As they stretch and invest more into the work of the Kingdom, God will bless them with growth and resources. **A third principle is that a foothold in a new community, or new network of people, will lead to new ministry needs, opportunities and ideas.** Everyone has needs of some kind. Whether these are physical needs, emotional hurts, faith development, or even needs to step out and serve, everyone will benefit from the giving and receiving of God's blessings in an interactive, serving community of believers. If we are honest with one another, these areas of need and strength will become evident, and we will be drawn to serve in new ways.

How do we find new footholds for ministry in a new ministry setting? From the examples of Scripture we see: (1.) **Some people will simply offer their home to be used for ministry.** This was the case of Lydia in Acts 16. Upon her conversion, she invited Paul to come to her home. Now in Paul's case, he was travelling through, so he had no stable place to live. Lydia realized this, and offered to allow him not only to have meetings at her home, but also to live there. (2.) **Jesus instructed His disciples to watch for a worthy person.** This implies that God *will* provide an opportune place to meet, but we may need to speak up or ask. At times, this will become very evident, because we will see the hand of the Lord orchestrating the connection, or have something in common with the person. For example, in the case of Aquila and Priscilla, the fact that they were Jews, and were of the same trade, motivated Paul to seek to associate with them. They responded to his message and he ended up not only staying at their house, but also developing an ongoing ministry relationship with them. Later, they hosted churches in their home (Rom. 16:3-5; I Cor. 16:19). (3.) **Sometimes we need to respond to Divine revelation.** We see an example of this in Luke 19:1-10. In Jesus' encounter with Zaccheus, he told him that "it was necessary" for Him to stay at his house that day. The language sounds like Jesus had been *instructed* to stay at Zaccheus' house. In I Samuel 9,10 we see an example of how God can reveal specific things about a future event or person in order to identify him to a prophet, or in order to convince the person of God's will for him or her. We see NT examples of that in the Spirit's direction of Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch, or God's instruction through the angel a vision to get Peter together with Cornelius. Paul's journey to Philippi, where he met Lydia, was also the result of a vision from the Lord, instructing Paul to go to Macedonia. If God did these things in Bible times, we certainly can expect that He can, and sometimes will, do the same kinds of things for us today. (4.) **Sometimes we will meet people interested in pursuing a new ministry outreach at other, established religious gatherings.** In the NT, it was not uncommon for Jesus or Paul to go to the local synagogue first, in order to find those who were open to stepping out in a new direction with God. We know that they were accused of "leading these people astray", so we shouldn't be surprised if we, too, would be considered "sheep stealers" by the leaders of congregations in our day. We need to recognize that this is a legitimate option for finding a new avenue of service. We don't want to be drawing away people from something healthy and good, but sometimes God *does* call people out of a church to get involved in a new ministry outreach in the community. A healthy new work, however, should lead to new conversions, not just attract Christians from other churches. (5.) **God will often use an opportunity to serve someone as a means to establish a relationship and a foothold in a community.** For example, in the early days of the church in Jerusalem, it was the service work of the believers toward one another that people were impressed by. The church had favor in the eyes of outsiders because of their ministry to the poor. This led to opportunities to share the gospel, and as a result many people were being saved and new meetings were started (Acts 2:42-47). In another example, from Acts 28:7-10, Paul prayed for a sick man who had a bad case of dysentery. He was healed, and this led to more people coming for prayer, which grew to where Paul and his friends were being cared for and held in respect. (6.) **Sometimes we will have to experiment with different options to find something that will work.** Romans 12:2 teaches that even when we are renewing our minds, we will have to test-out-by-trial-to-discover the will of God, that which is fertile, advantageous, well-pleasing, and mature (cf. Phil. 1:9-11).

One of the important lessons we can learn from the Scriptures is that sometimes we have to wait. God does not work on our time-table. He invites us to ask Him. In due time we will reap, if we do not give up (Gal.6:9,10).