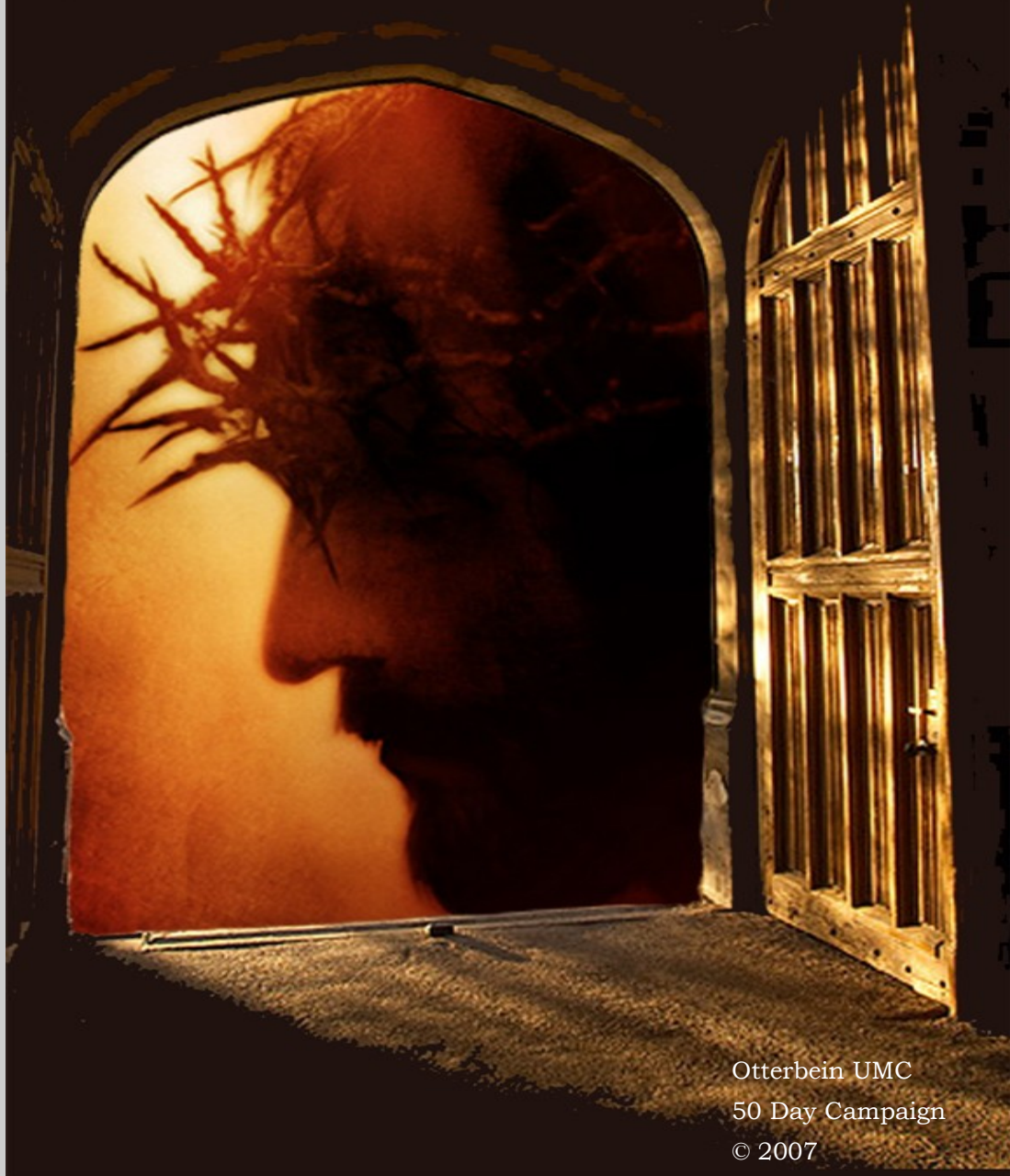


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Teaching Disciples of Christ to Connect with Others



Otterbein UMC
50 Day Campaign
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NOTE TO GROUP FACILITATORS

The lessons are designed to have your group look at scripture in ways that allow for practical application and hopefully, life transformation. The amount of time necessary for each lesson will depend on the size of the group and the amount of discussion. We encourage you to help everyone be an active part of your group life.

Make prayer a vital part of your group's activity, not just a "little add on" at the end. The last page of each lesson gives space for listing prayer requests and concerns that arise from the lesson or from your discussions. Prayer is a vital part of group life! Budget your time to include prayer for one another!

Very little scripture is actually written out in this study. It is designed this way to get participants to use their Bibles. Encourage everyone to have their Bible handy. This study was written for best use with the NIV as some questions take their phrasing directly from this version. However, if others have a different version that is okay.

Each lesson has an "Action Focus." The real strength of the lessons and the best hope of this study having a life-changing impact depends on doing these.

Each lesson will have specific tie-ins to the most recent sermon. Feel free to ask relevant questions that help your group identify this sermon-connection. Challenge your group to memorize the "Key Verse."

Your group is not simply a "meeting" but is the body of Christ, and where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, He is there! May we all become fully committed followers of Jesus Christ!

Spend the first minutes of Session 1 getting acquainted and filling in everyone's information inside the back cover.

A presentation of the gospel is included on page 26 of this study guide for your convenience. You may reference it at any time if the make-up of your group indicates the need to do so.

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Lesson 1 Examining God's Heart for the Lost

Scripture in Context

Luke 15:1-2 tells us why Jesus told the following parables. There in the middle of a crowd was Jesus. Surrounding him were the outcasts and sinners of society. Apparently something Jesus was saying resonated in their hearts. Lurking around the fringes of the crowd were the religious leaders of Christ's day. You can imagine them pointing at him and whispering loud on purpose so that Jesus might even be able to hear them. "Look at him, hanging around with sinners. He is even eating with them as though they are friends. No sinner is a friend of God's and yet He acts as though they are so important." Jesus took the moment to teach, not only what the crowd needed to hear, but what the religious leaders needed to understand... God cares about the Lost.

~ It's All about People ~

Open - Describe an experience or time you were lost.

Read Luke 15 (You may want to read the left hand column first)

Parables of the lost: 1. Sheep 2. Coin 3. Son

Who might the outcasts and sinners of our society be (verse 1)? Are there people you view as being less worthy or unimportant?

What would be so important to us that, upon losing even one of it (even if we have others), we notify our friends about it?

When something is lost we cease to gain any benefit from it. Also what was lost becomes useless because it cannot be used and gains no benefit from us. For instance if you lose your keys, those keys no longer are able to serve the purpose for which they were created. Until you find them they simply exist without purpose. When you do finally find them and begin using them to start your car or to get you inside your house, the keys again have value and purpose.

What makes a person "lost" according to scripture?

What benefits does a lost person have when they are found? What is the benefit to God?

Having discussed the questions above, you have a sense of just how serious the condition of being lost is. Until they are found, the lost can never experience the abundant and everlasting life that God created for them.

What does this passage tell you about the length that God will go to in order to seek out the lost?

It seems that the whole host of heaven understands God's heart for the lost since there is great rejoicing when the lost repent (Luke 15:10). Christ knew the Father's heart better than anyone - He recognized God's joy at seeing even one sinner come to repentance.

*What does **Luke 19:10** say about God's heart for the lost?*

What are some of the other things Christ said or did that show God's heart for them?

Does the church today reflect God's heart for those outside the body of Christ?

Explain your answer...

In what ways does your life reflect God's heart for those who aren't walking with Him?

The focus of this study is to enable us to effectively and intentionally live life beyond ourselves. Jesus, of course, demonstrated this over and over as He selflessly reached out to the hurting, needy, hungry, wounded people around Him. In many ways we have become products of a very self-serving culture.

What factors prevent us from being more focused on the spiritual and eternal needs of others?

How does self-centeredness limit our compassion and ministry to others, especially "the lost"?

It's important for us to remember that repentance is not just being sorry for sin or recognizing we've done it, but it means "to turn from the way we were going." To repent means to think differently than we did. It is a "mental" change that produces a "life" change. **Read 2 Peter 3:9**

Let's Get Personal - *What are some areas of your life (in your home, at work, in your relationships) where self-centeredness tends to routinely show up?*

Action Focus: Heart Preparation for this campaign.

1. Confess those places where your selfishness most frequently shows up. What do you need to do to have a “change of mentality” or repent? Pray about these sins in preparation for communion.
2. Who do you know whose life or life-style may be outside God’s plan? _____
This may be a person who has never known the Lord or a Christian who has “lost their way.” It may be a neighbor, a co-worker, a school buddy or even perhaps someone who you might consider an enemy. Over the next seven weeks as you journey with your group through this study, this person will be one among many whom you will be encouraged to serve and with whom you will be asked to make connection. It all starts with seeing them as God does and then making a simple connection with them. You will be able to share your successes, fears and joys with your group as we put into action what we are learning. Have your group pray for this person by name.
3. Some of you may enjoy keeping a journal as you go through this campaign. Write about your feelings, the truths you’ve learned, the joys or failures you’ve experienced. Perhaps there even may be a chance for you to share some of these reflections with the larger body of Christ.

Individual and/or group prayer requests...

Additional Notes:

Key Verse to Memorize - “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others.”

Philippians 2:4

Looking Ahead: This coming Sunday’s worship will include communion. Prepare yourself for this sacrament by repenting of the selfish areas of your life you’ve identified in this lesson. Remember that while we were still (lost), Christ died for us. Romans 5:8.

Lesson 2

Scripture in Context

God had sent Jesus to earth on a mission. Though it had seemed impossible, in just three years Jesus was able to report back to God, “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4). The work Jesus had been sent to do had been finished, now it was time to leave the mission in the hands of the students he had been training for this work. He had formed a close bond with them and thus had concern for them as they embraced this great challenge. They had often struggled to even understand the mission. Yet Jesus knew that the Gift he would send to them would not only remind them of the mission, but empower them to fulfill it. So in this power, the twelve recruited & trained others who united together into a missions team called the “church.” The mission to “Make Disciples” remains!

Embracing the Mission

~ Impacting Others ~

Open: *What significance is added to partaking of Communion when we have taken time to confess and repent of sin prior to receiving it?*

Read John 17:13-26 (You may want to read the left hand column first)

Who is Jesus praying for?

What specific areas of concern does Jesus pray about?

Jesus uses the word “world” many times in this passage. What do you think he means by “world” and why is it significant?

What is the reason that Jesus wanted us to be “one” or “unified”?

What does that say about our purpose as a church?

The article below was recently in our church newsletter...

Why doesn't God just take us to heaven when we embrace His salvation? After all that is what God ultimately wants for all of us so why does He make us remain here on earth? The answer to that should be obvious to those who know God's heart well. We are here on earth to make disciples. Plain and simple, that is why we remain on earth. Yes God wants us to enjoy a relationship with Him, yes He wants to enjoy fellowship with us but we could do that in heaven. What we can't do in heaven is be Christ to everyone on earth.

I wonder what a local church would be like if it's main focus was on being Christ to others? I suppose the worship services might be less programmed and more about simply experiencing Jesus and adoring Him. No longer would worship services be designed to attract people and keep them coming. Rather it would be a time of gathering with each other to experience God. I suppose the church would stop putting so much energy into having great programs and start encouraging it's people to do life together in Christ. Disciples would begin meeting together with each other while inviting non-disciples to come with them. Sunday morning church would become less about having

our needs met or being entertained and more about spending time with God together with other believers. I suppose the church building would become less important while people became more important. I suppose seeing people embrace salvation would be the norm and celebration of this would be a part of every gathering.

I suppose non-disciples, when they did come to a Sunday meeting, would experience God in a whole new way because no longer would the focus be on the music, or message but rather on experiencing God through the music or message. I suppose the time of meeting together would become much more sacred.

When our main focus is on sharing Jesus with others; telling them about his teachings, showing them His love, and giving them His grace we can only image what differences it would make. People want to experience Jesus Christ. People are generally spiritual and want something that is real. We have to point the way by showing them and talking to them about Jesus. We can't only show them or only tell them, we have to do both.

How would our lives be different if we embraced our mission with the focus and zeal that Christ and the Apostles did?

What might zeal for our mission look like today within the church and outside of the church?

Read Matthew 28:18-20

There are four specific commands given in this passage. What are they?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What might each of those commands look like today?

Why do you suppose Christ began his commissioning of the disciples with "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (verse 18)?

Even a casual look at the ministry of Jesus reveals his concern for the needs of others. He healed the sick, encouraged the faint of heart, fed the hungry, and so much more. In short, Jesus met people and ministered to them right where they were. When he saw a need, he took advantage of the opportunity to fill it.

What things keep us from seeing the needs of others?

As a group, list as many things Jesus did to bless and serve others as you can think of. (If necessary just page through the first several chapters of Mark's Gospel).

How did those "served" respond to the connection Jesus made with them?

Action Focus: Getting practical in reaching out to others...

1. Be intentionally self-less this coming week by blessing somebody else everyday! This can be a note of encouragement, helping out a co-worker, or going the second mile for someone. It may be an ARK (Act of Random Kindness), like buying the kid who sits alone at lunch a chocolate milk. Your focus should be doing things for which you don't expect a reward or pay back. Be creative! If you're looking, opportunities to serve others will show up all over the place! Ask your group to help you come up with ideas if you need help.
2. Pray for that specific person with whom you are trying to connect. Include them as your "person to bless" at least one-day this week.

PUT IT ON PAPER...

In the chart on the top of the next page, list the names of those you "selflessly serve" this week and the act of service or the "ARK" you did for them. You will be encouraged to share these results with your group next week.

Who did you bless today?	What did you do to bless them?

Individual or Group Prayer Requests...

Additional Notes:

Key Verse to Memorize - “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45

Looking Ahead: Be thinking of ways you can invest even more time into that specific person with whom you are trying to connect.

Lesson 3

Scripture in Context

Jesus, though still in the beginning of His ministry, had already encountered the crowds. However, in this passage, Jesus pulls away from everyone. “One day soon afterward Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night” (Luke 6:12). No one can know for sure what Jesus spoke to God about but the very next morning he called his disciples together and chose twelve of them to be apostles. They had been learners but Christ called them now to also be messengers sent out by Him. Then Jesus led them down to a huge crowd of people as though to show them the crowd and he began to speak directly to the apostles. The crowd now pressing upon them must have served as a powerful illustration to the words Jesus would speak in Luke 6:20-36. How could the disciples escape the fact that they were to put others first?

Getting Beyond Myself

(For the Sake of Mission)

~ Investing Time in Others ~

Open - Share some of the “Acts of Service” you did for others this past week.

In *Kon-Tike: Across the Pacific by Raft*. Thor Heyerdahl tells how he and a crew of five crossed the Pacific Ocean from South America to the South Pacific Islands on a crude raft made out of balsa logs that were tied together with rope.

During the three-month journey in 1947, they had little control of the direction of the raft and no way to stop its forward progress. They learned early in the voyage that anything dropped overboard was almost impossible to recover once it passed behind the raft.

Two months into the voyage and thousands of miles from land, one of the men, named Herman, lost his footing and fell overboard. The raft, driven by a strong wind in heavy seas, moved ahead faster than Herman could swim. The five remaining men were horrified for their friend. They tried to throw him a life belt on a rope, but the wind blew it back at them. In seconds, Herman was all but lost to their sight in the mass of waves.

Suddenly one of the men, by the name of Knute, grabbed the life belt and dove into the water. He swam back to Herman and wrapped his arm around him, holding his exhausted friend and the rope while the men on the boat pulled them both back to the safety of the raft.

What things need to be overcome for us to step beyond our comfort zone in serving others?

Where do you find the motivation necessary to go beyond your personal comfort level in serving?

Have you taken any other risks to serve or connect others to Christ?

Read: Luke 6:20-36 (You may want to read the left hand column first)

Why do you think Jesus spoke to the disciples of these blessings and woes (Luke 6:20-26)?

What “greater commandment” do these verses reinforce?

List some of the commands of Jesus in the box to the right. Which pose the greatest challenge to you?

How is it possible for us to live beyond ourselves to such a degree?

Key commands in Luke 6:27-36.

Christ was teaching his disciples (us) a valuable lesson. He wants us to love others so much that we even put our enemy’s interests ahead of our own. This means that we have to put away self and start living beyond ourselves. We can’t possibly do this on our own “but I (you) can do all things through him who gives me (you) strength” (Phil 4:13). It may take some discipline, some prayer, some time and even some help from brothers and sisters in Christ, but living beyond ourselves is what Christ intended for us. The alternative is to live without truly living. Our purpose is to become all that Christ has called us to be. We don’t want to miss the blessing, power, and joy that are ours in Christ because we were too lazy, scared, or in love with ourselves to trust in Christ and put others first.

The first step in living beyond ourselves is to realize how much lost people mean to God. The second step is realizing that God wants lost people to mean every bit as much to us! The third step is trusting Christ to enable us to set aside our interests and put others first. This may mean going beyond our comfort zones, it may mean changing our mentality to one of living a “missional life” rather than a “consumer life.” It may mean for all of us that we have to again become the “church on a mission.” We were made and given the Spirit for such a time and purpose as this. The following story tells an all too real but sad tale of what happens when we fail Christ by not being missional.

On a dangerous sea coast where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves, went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding area, wanted to become associated with the station and gave of their time, money, and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and crews trained. The little life-

saving station grew. But some of the members were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now the life saving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully because they used it as a sort of club. Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The life-saving motif still prevailed in the club's decorations, and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where the club's initiations were held. About this time a large ship wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boat loads of cold, wet and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick. The beautiful new club was in chaos. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwrecks could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split among the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon life-saving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a life-saving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own life-saving station. So they did. As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club, and yet another life-saving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that sea coast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown.

Discuss this story in light of the church in general and our church in particular...

Why do you think churches (people) tend to lose the passion for their original mission?

What excuses do Christians often give for not living beyond themselves—or for not trying to fulfill their mission of connecting others to Christ?

What specific steps can you take to put others first and further embrace your mission? Are you willing to take these steps?

Read Luke 19:5-6 - While many of the “life-changing encounters” that Jesus had with people were relatively brief, his concern for others was such that he would take whatever time was necessary to “really connect” with them. This passage about Jesus connecting with Zacchaeus is one such example. Time is a priceless commodity. We have time to do everything we *really* want to do!

Action Focus:

1. Continue daily acts of selflessness. Let “blessing others” become a daily norm!
2. Invest an hour (or a significant block of time) in one individual this week. Visit them, take them to lunch, do something that will give you the opportunity to connect with them. Invest your hour in conversation, sharing, or even in helping them with a project. Your group can help you with ideas if you need some. Remember that one of the best tools for connecting to anyone is to listen well. (While not required, consider doing this activity with that person you’ve been praying for from the start of this study).

Individual or Group Prayer Requests...

Additional Notes:

Key Verse to Memorize - “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” Romans 5:5

Looking Ahead: Be thinking of ways that as a group you can serve or minister to the community or others in need. This could be anything from serving at a rescue mission to raking someone’s leaves. The goal is to serve together as a group.

Lesson 4

Scripture in Context

Peter, always so zealous but usually too quick to speak, stood in the power of the Spirit of God and preached a simple, yet powerful, message. There was no doubt that God's Spirit had come and was stirring hearts because 3,000 people responded to Christ that day. They were simple Jews with families to support, jobs and personal matters to attend to. Yet as the Spirit of God began working through the disciples to build the church, these ordinarily busy Jews had a change of heart that resulted in a change of life. Suddenly self was not so important as being together with those of a like mind and heart. Unity among total strangers was forged; they began to devote themselves to a new way of living, one that involved Comm-unity. People were amazed and in awe as the church began with this great sense of togetherness, fellowship and unity. They made time for what was important to them.

Fulfilling Our Mission Together (Comm-Unity)

~ Increasing Unity with Others ~

Open: Share your experiences in completing last week's Action Focus.

Read: **Acts 2:42-47** (You may want to read the left hand column first)

From these verses what are some of the outstanding characteristics of the early Christian Church? What did they devote themselves to? What did they do every day?

Compare the above answers to the church today. What are the differences or similarities?

How would we be benefited if we conducted our lives and assembling together in the same manner as the early church?

The early church as we see it here in Acts did not come together with unity and in fellowship because their denominational handbook told them to. They certainly did not do it because their religious leaders prescribed it, but rather it was because the Holy Spirit was moving in their hearts. If we understand that it was the Holy Spirit that was unifying the early church in such a powerful manner, what might we conclude about God? Is God by His very nature "Community Driven"? Does He seek after and embrace community? Let's find out the answers to those questions together.

In Genesis 1:26 with whom is God talking?

What does this say about God and community?

What was unique about the creation of man from the rest of creation (Genesis 1:27)?

How might this impact us if part of “God’s image” is one of community?

God had created Adam and Eve for fellowship –that they would enjoy Him and He them. But sin separated them from God. God could have allowed this separation to remain but instead God sought out the man and woman and made provision for them. He took the initiative to re-establish the fellowship that had been lost. And of course this is largely the focus of the rest of the Bible and the rest of history. God is taking initiative to re-establish fellowship with mankind. From calling out Israel as His own people to redeeming humanity back to himself through Christ, God continually establishes Himself as a God of Comm-Unity.

Since community is a vital part of God’s nature it only makes sense that Christ’s highest dream for us would be community. How do the following verses communicate this?

Mathew 1:23

Mark 3:13-14

John 17:11

John 17:21-23

God’s examples of community seem to suggest that smaller and more intimate groups of community fueled the larger gatherings of believers. Perhaps this is most evident in God living out community through the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The fact that Jesus had a “small group” of twelve disciples and that the early church met together in homes suggest this as well. In light of all we have learned, it’s no wonder that the Holy Spirit’s work in the hearts of the early church meant a movement toward Comm-Unity and fellowship. Let’s answer some tough questions about the church today and our responsibility as people who bear God’s image of community.

How is our present way of assembling together as a church beneficial or not beneficial for intimate community?

Many people conclude that today’s church is an “audience” rather than a body consisting of cells. How might they come to this conclusion?

How accurate is that view?

How does the present structure of the typical church encourage the mentality that ministry happens best in a building rather than in the lives of God's people?

Have you ever been in a situation where you really needed some help? Who did you call? Were you able to turn to your brothers and sisters in Christ? A while ago my youngest son who was 19 months old, came down with a serious virus. My wife and I spent three nights without sleep trying to comfort him as he vomited and cried. On the third day of his sickness we were forced to take him to the Emergency Room due to dehydration. Both of us were very sleep deprived and neither of us had eaten well. We both nearly cried as we thought about taking our son into the E.R. where he would have to have an IV put into him and a number of tests run on him.

I can remember coming home from work early so my wife could take him in. We had thought of calling someone to watch our older son so I could go with my wife to the hospital. We both felt guilty about asking someone to come on such short notice to a home that had sickness in it. We tried calling one person but gave up after that. Looking back I realized that, because I did not live in intimate community with any of my brothers and sisters, my wife and I went through this problem rather alone. It was no ones fault but ours (I am sure there were brothers and sister in Christ that would have gladly helped us).

We had neglected doing "life together in Christ" with others and thus in a dark hour of our lives, we felt guilty and hesitant about asking for help. Things will change for my wife and I. God created us for intimate community and we will make time for it. I think the best of what God has in store for us depends on it.

What do we lack when we don't live life together or have a commitment to intimate community such as the early church did in Acts 2:42-46?

What things stand in the way of our building community with others?

Doing community together is critical to our spiritual health. So also is realizing the strength that comes from working together with others on a common goal or need.

How is working as a group easier than doing things alone?

How is it more difficult?

Action Focus:

1. Continue to bless others daily. Consciously look and actively listen to God’s Spirit showing you who and what! Pray for those you are serving and watch God work in their lives!
2. Plan and work together with your group to serve or minister to another person or group. This could be a Saturday morning clean-up for a widow, a person in need, or any place you can “serve” as a group. The idea is to fulfill your mission of connecting to those in need by serving together. It’s almost guaranteed that serving together will increase the fellowship you have with those with whom you are serving. If you need some suggestions, our Service Team has developed an extensive list.

Individual or Group Prayer Requests...

Additional Notes:

Key Verse to Memorize - “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.”

1 John 1:7

Looking Ahead: Who can you invite to church (or to experience community with your small group)? How about the person you have been focused on reaching? Are there others? Think and pray about this.

Lesson 5

Scripture in Context

Previously in this study we have referenced this passage of scripture (John 17:21-23). It is the only place in the Bible where the words of a prayer of Jesus for his disciples is recorded. This prayer took place the night Jesus was betrayed, so it was his last opportunity to do so before his crucifixion. If you knew you were going to die, and this was your last chance to have time to pray for those you loved, you would choose your words carefully. You would probably also choose to pray only for those things that were truly important to you. This prayer clearly captures Jesus' heart for his disciples. In this prayer we can see his concern for the mission and those who followed after Him. Later in scripture, we find Paul communicating the same things (and for the same reasons!).

Experiencing Community

~ Inviting Others ~

Open 1: *Assuming your group was able to schedule and already complete Part 2 of last week's action focus, what things about self-denial and serving others change when we work together?*

Open 2: *Share a time in your life when you experienced a bond of true community and companionship? What are the things you remember most about it?*

Read John 17:20-23 (You may want to read the left hand column first)

According to verse 23, what two things should our unity communicate to the world?

What do you think the typical church or denomination conveys to the world about unity or oneness in Christ?

What are some of the obvious blessings of the unity and oneness Christ was praying for in John 17?

If our unity and connection for others communicates the good news of Christ and God's love for the world what does that say about our mission as Christ followers? Here is how the Willow Creek Association answered that question:

“Christ sees our unity and community as our message to the world that He did come and that He is love, and if we, the church fail at community we fail our mission.”

Illustration of the importance of community to the lost...

Dan Kimball in his book “Emerging Church,” tells about a time when he was at a discussion group. At this discussion was a young girl in her early twenties who had recently become a follower of Christ...

“As our discussion group focused on leadership, the pastors voiced various opinions, including many typical views about what a leader should look like. But I could sense a restlessness in this girl as she sat and listened. I finally asked her what she would look for in her pastor or leader at church. What she said was worth the two days I spent in San Francisco, because it resonated with what I believe is at the heart of the emerging church.”

Below is this girl’s first answer and then below that is Dan Kimball’s comment on it.

“I want the same kind of community with my leader that I used to get when I would smoke a bowl with my friends.”

“This was the first thought that came to her mind. For her, and for many others, smoking pot together represented a form of true (not shallow or rushed) community. When she used to do this, she enjoyed a sense of bonding and equality. What she missed wasn’t the high from pot, but the sense of true community and companionship. She wanted that same experience within the Body of Christ.”

What remains missing in our lives (and our group) that hinders the kind of unity this girl longed for?

Can the kind of oneness and unity Christ prayed for in John (or that the early church experienced in Acts) be found just by coming to church one Sunday a week?

The scriptures below mention several blessing that are gained from true community. Look up the verses and see if they compare with your answers to the above question.

Eccl. 4:9-10

Prov. 15:22

Prov. 27:17

Prov. 18:24

In our study you should have discovered a fundamental truth about unity and oneness that relates to us accomplishing our mission. We have to live life in “unity and oneness” in order to show the world Jesus Christ and God’s love for all. This is much more about living in connected relationships with other Christ followers than in trying to live life alone.

It involves a commitment to more than just coming to church one day a week. Living life in unity and oneness with other Christians fuels the experience we have when we gather in the larger body of Christ. Our sense of connection, belonging, and passion for worship will come alive like never before. We will begin to see others through the eyes of Jesus, and we will begin to see Jesus on the face of others. And when we invite other people to church, they will not be able to hide from the glory that Christ gives us when we are unified and one.

How can (or does) working together as a group add to the sense of purpose and oneness that can be experienced when the larger body of Christ gathers together?

Fulfilling our mission depends on us living life in Comm-Unity. We draw strength and encouragement from those who are yoked with us in the journey! We have one another! BUT, we are challenged to invite others to share the journey with us! (Consider Luke 14:23). Gathering strength and encouragement from the unity we share with one another, we simply must do all we can to connect with the lost!

What more can I do to connect those I am serving to Jesus Christ?

Do they know that I am serving them because of Jesus Christ?

What role does fear play in limiting the sharing of our faith?

What other factors stand in the way of "faith sharing" or even inviting others to our group or our worship?

Living Beyond Ourselves is more than just dealing with the self-centeredness that keeps us from serving others. Living Beyond Ourselves also means getting over the fears that prevent us from inviting others to join us on the journey!

Action Focus:

1. Whether in person or by phone, invite someone to join you in worship this week or to the “community” you are experiencing in your group. When thinking of “who,” consider that person who has been your special focus through this study.
2. Pray for the person you are inviting, and pray for boldness for your group members as they make their contacts. See Acts 4:29.
3. Continue looking for opportunities to bless others through acts of service or ARK.s.
4. This coming Sunday we will share in a special offering for “local missions.” Prepare to share!

Individual or Group Prayer Requests...

Additional Notes:

Key Verse to Memorize - “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.’” Luke 14:23

Looking Ahead: You will want to continue your connection with the person you have invited to join you in your/our community of faith. Also pray about your commitment to local missions that help and care for those less fortunate.

Lesson 6

Scripture in Context

Though Jesus is near the beginning of his public ministry, he has been gathering people. First his disciples, then crowds of town folk and villagers were coming to hear him. He takes his followers aside and begins to minister to them specifically about practical applications of Truth! We call this passage “The Sermon on the Mount.” Many of those following Jesus have just begun to journey with him, but he doesn’t hesitate to explain their role in pointing others to the gospel. Jesus makes it clear that how they live will play a vital role in how much of the Kingdom the world gets to see. Faith in God will be critical to their success, but how they conduct their lives before others will also be a critical factor in others coming to live for Christ. This lesson will focus on some of the guidelines essential to fulfilling the mission he gave us.

Sharing the Good News of Jesus

~ Including Others ~

Open: *What does a person mean when saying of another: “They talk the walk, but don’t walk the talk.”*

Read Matthew 5:14-16 (You may want to read the left hand column first)

Romans 10:14-18 - “But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? 15 And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, “How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!” 16 But not everyone welcomes the Good News, for Isaiah the prophet said, “Lord, who has believed our message?” 17 So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ. (NLT)

These passages contain two critical aspects of living the Christian faith. The one is “our works” (how we live) and the other is “our words” (what we say).

How do these two work together in our lives?

What would be missing if we tried to share the good news using only one of these tools?

The late Rich Mullins, a recording artist and Christ follower, wrote a fun little song expressing an answer to the question above. The name of the song is “Screen Door.” Here is the chorus to that song...

“It's about as useless as a screen door on a submarine
 Faith without works, baby, it just ain't happenin'
 One is your right hand, one is your left
 It's your light, your guide, your life and your breath
 Faith without works is like a song you can't sing
 It's about as useless as a screen door on a submarine...”

Obviously the song is talking about faith and works, whereas we are focusing on good deeds and works. However, it still illustrates the point well. Good deeds (works) and the spoken message of the good news of Jesus Christ must exist together in the life of every Christ follower. To have one without the other is like having a screen door on a submarine, it just doesn't work.

We are called to “Live Beyond Ourselves” in sharing the gospel. If the message is to get beyond the church to the culture in which we live, our faith and works must be partnered! That means we need to prioritize our lives.

What things might we look at if we were trying to determine what someone else really thought was important?

Read John 4:35-37. From verse 35, it appears that procrastination played a role in how quickly they were caring for the harvest.

What might be a similar excuse we would give today?

If the fields are ripe for harvest what does that mean for us today as Christ followers?

Christ talks about two kinds of workers in the field. Who are they? What do they represent?

Share your understanding of the symbolism of the field.

In what ways do we, as the harvesters, reap what we did not sow? Are there lives in which we are the sowers?

What is the relationship between those who sow and those who reap?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:5.

When the harvest is reaped what is the attitude of both the reaper and sower?

Consider your use of your time, your talents, and your treasures. How is our stewardship of them connected to the process of sowing and reaping?

Read 1 Peter 3:13-17

Peter challenges us to always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks us about the hope that we have (regardless of the cost to self).

What is “the hope we have” as Christians?

What attitude should we have as we give this reason for our hope?

The essence of our message to the world...

Living Beyond Ourselves is a great mission we have, but it is not the essence of our message. The message is the simple proclamation of the gospel. It is a message of salvation and love. It is a message everyone in the world needs to hear! AND we are responsible to see to it that they do! We can take the message to the culture around us, BUT how do we get the message to the whole world? Our mission dollars can help make that happen.

But we need to know the message, believe in the message, and be fully committed to the message before we can effectively share the message. So what is the message?

At the 2006 Leadership Summit Bill Hybels shared the “old story” in a unique way, focusing on the matter of how “atonement” happens. What follows is an overview of that message - a message the whole world needs to hear!

Reason for our Hope

- A Simple Explanation of the Gospel -

“Atonement” is what a person does to pay for the crimes or offenses they have committed. When you commit a crime against society, you must atone for that crime by paying a fine, being put on probation, doing time in jail, or even worse.

Even if we have never been arrested, we have “all sinned and come short of the glory of God!” **(Romans 3:23)**.

This carries with it a penalty more serious than jail time. According to the Bible, the penalty is death **(Romans 6:23)** of the worst kind... eternal separation from God.

But there is Good News! Because God loved us so much, and wants to be in relationship with us so badly, there is hope **(Romans 5:8)**! Jesus went to the cross to pay for (atone for) our offenses. Christ atoned for our sin so we would not have to. Because of Jesus our sin has been atoned for, and we can live in God’s presence forever.

But there is a catch! You have to accept the gift he’s given you. You have to believe that God sent Jesus Christ to the earth to live and die and that He was risen from the dead. **Rom 10:8-10**.

How we try to atone for our sin is our decision. Many try to “self-atone” - they try to make up for their sin and selfishness on their own. It’s a BAD IDEA, because it can’t be done. The penalty of our sin is too great a price for any of us to pay. Others, who know the “self-atoning plan” doesn’t work are trusting Christ’s atonement on their behalf. That’s his plan for salvation.

Trying to atone for your own sin means death and hell. The only way out of the whole predicament is Christ, there is simply no other way. **Acts 4:12**

Jesus Christ has atoned for our sins! We need simply to receive the gift by faith. Can you imagine that anyone could understand this and not respond to this incredible Good News?

Action Focus:

1. Continue to connect with those persons who responded to your invitation to come to worship or to your group.
2. Pray for boldness and wisdom in the body of Christ in making disciples.
3. Pray about your faith-promise commitment for next year, as we seek to financially support those who are taking the message of Christ's Atonement to "the uttermost parts of the earth."
4. Consider your group's future... Would you like to continue to meet? What would we study, how often and when would we meet.

Individual or Group Prayer Requests...

Additional notes:

Key Verse to Memorize - "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

Looking Ahead: Next Sunday we will have a Missions Speaker who will challenge us to "serve the world" by taking the message of salvation way "beyond ourselves."

Lesson 7

Scripture in Context

Jesus has spent the last 40 days since his resurrection meeting with his disciples. Though the anguish and loss they had felt at his death is still fresh in their minds, all doubt as to the fact of the resurrection has been removed. Before his death, he had told them that it was to their advantage that he leave them because the Holy Spirit would come. They would be able at a whole new level of servant-hood. He was ready to trust them with the task of sharing the gospel, of loving one another, and of being servants to the world, just as he had been. Just before he ascends into heaven, he reminds them that the Holy Spirit would empower them and then they should "Go." Little did they know the challenges that would await them. Likewise, we don't know the challenges that are yet before us. However, in faith we look to our future just as they did!

Connecting to Our World Through Serving

~ Imparting the Gospel to Others ~

Open: As we have already seen, the early chapters of Acts reveal a church that is committed to one another in unity. It is also a church that was seeing thousands commit themselves to Jesus Christ.

Review! *What factors enabled the Early Church to have such explosive results?*

Read Acts 1:8 (You may want to read the left hand column first)

The disciples are told by the Lord himself that they would be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Where might our "Jerusalem" be?

Our Judea? Or Samaria?

One might think that they would be motivated to take the message beyond Jerusalem just because Jesus said to. But look at Acts 8:1...

What took place to motivate the church to get the message of the Gospel to Judea and Samaria?

Though thousands around the world are still persecuted and imprisoned for their faith, in the United States we have not yet been subject to that.

What might modern-day persecution toward us look like?

In what ways have you ever been persecuted for your faith?

While we may not be tortured for our faith, too many Christians have a fear of public opinion (a fear of what others might think) that prevents them from being verbal about their faith. In Romans 1:16 Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement and why... When we have the opportunity to share our faith and don't, it is likely because our fear of others is greater than our fear of God.

All of us are called to share the gospel on a regular basis, but only a few of us may actually go “to the uttermost parts of the earth” to do so. Jesus disciples certainly were called to this. So was the Apostle Paul, and so have many thousands down through the centuries. Through our financial support our church actually serves those who are serving Christ in foreign lands, and we serve those to whom they are ministering. We obviously serve those on the mission field through faithful prayer support.

Are there other practical ways we can serve those who respond to God's call to “Go”?

How committed am I to doing these things?

Throughout this study we have focused on making our service and ministry to others both spiritual and practical. As we wrap up, what insights into the attitude and character of a servant can you discover in these verses:

Titus 3:1-2

Hebrews 12:14

What additional character traits do you think are essential in order for us to be true servants?

Wrapping it up...

Jesus said, “Whoever would be great among you must be the servant of all.” - Mark 10:43

In light of this campaign, what does “Life Beyond Myself” mean to you?

How has your understanding and application of servant-hood changed?

Action Focus:

1. What things have we experienced that we would like to share with the larger body of Christ?
2. Continue to pray for those we have served...
3. Look for others to begin the process with (they are everywhere).
4. Confirm and finalize plans for your group to continue to meet and grow that you may pursue the goal of becoming fully committed followers of Jesus Christ.

Individual or Group Prayer Requests...

Additional notes:

Key Verse to Memorize - “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Looking Ahead: Plan to attend Celebration Sunday!

Pass this study book around your group. Let each person sign their name and the best way to contact them... home phone, cell, e-mail, etc.

Name

Contact Number

1

2

3

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14

It's All about People!

Jesus' life and ministry were totally focused on people. They were the reason He came, and most certainly the reason he died. Followers of Christ know that He is the reason for their salvation and that He is the source of every "good and perfect gift" in their lives. They also know they are called to minister to, serve, and connect with other people whether those people are followers of Christ or not.

The lessons in this book have 2 basic focal points...

1. The first is "looking inward." We will look inward at our own hearts and what needs overcome for us to live "life beyond ourselves." We will also look inward at the church and how we can serve, build relationships with and connect to other Christ followers.
2. The second is "looking outward." Our focus here will be to serve those not yet committed to Jesus Christ and seek to connect them to the message of the gospel.

To do neither of these would call into question the level of commitment we have to Christ. To do the first without the second will render us useless in fulfilling our mission on earth. To attempt the second without the first will cause us to quickly grow weary of the task we are called to do. BUT to do both means fruit for the kingdom and personal fulfillment and reward for us! May you find joy in the journey!

~ Dan and Wayne ~