

# BaptistWay Bible Series for September 30: Minister to human need

September 20, 2012

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I don't remember his name, but that doesn't matter. The words the pastor spoke were short, sweet, to the point but so amazingly impactful.

It was the day before Super Summer started. Being the mid-1990's, all the youth pastors arrived wearing khaki pants, blue denim shirts and sporting freshly trimmed goatees.

The pastor, about 40 years old, stood to deliver a seven-minute sermon to several hundred youth workers. He had one point. He read the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:53-9:11). Second, he read the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11). Finally, he read the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15). He proclaimed, "There is a scarlet thread in all these stories. Jesus didn't say much. He didn't do much. He simply showed up. You should show up in the lives of youth around you this week. Just show up." With that, he sat down.

I don't think the pastor was ill-prepared. Rather, he wanted to make a significant impact with just a few words. He changed my perspective that day. He made ministry simple, especially crisis ministry.

In Acts 6, a crisis arose. The Twelve calmly put together a simple plan. We have convinced ourselves the main problem was about food, one of several "food fights" in the Bible. That assumption couldn't be further from the truth. The problem, rather, was the potential slowing down of the

advancement of God's kingdom.

"In those days when the number of disciples was increasing" (v. 1), a problem arose. A complaint was filed inside the church pitting one group of the church against another. Uh oh! Look out! With cool leadership, Luke writes a key phrase about the set of problems, and in doing so, summarizes the fostering of a very healthy church: "We will turn this responsibility over to them" (v. 3).

When the possibility of the message of Christ slowing down reared its ugly head, the church decided to empower more believers in order to meet physical needs. Now, I wonder where they got that idea?

Spiritual empowerment is the way of the Jesus movement. He called the Twelve, equipped the Twelve and sent the Twelve.

How did Jesus equip them? By placing them on the front row of universe-altering teachings, using their hands to gather leftover fish and loaves, and giving them the keys to the Ferrari that is his spiritual kingdom. They were fully empowered with the same Holy Spirit that filled Jesus. Their level of spiritual empowerment was the same level of spiritual empowerment the Holy Father gave to the Holy Son. Empowered small group. Shared ministry. And by the way, you are reading this today because it worked.

Back in Acts 6, they simply modeled what had been shown to them: Empower more people to just show up. Wow, did they ever show up! You are preparing to teach a Bible study because those men chose to write the Holy Scriptures instead of mastering the art of the waiting tables.

We Gentiles have the gospel message because early on, the church decided to let the apostles continue to take the message forward, to preach and to plant new churches. The widows needed to be taken care of for sure, but rather than trying to do it all, the Twelve followed the example of Christ. They empowered other people to show up as well.

The result? New leaders were empowered at a pivotal time in Christian history, including Stephen, the first martyr. More results? “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly ...” (v. 7). All because some fairly new believers decided to not try to do it all themselves, but rather empowered others to just show up.

I recently talked to a young church staff member who was frustrated. Being at a small church, he thought it would be helpful to the pastor if he made hospital visits from time to time. So, without seeking permission, he stopped in a few times a week to check on church-family members who were in the hospital.

This is the act of a good minister, or so he thought. Much to his surprise, he found himself in hot water with the pastor. This young minister was told by the senior pastor he could make the visits, but only after the senior pastor made the initial visit. This would ensure the hospital visit was done properly and also the person in the hospital would know the senior pastor cared enough to go first.

This practice is all wrong. We don't visit the sick to win brownie points. We visit the sick and send others so our churches are a community of love and expressed care. It doesn't matter who shows up. It matters that we show up.

And so it is for your church. The message of the gospel is limited when most of the practical ministry is left to a few. Want your church to soar like the early church? Call, train and equip more people for ministry.

Since we are morphing your Bible study group into a “Bible-doing” group, here are a few ideas for this week:

1. I guarantee you, there is a ministry in your church that is barely surviving simply because of a lack of volunteers. Decide as a group to supercharge that ministry by giving it your time, energy and resources.

2. Adopt a missionary. They can get so discouraged, tired and homesick. Be secretly awesome. Send the missionary and family birthday cards, gifts, letters of encouragement and special things. Don't tell them who you are or what church you are from for a while. It will build suspense and encourage them as well.

3. If you want to be radical, give the nursery and preschool volunteers the month off. Get your hands dirty, really dirty. Take over their responsibilities and let them go to Bible study and worship for the month. You might just start an empowerment revolution in your church.