

# **Bible Studies for Life for December 7: God's missionary heart**

November 24, 2008

"True religion is like the smallpox. If you get it, you give it to others and it spreads," said C.T. Studd, English missionary to China, India and Africa. Saved at the age of 18, Studd reported a flood of joy and peace at the moment of his salvation. But then, 'instead of going and telling others of the love of Christ, I was selfish and kept the knowledge to myself. The result was that gradually my love began to grow cold, and the love of the world began to come in. I spent six years in that unhappy backslidden state."

As we discussed last week, we are all called to tell our story. Each of us has a testimony about God's work in our lives, and if we don't obey the mandate to share it, we can lose intimacy with God. Studd's comparison of Christianity to smallpox is apt. God designed faith to be viral in nature. Like the flu or a YouTube video, it should spread quickly and easily. But it cannot spread if we won't share our stories.

Salvation is for everyone: Jew and Gentile, rich and poor. Everyone. This week's lesson reveals God's desire for all people to be saved. It also underscores the need for us to join God's effort to bring people to himself.

## **God wants to restore relationship with those who have fallen away**

All creation was made by God, and as any artist can tell you, a creator loves his creation. When sin entered the world, God's heart was broken. He had created man to enjoy intimate relationship with him, and sin created a barrier that could not be penetrated.

Salvation, which is God's reaching out to us, is part of God's plan to restore us to intimate relationship with himself. But God wants his children to participate in his work. That's why he calls each of us to tell our stories, spreading the good news of God's love, and leading people into relationship with him. His desire is expressed in Isaiah 49:6—that his salvation be taken to the ends of the earth.

In verse 5 of chapter 49, Isaiah writes, "And now the Lord says—he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself ... ." God's heart is to mend the broken relationship with man. In spite of the fact we are separated from God because of our own choices, God wants to restore us to him.

Then in verse 6 of chapter 49, God says, "Is it too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept." In this passage, he is speaking specifically about Israel. But his desire is the same for anyone who has become estranged from him. The world is full of people who have responded to God but fallen away. God wants these people to come back to him, and he wants us to help make it happen.

### **God wants all nations to know and worship him**

In the Old Testament, we read primarily about God's work among the Hebrew nation. But in this week's reading, it becomes clear God's plan always has included all people. "Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the Lord say, 'The Lord will surely exclude me from his people'" (Isaiah 56:3). Anyone who loves God sincerely and obeys him is counted as one of God's chosen.

Remember what Jesus told his disciples? "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). God wants men and women to come to him by choice. Regardless of their nationality, if they love, serve and worship

him, “these (he) will bring to (his) holy mountain and give them joy in (his) house of prayer” (Isaiah 56:7).

Now, look at what God says in Isaiah 66:18, “And I, because of their actions and their imaginations, am about to come and gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory.” God isn’t leaving it to chance for people to learn about him. His eternal plan, initiated at the first moment of creation, was for all mankind to be gathered into his presence. And we are called to be the gatherers. Look at verse 19: “... I will send some ... to the nations ... to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations.”

We are saved for a purpose. On a personal level, we receive redemption from our sins, but eternally, we become part of God’s plan for this world. We are to join him in calling others out of sin and into his glory.

Take a look at verse 20: “And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord ... . They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the Lord in ceremonially clean vessels.” The calling to tell others is not an optional request. Telling others about Christ is an act of worship, and the people we bring into God’s presence are the offering we bring to His temple.

It’s easy to understand why God wants his creation to be restored to him. Sin stole his creation, corrupting it forever. The only way God could restore it to its former glory was to sacrifice his own son, Jesus. But why does God want to include us in his work? He doesn’t need us. It seems including us in his plans are meant purely to be a blessing to us.

One day this world will end, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. This life is a trial run of sorts. Through the choices we make and the priorities we set, God tests our hearts. Do we care about him or only for our

own gain? Our place in his new heaven and earth are determined by the way we live today. “‘As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,’ declares the Lord, ‘so will your name and descendants endure’” (Isaiah 66:22).

### **Discussion questions**

- *How can faith be viral in nature?*
- Why is it important for us to become a part of God’s plans on earth?
- What do you think about Studd’s comment that not sharing the story of Jesus is selfish?