

group Bible Study – September 26, 2007

Read Genesis Chapter 12

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Welcome back! If it's your first year at SPU, an especially big welcome to you. I hope that this time in your life will become as meaningful for you as it was for me back when I was a student here. If you're a returning student, thank you for joining us again. I believe that this year will be more thoughtful and more challenging and more hopeful than ever before.

In the group service we're really pressing into the idea of "Being the People of God"—we don't want to just drift through life. We want to live out our purpose and make an impact. Let's do this thing together! Each week that we meet for worship you will receive a Bible study that includes a weekly reading assignment, a reflection on the Scripture passage from one of our leaders, and study questions that you can use for personal devotions or small group discussion. If you follow this Bible study guide each week, by the end of the year you will have read through all of Exodus, Hosea and Mark. Please join us in this great adventure by committing to study these books throughout the week!

This first week is our time to give an overview of the big picture for the whole year: "Being the People of God." Next week we'll dive into the book of Exodus. For now, think about this...

What does it mean to be "God's People"? If God loves everyone in the whole world equally, why does he have a "special people" that he calls to himself? Isn't that favoritism?

When we look at the people of Israel in the Old Testament, the original "People of God," we see both good and bad examples for us today. Sometimes this group of people thought that they were better than others, that God loved them and not the other nations. When the people thought like this, they were missing the whole point.

Let's go back—all the way back. The "People of God" begins with one man and one woman: Abraham and Sarah. Read Genesis chapter twelve. This is the first time when God looks down on all the people of the earth, and he says "YOU! ... yes, you. Abram and Sarai, you will be mine. You will move away from your home and you will become a new nation. And this nation will be my own people, set apart for my purposes. You don't live for yourself any longer. Now you live for a bigger plan that I'm working out for the whole world."

This is what it means to be "the People of God" on earth: it's not that God loves us more, but rather God calls us apart so that we can be part of a special mission. "I will make you into a great nation... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:2-3).

We are God's hands and feet. The mission is that "all peoples on earth will be blessed." This is why we exist.

Study Questions (for individuals or small groups):

- As you have grown up, what have you assumed about the purpose of the Church? What is the point of being God's People? Have you thought about it in terms of what it does for us, or what it does for the world? Talk about that with your friends this week.
- In Genesis 12, when God decided to make Abraham and Sarah into his new People, he told them to leave their country and go to a new place. Why do you think God had these people leave their home?
- What does all of this mean for the Church today? In what ways are we being true to our mission, or not?