

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: January 26, 2008

THE NEXT CHAPTER

REV. STEVE SCHIBSTED

WEEK 1 OF THE SERIES

“OPENING THE NEXT CHAPTER”

Scripture

Matthew 5:13-16

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Study Notes

This week we begin a new series of messages on the new vision for our church. This series will span 8 weeks, leading up to Easter.

Today texts from the Gospel of Matthew outline the mission that God has given to the church. The first passage, Matthew 5:13-16 is found fairly close to the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. The second passage is at the end of the Gospel of Matthew just before Jesus ascends to heaven.

Questions for Personal Reflection and Small Group Discussion

1. What does Jesus mean when he says that his followers are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world?” What does being salt and light tell us about the mission of the church?
2. The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: *The church is only the church when it exists for others . . . the church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell people of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others.* What does it look like (in very practical terms) for a church to be missional, or to exist for others? What problems can arise in a church when it becomes a church for others? What problems can arise in a church if it merely exists for itself?
3. Why is change sometimes difficult for a church?
4. In Matthew 28:16-20, what does Jesus command the church to do? What promise is found in verse 20?
5. What evidence have you seen of God's grace in the lives of the people of Bidwell Presbyterian these last 10 years?
6. Steve said that “he wants to pastor a church that attempts to do things that impossible without the power of God, a church that lives by faith.” What “impossible things” would you like to see God do in our church in the next 5 years? What are some of your dreams for Bidwell?

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: February 3, 2008

THE NEXT CHAPTER

REV. GREG COOTSONA

WEEK 2 OF THE SERIES

“MISSION: DISCIPLESHIP”

Scripture

Matthew 8:1-3

¹ When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. ² A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." ³ Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Study Notes

Notes:

The first passage (which many call "the Great Commission") is focused on discipleship. There is only one main verb, a command from Jesus to his followers: "Make disciples," which is supported by four subordinate participles. Those three are best translated as "going," "baptizing," "teaching." In other words, these activities are all part of making disciples. We must go, baptize, and teach as the Christian community.

The second passage is familiar to many, and unfortunately has been used to describe a romanticized view of "cute" children and their openness to faith. All this may make us tempted to stay immature. Yes, children are often cute, but Jesus is not saying that we are to stay immature: he is emphasizing that like a child—who has no power and must come with and "become humble"—we can only grow in faith as we admit our need for God and our openness to grow up in him. (See also 1 Corinthians 14:20.)

Questions For Further Reflection

1. Starting with the first helping verb in Matthew 28, "going," what does it mean to go in order to preach the Gospel? Is that about overseas mission? Taking it to places it hasn't reached closer to home, like places of unbelief in our culture? Or both? How do we "go" to make disciples?
2. "Teaching" is the call for others to humbly receive God's truth like a child. See Matthew 18:1-5 and the notes above. What does it look like for you to be taught? Are you teaching others the faith?
3. Have you been baptized as an adult or an infant? What does that experience mean to you? What happens when you see someone else baptized?
4. All these add up to support the main mission of Bidwell Presbyterian Church and really the universal Church, *discipleship*. The simplest definition for discipleship is to "follow after Jesus." How does that look in your life? Are you helping others in that path? Where is Jesus taking you and taking our church?

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: February 10, 2008

THE NEXT CHAPTER

REV. JIM COONS

WEEK 3 OF THE SERIES

“PURPOSE: GROW”

Scripture

John 15:1-17

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 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. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

Study Notes:

John 15 is part of what scholars call John's "Final Discourse", that group of teachings that immediately preceded Jesus' crucifixion. These are among the most essential teachings of Jesus! It is here in John 15 that we find the basis for the Purpose of our church as we enter the Next Chapter: Growing Deep in Christ, Growing Up in the body of Christ, and Growing Out in the work of Christ.

Questions For Further Reflection:

1. Where do you find Jesus inviting his followers to "grow deep" in a relationship with him in John 15?
2. A large part of growing deep with Jesus is placing yourself in fertile soil where you can grow. How are the spiritual disciplines (daily scripture reading/studying, prayer, giving) like fertile soil? How are you doing with the spiritual disciplines? Are you putting yourself in places that will cause you to grow (worship, bible studies/small Groups, Core classes, etc.)? Why or why not?
3. Where do you find Jesus inviting his followers to "grow up together" in John 15?
4. Do you meet regularly with other people in the church for the purpose of sharing life, concerns, burdens, joys, accountability, and encouragement in your faith? Why or why not?
5. Are you in relationships with people in different generations in our church? Why or why not?
6. Where do you read Jesus inviting his followers to "grow out" in mission in John 15?
7. Do you have non-Christian friends?
8. How are you showing your concern for the nations? The poor? The sick?
9. Are you involved in some cause that does not directly benefit you, your family, or your friends?
10. Based on your answers, how are you doing in regard to our church's purpose of Growing Deep, Growing Up, and Growing Out? In what purpose are you doing well? In what purpose do you need to continue to grow?

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: February 17, 2008

THE NEXT CHAPTER

REV. STEVE SCHIBSTED

WEEK 4 OF THE SERIES

“PURPOSE: GRACE”

Scripture

Ephesians 2:8-10

⁸ For by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Study Notes

With this study we begin exploring the Core Values of our church. This week we look at the core value of Grace. Here's how we have described this core value: Grace is at the heart of our church---In Jesus Christ, God has moved first toward us and saved us. Christ loves us just as we, and by the Holy Spirit, we are growing deep in God's love and becoming more and more what God intends us to be. In response to God's unconditional love, we seek to love others with a compassionate, open and non-judgmental attitude.

Questions For Further Reflection and Small Group Discussion

1. How would you define grace to a friend who is unfamiliar with the Christian faith?
2. What does Ephesians 2:8-10 tell us about the relationship between grace and good works?
3. Why does grace have to come before good works?
4. Sometimes people are afraid of have grace preached too much at a church because they believe it might give the impression that grace means we can do anything we want. How would you respond to the concern?
5. Grace is powerful. How has your experience of grace changed you?
6. Read our core value statement together. How does our experience of grace transform our relationships with others?
7. In what ways can we become a more grace-filled church?

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: February 24, 2008

THE NEXT CHAPTER

STEVE SCHIBSTED

WEEK 5 OF THE SERIES

“CORE VALUE: REACHING OUT”

Scripture

Luke 4:16-21

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, ²¹ and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

I Corinthians 12:12-14; 27

¹² The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Now the body is not made up of one part, but of many.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Study Notes

We now come to the second of our five core values—Reaching Out. Here is the statement: *God is reaching out with grace to all people. We are joining our Lord in this mission of righteousness and peace, demonstrating the good news of God's unending mercy and love for a hurting world. We are Christ's hands and feet --- indeed, his ambassadors --- in our everyday lives. Ultimately, our church does not exist for itself, but for those around us.*

Questions For Further Reflection and Small Group Discussion

1. What do we learn about Christ's purpose and ministry from Luke 4:16-21?
2. What do we learn about the church from Paul's description of it in I Corinthians 12:12-14, 27?
3. Saint Theresa of Avila once said, "*Christ has no body on earth but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Jesus touches the world. Yours are the hands with which he blesses.*" What does she mean by this statement? Do you believe it? Do you see yourself as the hands and feet of Christ? His ambassador? Why or why not?
4. Where do you think more ministry can be done in the name of Christ—at 208 West First Street or at all the places where the 1500 or so people who call Bidwell their church find themselves everyday? What would happen in Chico if each

one of us saw ourselves as Christi's ambassadors scattered throughout our community all during the week?

5. Are you involved in any sort of local mission? Is your small group serving in some way as a group? Perhaps look over the Local Mission brochure passed out in worship on Sunday (also posted on the web) and choose one that your small group can take on as a service project.

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: March 2, 2008

THE NEXT CHAPTER

STEVE SCHIBSTED

WEEK 6 OF THE SERIES

“CORE VALUE: AUTHENTICITY”

Scripture

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

John 15:9-17

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

Core Value: Authenticity

Embraced by the love of God, we are free to be transparent before God and before others. We seek freedom from hypocrisy. Through Christ's transforming power, we are becoming authentic and genuine people, admitting fears and flaws. We want to be real people, encountering a real God, serving a real world.

Study Notes

We are hearing a lot about authenticity these days. We are told that Americans want a president who is "authentic." This week we explore what role authenticity plays in the lives of Christians and churches.

Questions For Further Reflection and Small Group Discussion

1. Steve said in his sermon that some people spend their entire lives listening to the voices from the cellar while others listen to the voice from the balcony. The voices in the cellar are those that tell us that we never quite measure up, that regardless of what we do, it is never good enough. The voice from the balcony is the voice of God, the heavenly Father, who loves you unconditionally. Why is it so hard for us to listen to the voice of love instead of the voices from the cellar?
2. What happens in our lives when the voice of love becomes the dominant voice that we hear? In other words, what changes occur in our lives as we send our roots deeper into God's grace? What changes have you experienced in your life because of God's grace?
3. The word for remain in the John passage is a rich word in the Greek. It is the word *mello* which means dwell, or remain, abide. What commands does Jesus give us in verses 9-12? What are the results of obedience that Jesus gives us in verses 9-12? What is the relationship between remaining, obeying commands, and loving others? Is there a connection between remaining in Christ's love (in other words, listening to the voice from the balcony) and loving others?

4. How would you describe authenticity to a friend? How would you describe to him or her how knowing Christ helps one to be authentic?
5. Is it possible for a church to be a place where people can be authentic with one another? What are some obstacles that prevent authenticity from being a core value in churches?
6. Larry Crabb writes in his book *The Safest Place on Earth*: "It is our weakness, not our competence, that moves others; our sufferings, not our blessings, that breaks down the barriers of fear and shame that keep us apart; our admitted failures, not our paraded successes that bind us together in hope." Do you agree or disagree with Crabb?
7. Is your small group a place where you and the other members can be "real" with one another? If not, what steps can you take to help it be a safe place?

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: March 9, 2008

THE NEXT CHAPTER

JEFF GEPHART

WEEK 7 OF THE SERIES

“CORE VALUE: CELEBRATION”

Scripture

Psalms 100:1-2

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.”

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice!

Psalms 89:1-2 & 15-18

I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself.

Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD. They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness. For you are their glory and strength, and by your favor you exalt our horn. Indeed, our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

Study Notes

This week's Core Value is **Celebration**: Christ lavishes grace on us by his Spirit, releasing us from hopelessness and bringing us into abundant life. So, as a grateful Christian community, we pray, study Scripture, sing, and serve to celebrate God's goodness. We seek to rejoice in all aspects of our life, whether in work or in play. We want our life together to be marked by joy.

If you haven't been around Bidwell it doesn't take too long to figure out that we like parties. And that's a good thing. We want a spirit of joy to be everywhere. But we intentionally wrote the core value to talk about all of life, the good, the bad and the ugly. What does it mean to celebrate God even in the mundane parts of life—doing laundry, paying bills, waiting at the post office, even working in a dead-end job. Celebration is an important value here too, and that's where the spiritual disciplines come in. They give us the means to experience grace in ALL moments

Questions For Further Reflection and Small Group Discussion

1. Psalm 89:15 says “blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you.” That is, you're on the right road when you have learned how to worship. In what ways are you learning how to worship? How are you learning to worship God especially in the mundane moments? How are you learning to worship God outside of Sunday?
2. Which of the spiritual disciplines do you find most helpful for you right now? Which one do you want to practice so that you can live a life of worship?
3. For what are you most thankful for right now?
4. What do you think Paul means by “rejoice always?” What does that look like? Is Paul exaggerating or is he serious? How might that look in your life?

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: March 16, 2008

THE NEXT CHAPTER

STEVE SCHIBSTED

WEEK 8 OF THE SERIES

“CORE VALUE: EXTRAVAGANT GENEROSITY”

Scripture

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” Mark 12:41-44

Core Value Statement

Grace is the outpouring of God's unlimited goodness, and generosity is our heartfelt response to God's gifts. Generosity involves a stewardship of all that we are and have. We therefore commit to using our gifts of time, money, skills—our whole lives—in service to God and those around us.

Study Notes

The familiar story of the widow's mite is part of a larger section of scripture that deals with some very important issues. Read 12:28-44 to set today's passage in context.

Questions For Further Reflection and Small Group Discussion

1. Think of someone you know who is generous. What is it about this person that makes you think they are generous? Do you know many people who are generous?
2. In contrast to the teachers of the law and the rich, what motivates the widow's behavior?
3. Jesus uses the widow as an example of generosity. What do we learn about the kingdom definition of generosity from this great story? Our society often defines generosity by the size of the gift. Jesus defines generosity by the sacrifice that is made. What's the difference? What's the good news in this kingdom definition of generosity? What is the challenge?
4. In his message, Steve said that extravagant generosity is always marked by three things: sacrifice, trust in God and love. Why does generosity involve sacrifice? Why does it lead to a deeper trust in God? Why must it be based in love?
5. Our core value statement says that God grace and our generosity are related. Is there a direct relationship between God's grace and our generosity? What is this relationship?
6. Generosity involves our whole lives, not just our financial resources. As a church, what are some ways we can be generous to each other? Our community? Our world?
7. How do we become more generous? What steps can you take in your life to become a more generous person?