

Study Guide for the Week of December 31, 2007

This study guide is designed to help you to become more familiar with the Bible. Study these passages on your own, with a friend, or with a group. If you or someone you know needs a Bible, please take one from under a chair in the Worship Center. They are there for you to take home and use! Sermon manuscripts are available at www.spwired.com.

Monday, December 31. Read Genesis 2:18-25; 1:26-28 in the Old Testament. One purpose of God in history is the creation of an all-inclusive community with God at the very center of the community. The Bible traces the formation of this community from the creation in the Garden of Eden (Genesis), to the birth of the church (Acts), all the way to the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation). All through history God is our primary companion. Yet God has given us human companions. Adam was “alone” at first. God gave him a partner, someone to share the burden and stewardship. Noah was isolated from other humans in a faithless world. When God saved Noah, God saved his family as well. How has God formed you from individual, to family member, to be part of a community or church? How has God companioned you? Who are your human companions?

Tuesday, January 1. Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 in the Old Testament. The desire for satisfying relationships is woven into the fabric of our being. We were created in the image of God, to be relational (Genesis 1:27). Christ gave himself up for us to bring us back into right relationship with God and one another. We long for a few people who understand us, who genuinely care about and for us, people to whom we can trust our hearts, and we can form deep bonds. Sometimes human relationships fall short. We don’t always know how to navigate the sea of relationships. How can you be intentional about creating satisfying relationships? Consider meeting others and going deeper through a learning opportunity or a small group.

Wednesday, January 2. Read Numbers 11 in the Old Testament. There are times when the captain becomes very aware of his or her need for shipmates. You might remember Moses’ call to ministry in the burning bush story of Exodus 3. Numbers 11 reveals that Moses has gone from burning bush to burning out. Moses discovered that “I am not able to carry this people alone, for they are too heavy for me” (Num. 11:14). Moses could have given up, but God came up with an alternate plan. God did not ask Moses to recruit volunteers for Moses’ ministry. He told Moses to gather seventy men to bear the burden of the people along with Moses so he didn’t have to do it all himself. How often do we try to go it alone, do it all ourselves? Finally, we listen to God and seek his will. Then, we gather people for God so that God can give what is necessary for ministry, a share of God’s Spirit, the Spirit that empowers ministry. God called multiple talents into service for the sake of all Israel. How often do we gather to listen to what God has to say, remain open to God’s presence, and consider how God equips us for communal life or ministry.

Thursday, January 3. Read Matthew 4:19-21; Mark 1:19 in the New Testament. When Jesus began his public ministry, he went out to find companions, men like Peter who even denied Christ, but who shared his life and mission. He knew it would take a crew, and in this case a very diverse crew. To accomplish a mission you need mates who can collaborate and engage in team-work. Jesus taught and equipped very unique people to do the work. Any crew needs many gifts and skills. Each serves a particular function. **Read 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12.** Each shipmate or disciple is first called, then equipped, and given gifts by the Holy Spirit to do the work. Have you heard the call of Jesus? Do you know your skills? Have you discovered the gifts of the Holy Spirit for your part in the mission of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20)? Consider taking the S.H.A.P.E course in the upcoming session of Wednesday Night Live.

Friday, January 4. Read Acts 4 in the New Testament. In the book of Acts the Church engages in the same activities that characterize the life and ministry of Jesus. Unlike our culture, the ethos of the early church was communal. They shared *koinonia*, Greek for fellowship, participation, or communion. Loving relationships were experienced by Christians with God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and among themselves. They gathered together to hear the word, to break bread, to pray, and to worship. They went out from those gatherings to bring others into the fellowship, Christian community. They were distinguished by the love they showed for one another, self-giving love. The Apostles, the disciples, and new believers were to do the will of God in the world and they were called, not to do it alone, but together! How is our church and your life like and unlike the Christian community described in Acts?