

Study Guide for the Week of February 12, 2006

Contagious...part 1.

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.saintpauls-umc.com.

Monday – Read Acts 16:4-15, 31, 33 and Acts 18:7. These are passages that demonstrate how the Christian faith spread through households. In the time of the New Testament, a “household” was an extensive network of relationships and it was through those relationships that one person shared his or her faith with another person. The best way that people learn the good news of Jesus Christ today is still through relationships as people trust one another and demonstrate in authentic ways what a relationship with Jesus Christ has meant to their lives. Begin thinking about the people in your network of relationships that are far from God. This is not meant to be a form of judging people, but knowing if they are living in an active faith in Jesus Christ and knowing that God has put you in their life for a reason: to be a reflection of his love. What are your thoughts and feelings about this responsibility?

Tuesday – Read Luke 19:1-10. This is the story of Jesus’ encounter with a tax collector named Zacchaeus. Tax collectors were considered traitors against the people because they worked for the Roman government. Zacchaeus would have been considered an outcast and a sinner, yet Jesus was not afraid to spend time in his home. What was the outcome in Zacchaeus’ life because of that encounter? What did people say about Jesus because he ate with Zacchaeus? Write down verse 10 and commit it to memory. This was Jesus’ mission and as we follow him, it becomes our mission.

Wednesday – Read Luke 7:36-50. Here we see Jesus invited to dinner at the home of one of the religious leaders, a Pharisee. That meal is interrupted when a woman enters in to anoint Jesus with oil as a sign of her love and respect. It was also a foreboding of his death, an anointing to prepare him for his crucifixion. She weeps at his feet, her tears fall on them, and she wipes them with her hair. This is a truly moving scene. This woman, a “sinner”, sees Jesus’ love and care for her. While others considered her an outcast, Jesus saw her as a precious child of God. She sees him for who he truly is and honors him with her tears of joy. What is the response of the Pharisee? What is Jesus’ response to him? What can we learn about reaching out to others from this incident? What does it mean to be **in** the world but not **of** it?

Thursday – Read Mark 1:40-42. Reread this passage and notice all of the details. Remember that lepers were not to come within 10 feet of anyone else. This man broke the law in coming to Jesus. And Jesus risked becoming unclean himself by touching the man. Yet Jesus reached out in compassion and touched this leper. If our hands are to be like Jesus’ hands, how are we to be reaching out? Who might be considered the “lepers” of our day? How might you take a risk to reach out to them?

Friday – Read Matthew 13:1-9 and 18-23. This is the parable of the sower and the explanation of its meaning. In the context of being a contagious Christian, this story encourages us to keep on sowing the seeds of our faith. This takes strength of character, especially when the seeds we sow are seemingly unproductive. It can be very discouraging to share your faith and invite someone to church and they refuse or come once and do not return. This parable would teach us to not be discouraged, but keep on sowing, keep on sharing the faith, keep on inviting. Because when that one seed does take root and grow, when one person accepts Christ, then that one relationship multiplies many times over. In what ways have you sown the seed of the good news about Jesus with others? How might you be more prepared to do so? Who in your network of relationships is far from God and needs to see and hear about the One you know? Pray the prayer that Aaron suggested: “Lord give me a heart for those who are far from you.” Let this be a regular prayer for your life and watch how it is fulfilled.