

December 2009

Neighbors for Life & being “Includers”

*“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.
...We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.
As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, "In the
time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you."
I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.”*

2 Corinthians 5:16, 20 & 6:1-2 NIV

By the time you are reading this article the holidays will be upon us. Like no other season, our end of the year celebrations provide us with “golden” opportunities to live as neighbors to the folks within our daily circles of influence. As a community, New Life is called to be His living bridge –connecting our heavenly Father to the delight of His heart –humanity.

Historically, one of the most fruitful methods of being neighbors for life is to be “includers.” Three out of five of Jesus’ followers were introduced to Him through the invitational activity of someone they had some level of relationship with. This shows us that relationships and personal invitation are the key ingredients in being fruitful followers of Jesus. Both Andrew and Philip responded to Jesus’ invitation by going immediately to find their brothers -Peter and Nathanael.

In the scripture reference shown in the box to the right, Paul coaches the church in Corinth to “get in the game.” He challenges them to “see” the people around them with the eyes of Christ and to live as His representatives: Ambassadors of His Kingdom.

This pattern of being invited by Jesus and then inviting others is the essence of being an includer. Our holiday season and the hunger it creates in the heart of people provides us with an amazing opportunity to partner with God in seeing others introduced to Him. In another letter, Paul coaches the church in Ephesus to “make the most of every opportunity” – “to live intentionally doing as God would direct us.” (Eph.5:15-18) For the New Life Family, we have two main venues for celebrating Jesus’ birth: one is our Children’s Program and Family Dinner on Sunday, December 20th. This provides us with a wonderful opportunity to live as an includer. During the time when I usually speak, our children will sing and share a short play. Afterwards, we will have a family dinner in the gymnasium.

The other venue takes place in homes around our area during the holiday season; it is the Home Church Network Christmas parties. These are wonderful times of gathering together in smaller numbers to laugh and eat, to pray and fellowship around the person of Jesus Christ. Both venues provide us with opportunities to invite others –to let them see that Jesus’

followers are not weird, but regular people who know Him and His love. Intentionally including others in these events is one way of exposing them to God's tangible love during a time when their thirst for peace and hope and joy is incredibly high. Including others in our church celebrations is just one way of being neighbors this holiday season. When applied to our personal holiday celebrations, Paul's words in Ephesians 5, challenge us to submit all of life to Him –including our family events. Join me in praying, and including as we celebrate our Savior's birth.

Pastor Dave