

Chapter Seven

“Church Members Actually Do Stuff?”

“THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST: ITS TRAINING”

Those who comprise the Church of Jesus Christ must be trained to serve God effectively. It is not the purpose of this chapter to train the Churches of Jesus Christ, but to show beyond reasonable doubt that God’s plan for His Churches of redeemed and baptized believers in a congregation is that they are *to be trained*. What do I mean by the word train, especially when using the word as a verb? As defined in *Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, training is the preparation of someone using education, instruction, and practice.¹ This definition is good as far as it goes, with the Christian concept of training including the glorification of God and the exaltation of Christ within the context of a congregation of Church members. The implication of the goal of training, of course, is the development of an individual’s set of abilities and skills for the performance of one’s duty.

We recognize that the primary means of God’s grace by which sinners are converted to Jesus Christ is the foolishness of Gospel preaching, First Corinthians 1.18 and 21:

¹⁸ For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

²¹ For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

One of the serious problems facing contemporary Christianity, particularly in western culture with its emphasis on individualism and the isolationist tendencies by which so many people live out their lives, are people, married couples, and even families existing in a starkly anonymous and unaccountable way.

¹ *Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1996), page 1936.

Imagine folks sitting under the preaching of God's Word, coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, but then remaining relatively unconnected and reserved in their reluctance to allow for their proper training. How will they know how to live the Christian life they have been given; how to be husbands and wives, how to be parents and children, how to be workers and leaders? Then there is the exhortation that is lost by not gathering, Hebrews 10.25.

What I will show using this survey of both the Old and the New Testaments is that such an approach to the life lived for God is not advanced as a merely desirable way of learning how to serve and please God. Obviously, our consideration of this matter will not be in depth, but will serve to show that God's plan has always been for His servants to be trained to serve Him in various capacities in a personal and accountable way.

Granted, the progressive nature of revelation means the examples found in the Old Testament will be scattered and not fully developed. However, the pattern of training emerging over time, as well as the pattern of training tragically breaking down, abandoned, or misused in some instances, with its full development seen in the New Testament, especially in the life and personal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ with His disciples, will be seen..

We Begin With EXAMPLES OF TRAINING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Abraham is as good an example of training as we can hope for. We might well imagine that Abraham trained his nephew Lot, though we are disappointed that he took Lot with him to Egypt, a trip that was contrary to God's will and resulted in the acquisition of Hagar by whom he later sired a child. It was not a good lesson to teach a nephew. Sadly, after returning from Egypt, Abraham and Lot were so wealthy their herds could not graze together, so they separated, which eventually resulted in Lot living in the wicked city of Sodom.

However, in God's providence, we are, as a result of that move, shown evidence of Abraham's commitment to training. When Sodom was

sacked, and Lot was kidnapped, we are told of Abraham's response when the news of Lot's trouble reached him, in Genesis 14.14:

“And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained *servants*, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued *them* unto Dan.”

Military historians have suggested that Abraham and his trained men may have undertaken the first successful nighttime military raid in recorded history, during which Lot was rescued. Note that Abraham's men were “trained,” translating a Hebrew term for those who were trained, tried, and experienced.² Do you imagine this result was accidental, anything other than hands-on instruction given to trusted men who were relied upon to protect both Abraham and his family? Think again.³

Jump ahead with me in your reflection to Joseph. The account from Genesis of Joseph's brothers betraying him by selling him into slavery is a familiar one to most of us. While serving in Potiphar's house, we learn that everything Joseph did in service to the Egyptian was blessed by God.⁴ Where might Joseph have learned how to manage a rich man's household? Could it be that his father trained him, or at least that he was trained in his father's household? As well, do you think he learned on his own to fear God and was persuaded of the rightness to resist temptation, or might his father have taught him?

To be sure, God blessed Joseph so that his organizational skills were sharpened and matured over time in Potiphar's house, and certainly while Joseph was unjustly imprisoned. However, whether Pharaoh ever realized it or not, evidence and experience suggest that Joseph's blessings from God, from which he derived great success as the second most influential man in Egypt, can be traced back to the personal and intimate training he received while growing up in his aged father's household.

² Francis Brown, S. R. Driver & Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew And English Lexicon*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), page 335.

³ Chaim Herzog and Mordechai Gichon, *Battles Of The Bible*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1997), pages 33-35.

⁴ Genesis 39.2-6

Now, consider Moses, a Jewish child taken in by Pharaoh's daughter and raised as her own. The Egyptian education he received was not only second to none but also extremely personal. How many other children would his tutors have had to worry about as Moses was growing up? Even if Moses was one of dozens of young scholars, his advantages and opportunities were unsurpassed.

Of course, Moses also had to learn to shepherd as an adult, so he could lead the flock of Israel when they went forth from Egyptian bondage. However, the foundational instruction Moses received as a child, which had to include how to lead large numbers of people as an Egyptian ruler, taught him in a very personal and intimate way while he was in Pharaoh's household.

Next comes Joshua. Where might the right-hand man of Moses, the man who led the fighting troops who would defend the children of Israel in battle have learned his craft? Who other than Moses would have taught this man who was born and raised a slave? No Israelite slave would by instinct alone know how to lead an army in battle against experienced fighters successfully.

Thus, it was his intimate association with Moses, who himself had been taught military tradecraft by the Egyptians and perhaps learned desert fighting from his father-in-law that resulted in Joshua learning from one who had himself been taught by the very best. But it was an intimate instruction, don't you see, and not the lessons learned from a lecture series or from being self-taught.

Consider now the prophet Samuel. Remember that he was the answer to Hannah's prayer for a child, who was then given to the LORD's service in the high priest Eli's household when he was about four years old. Thus, the essentials of his character were already formed through the loving devotion of his godly mother who taught him to love and serve God. However, Samuel did complete his growth to manhood in the household of Eli, who was an ungodly fellow who raised two sons to be reprobates.

Sadly, though he was a great and devoted man of God, privileged to anoint Israel's first two kings, Samuel seems to have failed as a father himself, raising two worthless sons who did not fear and follow God as their father had. The reason? Perhaps Samuel never learned how to be the proper

father of his sons because of the terrible example of fatherhood he had grown up with in the household of Eli.⁵

Next, there is Solomon. Of course, Solomon's father was David, the sweet psalmist of Israel. But we must admit that evidence strongly suggests that David was a terrible father, setting a horrible example while admittedly being a great warrior and worshiper of God. Being the eighth son of Jesse, it might be that David was hardly raised himself, so he did not know how to raise sons except to train them in the art of warfare.

Solomon, too, gives little evidence of being a good father himself, though we do have the book of Proverbs he was inspired to write (no doubt after most of his children were raised). However, if you read Proverbs, it is obvious that much of the book is devoted to the art of raising a son, with clear evidence that such is to be done with intimacy and a great deal of personal attention to detail. Sadly, few men and women have been raised by such fathers.

I close our consideration of the Old Testament with the prophet Elijah. I mention Elijah because, from the time of Samuel down to the time of Elijah, we find references in the Old Testament to the school of the prophets, the children of the prophets, and similar comments. However, understand that a prophet was not primarily a predictor of the future, delivering what we call prophecies, but someone who declared God's truth, a preacher.⁶

Consider how those enrolled in the school of the prophets, the children *of* the prophets, learned their craft. They learned by intimate and ongoing association with the prophets who came before them, older men, far more experienced men, who took the time to provide personal instruction to them.

So you see, whether it is raising children, developing leaders to succeed you, or training up men who will proclaim God's truth, the right way to get it done is shown in the Old Testament Scriptures. Training is accomplished (not in any classroom, though instruction is certainly needed) by means of personal introduction to truths, application of truths by

⁵ 1 Samuel 8.3

⁶ Carl Sumner Knopf, *Ask The Prophets*, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1938), pages 19-20 and Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction To The Old Testament Prophets*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), page 14.

instruction, and then the actual practice of newly acquired truths and developing a set of skills to implement those truths. Of course, all of this fits perfectly with the plan for rearing children using education, instruction, and practice that was presented by Moses in Deuteronomy 6.4-9:

- 4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD:
- 5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.
- 6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:
- 7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.
- 8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.
- 9 And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

We Next Consider EXAMPLES OF TRAINING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The lessons learned in the Old Testament were not cast aside and forgotten by those serving God in the New Testament era. Quite the contrary. What we find in the New Testament adds to that body of knowledge about training already presented in the Old Testament:

The prime example of training is found in the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in the four Gospels. Consider our Lord's approach to making disciples. *First*, there was the inner circle of three chosen men: Peter, James, and John. Those three were taken with Him to the Mount of Transfiguration, Mark 9.2-13. *Then* there were the twelve apostles, Matthew 10.1-4. *Lastly*, of course, there were the seventy, Luke 10.1. By the time of

our Lord's resurrection from the dead, ascension, and the Day of Pentecost, there were 120.⁷

During His three and a half years of public earthly ministry, commencing with His baptism by John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Christ chose, from among His followers, different men in whose lives He invested His time, love, and wisdom. He ate with them, slept with them, traveled with them, provided different levels of personal instruction and teaching to them, and engaged in the development of their character and personalities.

Important to remember, through all of this, is that He also gave them along the way various responsibilities and held them accountable to perform their assigned tasks.

Matthew 16.24: "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

Mark 6.34-42: ³⁴ And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.
³⁵ And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time *is* far passed:
³⁶ Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat.
³⁷ He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?
³⁸ He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes.
³⁹ And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass.
⁴⁰ And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.

⁷ Acts 1.15

41 And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave *them* to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all.

42 And they did all eat, and were filled.

Luke 9.23: “And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”

His instruction would sometimes include rebuke and correction, Mark 10.13-16:

13 And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and *his* disciples rebuked those that brought *them*.

14 But when Jesus saw *it*, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

15 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

16 And he took them up in his arms, put *his* hands upon them, and blessed them.

To put to rest any doubts about the personal nature of His instruction, consider Luke 11.1:

“And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”

Of course, this led to the Savior providing for them what is sometimes termed the Lord’s prayer, a template useful as a guide for disciples to know the essentials of praying to God, Matthew 6.9-15.

With the Lord Jesus Christ providing the best examples, we find much additional instruction provided by the Apostle Paul in the epistles he wrote. In the passages that follow, try to imagine – if they do not demand the personal ministry of one Christian to another – what these verses do suggest:

First Thessalonians 2.7-12: 7 But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

- 8 So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.
- 9 For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.
- 10 Ye *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:
- 11 As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father *doth* his children,
- 12 That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

Sadly, these days some mothers and fathers are not intimate and attentive with their children, but that should not be. How many mothers and fathers know, really know, how to parent their children in this fashion? I have observed very few throughout my scores of years as a Christian.

- Ephesians 4.11-16:
- 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;
- 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:
- 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

- 14 That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;
- 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:
- 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Take note that Paul showed that developing Christians for a life of ministry is not so much different from raising children. Any parent who has more than one child knows that no two children are alike, no two youngsters have identical needs, and every child requires personal attention and intimacy to be raised properly.

One great example of this was Susanna Wesley, mother of John and Charles Wesley, who spent personal and private time with each of her nineteen children at least once each week while they were growing up. She knew how to do it the right way.

- Titus 2.1-8: 1 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:
- 2 That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.
- 3 The aged women likewise, that *they be* in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;
- 4 That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,
- 5 *To be* discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.
- 6 Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.

- 7 In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine *shewing* uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity,
- 8 Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.

Someone comes into Church membership after trusting Christ and being baptized. Who is to say that man or that woman knows anything about being a real Christian husband or a wife or knows the first thing about being a Christian dad or mom? Are new members to limit themselves to being the kind of mom or dad, husband or wife, their parents were? Good grief, I hope not! And what about those who did not have a mom or a dad in the home, and therefore have no idea how to get the job of raising children or being a godly spouse done effectively?

Where are such poor babes in Christ to learn how to live the Christian life? See the word “teach” in verse 4? It translates *σωφρονίζω* and has to do with encouraging, advising, and urging upon someone a course of action.⁸ Now, look at the word “exhort” in verse 6. Translating *παρακαλέω* and meaning urge, exhort, encourage, its meaning developed over the years from a word that initially meant to call to one’s side.⁹ That provides a mental picture of a certain level of intimacy, does it not?

It is undeniable that training is thoroughly woven into the Scriptures as a means of raising children, as a means for developing leadership, as a means for providing for a successor, as a means for training young women how to love their husbands and their children, as a means for training young men how to be real men, and as a means for bringing Christians in the Church to spiritual maturity with skill sets that will enable them to serve God and bear fruit.

Is it not, therefore, tragic when our western cultural biases reinforce isolation from people, justify inappropriate autonomy from those who would mentor us and hold us accountable as they train us to live for Christ? Let us,

⁸ Bauer, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), pages 986-987.

⁹ *Ibid*, pages 764-765.

therefore, recognize that, since the Church of Jesus Christ is the pillar and ground of the truth, First Timothy 3.15, we should certainly be committed to learning how we ought to behave ourselves in the Church.

That can only fully be accomplished when we recognize that training involves more than lecturing by a pastor or a teacher and involves more than devotional Bible reading and prayer by a committed believer. It also involves the appropriate application of the truth to our lives by a mentor and the practicing of that applied truth under the watchful eye of that mentor. Only in the Church of Jesus Christ are mentors authorized and given grace by God to fulfill the commission given by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are you being trained at present? Pastors should seek older mentors in the ministry. I would suggest that members prayerfully consider seeking out your pastor to arrange for training after the Scriptural fashion. After all, how else is Christ's command that we teach you to do all things whatsoever He has commanded to be fulfilled?