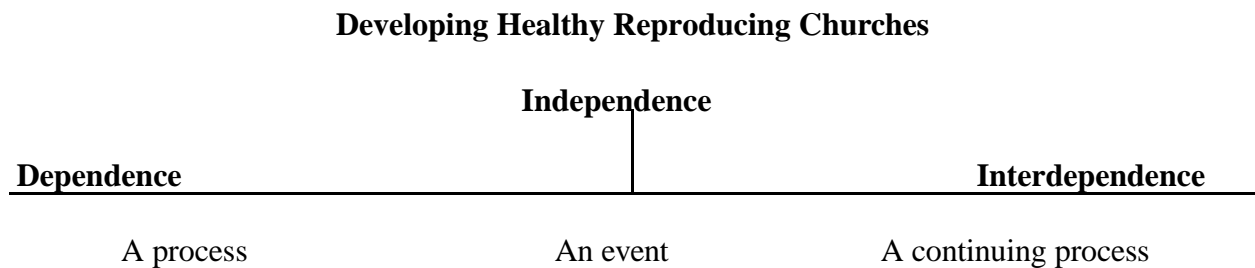


The Process of Developing Healthy Reproducing Churches

Introduction

All churches which become healthy reproducing churches go through a process of stages in their development. We might diagram that process as follows:



That process of moving from dependence to independence is defined very clearly in Acts 14:21-24. Then the continuing process of interdependence is explained in Acts 16:1-5. These passages will provide a foundation with the addition of other passages as needed for further explanation.

We see that these passages give us the five stages of development that are common to all of the main churches in the book of Acts. These five stages are:

- I. Initial Contacts
Goal: Evangelism
- II. Group Meetings
Goal: Stable Christians
- III. Church Beginnings & Leadership Development
Goal: Spiritual Trained Leadership
- IV. Church Organization
Goal: Independent Churches
- V. Church Extension
Goals: Sending Churches
Sister Churches

Three cities are mentioned in these verses. Those cities are Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. A Jewish synagogue was located in Iconium but no mention is made of a synagogue in either Lystra or Derbe which means that there were less than ten Jewish families in either of those cities. Paul and Barnabas began preaching in the synagogue in Iconium (14:1) but they began by preaching in a public meeting place in the other two cities (14:7, 14:21).

The first thing that we notice is that the team of Paul and Barnabas viewed their ministry as a regional ministry and not just a local ministry. Iconium was 18 miles from Lystra and Derbe was 40 miles the opposite direction from Lystra which meant that it was nearly 60 miles from one end of this region to the other. This meant that Paul and Barnabas began with the plan to start several churches in this area and not just one. It also meant that they had to immediately begin

preparing the Christians for their absence since Paul and Barnabas had to leave town quickly from both Iconium and Lystra due to persecution.

Some of the following things are mentioned about the establishing of churches in these three cities.

1. The team preached the Gospel - 14:1, 7, 21
2. There was a great response from both Jews and Greeks - 14:1, 14:21
3. There was both immediate and continuing opposition - 14:2, 5, 19
4. There was teaching of those who had believed - 14:3, 14:21-22
5. There was movement between the various cities (planned absences) - 14:6, 14:20, 14:21, 14:24
6. The team focused on making disciples - 14:21
7. The team focused on strengthening the souls of the disciples - 14:22
8. The team focused on encouraging the disciples to continue in the faith - 14:22
9. The team prepared the disciples for persecution - 14:22
10. The team appointed elders in every church- 14:23
11. The team prayed with fasting for those elders and churches - 14:23
12. The team commended them to the Lord on whom they believed - 14:23
13. The team left town and visited other areas - 14:24-26
14. The team returned some time later - 16:1-5
15. The team selected Timothy to join the church planting team for other areas - 16:2-3
16. The team left behind churches that were continuing to multiply - 16:5
17. The team returned some time later to strengthen the disciples - 18:23

One of the key things to notice is that the focus was on making disciples and the development of churches was the natural result. Today we often find that the focus is on having a traditional church program with little or no effort to make disciples. That is like putting the cart before the horse. Our commission is to make disciples and the result of making disciples is that churches develop. Our commission is not to plant church programs with the hope that disciples will result. With these thoughts as a background, let us look at what begins to happen at each stage of the development of a church.

Stages of Development of a Church

Stage One

When Christ first began His ministry, He invited people to “Come and See” - John 1:35-46. He was inviting people to learn about Him and get to know Him. This stage in the ministry of Christ lasted about a year as He spent time with many people and invited many people to follow Him. He was building relationships with them and introducing them to Himself. Whenever we are spending time with people, building relationships with them and introducing them to Christ, we are doing what Christ did during the year after He gave that call to “Come and See”.

When a work is a stage one work, the primary focus is on preaching the Gospel and leading people to Christ. This is clearly seen as the beginning stage in every place - Acts 2:37-41, Acts 8:1,

4, Acts 8:5, Acts 8:35, Acts 10:34-45, Acts 11:19-21, Acts 13:5, Acts 13:15-49, Acts 14:1, 7, 21, Acts 16:13-14, 25-34, Acts 17:1-3, Acts 17:11-12, Acts 17:16-34, Acts 18:4-8, Acts 19:1-10. By looking at these passages, we see that if a work is still a Stage One work, the primary job is preaching the Gospel and leading people to Christ. If we focus on some other thing (building buildings, holding services, children's work or some other thing), we will be trying to start on the wrong foundation. If we are at stage one in a church planting ministry, we might want to ask ourselves the following questions:

1. Are we regularly making contacts with people where they live, work and spend their free time to build relationships for the purpose of sharing the Gospel?
2. Are we regularly praying for and sharing the Gospel with those that we have met?
3. As people show an interest, are we meeting with them regularly for an evangelistic Bible study to help them learn to search the Scripture to find answers to their questions (Acts 17:11-12)?
4. As people begin to place their trust in Christ, are we regularly meeting with them in their homes for Bible study and fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer?
5. Are we helping those who place their trust in Christ to begin praying for the salvation of their relatives (John 1:39-42), friends (John 1:43-46), co-workers (Matthew 9:9-10) and neighbors and other acquaintances (Mark 1:30-33)?
6. Are we going with those who have become Christians to share the Gospel with these relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors and other acquaintances?

Stage One and Two

About a year after Christ began His ministry, He gave a second call to those He had invited to spend time with Him over the previous year. In Mark 1:17 Christ said, "Come after me, and I will make you become fishers of men." This was His second call and was a call to "Come and Grow". At this point Christ is beginning to develop the team that will plant and establish the first church in Jerusalem and from there to the ends of the earth. During this period the disciples were going to participate with Christ in addition to observing Him. Again this was a call to a larger group than just the twelve and probably included the seventy and the hundred and twenty. The focus of this period of ministry was that they were going to grow and learn how to share the gospel with others. This required a different emphasis in ministry because now Christ began to focus more on the disciples.

As soon as the first individuals become Christians and we start to gather them together for Bible study, a work becomes a stage one and two work. The preaching of the Gospel must continue in every stage or a church starts to die. However, as soon as there are Christians, it is time to begin follow-up Bible studies with the new Christians. Acts 2:41-42 tells us, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." Here we see that the new Christians were gathered into groups (probably small groups that met in homes throughout Jerusalem - Acts 2:46, 5:28), for the purpose of Bible study and fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer. The goal was always to "Make Disciples" whether they studied the Word together, fellowshiped together, ate together, prayed to-

gether or whatever they did. One of the things to notice is that the early church did things together usually in small groups. As they gathered together in homes and other places, the result was that family and friends were also becoming Christians - Acts 2:47.

Today the focus is often on beginning programs (especially Sunday morning services) in stage two instead of making disciples. The church in Troas which Paul and his team had ministered too several times and which already had disciples did not seem to meet on Sunday morning but rather in the evening - Acts 20:7. If we focus on a region rather than a building location, the team can have Bible studies going in several areas for a period of time before beginning Sunday services. These are more informal and allow people to get their questions answered which is a real key in the process of helping them become disciples. Then when Sunday services begin, they may begin in more than one location which provides an ideal situation for establishing multiple churches.

If we are at stage one and two in a church planting ministry, we might want to ask ourselves the following questions:

- 1-6. All of the questions in stage one
7. Are we helping the new Christians get their questions answered?
8. Are we helping the new Christians to begin to build loving relationships with one another as Christians?
9. Are we taking new Christians with us as we minister so that they can begin to learn through observation?
10. Are we having new Christians in our homes so that they can see how Christian homes function?

Stage One, Two and Three

After another nine months of ministry with the disciples, Christ gave them a third call. This is found in Mark 3:13-15 where we read, "And He went up on the mountain and called to *Him* those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. ¹⁴ Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, ¹⁵ and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons:" This third call after 21 months of ministry was a call to "Come and Serve". The first reason for this call was, "That they might be with Him." During this period Christ would also send out the twelve and later the seventy and they would come back to Him and report what they had done and what they had taught.

Corporate worship by a group of growing Christians is for the purpose that they, "Might be with Christ and also worship the Father." This is the ideal time to begin Sunday services so that the Christians can begin to worship Christ as a corporate body which may include people from several different Bible studies.

When the number of Christians who are becoming disciples has increased to the point where it is time to begin Sunday services, remember that the purpose of Sunday services is to worship God. The beginning of Sunday services is very important because that is the opportunity for the Christians to express as a corporate group their worship to God (Acts 20:7, I Corinthians 14:23-35, I

Corinthians 16:2). A key to remember at this point is that in a worship service the Christians are the participants and God is the audience. We will see what the passages listed above tell us about these meetings of the whole church.

People have often been so focused on the topic of tongues (either for or against) that they have failed to realize that I Corinthians 14:23-35 focuses on what a meeting of the whole church was like in the early church. Those verses tell us:

“²³ Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those who are* uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? ²⁴ But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. ²⁵ And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. ²⁶ How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, *each* in turn, and let one interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. ²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. ³⁰ But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. ³² And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. ³³ For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. ³⁴ Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says. ³⁵ And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.”

In verse 23 we are told that we are talking about a meeting of the whole church. In this verse we see that it is possible that unlearned and unbelievers could also be a part of the congregation. The word that is translated unlearned is used five times in the New Testament (Acts 4:13, I Cor. 14:16, 14:23, 14:24, II Cor. 11:6). In Acts 4:13 it is translated ignorant and talks about the fact that the apostles were not part of the religious officials. The word translated unlearned in that verse probably speaks of the fact that they were not familiar with the Rabbinical teachings. In II Cor. 11:6 Paul said his speaking was not as eloquent as the that of the false teachers mentioned in the earlier verses. In these three uses in I Cor. 14:16, 23, 24 it speaks either of those who are not yet Christians or those who are new Christians and have not had the opportunity to learn yet. In verses 23 through 25 we see that the services of the whole church should bring both the unbelieving and the unlearned to an understanding of true worship of God.

If a church waits until there are some disciples to begin Sunday services, then it is possible for that church to follow the pattern given in these verses for developing the disciples as the spiritual leadership of the church. In verse 26 we see that all are to be involved in sharing in the worship services (In the Jewish synagogue after which the early church was patterned, every service would have seven to nine men read various passages from the Old Testament.) From the very first Sunday service we want to help people become participants and not just spectators.

In verse 26 we see that one would read a Psalm. Even a very new Christian can read a Psalm as

a call to worship. Someone else would teach a doctrine. Since Corinth was a seaport and had people from many areas of the Roman world pass through the city, Christians from other parts of the world might also want to share. (The next verses will tell us that there were some limitations on those who spoke other languages.) Since the New Testament was not yet written, someone else might share a revelation (Today as a person reads from the New Testament that person is sharing what was given by revelation before the New Testament was written.) Still another person might give an interpretation. (to explain in words or to expound). However, everything was to be done to build up the other believers.

In Acts 13 we see that Paul and Barnabas were at Pisidia and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. In verse 15 we see a typical service in the synagogue, “And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.” Various men gave readings from the different parts of the Old Testament and then they asked Paul and Barnabas to give a message of encouragement for the people. This is a Biblical example of an interpretation.

We see that it is allowable for visitors who speak a different language to participate only if there is someone who can interpret into the language of the congregation. When this happens, there are to only be two or at the very most three who would speak in a different language (I Cor. 14:27-28). Otherwise it might cause some to lose interest.

In the typical service of the early church from I Cor. 14:29-33 we see that it was common for two or three to speak and give a doctrine or an interpretation. (This means the a person just beginning to speak doesn't need to prepare the entire sermon.) The others were to examine what was being said to make certain that what was said was in agreement with the Word of God. Over a period of time all were to be given opportunities to explain the Word of God so that all would learn and all would be encouraged. Of course the one who learns the most in any sermon is the person who spends the entire week preparing to share that passage from the Word of God. The Word will always bring encouragement to those who hear it as long as they have a right heart attitude.

Since John 4:24 says, “**God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.**”, the attitude that people have as they gather as a whole church will determine whether there is true worship. Those who come with a critical spirit will never experience true worship. However, those who are yielding their spirit to the Holy Spirit will be able to worship the Father in spirit. In addition, As various people read the Scripture and explain it, they will be worshipping according to the truth of the Word of God.

Since the spirits of the speakers are to be subject to the speakers, it is important that those who speak study and understand the Word of God (II Timothy 2:15) so that they can properly explain and interpret the passages that they are explaining. A church that is producing healthy reproducing Christians will realize that this preparation to speak is a key part in the spiritual development of those who speak. Since the members of the church planting team are only a part of those who speak, they will be spending much of their time continuing to develop disciples and equipping them for ministry.

In verses 34-35 we see that women are not to speak in meetings of the whole church. There are several reasons for this. First, they are demonstrating obedience to the Lord. Second, it will cause them to ask questions of their husbands at home while will help the men in their ability to explain the Word of God. In addition, a church which helps men develop will be a church that has entire families while churches that do not use the men will often lose them. That is one reason why we see many churches today that are mostly women and children.

In addition to what is happening in the church services as they begin, the church planting team will want to focus even more attention on the development of the men who are becoming the shepherding team of the church. In Luke 6:12-13 we see that when Christ gave the third call to His disciples, “ Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. ¹³ And when it was day, He called His disciples to *Himself*; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles:” that He gave this call after spending the entire night in prayer. As the developing church is starting to have corporate worship as an entire body, the time has now come to select the team that will be trained to lead the church. The key in selecting this team is much prayer so that those chosen are those who are developing godly character and not those who lead by a salesman’s personality.

Since this group of men are now in training for the shepherding of the church, it is important that they begin to function with the team as a part of the team. During this period one of our primary functions will be to help them become spiritual parents to a group of newer Christians. In a very real sense they are becoming our Timothys and those who they are parenting spiritually will one day become their faithful men who will be able to teach others also (II Timothy 2:2). It is at this point that the church planting team is beginning to exercise indirect leadership so that the faithful men will begin to be recognized and followed by the other Christians. During this period the members of the church planting team will begin to have planned absences more frequently.

If we are at stage one, two and three in a church planting ministry, we might want to ask ourselves the following questions:

1-10. All of the questions in stages one and two

11. Are we showing Christians how to worship the Father in spirit and in truth both in corporate worship and in personal worship?

12. Are we showing Christians how to use their spiritual gifts for the benefit of the whole body?

13. Are we giving members of the developing team opportunities to go out in teams to minister to others in surrounding areas?

14. Are we expanding the vision of the developing team to their Judea and Samaria?

15. Are we helping each member of the developing team begin to work with a few others to develop their spiritual lives?

Stage One, Two, Three and Four

After His resurrection from the dead, Christ gave a fourth call to His disciples. This happened by the Sea of Tiberias when seven of the disciples had gone back to fishing. We read about it in

John 21. The disciples, and particularly Peter, felt like they had failed because they had all forsaken Christ the night He was betrayed and Peter had denied Him three times. As a result, they had decided to go back to fishing and had caught nothing. After Christ filled their boat with fish and fed them breakfast, Christ asked Peter the most important question for effective ministry, “Peter, do you love me more than these?” Peter and the other disciples had to determine that they loved Christ more than fish (things) before He could give them a fourth call. Peter and the others had to make the choice that Christ was their first love. Based on the answer, Christ gave a fourth call as He said “Come and Shepherd”.

In that fourth call Christ told Peter and the others that they were to do three things as it related to their ministry to other Christians. They were to:

1. Feed my lambs
2. Shepherd my sheep
3. Feed my sheep

In these three phrases, we have a short summary of what we are working to develop in the lives of the developing team who will become the shepherds of a local church. They need to learn how to feed newer Christians. They need to know how to lead people as loving shepherds and not drive them as hirelings (John 10:11-18). They need to know how to feed and equip those who are mature Christians so that they will become part of the shepherding team. This is what makes it possible for the original church planting team to move on and repeat the process in other places - Acts 13:1-3.

Church organization will happen at the end of stage four as a church is formally organized with its own elders. During this time the church planting team may not be there at least part of the time. In Acts 14:21 Paul and Barnabas were traveling among the various towns of the region before appointing elders in the churches in Acts 14:23. In I Timothy 1:3 Paul left Timothy behind to help the churches in Ephesus and the surrounding area of Asia become organized under their own elders. In Titus 1:5 Paul left Titus behind, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” Scripture gives us the qualifications for recognizing elders.

As a result, one of the key things during stage four is to develop the elders who will carry on the shepherding of the church when the church planting team is no longer there. The elders who will carry on will have different gifts to equip the church. Since Ephesians 4:11-13 says of Christ, “And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 2:19-20 point out that the apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church and Jesus Christ is the chief corner stone. The:

1. Apostles gave us eyewitness testimony of the resurrection of Christ - Acts 1:21-22
 2. Prophets gave us the written Word of God - II Peter 1:19-21
- Their ministry was completed with the completion of the New Testament.
Today Christ still gives:

3. Evangelists - to equip all saints to share the Gospel - Acts 8:4
 4. Pastors - to equip all saints to minister to one another - John 13:34-35
 5. Teachers to equip all saints to teach people how to obey the Word of God - Matthew 28:20
- These ministries are still needed in every church which is why all churches need elders who have these various gifts so that they can equip all of the saints and bring all of the saints to maturity.

In addition to giving elders time to mature and develop Biblical qualifications for leadership, this period of time is also important for at least three other reasons. In Acts 14:22 we see that Paul and Barnabas were:

1. Strengthening the souls of the disciples
2. Exhorting them to continue in the faith
3. Preparing them for much tribulation

If we are at stage one, two, three and four in a church planting ministry, we might want to ask ourselves the following questions:

- 1-15. All of the questions in stages one, two and three
16. Are we helping potential shepherds learn to effectively feed new Christian?
17. Are we helping potential shepherds learn to lead others by love instead of drive others by fear?
18. Are we helping potential shepherds learn to feed and equip maturing Christians so that those able to shepherd continues to expand?
19. Are we helping potential shepherds learn to equip others for ministry?
20. Are we praying, fasting and commending the elders and the church to the Lord?

By the time we have prepared the elders who will be appointed to shepherd the congregation, we should already have had enough planned absences by the church planting team that the Christians are already looking to the men who will be recognized as they elders for guidance and growth in their spiritual lives. It is at this point that the church is officially recognized with its elders in place to lead the church as it follows Christ. As Paul and Barnabas did in Acts 14:24, it is now time for the church planting team to begin planting additional churches in new areas. The church is now being led by its own elders and it is ready to begin stage five where it becomes a partner in the planting of churches in other areas.

Stage one, two, three, four and five

Just before His return to heaven Christ added a final commission to the calls He had already given to His disciples. That commission, known as the Great Commission is given in Matthew 28:19-20 where we read, **Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,** ²⁰ **“teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.”** Amen.” This commission has one command and three participles which tell us how to carry out that command. The command is:

Make Disciples

the three participles which tell how to carry out that command are:

Going

Baptizing Teaching

The disciples were commissioned to do the very same thing that Christ had done with them and this was to continue to happen until the end of the age. That means that is also the Great Commission of every church that is planted. Christ also said that this was to be done in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth - Acts 1:8.

As a church becomes organized with its own elders and becomes an independent church, it is now ready to join with others in interdependence to carry out our Great Commission. We see this is what happened to the churches in Galatia in Acts 16:1-5 when Paul and Silas came back to the area where Paul and Barnabas had previously planted the churches in the cities of Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. In Acts 16:1-5 we read:

Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, *the* son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father *was* Greek. ² He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took *him* and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. ⁴ And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.”

In these verses we see that these churches had now become active partners in all five stages of Biblical Church Development. In verses 1-3 we see that they became a sending church as they recommended to Paul and Silas that Timothy be added to the church planting team. However, equally important verse five tells us that they were also starting sister churches because the churches were increasing in number daily. As Paul wrote his final instructions to Timothy a number of years later, he told Timothy how to continue to develop healthy reproducing churches when he said in II Timothy 2:2, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Here we see four spiritual generations:

Paul → Timothy → Faithful Men → Others

If we are at stage one, two, three, four and five in a church planting ministry, we might want to ask ourselves the following questions:

- 1-20. All of the questions in stages one, two, three and four
21. Who are my Timothys?
22. Who are their faithful men?
23. Am I praying for my Timothys and their faithful men each day?