

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE OF PAUL'S MISSIONARY STRATEGIES: *The Mentoring for Multiplication Model*

Jesus identified what is missing to see a great harvest of souls. He said, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few (Matt. 9:37)." A great need in the church today is a way to multiply workers for a greater harvest. By increasing the number of workers, the scope and depth of the harvest can be increased as well. There is much talk today of the need for mentors. Mentoring leaders is indeed a critical need. Multiplying mentors is needed even more.¹

As a biblical example of mentoring for multiplication this article will examine the apostle Paul. Many have written on the missionary strategies of Paul in the New Testament. Typically, these studies make a broad stroke examination of Paul's ministry calling out specific behavior and values with the assumption that they were characteristic of all Paul's ministry. Rarely are there any comparisons of the journeys looking for differences in strategic approaches.

We usually think of Paul as a teacher, but consider him as a learner and God as his teacher, while we re-examine the Acts of Paul. What we will attempt to show is that Paul was a learner throughout life (Philippians 3:12-16) and that the Lord sovereignly led Paul in each of his journeys to discover values and principles that could saturate an entire empire with the word of God. This article will examine Paul's missionary methods, and demonstrate that he improved upon their effectiveness and fruitfulness with each journey as he focused more concerted energy in mentoring and multiplying leadership. We will gain a better understanding of Paul's maturing in ministry.

A. Paul's First Missionary Journey (13:1-14:28) 47-48 A.D. took place in SE. Asia Minor.

The team for this trip consisted of Paul and Barnabas (and John Mark, for a portion). And their method was that of traveling evangelists going from town to town, making some disciples and then moving on. They covered some 1,500 miles in about a years time, so the results they saw were an obvious work of God that most of us only dream of. But the work was mostly addition growth, and the churches that were left behind were needing some significant follow-up work (Acts 14:21-23; 15:36; 16:1-5; 18:23). Paul and Barnabas were the founders of each church, and when they left so went the church leadership. For this reason it was paramount that they allow some time for God's leadership to rise to the surface. Then they could go back with apostolic authority and appoint those who were indeed elders of each church.

Some of Paul's most influential apprentices were born into the kingdom during this first mission including: Timothy (Acts 16:1) and Gaius (Acts 20:4) of Derbe, Luke, and Titus (Gal. 2:1-3). None of these men were of use on the first journey. It wasn't until Paul's return through the same towns that he could even begin to put these men to use in the ministry. Nevertheless, they are a great testimony to the fruitfulness of Paul and Barnabas' first missionary trip. One can only wonder what the New Testament would be like with out these men? Five of the New Testament books and over half of the actual written content is given to us in some way because of these men.

Certainly it was a good work which they did. They were called by the Holy Spirit to do these works (Acts 13:1-4), and God brought much fruit for years to come. It was also important for Paul to have experienced

¹ In the resource [Raising Leaders for the Harvest](#), by Robert J. Logan and Neil Cole, Leadership Farm Systems (LFS). is introduced and explained with biblical, historical and contemporary examples. This article is a greater elaboration of a biblical example of a LFS. LFS is defined as an organic process of leadership development that results in natural and spontaneous multiplication of disciples, leaders, ministries and churches. For a greater understanding of the principles and process see the above resource available from ChurchSmart Resources (800) 253-4276.

this kind of church planting ministry so that he would later be able to train others in the same kind of ministry.

It is hard for us to see room for improvement in Paul's fruitful work, and we certainly are not in a place to do so—but God is. He had even greater expectations, so He sovereignly began the educational process in Paul's strategy.

Few who see the kind of results that Paul experienced would venture to change much, so the plan appears to have been to repeat the strategy. But before they could even begin, God sovereignly implemented a dramatic shift. He forced multiplication of the team when the two partners became two teams, dividing over the philosophy of church planter assessment (regarding John Mark, Acts 15:36-41). From this point on we see that God desired a strategy that released multiplication, and Paul became the student of God's lesson on church planting strategy. Today we can learn from his lessons.

B. Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22) from 49-52 A.D. covered Macedonia & Achaia.

Paul took Silas with him on his next outing, but he also recruited others (Timothy, Luke¹ and eventually Aquila and Priscilla). They began with the same traveling evangelists method, but during the course of the trip, God demonstrated that He had an agenda which differed from theirs. This became obvious when He would not allow them to go to Asia (Acts 16:6-10), not until certain lessons were learned. It's not that God didn't want Paul to reach these people for Christ, He was already preparing something special for Asia, but the man He would use there needed some further refining. In this second journey, God forced Paul to shift to a multiplying church planting strategy, and planted him in one of the darkest cities in the world at this time-Corinth. In the process of getting him there, God sovereignly chiseled down Paul's team until he was left in Corinth "alone".

- Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke (16:1-16:40) became . . .
- Paul, Silas and Timothy (17:1-13), which became . . .
- Paul (17:14-18:5)

God showed Paul in dramatic fashion, that he could never recruit a team big enough to be able to leave someone in every town he came to. Paul found that the need for production far exceeded his capacity for production. He ran out of team just when he hit the darkest of cities. The need for the gospel was far greater than the shadow of his leadership influence could extend.

Paul, the man who covered 1,500 miles in a single year, was at first frustrated by being stuck in one places alone. He was also more then likely discouraged, and even a little frightened. Yes, Paul, the great apostle was scared. Alone in such a demonically controlled environment must have aroused some anxiety in the apostle. He knew first hand what it felt like to be beaten and even stoned (Acts 14:19). If he found that the evil in Athens provoked his spirit (Acts 17:16), imagine what a place like Corinth would do. But God had a lesson in mind for His student. He appears to Paul in a vision to encourage him, but also to give him a message of instruction. His message was "Stay, make disciples here that could be sent out all over the place. You are not alone, I am with you, and I have many here who will join your efforts." Luke describes the message in this way:

¹ In order to find Luke's involvement on this particular journey one must pay attention to the pronouns used to describe the team. Luke being the author, and a humble man, never actually referred to himself except that he would change the pronouns from third person plural (they) to first person plural (we) when ever he was a part of the team.

"And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, 'Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.' And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them (Acts 18:9-11)."

This marked a truly dramatic shift in the apostle's methodology. In essence, the Lord challenged Paul to raise up a team from out of the harvest itself. It was here at Corinth that Paul first learned the strategy of multiplying church planters in a single church ministry, who can then be sent out to start new works by making disciples. Soon after Paul received this word from the Lord, he won Aquila and Priscilla to Christ² and mentored them using on-the-job training, both literally as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3) and figuratively as a church planter (Acts 18:18). These two were used by God not only here in Corinth, but also in Syria (Acts 18:18), Rome (Rom. 16:3), and Ephesus (Acts 18:19-28; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19). Instead of just producing a church, he reproduced a missionary team that could go from there all over the empire producing churches just as he had once done. Paul found that the gospel's influence could spread twice as far and twice as fast when he focused his energies on reproducing his leadership.

One prominent example of their effective ministry is the discipling of Apollos who immediately took prominence in the kingdom as a preacher. Dr. Luke digresses from his story of Paul's missionary activity in uncharacteristic fashion to elaborate on the identity and ministry of this man—Apollos.

One must ask why Luke would present this digression. Granted, Apollos was a significant leader in the New Testament church, but there were many others that were significant as well yet did not merit any special attention from Luke. Those who were mentioned earlier in Luke's account, have little or no part in the rest of the book. In fact, people are only mentioned when they cross into the path of Paul, and even then there is little said (i.e. James-Acts 21:18). We know that these great men continued to be used by God, but Luke seems intent on only revealing the ministry of Paul.

Apollos was not a disciple of Paul's directly, but rather a second generation disciple. Was this really a digression from Paul's ministry, or actually a further elaboration of the multiplying effect of Paul's influence? Perhaps it was Luke's intention to grant us a glimpse of the fruit of this new strategy Paul was beginning to implement.

Aquila and Priscilla led Apollos to faith in Christ³, and mentored him in the same manner that Paul had done for them (Acts 18:24-28). It is of interest to note that Luke uses almost identical language in describing both Apollos' post conversion ministry and Paul's preaching ministry. Compare the following:

² Luke tells us that Aquila and Priscilla came to Corinth because they were exiled from their home in Rome by the emperors edict banishing Jews. Many believe that they were exiled from Rome by Claudius' imperial edict in 49-50 AD because of faith in Christ. The edict, commonly referred to as that identified by Suetonius in his *Life of Claudius* 24.4, refers to "Jews (who) were indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestus, (whom) he banished from Rome." The assumption is that "Chrestus" is a reference to Christ. The Romans would suppose Him to be a Jewish rebel stirring up riots between the traditional Jews and the new sect. There is certainly some merit to this proposition which makes Aquila and Priscilla Christians prior to meeting Paul, but Luke does not state as much. Luke tells us plainly that they were banished from Rome because they were "Jews (Acts 18:2)." Given his obvious bias it does seem unlikely that Luke would mention that they were exiled because they were "Jews" if indeed it was for their faith in Christ. Certainly, the description found in the edict does not reflect either our Lord or His followers, but when did the edicts of secular governments ever reflect the righteousness of God or His people? Whether they were Christians before or after, Paul certainly influenced them and a life long partnership in spreading the gospel had begun.

³ Dr. Luke does mention that Apollos was learned in the Scriptures and had an understanding of Jesus, but was only familiar with John's baptism. This could mean that he was unfamiliar with the doctrine of Christian

Luke's Account of Paul's Evangelistic Method:	Luke's Account of Appollos' Evangelistic Method:
<p>“...and according to Paul’s custom, he (Paul) went to them (the Jews), and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures saying, ‘This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ (Acts 17:2-3 NAS).’”</p>	<p>“...he (Appollos) powerfully refuted the Jews in public demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 18:28 NAS).”</p>

Paul must have effectively trained Aquila and Priscilla in simple but powerful ministry skills, because they in turn trained Apollos in much the same way with astonishing results which reflect Paul's own methodology, even though he had not as yet even met Apollos. Paul multiplied his leadership.

Left without any other options, for the first time Paul raised up a church planting team from the harvest and for the harvest. Corinth was without a gospel witness, and Paul was without a missionary team. If Paul was going to see a work accomplished here he would need to carve it out of the darkness. Later he would refer to his ministry at Corinth as that of laying a foundation. He wrote:

"According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it (1Co 3:10 NAS)."

The plan was working. The production capacity was expanding, and the production of disciples and churches was increasing exponentially. He began with Priscilla and Aquila. These two went on to do the same thing, thus multiplying Paul's efforts. Apollos, the third generation, then multiplied their efforts countless times over! Paul had learned a strategic lesson from his Teacher, one that would play a central role in his next outing.

baptism, but one can argue from the book of Acts that baptism is tied directly to an understanding of the gospel and salvation. Aquila and Priscilla certainly recognized his profound giftedness and passion, but also his incorrect understanding. They explained more of who Christ is and what he did. It is plausible that Apollos knew about Christ before meeting these two for there was a church in his home town of Alexandria and simply misunderstood a nonessential doctrine. But Dr. Luke makes it clear that Apollos had a limited knowledge of Christ and that he was influenced by the teaching of John the Baptist. For Luke to make mention of the correction suggests that it was more than just a few blanks on nonessential doctrines. Perhaps Apollos was acquainted with Jesus as Messiah and even as a substitutionary atonement, as John was (John 1:29), but did not know of the death, burial or resurrection as yet. As such his message would have been that of repentance and righteousness-perhaps even following Christ-but without the gospel his ministry would be lacking power for salvation (Rom. 1:16). This would certainly best fit the description presented by Luke. Regardless, Apollos was deficient in his understanding the work of Christ and quite responsive to the tutelage of Aquila and Priscilla who were mentored by Paul. The results still come out to be an astonishing reproduction of Paul's ministry practice passed on through three generations!

Aquila and Priscilla were not the only apprentices trained by Paul in Corinth at this time, another example of a leader whom Paul raised up from the harvest is Stephanas. He was a personal disciple of Paul's while in Corinth. Paul writes of him that, "...I did baptize also the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1 :16)." In fact, he and his family were the first converts from his ministry there (1 Cor. 16:15). This would mean that Paul had invested a year and a half in Stephanas' development (Acts 18:11). This is a considerable amount of time understanding that his previous missionary trip as a whole lasted only a year. Apparently the time was well invested.

Stephanas was eventually called into ministry at Corinth as a leader. He was also sent from the church in missionary ministry much like his mentor. See how Paul describes his ministry:

"Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. And I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus; because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men (1 Cor. 16:15-18 NAS)."

Aristarchus was a disciple won at Thessalonica during this missionary journey and he later accompanied Paul in Ephesus. He was trained personally by Paul and became like his teacher in several ways (Matt 10:25). He traveled with Paul (Acts 20:4; 27:2). He learned how to face persecution with Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:29). And, like his teacher, he became an apostolic leader imprisoned in Rome (Col. 4:10).

Sosthenes who also joined Paul in Ephesus on his next trip,⁴ was a disciple from Corinth as well. He experienced persecution much like his mentor (Acts 18:17), and even joined Paul in authoring New Testament scripture (1 Cor. 1:1). There isn't a single aspect of Paul's ministry he didn't see fit to reproduce in others. Nothing was too sacred for Paul to train others in, including the writing of scripture!

Erastus also may have been one whom Paul disciplined and trained while in Corinth, and who went on into various ministries for the Lord (Acts 19 :22; Romans 16:23; 2 Tim. 4:20). Fortunatus and Achaicus were sent out from Corinth to minister to others as well (1 Cor. 16:17-18).

There are other leaders whom we can consider his disciples from this journey, including Sopater of Berea (Acts 20:4), Secundus of Thessalonica (Acts 20:4), as well as Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25), Clement and perhaps Syzygus (Philippians 4:3)⁵ of Philippi. Crispus was also a disciple of Paul's from Corinth (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:14). If indeed Paul was in Corinth when he wrote the epistle to the Romans, as many believe, than we can assume that Tertius, who was Paul's scribe, was a Corinthian disciple (Rom. 16:22).

With this second trip Paul's emphasis seems to have shifted from that of making disciples to raising up leaders out of disciples. The results of this shift have been demonstrated above, but it is in the next journey that we actually find the valuable principles that Paul applied in doing this.

⁴ It is believed that Sosthenes was with Paul in Ephesus since Paul probably wrote 1 Corinthians while in Ephesus.

⁵ Syzygus, which is translated as "true comrade" in the NASB, may actually be a personal name for an elder of the Philippian congregation. Having a personal name that can be translated as a description is not unique to this example in the New Testament. Onesimus can also be translated as "helpful" or "useful," which is why Paul makes a play on his name in Philemon 10-11. Another option would be that Paul is referring to the entire church body in the second person singular to emphasize the united obligation of the church to maintain love and unity. Both interpretations are possible and have strong merits.

C. Paul's Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23-21:16) 52-56 A.D. covered Asia (4,000 mi.).

Having learned this valuable lesson, Paul, on this next journey, invested himself completely to the task of mentoring and multiplying leaders from the harvest who could be deployed into the harvest. With this trip, only a one-man team was needed—Paul the multiplying mentor.⁶ Paul implemented a regional church planting saturation strategy from Ephesus for three years and in that time reached all of Asia with multiplication (Acts 19:8-10; 20:31).

From Paul's first century perspective of the world, there was great urgency to get the good news out to everyone every where. It is important to understand that Paul would not willingly venture into an area that had already been evangelized. He had a strict philosophy that he would not build on another's foundation. He wrote to the Romans:

"And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation (Rom. 15:20 NAS)."

So when Paul arrived in Ephesus and set up his ministry there, first in the synagogue and later in the school of Tyrannus,⁷ we can be assured that there were no other Christians in the city. There were some strong evangelistic contacts in the city which Paul had met briefly on his previous journey but none had actually accepted the gospel as yet (Acts 18:19-21).⁸ Paul claims to be the apostle for the church (Eph. 1:1) and as such to have laid the foundation for the church (Eph. 2:20). He was the first to bring the gospel to Asia. Others would build on the foundation, but only Paul can claim to be the foundation layer.

Paul's missionary journey's never took him to all the cities of Asia Minor. Instead he stayed in Ephesus, trained men, and sent them out to reach all Asia with the word of the Lord. Ephesus became the mother church to all the churches of Asia Minor. The Apostle John came to have a prominent ministry here. Some believe that it is the Ephesian church that he referred to as "the chosen lady" and to the other Asian churches as "her children (2 John 1)." Later, he was to receive the Revelation of Jesus Christ on the Island of Patmos. The Revelation was addressed to the "seven churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 1:4)" and Ephesus is the first church (Rev. 2:1-7), probably because she is the mother church of the rest.

It is interesting that Paul writes to the Colossians and mentions that he had never actually met them personally. Nor had he met the church at Laodicea. He wrote:

"For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, (Col. 2:1 NAS)."

⁶ There is really no mention of Silas after the second journey (Acts 18:5).

⁷ The School of Tyrannus was probably a school of philosophy and discourse owned and taught by a man named Tyrannus. Tyrannus means "a despot or tyrant," which begs the question why his parents would choose such a name? Perhaps it was a name given to him by his students! Either way, he doesn't seem to live up to his name when it came to showing hospitality to Paul and his new companions. There is manuscript evidence that Paul used the school during the hot afternoon hours which would make sense since the customs of the day would have the school in session during the cooler morning hours leaving it available to Paul in the afternoon while most would be resting.

⁸ Luke says that Paul's teaching was of great interest to those in the Synagogue of Ephesus, indicating that his message was something new to them. This is also evidence that there was not a witness in the city until Paul came.

He is an apostle to them (Col. 1:1-2) but they did not receive the gospel directly from him, but through his apprentices. It seems that it was Epaphras who was trained by Paul in the school of Tyrannus and sent to Colossae to start the work. Paul reminds them:

"We give thanks to God...praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit. (Col. 1:3-8 NAS)."

Epaphras, an Asian (Col. 4:12), is probably one of those whom Paul personally trained in Ephesus and sent out to start churches. Ephesus, being the most prominent city in all of Asia was likely to have many from the surrounding regions resident. Paul always looked to choose strategic urban centers for his ministry perhaps for such a reason. Epaphras, originally from Colossae, came under Paul's influence while in Ephesus, found Christ, was trained and equipped with God's word and sent back to bring the message to his family, friends and home town. Once the ministry was established, being trained by Paul as a missionary, Epaphras was then sent by the Colossian church to carry on with more church planting ministry (Laodicea and Hierapolis) and eventually to stand with Paul in Roman chains (Philemon 23).

Epaphras ached with a pastor's heart for the churches he'd started years earlier (Col. 4:12). It is interesting how similar the words are that Paul uses to express Epaphras' concerns and prayers for the Colossians with those he uses to express his own concerns for churches he has founded. Compare:

Epaphras' Prayer for his Churches (Col. 4:12-13):	Paul's Prayer for his Churches:
<p>"Epaphras, a bondslave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings,</p> <p>always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers,</p> <p>that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.</p> <p>For I bear him witness that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are at Laodicea and Hierapolis."</p>	<p>"Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, Grace to you and peace (Ro. 1:1,7)</p> <p>"always offering prayer...for you all (Phil. 1:4)</p> <p>"that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will (Col. 1:9),</p> <p>"For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:8)."</p>

Apparently, Epaphras' heart beats much like the heart of his mentor. He has been mentored by Paul to the extent that he has the same heart, the same calling (apostolic church planting), and the same consequences (Roman imprisonment). Jesus' words concerning discipleship are confirmed with this relationship of apprentice and mentor: "A disciple is not above his teacher...It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher (Matt. 10:24-25)." It is clear that this mentoring relationship began in Ephesus while Paul was teaching at the school of Tyrannus.

Epaphras was not sent out alone however. Another example of one whom Paul led to Christ, disciplined, and who went out to Colossae⁹ to start a church is Philemon. Perhaps the two were sent out as a team following the pattern of Paul's earlier church planting missions. In verse 19, Paul seems to indicate that Philemon was indeed one of his own disciples:

"I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (lest I should mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well)."

Paul also lets us know that Philemon was committed to ministry:

"to Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house (Philemon 1-2 NAS)."

"For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother (Philemon 7 NAS)."

Other Asian leaders Paul raised from the harvest and sent out for the harvest would include Trophimus (Acts 20:4; Acts 21:29; 2 Tim. 4:20), Tychicus (Acts 20:4; Eph 6:21; Col. 4:7; 2Ti 4:12; Tit 3:12), Archippus (Col. 4:17; Philemon 2), Nympha (Col. 4:15), Apphia (Philemon 2) and perhaps Artemas (Titus 3:12) and Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:16; 4:19). Apparently, many of Paul's Ephesian leaders rose to great prominence in the kingdom of God.

There were also some Asian elders who did not come to great stature in the kingdom, though they may have gained an infamous reputation. They include Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20) as well as Phygelus and Hermogenes (2 Tim. 1:15). Paul knew that some would fall away from the faith and even take others with them, but such is always the risk in any work of God (Acts 20:29-31).

The Asian churches that were born out of the Ephesian years were not dependent upon Paul- he didn't start them. They were started by indigenous church planters so they didn't need any follow-up, like the previous churches Paul had started. He gave a short and emotional challenge to the pastors, then left (Acts 20:17-38).

Paul never needed to visit the other Asian churches. He only met with the elders he had trained for this final (at least he supposed) admonition encouraging them to do as he had done and as they had been trained.

How could one man effectively reach the entire Asia Minor region in just two to three years without having left the city of Ephesus? Paul effectively raised leaders from the harvest for the harvest. There is no other adequate explanation for such a prolific expansion of the kingdom in Asia.

In both Acts 19 as well as Acts 20:17-35 Dr. Luke gives us some clues to Paul's Asian strategy in which he established an effective Leadership Farm System from the School of Tyrannus. We can identify seven strategic objectives that Paul implemented while in Ephesus which unleashed and fueled the grassroots spread of the gospel across the continent.

1. Paul established a regional base of church planter development (Acts 19:9, 20:18).

⁹ It is probable that Philemon hosted a church in Colossae in his home. This is evident in that Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon (Philemon 12) and in his letter to the Colossians he has them welcome Onesimus who is one of their own (Col. 4:9).

"...he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:9-10 NAS)."

At first Paul remained in the Synagogue (Acts 19:8), but after three months of preaching this became unwelcomed (Acts 19:9). A man by the name of Tyrannus allowed Paul use of his own academy during the off hours.¹⁰ Paul did not merely plant a church in Ephesus, he established a training base for world missions! This training center also happened to be the formation of the church of Ephesus. In essence, Paul planted a church-based Leadership Farm System to strategically multiply and mobilize a missions force for all of Asia. When he called the elders in Ephesus to himself for his farewell admonition, he begins by stating, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time (Acts 20:18)."

2. Paul implemented a teaching/mentoring strategy by life example, both in large gatherings and small groups (Acts 20:19-20).

Paul gave himself to mentoring these disciples in a context of real life. They saw how he handled himself in the most threatening of circumstances. Throughout their lives, they would all remember how Paul behaved, and they would follow the patterns he set (1 Cor. 11:1; Philippians 3:17). In his own words, Paul said to the elders from Ephesus:

"I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:18-21 NAS)."

3. Paul integrated evangelism into the spiritual formation of his disciples as a foundation for training leaders for ministry (Acts 20:21).

One passion Paul had more than any other, was to share the Good News about Jesus Christ. He wrote to the Corinthians, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2)." The gospel was so much a part of Paul that he referred to it as "my gospel" (Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim. 2:8). Any who would spend any time at all with Paul would soon learn to tell others about Christ. This is essential for all Christians, but especially for those who are to start churches in unreached places. This is why Paul reminds the elders of their early spiritual formation in the context of evangelism. He says:

"I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:20-21 NAS)."

4. Paul released the power of God's word in people's lives to carry the grassroots movement of multiplication (Acts 19:20).

The Lord made it clear that the word of God is the seed of new life (Luke 8:4-15). In Acts, Luke demonstrates for us that it is the word that takes flight in men's hearts and ignites widespread evangelism.

To gain a perspective of the power of the word in saturation church planting, let's start here in Luke's account of the Asian Minor church multiplication movement and take a brief walk backwards through the

¹⁰ Codex Beza adds that Paul used the quarters from the fifth to the tenth hour (11 am to 4 pm), which is the time when most people would be resting and the lecture hall would be unused.

book to track the spread of the church thus far. You will see how the word of God is the fire that spreads the new life in Christ.

- Acts 19:20 So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing (in Asia Minor).
- Acts 19:10 And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.
- Acts 18:11 And he settled there (Corinth) a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.
- Acts 13:49 And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region (Pisidian Antioch).
- Acts 12:24 But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.
- Acts 8:4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.
- Acts 6:7 And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

Given this view of the expansion of the church and the power of God's word we can certainly understand why the apostles would conclude, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God (Acts 6:2)." Instead of being distracted from the essential ministry of spreading God's word among the growing disciples, they determined, "But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4)."

Perhaps it is time for Christian leaders in the western church to make the same determination. Not that we need to lock ourselves up for even longer time in the study preparing for our sermons, but rather a steady and voluminous intake of scripture without any purpose other than to hear from God!

By getting his disciples into the word, and getting the word into his disciples, Paul empowered them to be disciples of the Lord, and not just followers of Paul (Acts 20:32). Thus, when they were deployed as missionaries, they in turn could do the same.

5. Paul gave the Holy Spirit His rightful place in leading his disciples into ministry (Acts 20:28).

This book Luke wrote on the expansion of Christianity is not really the Acts of the Apostles, it is really the Acts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is mentioned or alluded to by the author fifty seven times in twenty eight chapters! When the question is asked, "Who was in control of the growth and expansion of the church?" there is really only one answer—the Holy Spirit! Peter was not (Acts 10:19-20). James was not (Acts 15:28). Paul was not (Acts 16:6-10). There is no human leader who orchestrated and organized the growth and expansion of the New Testament church! From a strictly human perspective this operation was completely out of control! All spontaneous church expansion in a period of revival has that same sense of loss of control. When the momentum of heaven is at your back and the lost and dying world is before you there tends to be the "Ready—Fire—Aim!" philosophy among church leaders.

Perhaps the reason that the western church today is not seeing rapid expansion and multiplication is because her leaders are in too much control. We tend to get nervous and cautious of anything that even appears to not have controls.

Many years ago, Roland Allen wrote on missions strategy using Acts as a viable model for church expansion. In his book *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, he writes:

"By spontaneous expansion I mean something which we cannot control. And if we cannot control it, we ought...to rejoice that we cannot control it. For if we cannot control it, it is because it is too great, not because it is too small for us. The great things of God are beyond our control. Therein lies a vast hope. Spontaneous expansion could fill the continents with the knowledge of Christ: our control cannot reach as far as that. We constantly bewail our limitations: open doors unentered; doors closed to us as foreign missionaries; fields white to the harvest which we cannot reap. Spontaneous expansion could enter open doors, force closed ones, and reap those white fields. Our control cannot: it can only appeal pitifully for more men to maintain control (p. 13)."

Leadership in the New Testament was sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit because they were well aware of the fact that He was the one who was truly in control. In fact, they determined to surrender control to Him so that their efforts were backed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

One of the keys to unleashing spontaneous church multiplication is for the leaders of the churches to be spiritually empowered. The disciples had been with Jesus for three to four years, day and night and seen all that He had done. They had seen the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. They were saved from their sins (John 13:10-11), reconciled with their past (John 21:15-23) and given a commission to turn the world inside out with the power of the gospel and all authority of heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18-20). They had heard all of His teaching, watched Jesus as a model and been personally trained by the Master. They had each cast out demons, healed the sick and preached to multitudes. Yet, Jesus' final words to the disciples before He went to heaven and they to the uttermost parts of the earth were: *Hurry up, and...wait!* Don't do anything yet! Jesus instructed the disciples to wait and pray until the Holy Spirit was to empower them to accomplish the work he had given them to do. Despite all that they knew and all they had done and regardless of the personal training of the Master, they were unfit for ministry until they received power from the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49). This is even more true for the leaders which we train.

In fact, each time Jesus gave the command to preach the gospel, He emphasized the need for spiritual power (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8). Paul commands us to be full of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), to walk/live by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25-26; Rom. 8:4), to be led by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:18; Rom. 8:14), to bear the fruit that comes from the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) and to pursue the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 14:1). Ministry for church leaders is to be in the power of the Holy Spirit and not according to the flesh (Rom. 8:5-9; Gal. 5:16-17; 6:7-10).

The task of saturation evangelism is too great for any to attempt alone. We need help, and that's why Jesus sent us a Helper (John 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26; 16:7). To attempt to fulfill the great commission or even the Christian life without the power of the Holy Spirit is not only foolish and impossible, but arrogant and presumptuous! Nevertheless, most of us have done so more frequently than we care to admit. But we need to admit it, confess it and go back to the truth that "apart from Him we can do nothing."

Spiritual empowerment should not be hard to see in an emerging leader. When searching for ministry leaders, the early church looked for those who were "full of the Spirit (Acts 6:1-10)," which meant that being full of the Spirit was something easily distinguishable. They had to be able to look at all the Christians in the church and discern which ones were indeed full of the Spirit. They did so and chose seven men who met the test. Being full of the Spirit had to be something recognizable.

When Paul first went to Ephesus he came upon a group of disciples and immediately noticed something was wrong. They were blatantly missing something. He asked if they had ever received the Holy Spirit, to which they replied, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." Paul then looked into their

salvation and discovered that they did not know Jesus. He told them about Christ, they believed, were baptized and then Paul laid hands on them and they received the missing ingredient—the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-7). It appears that Paul was able to notice instantly that the group was without the Holy Spirit. I wonder what he would have to say to us if he visited our churches today. Unfortunately, we can't claim ignorance as these Ephesian disciples of John did. What's our excuse?

Others readily noticed the empowerment of the Holy Spirit as well. The early church recognized the Gentiles as indeed a part of the church based on the fact that they too had received the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Act 10:44-48; 11:15-18). Even the enemies of the church (Acts 4:8, 13-14) and opportunists in the church (Acts 8:9-24) recognize the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

One can hardly guess what the world thinks when she looks at the western church today, but I would venture to say that power is not one of the characteristics that comes to mind. Love, joy, and "peace that passes understanding" are probably not on their short list either.

If we believe that the power and presence of the Holy Spirit is subtle and hidden, than our theology is contrary to the enormous biblical evidence! It is foolish to believe that almighty God, creator of the universe has taken up residence in our lives—unnoticed! If there is not the empowerment, we need to repent and pray that God would fill us with His Spirit. This will make a substantial difference in our lives, and the world will eventually take notice. If not, God is a liar, the Word is false and our faith is impotent and in vain. Jesus did not come to earth, die on the cross and rise from the dead so that we can continue to go on living in the status quo!

Paul desired that his Asian leaders find their power for effective ministry in the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit. He wanted them to know that it was not Paul who was in charge, but God Himself in the third person of the Trinity. Paul did not save them or call them into ministry, the Holy Spirit did, and long after they were deployed and Paul was off the scene, the Holy Spirit would still be in control. In his admonition to the Ephesian elders he states:

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28 NAS)."

6. Paul mentored individuals on a one-to-one basis (Acts 20:31).

People develop at differing rates. Emerging leaders don't all start and finish together at the same time. One of the problems with current training models which run on a class schedule with set curriculum is that it does not take into account the different rates of development that a group of leaders may experience. It also assumes that every one in the group is ready to learn the same thing at the same time. We are foolish to think that each of us need the same admonishment, for the same sin, at the same time, in the same way. This is not a system that the New Testament church would understand. Paul disciplined and mentored each one at their own pace. He states to the Ephesian elders:

"Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears (Acts 20:31 NAS)."

7. Paul empowered his leaders with accountability to God for the work that he modeled for them, so that his presence wasn't needed for the work to continue after him (Acts 20:32).

When one makes a photo copy from another photo copy the quality is slightly reduced. When one makes a fourth generation copy the quality degenerates even more. With each succeeding generation the product becomes more and more corrupted until eventually it is more unlike the original than like it. Every new copy

of a previous copy contains all the flaws of all the generations before it as well as its own unique blemishes. The solution is to make all your copies directly from the master itself; this will reduce almost all of the corruption and assure a copy most like the master. The best that a photocopy can be is very much like the original-but there is only one original.

When it comes to reproducing disciples and leaders, the same principles apply. Each succeeding generation must be directly linked to the Master if it is to maintain and reflect the purity and beauty of the Lord. Every generation that only mimics a copy of the Master will reflect back the flaws of both generations. Jesus said that a student can not be better than his teacher; at best he can be like his teacher (Matt. 10:24-25). If the teacher is always the next generation down the chain, than the quality of students and teachers diminishes with each generation. But if the student can learn to have the Lord as his or her teacher, than the quality of disciples will remain high. In fact, with this scenario, a disciple can actually emerge to have a greater extent of influence than his human teacher if he is pursuing the Lord as his master.

Paul understood that the men he was training must have the Lord Jesus Christ as their ultimate Master. They must reflect His beauty, purity and design in their own unique lives. Paul was only a copy of the Master, they needed to be directly connected to the Original Himself. For this reason, as he was speaking his last words (supposed) to these men who were to carry on the work in his absence, he said to them:

"And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Acts 20:32 NAS)."

If a disciple learns to live his life a certain way just to please the one whom he is apprenticing, his Christian life will not reflect the power of the Lord, nor will it last through the long haul. If he does reproduce himself in other disciples, they will not only have their own weaknesses, but will reflect the weaknesses of the two previous generations as well.

In spite of his efforts to connect his disciples to the Master Himself, Paul still had some who eventually fell away from the Lord. Phygelus, Hermogenes, both Asians and probably present for Paul's farewell charge in Acts 20, turned away from Paul and took considerable numbers with them (2 Tim. 1:15). Demas, and even Crescens and Titus may have deserted Paul and compromised their calling (2 Tim. 4:10). Even the Lord Himself lost Judas, so it is inevitable that we will all be disappointed by some of our disciples.

The number who will disappoint us will be dramatically reduced if we can connect them directly to the Master Himself. The connection is found in being accountable to God Himself for godliness, and to look "to the word of His grace" which is able to strengthen us in our sanctification (John 17:17). In a sense, the word of God is our master document revealing the character and works of God that we are to copy in our own character and behavior. If we each have as our highest goal to be found pleasing to our Lord, then we will live righteously even when there is no one else around to observe us, save God Himself. This is the only motivation that will keep one in the race to the finish (2 Tim. 4:1-8)!

Paul had discovered a key strategy which not only multiplied his efforts, but also empowered the work to carry on in his absence, which apparently was a problem for the churches started in his earlier journeys (Gal. 4:18-20). Now that Paul had fully comprehended the multiplication strategy the Lord had been teaching him, he was to put this strategy to the test in an extreme way on his next outing. As we will see, his next phase of mission is his most effective and is born in the most confined of situations.

D. Paul's Fourth Missionary Journey - Imprisonment from Jerusalem to Rome (Acts 21:17-28:31).

We don't often think of Paul's imprisonments as missionary journeys, but I assure you—*he did!* In fact, Paul claims to have more success in his missionary role from jail than he did in any of his previous missionary

journeys. Being locked up wasn't a hindrance to his missionary activity, it was an enhancement! While under arrest, Paul saw even "greater progress" in the gospel, without even leaving his front door. Eventually, according to his own words, Paul reached all the Gentiles from a prison cell. Talk about a cell-based ministry!!

Listen to what Paul states:

"Now I want you to know brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear." (Philippians 1:12-14 NAS)

Whether the following refers to his first Roman imprisonment, or his last, the words are still incredible. He again states:

"At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth." (2 Tim. 4:16-17 NAS).

How did Paul manage such an effective global influence from his jail cell?

1. His legal appeal itself brought the gospel to many.

In his first imprisonment, Paul preached to the greatest political rulers of the day including Felix governor of Judea (Acts 24:10-26), Festus, his successor, king Agrippa and his wife Bernice (Acts 25:27-26:32), and Nero himself (Acts 25:11-12; 27:24; 2 Tim. 4:17). He also managed to plant a church on the island of Malta while in transport to Rome (Acts 28:1-10). Rome even picked up the bill for his travels on this missionary journey!

2. His world renown reputation brought many to hear him in his rented quarters where he was given speaking privileges.

His first imprisonment was in Rome where Paul was under house arrest. Paul had already gained such a world renown reputation (Acts 17:6) that a crowd came to greet him in Rome when he arrived:

"and thus we came to Rome. And the brethren, when they heard about us, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. And when we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him (Acts 28:14-16 NAS)."

It seems this is an unusual spin on the Great Commission in which the uttermost parts of the earth came to him. They came in groves to Paul's rented home where he was given special "speaking privileges" (Acts 28:20-29).

"And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered (Acts 28:30-31 NAS)."

Try to imagine how it sounded to the Ephesian and Colossian churches when they received a letter from Paul while he was in prison and he asked them to pray for his boldness in preaching the gospel as he ought to. He wrote:

"and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak (Eph. 6:19-20 NAS)."

Paul apparently had every expectation of open opportunities to preach the word during this jail term. He asked of the Colossians:

"Devote yourselves to prayer...praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak (Col. 4:2-4 NAS)."

These do not sound like the words of a frustrated evangelist pacing the floors of an empty cell. In fact, it sounds more like a man who needs divine help just to take advantage of all the opportunities he faces! Paul seemed to have more evangelistic contacts in jail than most of us do out in the populace. Perhaps we don't take the time to recognize the fields before us that are indeed white for a harvest (John 4:35; Matt. 9:37-38).

3. His incarceration provoked many who were free to take up the work he was unable to continue.

Paul discovered an unexpected benefit to the gospel from his being locked up. He describes it to the Philippian church:

"and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice (Philippians 1:14-18 NAS)."

There is a sense that Paul used his imprisonment as a means to fuel missionary enterprise in others. You could say that he "milked" his circumstance for everything he could in the furtherance of the gospel. He even found that those with less than noble motives were preaching the gospel. Perhaps there were some who were jealous of Paul's fame and tried to take advantage of his jail sentence as a means to further their own reputation. Paul even saw that as an opportunity to further the gospel and he rejoiced.

4. His incarceration allowed him time to write. He penned four epistles while in his first imprisonment, and we know of one other he wrote during his last imprisonment.

While Paul may have been locked up, "the word of God is not imprisoned," in fact, it was being released by the imprisonment. The Lord took advantage of Paul being stationary for a time, and gave him revelation. Paul wrote at least five¹¹ letters while under house arrest four of which have been incorporated into the canon of scripture, commonly referred to as the prison epistles. They include Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philippians. The word of God came to the church through Paul's imprisonment. Many believe

¹¹ Paul wrote some letters which were meant to be shared but which apparently were not to be part of the canon. One of those was his letter to the Laodiceans (Col. 4:16) written and sent with the letters to the Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon .

that the book of Ephesians was actually an encyclical letter which was meant for all the churches.¹² Even if it was written with a single congregation in mind, certainly it was God's word meant to be spread! Paul even charged the churches of Colossae and Laodicea to swap letters knowing that they were of benefit for all the churches even if they were written to one specific congregation.

"And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea (Col. 4:16 NAS)."

Paul actually saw part of the purpose of his imprisonment to write and distribute the word of God for the benefit of the whole church. Later, while under arrest again, he wrote:

"I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned. For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory (2 Tim. 2:8-10 NAS)."

It is probable that Dr. Luke was writing his gospel and Acts while with Paul in this imprisonment.¹³ It seems that Paul even mentored others and multiplied his ministry of authoring scripture while in jail.

5. He had access to lost people that the church would not ordinarily have contact with.

"my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear (Philippians 1:13-14 NAS)."

"Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him (Acts 28:16 NAS)."

Paul was bound to a Roman soldier for two full years, but one must wonder who was the free man and who was in bonds? You might say Paul had a captive audience. The guards likely took regular shifts guarding Paul and they probably transferred to other duties as well. These guards are the same who would guard the royal family. Wherever they were sent, doubtless many brought the power of the gospel and a new life with them having been with Paul and learned of his God. Perhaps this explains how it is that Paul could say to the Philippians, "All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household (Philippians 4:22 NAS)."

It is interesting how Paul takes advantage of this scenario while writing to the Ephesians. He describes the very soldier he was chained to while picturing the armor of God, and concludes that section by asking the church to pray for boldness in telling others about Jesus. Perhaps he was preparing himself even as he wrote to share the gospel with that very soldier he described.

6. He always was mentoring new leadership that he would then send out all over the globe to multiply his efforts for the gospel.

¹² Some early manuscripts do not contain the words "in Ephesus" in Ephesians 1:1 leading some scholars to conclude that this was a letter to all churches (encyclical) with a sort of fill-in-the-blank address. Some feel that Ephesians may even be the letter which Paul refers to as the one from Laodicea in Colossians 4:16. These scholars also make note of the fact that the Ephesian epistle contains no personal greetings by name to those in Ephesus from Paul, which is very unusual.

¹³ Luke ends his writing with Paul's Roman imprisonment, even though the ministry of Paul was to continue as was Luke's partnership with him (2 Tim. 4:11). It is clear that Luke stayed with Paul during this imprisonment (Col. 4:14; Philemon 24) probably writing to Theophilus—and all of us as well. This would help explain his detailed accounting of Paul's life.

Paul had many creative ways in which his prison term furthered the gospel. But having visitors, appearing before rulers and judges and sharing the gospel with prison guards are not enough to get the gospel out to the extent which Paul claims to have accomplished. It is the opinion of this author that the last means was the most prolific-mentoring and multiplying leadership. The reason that Paul could say that "the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear" is that his voice was being carried out by empowered apprentice leaders. This is the only explanation that can make sense of Paul's claims that his imprisonment was cause for greater progress. The only way that being stuck full time under house arrest was more effective than being free to travel and preach is if Paul was effectively releasing others to take the word out all over the empire. This he did.

Paul was never intentionally alone. Wherever he went, whatever he did, he brought along apprentices. Of the thirteen letters Paul wrote eleven of them mention others who were with him. Even at the end, in his most desperate and lonely hour, while sitting in a dungeon on death row, Paul was not alone (2 Tim. 4:11).

When Paul sent out the epistles to the Asian churches, he also sent with them Onesimus and Tychicus (Col. 4:7-9). When he sent his letter to the Philippians from his confinement he also sent out Timothy and Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:19-30). But we also find that Paul had a team of several others who remained with him, including Luke, Mark, Demas, Aristarchus, Jesus who is called Justus, and Epaphras (Col. 4:10-12; Philemon 23-24). Just tallying up this list reveals an entourage of ten apprentices. Paul lived a lifestyle of constant mentoring and giving himself to others. He multiplied himself many times over, and this is how he reached all the Gentiles.

Perhaps the most obvious example of one whom Paul won to Christ, discipled and then sent out during his Roman imprisonment is Onesimus. Onesimus was a slave owned by another disciple of Paul's whom we have already mentioned-Philemon. Onesimus must have seen the difference that the gospel made in his master's life, but he did not receive the gospel himself under Philemon's ownership. Seeking freedom, he eventually ran away from his master and wound up in Rome. While there he found out that the apostle Paul was in prison and receiving visitors. Being a fugitive, alone in a large hostile city, Onesimus must have had a sense of desperation in his soul. Remembering the difference the message of Paul made in his master's life, he sought him out at great risk to his own life.¹⁴ Paul led Onesimus to Christ in his jail cell¹⁵ (Philemon 10), trained him to be helpful in ministry (Philemon 11), and sent him out to benefit and expand the church (Philemon 12). Paul even seems to indicate that Onesimus could have an effective missionary ministry if the church would send him out (Philemon 13-16).

What ever happened to Onesimus? One thing is for sure, whether he was released from his obligation to his earthly master or not, he found the freedom he was so desperately looking for! But what became of his ministry? The Bible doesn't say, but history can tell us something.

We can assume that Philemon forgave him,¹⁶ just because this letter was circulated and eventually canonized which probably would never have happened if Philemon refused the message of the letter.

¹⁴ For a runaway slave to intentionally come into the presence of a Roman soldier, and risk opening up in his presence indicates the desperation Onesimus must have felt.

¹⁵ It is a beautiful irony of the Scriptures that Onesimus, who should have been incarcerated, was free from chains but enslaved to darkness, while Paul, who should have been free (Acts 26:31-32), was locked up with chains yet free in Christ. This certainly must have been a very persuasive testimony to the slave who was seeking true freedom!

¹⁶ Philemon probably also granted Onesimus the freedom that Paul was requesting.

About 50 years after Paul wrote to Philemon, the senior pastor of a church in Syrian Antioch wrote a letter to the Christians of Ephesus in which Onesimus is mentioned. Remember that the last time we hear about the Ephesian church in the New Testament is not very encouraging. The Lord Himself criticized them for having lost their first love (Rev. 2:1-7). However, as this Antiochan pastor writes to the Ephesians, things have turned around, and a big reason for this dramatic improvement is a "helpful" man mentioned in his letter:

"I gave a godly welcome to your church which has so endeared itself to us by reason of your upright nature, marked as it is by faith in Jesus Christ, our Savior, and by the love of Him. You are imitators of God; and it was God's blood that stirred you up once more to do the sort of thing you do naturally and have now done to perfection...In God's name, therefore, I received your large congregation in the person of Onesimus, your bishop in this world, a man whose love is beyond words. My prayer is that you should love him in the Spirit of Jesus Christ and all be like him. Blessed is He who let you have such a bishop. You deserved it!"¹⁷

Onesimus may have grown to become a renown bishop of the prominent Ephesian church, one admired by his peers across the kingdom! Onesimus stands throughout eternity as a beautiful testimony of the fruitful ministry Paul experienced while jailed in Rome. His ministry started as a convert of Paul's, raised up as a leader from the harvest and for the harvest.

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¹⁷ A portion of a letter from Ignatius to the Ephesian church, chapter one.