

WATER Lesson 2: Unified in Spirit



Q: Do you remember your first experience in the church? What kind of impression did it leave for you? First impressions are important! As we discuss this topic, be care not to focus on what the church should be doing better, but rather how we, as the church, can do our part to make the church attractive to newcomers and visitors. People remember how they were treated, welcomed, engaged, etc. As much as possible, we want people to find the church to be a safe place (free from man's judgment) to experience the God who loves them unconditionally.

Q: How do we see people the way that God sees people? How do we cultivate this kind of heart for others? Seeing people the way that God sees them doesn't mean that we are ignorant or blind to the sin in people's lives. It means that we look beyond their sin and see a person created in the image of God that is no less worthy of God's grace than we are (if we were even worthy of it at all!). He loves them and has compassion on them. Most people aren't evil as much as they are misguided; victims of a life experience that they did not initially choose. They need truth, not judgment. People will not hear the truth if we shut them out of the presence of God with a message of hate. God wants us to love them so that they will be able to hear the truth about who He is and what He has done.

Q: Galatians 6:2 instructs us to carry one another's burdens. Do you recall a time where you needed someone else's help? What was it like to have someone come along to help or rescue you? We often try to tend to life's burdens on our own, and we should do so as much as we are able. But sometimes life can be overwhelming and at that point we need God to step in and help us out. He uses people minister to our needs as a tangible expression of His love. When we step into another person's life to be the "hands and feet of Jesus," we help to carry their burdens and it can be life changing for them. Perhaps you've had this experience and know how much of a blessing it can be to have someone come along side of you to show you that they care. God is so good to us!

Q: Read Hebrews 13:15-16. How can we find out about the needs around us? What are some practical ways to become more aware of who is hurting or in need? When we don't live in close proximity to people, it may be hard to know about the immediate needs around us. Paying attention when people talk about their lives, observing the obvious needs as you go through life, watching the news, checking out the C.A.R.E.S. Center at church. Try not to be overwhelmed at the endless possibilities, but instead take baby steps. Another way to prime your heart to watch for needs is to pray for opportunities to minister, or perhaps to budget a certain amount to use each month to minister to others. Do you have any other creative ideas?

Q: Discuss Luke 6:37-38. Do you struggle with judging people? It comes pretty naturally! How do we change our perspective so that we are more helpful to people? Our pride and insecurity drive us to compare our performance with others. Judging a person means holding them up to our standards of righteousness instead of allowing God to have the final say. Ultimately, none of us measures up to God's perfect standard so we have no right to judge anyone. Again, we need to look

at each person as an eternal being, loved by God. We need to look beyond their behavior and appearance to see the incredible person that God created. We change our perspective by gathering more information instead of jumping to conclusions without the whole story. Listen to what they say and learn about why they think the way that they do. It may change our perspective.

Q: Have you ever witnessed or experienced a poor example of what the Church was intended to be? Why does this happen even among God's people? How can this be prevented or improved? There are several reasons that Christians might be a poor example of what the Church was intended to be. Some people lack wisdom and tact, others might have a distorted theology. Some are filled with self-righteousness, others may be driven by fear or maybe guilt. It is so important to keep an understanding of our sin at the forefront of our mind and to allow that sin to keep us humble and our pride at bay. Love and humility are two essential ingredients for making God's Church attractive.

Q: What motivates you to live for God? What distracts us from being fully committed to Him? What can we do to avoid being distracted? Discuss 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. When we commit to living our lives for God, we die to ourselves and adopt God's plans for how we live. We are motivated by a heart of gratitude that is in touch with the reality of what we deserve. Lust, power, money, pleasure and other worldly gain can distract us from staying on the straight and narrow path that leads to the presence of God. We can avoid falling into a pit of distraction by keeping our hearts and minds focused on Jesus - daily!

Q: Read Matthew 5:14-16. Who do you think might be watching you? Do people know that you are a Christian? What kind of example are you setting for them and how can it be improved? This is a bit of a personal reflection question, but be sure to encourage anyone who shares some thoughts. If people know that we profess to be a Christian, then they are making their own assessment of this claim by watching how we live, act, and speak. It is critically important that we give an accurate picture of God to people because they've seen many bad examples - let's be sure to give them a good one!

Class Assignment: Have you given any more thought to whom God might want you to connect with to help you grow in your faith? Remember to talk about this every week. It seems like an easy assignment and many will try to justify not making the effort to find someone who can encourage them and hold them accountable. Just being in a small group doesn't mean you are being challenged and held accountable for spiritual growth. We need someone to ask us some honest, tough questions.

Memory Verse:

1 Corinthians 12:25-27 - *"there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*

PRAYER REQUESTS: