



SMALL GROUP
SERMON-BASED
STUDY GUIDE
FALL 2009

●●● **An Introduction Worth Reading**
Knowing God, Growing Together and Doing Something About It.

Dear SPC Small Group,

Let me be the first to say how excited I am about what you are doing in your

Small Group! A vital component of our Christian journey is having intentional

Christian relationships where we can bounce ideas off each other and wrestle

with the claims of Scripture on our lives. Because of that, great effort has

been made to sync up our Sunday Sermon topics with

the conversations you will be having in your

group. Consider your Small Group conversa-

tions as an extension of Sunday's message—

and then take what you learn out into your lives in the

world. I am thrilled that you have signed up for this adventure.

Welcome to the journey!

Excited to be on this adventure with you,



Jeff Lincicome
Senior Pastor

Keys to Getting the Most out of this Study Guide:

Key #1 – The Study Guide Serves the Group; the Group Does Not Serve the Study Guide

Your group may meet for the better part of an evening or it may meet for just an hour. You may meet every week or you may meet a couple of times a month. Regardless of how frequently or how long you meet, it is unlikely that you will be able to work through every question in this study guide in great detail. That's ok. Find the questions and topics that resonate with your group and pursue them together. Don't feel a need to make it through every question or topic. The goal is to grow in your relationships with God and with one another and to mature together in faith. There may be a week you spend the whole of your time talking about the scripture passage, the sermon, your lives and praying for one another without ever touching the questions in the study guide. Be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. As you will read in the passage for week #1, He has promised to be with you on this journey.

Key #2 – Be Willing To Wait

Some of the deepest and most significant thoughts and feelings can only be accessed after a period of reflection. If you engage a question or topic together and no one shares right away; be patient. Be thoughtful. Allow for times of fruitful silence as you and others in the group truly consider these scriptures and the discussion questions.

Key #3 – Be Willing To Risk

Our lives are filled with conversations without any real significance. It's easy to talk about sports, the weather, TV shows, and the things that keep us busy. There certainly is a place in life for those sorts of conversations and often these topics are a part of beginning relationships. But this study will invite you at times to participate in another sort of conversation. You will be invited to share together the things that lie below the surface. You may not be ready initially to engage in these kinds of conversations together and that's OK. But, when you are ready to do so, you are invited to risk sharing with the group the kinds of things you would share only with friends. You are invited to grow together by coming to know one another at a deeper level through Bible Study, prayer and authentic conversation. But that won't happen without your being willing to risk sharing with the group.





Sammamish Presbyterian Church
Small Group Sermon-Based Study Guide

Acts 1:6-11

Introduction to:
**Knowing God, Growing Together,
Doing Something About It.**

Sammamish Presbyterian Church

Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose (Sermon series, small group focus)

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the week's sermon

Acts 1:6-11

Sermon Topic

Introduction to Acts: Knowing, Growing, Doing

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activities...

Discuss what your small group will look like this fall—confirm the days and times you will meet and where. Use the suggestions in Appendix #1 this packet for creating a group charter. Even if your group has been meeting for years and years, take a few moments to discuss why you are gathering together, what commitments you are making to one another and how you will go about achieving your goals together.

Have someone read aloud the introduction to this study.

Have someone read aloud Acts 1:6-11

As you reflect on this passage and the related sermon, are there any key points which were meaningful to you?

Optional entry activity: Reflect on a time when you misunderstood what someone was trying to tell you. Did this misunderstanding lead to false expectations? What were the results?

Knowing God

1. In this passage the disciples ask Jesus if he will at this time restore the kingdom to Israel. What does their question tell us about their understanding of the kingdom? Where did they go wrong?

2. Jesus answers their question with no information about times and dates, but with the promise of the Holy Spirit and a worldwide agenda. What do you think he is trying to teach them (and us) about the kingdom? What does it mean to you to be part of God's kingdom?

3. According to this passage, what would be the role of the Holy Spirit? What is the role of Jesus' followers? Why would the Holy Spirit be so important to them?

4. What in this passage is new learning for the disciples/for you?

Growing Together

5. The vision statement of our church includes, "Growing Together." Discuss what "growing together" might mean. When in your life have you experienced a season of significant personal growth?

6. Jesus said they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. When and how have you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in your life? How do you open yourself up to experiencing this power?

7. The disciples had hoped that Jesus would set up his kingdom in Israel. His death dashed their hopes. But he rose again, and their hopes revived. Just as they were beginning to understand, he disappeared before their eyes. Imagine how they felt. How would you have felt if you had been there? What thoughts and questions would have been going through your mind? What do you think you would have done?

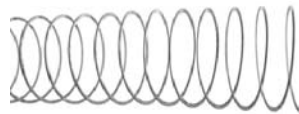
8. Why did Jesus want his disciples to be together at this event? How were they growing together? What can we learn from them about growing together?

Doing Something About It

In Acts for Everyone, N.T. Wright says, "Jesus gives the apostles an agenda: Jerusalem first, then Judea ..., then Samaria (the hated semi-foreigners living right next door), and to the ends of the earth. Sit back and watch, Luke says. That's the journey we're about to take.....Jesus is already appointed and enthroned as the world's true king. One day that kingdom will come, fully and finally. In the meantime, we have a job to do." (p. 10)

9. In verse 8 Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses..." What do you think this means? How can we be witnesses when we were not present at this event?

10. The angels ask the disciples why they are standing looking up toward heaven and assure them that Jesus will return. What do they seem to think the disciples should be doing in the meantime? What should we be doing? How can we support one another?



Extension Ideas

for those who might want to read, discuss further, either individually or as a group...

Additional Questions

- Apparently, at the time of Jesus' ascension, there was a Roman myth that when a Roman emperor died, it was customary that someone would say they had seen his soul escape and ascend into heaven, thus becoming a god. How is Jesus' ascension different?

- Why is the book titled the Acts of the Apostles?
 - Why was it written?
 - What is the purpose of the book...historical? Theological? Or...?
 - What are two “grand ideas,” or overarching ideas, in the book of Acts?

Books or Commentaries

- N.T. Wright –*Acts for Everyone*
- N.T. Wright—*Surprised by Hope*
- John Stott—*The Message of Acts*

Related Scripture Texts

- “Jesus came and said to them, all authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.... And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
Matthew 28:18
- Jesus taught the disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Quotes to Consider

N.T. Wright and John Stott describe the kingdom of God:

“‘God’s kingdom’ and ‘the kingdom of heaven’ mean the same thing: the sovereign rule of God...which according to Jesus was and is breaking into the present world, the earth. That is what Jesus taught us to pray for.”

N.T. Wright—Surprised by Hope (p. 201)

The kingdom is “best understood as the kingship, or sovereign and saving rule, of Israel’s God.... His (Jesus’) invitation to ‘enter’ the kingdom was a way of summoning them to allegiance to himself and his programme, seen as the start of God’s long-awaited saving reign.”

N. T. Wright—Acts for Everyone (p.201-202)

The Kingdom of God is his rule set up in the lives of his people by the Spirit.”

John Stott—The Message of Acts (p.42)

“The most accurate (though cumbersome) title...would be something like ‘The Continuing Words and Deeds of Jesus by his Spirit through his Apostles.’ For after his resurrection, ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit, he continued his work, first and foremost through the unique foundation ministry of his chosen apostles and subsequently through the ... church of every period and place. The Jesus of history began his ministry on earth; the Christ of glory has been active through his Spirit ever since, according to his promise to be with his people, ‘always, to the very end of the age’.”

John Stott—The Message of Acts (p.34)

“Luke, whose first volume we know as the gospel which bears his name, is telling us in his opening sentence about the whole book (Acts) which is now beginning. It is all about what Jesus is continuing to do and to teach. The mysterious presence of Jesus haunts the whole story. He is announced as King and Lord, not as an increasingly distant memory but as a living and powerful reality, a person who can be known and loved, obeyed and followed, a person who continues to act within the real world. That, Luke is telling us, is what this book is going to be all about. We call it ‘The Acts of the Apostles,’ but in truth we should really think of it as ‘The Acts of Jesus (II)’.”

N. T. Wright –Acts for Everyone (p.2)



Acts 2: 14-42

Knowing God: Part 1

Sammamish Presbyterian Church Vision Statement

Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose (Sermon series, small group focus)

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the week's sermon

Acts 2: 14-42

Sermon Topic

Knowing God Transforms My Future

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activities...

Have someone read aloud Acts 2:14-42

What were some of the main points in the sermon, Knowing God Transforms my Future?

As you reflect on this passage and related sermon, are there any key points which were meaningful to you?

Optional Entry Activity: In this passage Peter relays the message of the good news of what Jesus Christ has done for us to a large crowd of people who did not know Jesus. When and how did you first hear this message? When did you come to receive it as good news for you?

Knowing God

1. In this passage we read that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” What does it mean to “be saved”? Does it simply mean that I am going to heaven when I die? What are we saved from? What are we saved for?

2. Peter goes on to tell the story of Jesus, his first public presentation of the gospel. What important ideas does he want them (and us) to know?

Growing Together

3. Peter says of Jesus, “God has made him both Lord and Messiah.” What does it mean that Jesus is Lord and Messiah? What does it mean to say that “Jesus is Lord of my life?” Is He the Lord of your life? Are there areas of your life that need to be placed under His lordship?

4. We read that the people were “cut to the heart,” and asked, “What should we do?” What did Peter tell them they must do? What does it mean to repent? What does baptism signify?

5. What is promised and to whom? How do these promises transform our future—on earth, as well as our future hope?

6. What does verse 42 teach us about growing together? Are these things happening in our church? How might we do a better job of following this example?

Doing Something About It

7. The crowd asked what they should do. What must we do when confronted with the message of the gospel? What does knowing God require of us?

8. In verse 40 Peter says, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." What does Peter mean? Does he imply that we should isolate ourselves or escape? Does this have anything to do with repentance? In what ways might we need to be saved from our current generation?

9. What do you think in this passage the Lord is calling you to do? Are there any ways that your group can help you to do it?

10. Can you think of 3 ways in which Knowing God has an impact on your future?

Peter says on the one hand, that Jesus was crucified by wicked, lawless people, yet he was handed over to them, "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." (v.23)

- What does this passage teach us about God's sovereignty?

Onlookers hear the believers speaking in other languages and ask, "What does this mean?" Others conclude that the people are drunk. Peter answers that they are not drunk, but God has poured out his Spirit upon the believers.

- Is there enough evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our church to cause onlookers to comment or ask what it means?

- If not, why not? If yes, what comments or questions have you heard from them?

Reflection

- If there were no references to the Holy Spirit in Scripture, would it make any difference in the way we live our lives?



Acts 9:1-19

Knowing God: Part 2

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To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the week's sermon

Acts 9:1-19

Sermon Topic

Knowing God Transforms My Past

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activities...

Have someone read aloud Acts 9:1-19

As you reflect on this passage and related sermon, are there any key points which were meaningful to you?

How does knowing God transform our past?

Optional Entry Activity: Is there any season in your life that you are particularly thankful that God has transformed? Any season that you are having a difficult time believing he can transform?

Knowing God

1. Given Saul's plans for his trip to Damascus, what was the likelihood that he would become a follower of Christ? How is this encouraging to us today?

2. Why do you think Jesus met Saul in such a dramatic way? What did Saul learn on his journey? Have there been times in your life when God has met you in a dramatic way? What did you learn from the experience?

3. What evidence indicates Saul's conversion was purely an act of God's grace?

4. Jesus says that Saul is actually persecuting him. What meaning does this have for us today? How is it convicting? How is it encouraging?

5. Contrast the Saul (Paul) of Acts 9:1, 9:8, and 9:15.... How is Saul's conversion an illustration of repentance? Do you find Saul's experience of transformation hopeful?

6. The Lord says that he had chosen Saul to bring his name before Gentiles, kings and the people of Israel. Why do you think God chose Saul? Who would you have chosen?

Growing Together

7. Paul's conversion to follow Christ was certainly dramatic. What are other ways people become followers of Christ?

8. Reflect on your own conversion experience. How was God's grace evident in that process?

9. The passage says that the Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision. How do we hear God?

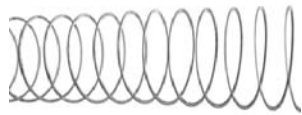
10. Although reluctant at first, Ananias obeys God. Try to imagine God asking you to meet with a person who is notorious for persecuting and “breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples?” How would you feel? How do you think you would respond? Are there places in your life where God asks you to take these sorts of risks?

Doing Something About It

11. How does the story of Saul’s conversion encourage those of us who have friends or loved ones who are not followers of Jesus?

12. Would you be willing to commit to praying regularly for a specific person or persons you believe are not followers of Jesus? Who comes to mind? Ask God to help you to be an instrument of God’s grace in this person’s life.

13. Ananias greeted Saul as “Brother Saul.” Is there someone in your life who needs to be welcomed as a brother or sister? How can you extend that welcome even if it is difficult for you?



Extension Ideas

*for those who might want to read, discuss further,
either individually or as a group...*

- When was Saul’s name changed to Paul? Why?

Related Scripture Texts

Paul recounts his conversion story in two other places in the book of Acts. Read and compare them with the account in Acts 9.

—Acts 22:3-16

—Acts 26:9-18



Acts 17:16-28

Knowing God: Part 3

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To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the week's sermon

Acts 17:16-28

Sermon Topic

Knowing God Transforms My Culture/World

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activities...

Watch the clip from the movie "The Gods Must Be Crazy." (available online at: <http://www.spconline.org/pages/Ministry/Adult/SmallGroups.html>). A Sho in the Kalahari Desert encounters technology for the first time--in the shape of a Coke bottle. He takes it back to his people, and they use it for many tasks. The people start to fight over it, so he decides to return it to the God--where he thinks it came from. Along the way, he is hungry and decides to hunt a goat to eat, not realizing that it is owned by someone else (his people have no concept of ownership). A cultural misunderstanding follows with a shepherd boy, a policeman, and the court system.

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1. What caused the misunderstanding? How could it have been avoided?

2. Have you ever had an experience where you had a misunderstanding with someone from another culture? How did it resolve?

3. Have you ever been impressed, shocked or puzzled at the practices of another culture?

Knowing God

Have someone read aloud Acts 17:16-28

In this passage, Paul is talking with a variety of people in the marketplace (*agora*) in Athens. The Epicureans thought that pleasure and happiness were the chief goals in life, people should avoid excess, seek tranquility, and love mankind. They also believed that gods did not get involved in the everyday lives of people. The Stoics were pantheistic (believed that God was in everything) and believed that a great "Purpose" was directing history and that people should try to align themselves with that Purpose.

4. What strategy does Paul use to talk to them?

5. What does Paul say about God that is new to them?

6. What does Paul say about the relationship between God and people that is new to them?

Growing Together

The philosophers gathered around Paul take issue with what he says in verse 18, with some calling him a “babbling.” According to the NIV text notes, “This Greek word meant *seed picker*, a bird picking up seeds here and there. Then it came to refer to the loafer in the marketplace who picked up whatever scraps of learning he could find and paraded them around without digesting them himself.”

7. Does this describe people in our culture? Does this describe you?

8. Paul says God is not far from any of us. Does He always seem near to you? Why or why not? (Or when or when not?)

9. Paul also says God wants us to look for Him and find Him. Does this describe how your relationship with God started? Are there better ways than others for one to go about looking for God?

Doing Something About It

10. Paul considered himself to be a missionary to the Gentiles (non-Jews). What is your mission field? Do you know whom God has called you to serve?

11. At the beginning of the passage, it says Paul was waiting for his friends to arrive. Even while he was waiting, Paul found ways to serve God and share the gospel. Do you ever feel like you are waiting for something to happen before you begin to serve God (e.g., the next mission trip, Sunday School class, service opportunity)?

12. Paul used elements of Athenian culture (statues, poets) as stepping-off points to communicate his faith. Are there things in our culture you can use to talk about spiritual things with the people in your mission field? (Be specific.)

13. If Paul took a look at our lives and culture, what do you think would be “deeply distressing to see” (v.16)? Is there an idol in your life that you would like to ask the group’s help to avoid?



Acts 2:42-47

Growing Together: Part 1

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Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose (Sermon series, small group focus)

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the week's sermon

Acts 2:42-47

Sermon Topic

Growing Together Changes How I Look at What is Ours

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activities...

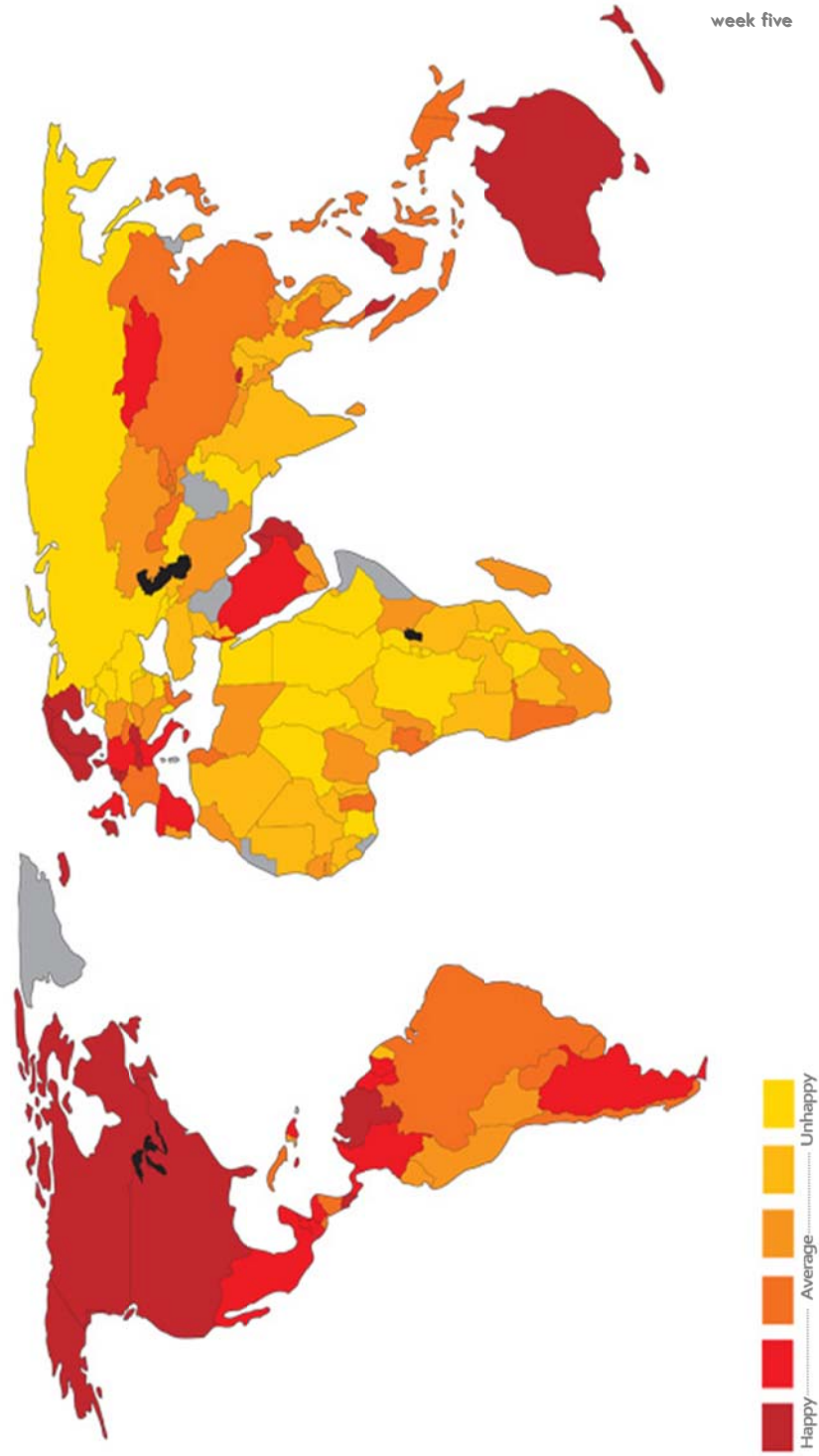
Consider the map on the next page, which shows the average subjective well-being for most countries in the world.

1. Which countries are the happiest? Why?

2. Which are the least happy? Why?

3. Is it all about money?

A Global Projection of Subjective Well-being:
The First Published Map of World Happiness



Knowing God

Have someone read aloud Acts 2:42-47

4. The passage says the believers held everything in common. Was this communism? Does God want the church today to follow this example?

5. The passage also says that the disciples enjoyed the favor of all the people (meaning the people outside the church). Do churches enjoy that kind of favor today? Why or why not? Would the community miss SPC if it were gone?

Growing Together

6. How are people caring for one another in this passage? When have you felt cared for and what did people do for you in that situation?

7. What brings "unity" to Christians today? Is it possible to have unity and diversity at the same time? How?

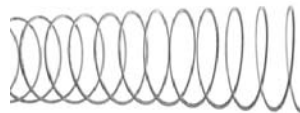
8. The early church was united by: belief (v.44), sharing together their possessions (v.44), spending time together (v.45), breaking bread together (v.46), and worshipping together (v.47). Which of these things have you experienced as the most powerful catalyst for deepening relationships? Which of these are the most personally difficult for you to do?

Doing Something About It

9. After reading this scripture, what things come to mind about how we as a small group might care for one another? How might our church care for our community and the world?

10. In some ways the early church was countercultural. Is our church countercultural? Should it be? If so, in what ways?

11. The passage says that every day more people came to faith. Why? What would it take for that to happen at our church?



Extension Ideas

for those who might want to read, discuss further, either individually or as a group...

Books or Commentaries

- Shane Claiborne—*The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*



Acts 5:1-11

Growing Together: Part 2

Sammamish Presbyterian Church Vision Statement

Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose (Sermon series, small group focus)

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the week's sermon

Acts 5:1-11

Sermon Topic

Growing Together Changes How I Look at What is Mine

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activities...

Watch the Bugs Bunny / Daffy Duck video clip together (available online at <http://www.spconline.org/pages/Ministry/Adult/SmallGroups.html>). In this clip, a rich Arabian Sultan has stored all his treasure in a cave, the door of which he closes with the command "Close, Sesame". He leaves a burly guard named Hassan to watch the cave, ordering him to let nobody enter. Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck accidentally burrow under the door and find themselves in the midst of the treasure. Daffy wants it all for himself.

1. Obviously, Daffy is quite extreme, but are there people for whom money is everything?

2. Why is Daffy so unwilling to share the wealth?

3. Why is money so often associated with words like "greed" and "evil"?
Need it be?

Knowing God

Have someone read aloud Acts 5:1-11

4. It appears from this scripture that Ananias and Sapphira pretended to give more to the church than they actually did. Describe Peter's response.

5. Why do you think Ananias and Sapphira withheld a portion of their earnings?

6. What was the real sin of Ananias and Sapphira?

Growing Together

7. What is your reaction to the sermon from Sunday? Did any new thoughts or ideas on stewardship emerge for you?

8. What reasons do people have for giving? What should be the reasons for giving?

9. What happens to us when we withhold a part of ourselves or our possessions? Why does it sometimes feel easier to withhold than to give ourselves completely to God, our loved ones, our community and/or our church? How much does "control" have to do with all of this?

10. What is the relationship between our faith in God and the intensity with which we hold on to our stuff?

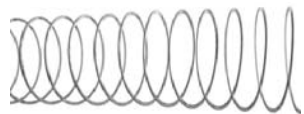
Doing Something About It

11. How much should we give to God's work? Should Christians tithe 10% of their income? Why or why not? If you said yes, should the 10% be figured before or after taxes?

12. Should we give only through the church? Should we give to other charities (Christian or secular)? Should we give to individual people in need?

13. Have you developed a plan for how much you give and where you give it? How do you and your family go about making these sorts of decisions?

14. Is it easy or difficult for you to talk with others about your process of deciding what stewardship will look like for your family?



Extension Ideas

*for those who might want to read, discuss further,
either individually or as a group...*

Related Scripture Texts

-Joshua 7: The story of Achan
-Matthew 6: 1-4



Acts 13:1-3

Growing Together: Part 3

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Scripture for the week's sermon

Acts 13:1-3

Sermon Topic

Growing Together Means I Must Commission/Be Commissioned to God's Purposes in the World.

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activities...

1. Revisit the group's conversation from the previous week. Have any of your thoughts about stewardship changed? Do you have any reflections on participating in the Stewardship Commitment Sunday? Does it feel to you like an act of worship to lay a financial commitment before God?

2. Do you have something in your home that you have set apart for a special purpose with rules that govern its use? (the guest towels, the kitchen scissors, a particular decoration that comes out only once a year, a tool that only some person(s) are approved to use?) What is important about preserving that thing for its particular use?

Knowing God

Have someone read aloud Acts 13:1-3. According to Vs. 1, the prophets and teachers in the Church at Antioch had a regular habit of meeting together in worship which included fasting and praying.

3. Is there any significance that the Holy Spirit chose to speak to them at these times?

4. Is fasting a common part of our worship today? Why or why not? Should it be?

5. Do you ever hear God or the Holy Spirit "speaking" to you while you are in the act of worship? What does it mean to hear him speak?

Growing Together

6. What from this past Sunday's sermon was significant to you?

The laying on of hands identifies the church with the ministry of Saul and Barnabas and acknowledges that they were on a mission which was chosen and directed by God.

7. Do you see this as a command for us today or is this merely an example of how God chose to work with Saul and Barnabas?

8. Does the laying on of hands bring more legitimacy to our service?

9. Have you participated in a commissioning? If so, what did it mean to you?

10. If you were asked to identify something that you are doing in life right now which feels like it is a calling from God, what would it be? Do you feel commissioned to do it?

11. Whom have you encouraged or sent out to do God's work?

Doing Something About It

In Mark 6:7, Jesus seems to give us the example of sending his disciples out by twos. That example is repeated here with Saul and Barnabas.

12. Why do you think the Holy Spirit sent Saul and Barnabas out together rather than alone?

13. What are we doing individually and as a group to pursue God's purposes in the world?

14. Are there ways that the Holy Spirit may be calling us as a small group to acts of service together?



Acts 8:26-40

Doing Something About It: Part 1

Sammamish Presbyterian Church Vision Statement

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To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the week's sermon

Acts 8:26-40

Sermon Topic

Believing in the Gospel to Change Lives

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activities...

Is there a time when you felt "nudged" to go somewhere or to someone in order to support, encourage or help?

As you reflect on the sermon and the worship service from this past Sunday, are there any new ideas you can share with the group?

Knowing God

Have someone read aloud Acts 8:26-40

In this story, Philip has responded to the command of an angel to head south to a desert road outside of Jerusalem. When the angel tells him to go, he simply goes without so much as a word of objection or even stopping to ask "Hey, what am I supposed to do or who am I supposed to see once I get there?" Listening transformed into doing without hesitation. Unwavering obedience.

1. Philip models a startling "listen and do" obedience to God. How did that enable him to better connect with the eunuch?

2. The eunuch was obviously seeking God evidenced by what he was reading. What significance does it have that the eunuch was reading this specific passage from Isaiah?

3. Though it is clear that Philip was guided to this eunuch, do you think that the eunuch was equally divinely prepared? If so, does that change your perspective in how you might respond to the "urging" of being called to a specific person or place?

Even though the Ethiopian eunuch was familiar with the Jewish way of life, he did not fully grasp what it all meant. In describing who this Ethiopian eunuch is N.T. Wright says, "It is very unlikely, virtually impossible, that he would himself be Jewish, and, being a eunuch, he would not have been a proselyte to Judaism. He was, thus, an outsider, forever to remain so within the Jewish system. But there was something about the Jewish God and Jewish way of life that attracted him..." It was to this unexpected place and to this unlikely person that Philip has been called to bring the good news of the gospel.

4. Even though they were very different people, from very different cultures, Phillip and the eunuch came to share a bond in Jesus Christ through faith. Are there people of other cultures and places in life with whom you share this sort of bond? If so, who? If none come to mind, what do you think that means?

5. Do you believe the Gospel has changed your life? If so, how does that change make you want to affect change in the lives of others?

6. Have you ever felt like an "outsider" and had someone embrace you with the words of the Gospel? Have you ever reached out with the Gospel (either in word or in action) to someone outside of your culture?

Growing Together

Isaiah was apparently a familiar passage to the Ethiopian eunuch, although he said he couldn't understand it unless he had some help.

7. As a small group, what are some ways we can help each other understand what the good news of the gospel means for us and for those to whom we are called to be witness?

8. How can we be prepared to respond to the "urging" or "sense" that we are being called to a person or a place?

9. Imagine that you were Philip. What might you have included in your message to the Ethiopian?

Doing Something About It

John Stott said “We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God.” Even though Philip and the eunuch were very different people, from very different cultures, they came to share a bond in Jesus Christ through faith.

10. Philip simply comes alongside the eunuch and enters his world by asking him a question. What does that say about how we might share the gospel today?

11. Have there been times in your life when you have been able to live out the “global” aspect of the Gospel?

12. Are there ways, as a small group, we can change the lives of others for the sake of the Gospel? In particular, are there ways that we can live out the “global vision” of Christianity?

13. If we, individually and collectively, transformed listening into doing the way that Philip did, how do you think your life would change?

14. Can you imagine the impact that change might have in the lives of others?



Acts 9:36-42

Doing Something About It: Part 2

Sammamish Presbyterian Church Vision Statement

Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose (Sermon series, small group focus)

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the week's sermon

Acts 9:36-42

Sermon Topic

Believe in the Gospel Enough to Speak It

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activities...

1. What is your reaction to the idea of faith healing? (You can be honest). What sorts of associations do you have with the idea?

2. Have you ever prayed for healing (for yourself or another) and experienced it? Have you ever prayed for healing (for yourself or another) and been disappointed?

Knowing God

Have someone read aloud Acts 9:36-42

3. What from the sermon and service this past Sunday was significant to you? Were there things that caught a hold of you in a new way?

4. In our previous studies angels spoke to the disciples, Jesus himself appeared to Saul, the Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision, and in this passage the believers send two men to Peter to ask him to come. Taken together, what do these examples teach us about the way God works through spoken words?

5. We are not told what the two men or those who sent them expected Peter to do. Why do you think they sent for Peter? What do you think they were expecting? What would you have expected?

6. If Peter were asked who raised Tabitha from the dead, what do you think he would say? (See also verse 34.)

7. Tabitha was not a well-known person in the world. Without this brief account, we would know nothing about her. What does this tell us about God's love and care for ordinary people who live quiet lives of service? How is this encouraging to you?

Growing Together

8. The passage indicates that Tabitha was known for her good works and charity. Is there someone in your life who is known for good works and charity? How would you want to be known and remembered?

9. What does this passage teach us about how the believers cared for one another? What does it show us about how we should care for one another in this group?

10. Is it easier for you to believe the Gospel enough to live out good works and acts of charity or to believe the Gospel enough to speak it in the midst of suffering?

Doing Something About It

11. Peter knelt and prayed, and said, "Tabitha, get up." How did his words and actions demonstrate what he believed about God? How did they proclaim the gospel?

12. No words of Tabitha are recorded in scripture, but the message of her life seems loud and clear. How did her life proclaim the gospel? In what ways does your life tell others about the love of God? What might you do to give a clearer message?

13. How did this miracle speak to the people? What was its effect on the community? Do you believe miracles like this still happen today? Why or why not?



Acts 7

Doing Something About It: Part 3

Sammamish Presbyterian Church Vision Statement

Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose (Sermon series, small group focus)

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the week's sermon

Acts 7

Sermon Topic

Believe in the Gospel Enough to Die for It

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activities...

The Seattle Times recently did a story on the 40th anniversary of the moon landing. Apparently some 6% of Americans remain convinced the landings were fake. Astronomer and author Philip Plait says, "There are smart, normal people who buy into these conspiracy theories," said Philip Plait, an astronomer and author who counters the conspiracy theorists point by point and at excruciating length at his "Bad Astronomy" Web site. He is one of many people who have joined the fight to affirm that It Happened.

Adam Savage, co-star of the television show "MythBusters," spent an episode last year taking apart moon-hoax theories bit by bit, entertainingly and convincingly. The theorists, he noted, never give up. "They'll say you have to keep an open mind," he said, "but they reject every single piece of evidence that doesn't adhere to their thesis."

(http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/nationworld/2009/4/7/1839_moonhoax15.html)

1. Have you ever experienced a time when you were forced to defend yourself from someone refusing to be "confused by the facts?" How did you deal with the situation?

2. Have you ever found yourself in the 6% group, attempting to reason with the other 94%?

3. Did the moon landing really happen?

Knowing God

Have someone read aloud Acts 7

4. What from the sermon on Sunday stood out to you? What have you been discovering during this sermon series?

Stephen, "a man full of God's grace and power," has found himself in the accusatory hornet's nest. Let's look at how HE handles it...

5. What is the basis for Stephen's defense? What is the reaction of his accusers as he uses "the facts" (i.e. the reason for their spiritual outrage) against them?

6. Do you think Stephen's defense failed? Which may have had more impact on the observers: his eloquent articulation/rebuttal of accusations, or his ultimate refusal to defend himself against his physical attackers?

7. Where did Stephen place his focus when the physical assault began? Was it on the "stones" or something else?

8. In vs. 60, what does Stephen say? Where have we heard this before? (Hint: Look at Luke 23: 32-33.)

9. Do you think the incident had an effect on the man who held the coats?

Growing Together

Stephen knew his “faith facts” and history and was able to articulate them clearly and concisely. More importantly, he had been transformed by incorporating that “head knowledge” into “heart knowledge.” He KNEW the One of whom he spoke – Jesus – and as Stephen stood up for his faith, Jesus was literally “standing up” for Stephen!

10. When the circumstances of life – the “stones” – are coming at you hard and fast, what is your usual focal point? How do you keep perspective?

11. As Stephen’s situation deteriorated, he “looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (v. 55). Is “looking up” or praying your usual default in crisis? If not, what is? If yes, do you also tend to “look up” when you are not in crisis?

12. Is our faith weaker than Christians who live in places where they are persecuted for their faith? Why or why not?

Doing Something About It

13. To what lengths would you go to defend your faith? If asked, how would you defend your faith?

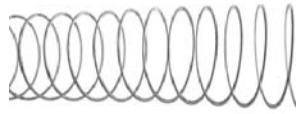
14. What are often the patterns of response when we are put on the defensive? In order to make a difference in our community and our world, what skills and information do we need to have?

15. In what ways has following Jesus been costly for you? How have you/do you respond to the sacrifices God asks you to make for His sake?

16. Jesus knew that at times his followers would experience persecution because of their faith in him. Jesus says in John 15:18-19:

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."

Do you think your faith is alive enough to be threatening to anyone? Do you feel a gulf between yourself (and the way you live) and the world that surrounds you? What do you make of that?



Extension Ideas

for those who might want to read, discuss further, either individually or as a group...

Related Scripture Texts

Background information in Chapter 6: As the early church grew, arguments developed between those who spoke Hebrew and those who spoke Greek. The arguments related to how they cared for one another, particularly the widows. To deal with these issues, the disciples chose from the congregation, 7 men who were respected, wise and Spirit-led. Stephen was chosen because he was "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." God's word continued to spread and more disciples were added to their numbers. However, some argued with Stephen and accused him of speaking against Moses and God, so Stephen came before the council to explain.



Acts 28:23-31

Doing Something About It: Part 4

Sammamish Presbyterian Church Vision Statement

Knowing God, Growing Together, Doing Something About It.

Purpose (Sermon series, small group focus)

To live out together God's call for us to know Him, grow together, and serve in the name of Christ.

Scripture for the week's sermon

Acts 28:23-31

Sermon Topic

Believe Enough to Live It Where You are At (?????)

●●● FOR SMALL GROUPS

Entry Activities...

"The stories of ordinary radicals are all over the place, stories of everyday people doing small things with great love, with their lives, gifts, and careers. I heard about a group of massage therapists who spend their days washing and massaging the tired feet of homeless folks. Some manicurists told me they go to old folks homes and ask which old ladies have no visitors or family, and then they sit with them, laugh, tell stories, and do their nails. On some of our marches for peace and justice, chiropractors join us in the evenings to take care of people's tired bodies so that we will be ready for another day of marching. Around the corner from us, our close friends at the House of Grace Catholic Worker run a free clinic where nurses, doctors, chiropractors, and dentists care for folks who do not have health care. There are lawyers who bail us out of jail, advocate for human rights, and go with us before zoning boards that have no categories for understanding how we live." (pg. 23)
(<http://www.thesimpleway.org/shane/sampler.pdf>)

1. How do these types of activities square with what the church has often thought of as "mission?" Does just hanging out in your neighborhood sometimes feel like evangelism?

Knowing God

Have someone read aloud Acts 28:23-31

2. Who is Paul's audience in this passage? How do you think they felt when Paul told them that God's salvation had been sent to the Gentiles?

3. Paul spoke about the "kingdom of God" to those who came to visit him. Dallas Willard, a philosophy professor at Southern Cal, says that the kingdom of God is "the range of his effective will, where what he wants done is done" (*The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 25). Is the kingdom of God only in heaven, or also on earth? Is it only in the future, or is it also in the present?

Growing Together

Paul spent “two whole years” in his rental house, probably chained to a guard, telling whoever would listen about the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ. He welcomed ALL who came to see him and found a way to serve God right where he was.

4. What parts of the Gospel are hard for YOU to hear? How does your faith complicate your life?

5. When have I been too afraid to step out in faith and serve when I felt Him prompting me? What fears held me back (fear of failure or inadequacy, unwillingness to relinquish my plan...)?

6. How has God used you in service? What kinds of roles/types of service has He placed you in the past?

Doing Something About It

Sometimes living out the Gospel is just looking around and seeing what you can do – and doing it! Paul allowed God to use the gift he had given him for sharing the gospel. He found a way to serve God right where he was.

7. What time in my life have I let God lead me to serve Him (i.e.: responded “yes” to a calling) in a specific ministry? Which ministry was that?

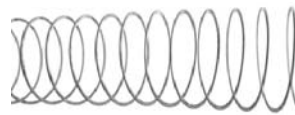
8. How do I live out my faith on a daily basis in my daily life?

9. What has to be in place for a ministry to be meaningful to you?

10. What times in your life have you said “yes” to something out of obligation to fill a need, instead of answering “no” because it was not honestly a fit for you? (or the opposite)

11. Where am I willing to step out in faith and let God use me?

12. St. Francis of Assisi is reported to have said, “Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.” Do you agree with this statement? In what ways can we preach the gospel through our actions to the people in our lives?



Extension Ideas

*for those who might want to read, discuss further,
either individually or as a group...*

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998.

Matthew Parris, “As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God,” *The Times Online*, December 28, 2008, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/matthew_parris/article5400568.ece?print=yes&randnum=1243885967303.



Appendix 1- Chartering Your Small Group

Getting Started

At the beginning of your first small group meeting, it is a good idea to create a group covenant or charter. This can be a physical document or simply a conversation that arrives at a consensus. As a group you will want to discuss what you are hoping to get out of the group and, just as importantly, what you are willing to commit to together in order to get there.

Sample Covenant

The covenant is designed to stipulate the expectations and responsibilities of the group members. This list is only a suggestion, you are welcome to create your own covenant or add to this one.

Meeting Day: _____

Meeting Time: _____

Location of meeting:(The meeting does not always need to be at one house.)_____

Refreshments: (This can also be more than one person.)

Length of meeting:_____

Frequency of meetings:_____

Group Facilitator(s): _____

We agree to the following:

1. ____ To come to the Bible study prepared to participate and discuss. For some groups this may mean studying the passage and questions ahead of your meeting time. For others, it will simply mean coming to the group ready to learn, share and grow.
2. ____ To participate in the discussions. This includes participating by listening to others, and helping all members have the opportunity to discuss and share.
3. ____ To respect the confidentiality of the group, keeping personal information shared within the group.
4. ____ To care for one another by listening, affirming, asking questions of, encouraging, protecting and praying for one another.
5. ____ To be open with one another by sharing feelings, joys, struggles and hurts; acknowledging that reaching the goal of authentic relationships begins by being open with one another.
6. ____ To collaborate with one another to create a healthy group by being honest, sharing in the creating of the vision for what the group ought to be and pursuing our objectives together.
7. ____ Any other key commitments we would like to make to one another *(examples might include: to grow the group numerically, to serve together, to be available to one another outside of group times, to communicate freely and frequently about how the group is going, etc).*

Creating a Vision Statement

Some groups have found it helpful to craft a Vision Statement for the group which they can refer back to as well as edit and add to over time. If you decide this would be helpful to your group, you will want to think about a concise couple of sentences that expresses a clear, easily communicated reason for your being a group.

Your group does not have to create a Vision Statement. But every member of the group should have a good idea of why it is that you are meeting. And every member of the group should be committed to working together to pursue those goals.

If you are having trouble getting started on a Vision Statement, you may want to think together about what you want your group to look like six months from now and then articulate some action steps for getting you there.

A Word on the Personality of a Small Group

Your group does not need to look like other groups. This one is yours. It is as unique as you are. Don't feel pressure to behave like another group or to make use of any one particular group formation tool (i.e. vision statement, group covenant, etc.).

The important thing is that you are together pursuing intentional, authentic, Christ-centered relationships. All healthy small groups will share some important characteristics and values. Some examples of these are things like:

Commitment to meeting	Safety
Commitment to one another	Availability
Affirmation	Confidentiality
Openness	Sensitivity
Prayer	Accountability
Honesty	Joy

But the path you will walk to a place where you share together in true spiritual friendship will be as distinctive as the people in your group. If you are committed to walking alongside one another as you seek to follow Jesus Christ, and if you are committed to asking God to help you become together an authentic, Christ-centered community; you will get there.

May God bless your journey of faith together.



