

Small Group & Personal Bible Study Lesson

Pastor Dennis Hadley

Memory Verse: Galatians 2:20

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

- ❖ This week in preparation for the beginning of our all church study on James, "Faith Lived Out" we want to take a moment to reflect and think about the things we value most as a church; our relationships with God, His Word, and People, and how we might build up those most important relationships in life.
- ❖ Within the next week you will begin to daily read the "Faith Lived Out" study by starting with the introduction on pages 5-7. Then each day read the daily meditation for that day starting on page 8 in preparation for your small group meeting next week.

Small Group Leaders: Be sure to inform your small group as to when you want them to begin reading the daily James study. It is my suggestion that you should try to have them read each day so that when you meet next week (the week of September 13th) you can discuss the small group lesson found on page 10 (day 7). Depending on which day of the week your group meets will dictate which day they begin the daily reading. Also if you meet this week, take a moment to go through the introduction together on pages 5-7.

Starting next Sunday (9/13) I will still send out a small group email with thoughts but I will not include any small group study in the sermon folder on Sunday. Instead we want to direct everyone back to the James study book. By the way, we have more books printed and available at the church right now.

1. Developing an Eternal Relationship with God

The most important aspect of every Christian's life is a relationship with God. Once we have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is vitally important that we remain connected with Him always. Jesus said it like this in John 15:5, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

- What do you think it means to remain in Jesus?

Remaining in Jesus means being forever in His presence. I understand that remaining in Jesus is keeping Him and His will in the center of my life. It means that He becomes my source of all strength. He is my source for feeding and nourishment. He is my source for producing eternal fruit. Anything good in my life always comes from my direct relationship with Jesus. I cannot produce the good fruit God wants from my life without remaining in Jesus.

- What would you need to do to really remain in Jesus' loving presence?

To remain in His love I must abide in Him. That means I must stay connected. To stay connected I must spend quality, consistent, quiet time with God. My time with God should include intimate and personal prayer. A time for meditating on His truth - the Word of God. And time in personal and private worship of Jesus Christ. At the same time, I should incorporate fellowship with the body of Christ to remain in His presence. Sunday morning worship and small group time will help me remain in Christ.

God wants your relationship with Him to be real and personal. He tells us, *"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."* Jeremiah 33:3.

- Why do you think God asks us to call to Him?

God wants us to seek Him. He is a loving but jealous God. He is not willing to play second in our lives. The truth is that God has told us that we are to love Him with all of our heart, and all of our soul and all of our mind, and all of our strength.

- Why do you think God has chosen to wait for us to call out to Him before He will reveal these great and unsearchable things?

He is always there and He is a loving God but He allows us the freedom to seek Him and abide in Him or not. He is drawing us to Himself and He honors the heart of those who earnestly seek Him by letting them find Him. Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

2. Developing an Eternal Relationship with His Word

Avery Willis, author of *The Disciples Cross* said, "Memorizing puts God's Word in your head. Meditating puts it in your heart."

In Joshua 1:8 God tells us to "*meditate on it (God's Word) day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.*"

The way to do that is to read the word and wrestle with the truth God has for you. As we read in Jeremiah 33:3, God will show you truth if you call out to Him. Once you discover what God is saying to you, obey and do what it says. Using a discovery method is a great way to develop an eternal relationship with God. Let's try it now.

Discovery Bible Study Exercise:

- Write out Galatians 2:20

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

- Re-write Galatians 2:20 in your own words

Since Jesus died and came back to life for me, now I have died to myself and come to life for Him. Even though my body is still physically alive it is no longer alive for me but alive to live for Jesus alone. The reason I can live for Jesus is because I can trust in Him and His promise that He has poured out through the grace He has demonstrated on the cross.

- What do you discover about yourself in Galatians 2:20?

I am not my own. I belong to Jesus. My life is not my own, it belongs to Jesus.

- What does God want you to do in response to this truth?

Quit living for self. Begin living for Him who loved me and gave himself up for me. This means that I must completely let go of the things that keep me from loving Him and serving Him. He must become more in my life and I must become less.

3. Developing an Eternal Relationship with People

The final part is our relationship with people. There are essentially two groups of people God calls us into a relationship with. First are those who are followers of Jesus. I will call these people our brothers and sisters in Christ. Second are those who do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior. I will call these people our mission field. We are called to reach out to both groups in love.

Jesus said, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* John 13:34-35

Our love for one another must be real and our commitment must be deep. Jesus wants us to love one another so much that the world sees Him through our love for one another.

- What keeps you from loving people the way Jesus wants you to love?

It is our sinful nature to see faults in others. To compare one another. To look at relationships from the perspective of "what's in it for me?" To let past hurts keep us at a distance from one another. When any of these come in to play in our relationships we place a barrier to love for one another the way Jesus would have us love. Our demonstration of love becomes a mask rather than real.

We need to learn to accept one another as sinners loved by God. We need to learn to look at every relationship as an opportunity to bring glory to God rather than gain to ourselves. We need to learn to forgive as Christ has forgiven and let God's grace prevail in our lives.

The reason we want people to meet in small groups is so that real transparent and intimate relationship might be built and that through those love relationships we develop with one another the world around you will begin to see Jesus by your love for one another.

- Going back to Galatians 2:20 and John 15:5 what is the promise of Christ in our lives? How might Jesus in your life help you love others the way He loves?

We have the promise of His presence in our lives. The Bible says He will remain in us (John 15:5) and He lives in us (Galatians 2:20). The presence of Jesus in our lives brings power and transformation. Jesus was clear He loved people and He wants us to love in the same way. One of my favorite books of all time is "Just Like Jesus" from the author, Max Lucado. The subtitle is this book says it all, "God loves you just the way you are but He is not willing to leave you that way, He wants you to be 'Just like Jesus'".

I prayer that God will transform our Church into His likeness.