

I like Church... that welcomes everyone! Acts 10

Small Group & Personal Bible Study Lesson: Pastor Dennis Hadley



Daily Scripture Reading:

1. Acts 9:1-19
2. Acts 9:20-43
3. Acts 10:1-23
4. Acts 10:24-48
5. Acts 11

- What has God revealed to you from the book of Acts this week?

Welcome All People

Jews and Gentiles knew they weren't welcome in each other's worlds. But that was changing. Acts 10:1–35 is a pivotal passage in Scripture, and Peter got it right: "God does not show favoritism." Christ's church was to be inclusive, not exclusive.

Welcoming others may not be hard, but it takes work. We must work at changing attitudes, at repenting of past wrongs, at learning how to show openness, at treating others in a Christ-like fashion, at recognizing the benefits of welcoming those we've kept at arm's length. Peter and Cornelius were surprised by what God had in mind. But their discovery allowed those of us who are Gentiles to be received into the family of God.

Small Group Lesson: Revelation 7:9-10

1. Who are the worshipers in this passage? What does this tell you about the believers you will be spending eternity with in heaven?

In Revelation 7:9-10 I learn that when we are together in heaven all believers from every tribe, nation, people and language will be together as one under God. It reminds me that the Kingdom of God is far bigger than my church, my city, my nation. The Kingdom of God reaches to all people, regardless of language, race, location, status, even religious upbringing. Therefore I should love and accept all my brothers and sisters in Christ and I should welcome all who come to seek Him even if they don't fit my vision of a Christian.

2. Have you ever experienced a worship service in a different culture? What did you like about it? How was it similar to your worship experience?

Ask people to share their experiences.

I have experienced several cultures worship that are different than my "culture". Example, in Ethiopia to worship with others who loved to dance and chant to our God was a tremendous experience and really enlightened me to how the Spirit of God is released in various cultures. In Tijuana, to experience the free flowing worship with testimonies of God's grace proclaimed again was a wonderful expression of worship. But closer to home, I have been in Christian Rock Concerts where young people worship God with everything they got, singing, dancing, jumping and yet all to the glory of God. Each and every one of these experiences are different than what we experience at EVC and yet every act of praise to God brings Him glory and honor. The one thing each and every one of these experiences has in common is that Jesus Christ is lifted up and glorified in our lives.

3. What are some specific ways in which you can help welcome all people to your church and get a taste of what heaven will be like?

Ask the question. Help people think about and take responsibility for welcoming people to our church.

I am truly grateful for the Koch/Lopez small group that has taken on the job of hosting the welcome center and really being a part of the answer to welcoming visitors. Their role has truly made a difference at EVC.

At the same time, I believe it is the responsibility of each and every one of us to welcome people to our church. A committee or a program will never be the solution to making people feel welcome and connected. That is something that takes a personal commitment and a personal connection.

One way we could make a huge difference is if every week, every person looked to meet one person or family they did not already know. Then, on occasion if you would invite that person or family to lunch or even better, to your home God would bless that big time and that would be the kind of church that welcomes all people.

One of the best things about EVC is it is a diverse community of believers. Each week that diversity increases. It is easy for you and I to meet and connect with people of other cultures. Are you willing to try?

Read James 2:1-5

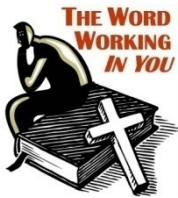
4. Do you think our church welcomes all people regardless of how they look or dress? (Even bikers that ride in on Harleys)

Read James 2:1-5 and then discuss this question. The answer to this question is an opinion only and the question is only meant to convict ourselves rather than judge the church. Hopefully each of us recognizes that we are to welcome all people. God used my time working with the homeless shelter to convict me of loving rather than judging my brothers who live on the streets of San Jose as I discovered their hurts in this world and their hearts for God.

5. According to this passage, why are we not to show favoritism?

James makes it clear that God chose them. How can we reject them?

Optional Lesson: Stretch Your Comfort Zones by Roger Haber (Copies Available in Lobby)



Action Step #5: Connect with Individuals Outside Your Circle

How warmly do you welcome people who differ from you in race, class, age, or other ways? Not just in church, but in your whole life. How broad is your circle of friends? Do you feel comfortable with different kinds of people? We need to make it a point to get to know people who are not like us. In so doing, we will broaden our own horizons, breaking barriers, learning to understand and accept those of different backgrounds. Only then can we hope to see the same attitude within our churches.

Directions: Evaluate the circle of friends and associates you have now and think about ways in which you could enlarge your circle. Consider areas such as age, race, religion, economics, education, or marital and family status. Then, select a person who is outside your normal circle of

friends. This may be someone you vaguely know at work or church or in the neighborhood, or just someone you pass every day but don't really know. Finally, find a way to get to know this person. Arrange to go out for lunch or coffee, or brunch after church. Go bowling or attend a concert together. Remember, your purpose is simply to get to know someone new. Be a friend.

Action Step Follow-up

- I have evaluated my group of friends and determined areas in which I can enlarge my circle of friends
- I have selected someone who I want to get to know better
- I have thought about ways in which I can become closer to that person
- I am listing one good thing every week about my church sharing it with someone
- I am asking the Holy Spirit to help me identify pollution in my life
- I am prepared to meet with My King in worship this week
- I am praying the looking & listening with Jesus Prayer

The Looking & Listening With Jesus Prayer

Lord, I long to be part of a caring church family,
But often I'm not sensitive to how people are really suffering.
Please teach me to see people like you do and to listen with your ears of compassion.
I pray for [FILL IN A NEED YOU'VE HEARD RECENTLY].
Lord, help me respond with a heart that cares the way you do. Amen

Reflection: How will expanding your circle of friends improve your walk with God?