



Life Group Study Notes

“Bethel’s Discipleship Path: Life Groups”

Sr. Ps. James Lowe - July 1, 2018

Warm Up (10-15 minutes)

Choose a question to answer, or ask another. No right or wrong answers.

- Who was one of your closest friends growing up? What was one thing you liked about him/her?
- How many close friends would you say that you have? Would you want more?
- “**Dunbar's number** is a suggested cognitive limit to the number of people with whom one can maintain stable social relationships—relationships in which an individual knows who each person is and how each person relates to every other person” (Wikipedia). What do you think that number is? (For the answer, see Wikipedia.)

Word (10-15 minutes)

Sermons can be heard online at www.bethelworld.org

Key Quote: “If you are not in close Christian community, you are in a crisis even if you don’t know it.”

Jesus said, “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*” (John 10:10 ESV). This quality of life is imparted to us and experienced by us in and through the context of Christian community, not in isolation.

Matthew 9:9-13 ESV *As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."*

Jesus proactively reaches out to individuals far from God to bring them near to God through a relationship with himself. We should pray and ask God to show us individuals we should proactively reach out to for the purpose of bringing them closer to God through a relationship with us. The goal is to influence other people to follow Jesus even as we follow Jesus.

By reaching out to Matthew, Jesus came into contact with many people in Matthew’s sphere of relationships. Like Matthew these people were not upright people who were respected by

“good” society. Jesus cared about them. He wanted them to also come into a relationship with God. We too should care about all people, including those who are not upright and respected. When we proactively reach out to specific people, we should also look for opportunities to get to know the people in their lives and try to bring them into a relationship with God.

When Jesus was criticized for spending time with people who were not upright, he wasn't deterred. He preferred to live his life fulfilling God's purposes and expressing God's love rather than please the supposedly important religious people. We should not be deterred from reaching out to people and helping them get into a relationship with God and follow Jesus, even if we are criticized by people. This is true even if those people are important in our lives.

It's important to remember that Jesus never compromised his integrity or violated his conscience or disobeyed God when he spent time with so many people who weren't living upright lives. He remained faithful to God even as he lived on mission among people who were often far from God. We are called to follow his example.

A simple way to remember these priorities is: Followers, Friendships, Focus, and Faithfulness.

Followers: God wants us to reach out to people and seek to bring them into a relationship with God and to influence them to follow us as we follow Jesus.

Friendships: God wants us to grow in relationship with such people so that we build genuine friendships with them.

Focus: God wants us to stay focused on reaching out with the Gospel and God's love to people even when we are criticized, even if the people criticizing us are in some way important.

Faithfulness: God wants us to remain faithful in our loyalty to him even as we spend time with people who may be living far from God.

Discussion (10-15 minutes)

Choose one of the points, and discuss how the lesson applies to our lives.

- Have you ever been criticized for reaching out to people with the Gospel and God's love? If so, how did you respond?
- Do you have some non-Christian friends that you spend time with who you are trying to bring into a relationship with Jesus? How is it going for you and for them?
- How do you practically invest in building deeper Christian friendships?

Prayer (10-15 minutes)

Pray any of the following, as well as any other requests you may have.

- Thank God for the close Christian friendships God has given us.
- Ask God to provide you with opportunities to grow in close friendships with other Christians.
- Ask God to provide us with opportunities to bring other people into Christian community.