

firstmbchurch

REAL

PEOPLE | FAITH | IMPACT

STUDY GUIDE

A five-week study that focuses on admitting brokenness, boldly following Jesus, and impacting our world.

REAL

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Questions?

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Introduction | Welcome

A very typical greeting in our culture today is, “How are you?” Most of us are quick to answer with responses like “fine” or “good,” whether that really rings true or not. On our toughest days, we don’t always want sympathy or advice. It feels awkward and uncomfortable to go into the deep, painful issues that we all go through, and it’s not fun for any of us to admit that we truly are broken.

It’s a lot easier to simply say, “I’m fine.”

This sermon series and small group study is all about our church’s desire to be real. We want to be people who are authentic, genuine, and true. That’s the kind of life that God calls us to live, and we all know that living life under a mask can be really exhausting and unhealthy.

Although most of us would probably say we *want* to live that way, we also know it is *really* hard. Life is messy, and being real means that the people around us will see our hurts and mistakes. More importantly, it means that we will admit our brokenness to a Holy God—the only One who can mend our brokenness and give us a full and abundant life worth living.

Over the next five weeks, we’ll dive deeper into this idea and talk through various ways we can start to live a more authentic and real life—both individually and collectively as a church.

The first week will focus on “real brokenness.” What does it mean to be broken, and what kind of implications does that have in day-to-day life? The following two weeks will focus on “real faith.” Do you have a dedicated, 24/7 faith, or do you only have a relationship with God on Sunday mornings? Later we’ll focus on “real impact.” As Christ followers, we have been commissioned to love our neighbors and make a difference in the world. Is your faith impacting those you work with? What about your friends and your family?

This study is designed to spur conversation with your group in all of these areas. We ask that you come to your gatherings having read the chapter for that week ready to discuss your thoughts from the study and the Scriptures. Leaders, we recommend reading each chapter out loud together as a group, but you’re free to figure out what works best for you.

We hope you enjoy and experience growth these next few weeks.

Lesson 1 | Real People

Study Text: Galatians 6:1-6

6 Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. 4 Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, 5 for each one should carry their own load. 6 Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

OVERVIEW

Brokenness does not make a great advertising campaign. All of us can think of great advertising slogans we have seen. GE's slogan is "We Bring Good Things to Life." Holiday Inn's slogan is "Pleasing People the World Over." LG's is "Life's Good." Companies utilize these slogans to make people think if they buy their products they can have a better life. What would you think of an organization who had "Admit Brokenness" as part of their campaign? This does not coincide very well with a society that promotes the pursuit of perfection. Many people would have us believe that everyone's life is without burdens, problems, or sin. We know that this is not true. This is why God designed His Church to be a place where people from all walks of life can come and admit brokenness.

What benefit is there to admitting brokenness? People do not see it necessary to be found (saved) unless they realize they are lost. It is all in how you approach God. Do you come to God claiming that your life is perfect or do you come before God admitting you have sinned and need His grace? Admitting brokenness is the first step in needing God. In this lesson we are going to discuss what it means to be broken, to carry one another's burdens, and to be restored.

BROKENNESS

There was an ad on Amazon.com recently for a cello. It read: "FREE CELLO. It's a nice cello. Actually, it's a great cello. It's probably the best cello, but I don't really know much about cellos. Also the neck is snapped off of the

cello. So it's really more like three quarters of a cello, but the other quarter is still there. It's just not attached. It's kind of like you're getting two cellos, only one of them doesn't have a body and the other doesn't have a neck."

For many of us, if we tried to write an ad for our life it would sound a lot like this ad for a cello. We are broken and have sinned, but we try to convince everyone around us that things are great. We claim to have it all together, but we are just broken pieces searching for someone to put us back together.

James 5:16 reads, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." Admitting brokenness requires humility. Pride is the adversary to confession. It keeps us from admitting our mistakes to each other and (more importantly) before God. No one intends on living a broken life.

In Galatians 6:1, Paul says that people *get caught* in sin. "The word for 'caught' means literally to be 'detected, overtaken, or surprised'."* One bad choice will lead to another, and then to another. Admitting brokenness is the first step to being restored. James 4:10 reads, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." Before God will put our broken lives back together again, we must first admit our brokenness.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. What are some of the biggest obstacles in the church when it comes to people admitting their brokenness?

SHARING THE BURDEN

Much of society teaches us from a very early age to look out for ourselves. This means that you primarily focus on yourself and try not to care about the problems of others. Galatians 6:2 encourages us to "carry each other's burdens." This is a command, not an option. This is a foreign concept in an "I" centered society. The church is not just a group of good people who

* George, T. (1994). Galatians (Vol. 30, p. 409). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

meet together on Sunday mornings. We are a community of Christ followers interwoven together in love by the Holy Spirit. Loving one another means caring about each other's problems, burdens, and sins.

So how do we "carry each other's burdens"? This can be a sensitive topic considering the length people will go to hide any sin or problem in their life. Helping each other deal with sin or struggles can only be done in the context of relationship. If you see someone struggling with a sin, offer to listen, give Godly advice, and hold them

accountable. Carrying each other's burdens can be messy, and this is why Paul gives us a warning. We are told to watch out so that we are not caught up in the same sin we are trying to help someone else out of (Galatians 6:1).

DIGGING DEEPER

The image of bearing another's "burden" or "weight" might remind readers of slaves or of impressment (Roman soldiers could require local people to carry something for them). In either case, it is an image of subservience that demands more than convenience. "Bear burdens" in this context must include helping a fellow Christian deal with sins.

Keener, C. S. (1993). The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament (Ga 6:2). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

2. Discuss a time when someone helped carry a burden in your life.

RESTORED

So far we have admitted our brokenness and carried each other's burdens. The next step Paul gives the church in Galatians is to restore our fellow believers. He states that this is to be done gently. Nobody wants to be beat up over the sin and mistakes in their life. It is far too easy to become a spiritual guru waiting for those around us to mess up so we have the opportunity to offer correction and advice. This is not the intent behind restoration. We are also not to be so gentle that we overlook the sin.

Restoration happens with confrontation. Once the brokenness has been admitted and the burden is shared, then restoration can occur.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

3. In what ways can people guard themselves against showing spiritual superiority when they are restoring a fellow believer?

Restoration is not to be done with an air of spiritual superiority. Romans 3:23 reminds us, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Every one of us is in need of being restored. Christ took upon Himself this mission of restoration on the cross not because we deserved it, but out of His love for us. In the same way, we should seek to restore our fellow believers not necessarily because they deserve it, but out of love.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

4. Judgment is the most common response when someone is caught in sin. In your life, how do you stand firm against sin and yet not be seen as judgmental?

5. Verse 2 reads, “carry each other’s burdens” and verse 5 says, “for each one should carry their own load.” How do you know when to ask for help in dealing with a sin or when it is something you should handle on your own?

DIGGING DEEPER

“Restore.” The Greek word used here is *katartizō*. It describes a dislocated limb returned to its place. Such is the tenderness with which we should treat a fallen member of the Church in restoring him to a better state.

Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (Ga 6:1). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

6. Galatians 6:1 reads, “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.” Why does Paul emphasize gentleness in the restoration process? Can the process of restoration be too gentle? Explain.

7. Throughout Galatians 6:1-6 the Apostle Paul emphasizes the person doing the restoring more than the person caught in sin. Why is it necessary for someone to examine themselves first before they try to help others?

8. 1 Peter 5:6 reads, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” In what ways does pride get in the way of people admitting brokenness?

9. It is easy to compare one’s own sin to that of others. Why does Paul warn believers about the dangers of comparing one life to another?

10. When it comes to admitting your brokenness within the church, how would you describe the ideal church setting? What would you like the church to do or not do to help facilitate people admitting brokenness?

11. Romans 14:12 says that each of us will give an account someday to God. While it is important to hold each other accountable, we will eventually have to give an account for our own actions. What steps are you taking to deal with the brokenness in your life? In what ways can the fellow believers in your group help?

12. Read James 5:16. How can admitting brokenness bring healing to your life?

FURTHER STUDY

Boundaries (Henry Cloud/John Townsend)

Encouragement: The Key to Caring (Larry Crabb)

THIS WEEK'S MEMORY VERSE

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." James 5:16

Lesson 2 | Real Faith

Study Text: James 1:22-25

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

OVERVIEW

Most homes are divided into rooms. Each room is designed to fulfill a specific purpose. It would be ridiculous to take a shower at the kitchen sink or to do the dishes in the bedroom. This would not be utilizing the rooms for their intended purpose.

In 1922, a Presbyterian minister named Dr. Frank Crane wrote an article describing different rooms we have in our lives. He describes ten rooms that every house of life should have, ranging from music to sports. Dr. Frank said, “Your house of life ought to be a mansion, a royal palace. Every new taste, every additional interest, every fresh enthusiasm adds a room.” Depending on your life situation and varying interests, your house of life will be uniquely specific to you. No matter what your house of life looks like, we all divide our lives into manageable sections.

What rooms do you have in your house of life? Most of us probably have rooms for things such as finances, work, family, and friends. We don’t want to spend all our time in the room of work and have no time for family or friends. We don’t want to always be in the room of finances and not give consideration to the other blessings in our lives. For most areas in our lives, it is good to maintain a balance. The question every believer needs to ask is, where does your faith in God fit into your house? Have you divided your house of life so your relationship with God fits neatly into a single room? Have you put God into one manageable section of your life? Throughout this lesson, we are going to explore the topic of real faith and how that faith overflows into every room in your house of life.

SUNDAY FAITH

James 1:22-25 uses the analogy of looking into a mirror and then forgetting what you look like once you walk away. At first this may sound absurd. How

can anyone forget what they look like?

During the time James wrote this letter, mirrors were not as readily available as they are today. It was usually the rich who could afford the added luxury of owning a mirror. Imagine being able to see your true reflection only once or twice a year. Given this context, it does not seem so improbable that people might forget what they look like.

What would your life look like if you put your faith in God only in your “Sunday morning room”? This may sound as absurd as forgetting your own image, but how many of us in our house of life have created a room specifically for God and never let Him out? It might even be a mansion-sized room, but in the end that is all it is—a single room. We don’t let Him into our room for work for fear of what our colleagues might think. We keep Him at a safe distance from the rooms for friends and family because we want to be liked and keep the peace. We come to church on Sunday morning and we worship together and study God’s Word, but that is where our faith begins and ends. This is not to say that we don’t believe in God throughout the week; He is just not reflected in any other area of our life. Can this Sunday morning faith be defined as real faith?

DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. Discuss as a group some of the struggles preventing people from reflecting a real faith in every aspect of their life.

DIGGING DEEPER

The Word of God reveals what we are on the inside, just as a mirror reveals how we appear on the outside. When Christians look into the Word, they see themselves as God sees them, and thus are able to examine their hearts and confess their sins. But it is not enough merely to look into the Word and read it; we must obey what we read.

Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament (p. 722). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

OPENING THE DOORS

How can a faith go from being displayed only on Sunday mornings to a real faith which is reflected in every room of your life? One way this is done is simply through the action of being consistent. Don’t just come and learn about God’s love, grace, and forgiveness without consistently demonstrating it in other areas of your life. When someone cuts you off on your drive to work in the mornings, don’t react in anger and try to get them back. When the clerk at the grocery store

is struggling to process your order, don't think of them with negativity. Allow your faith to give you the strength to extend God's love and grace to those around you just as it was extended to you. Open your room of faith and let God penetrate every other room in your house of life.

James 3:9-12 reads, "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water."

As we go through the everyday toils of life, it is sometimes difficult to connect everything we do and say as a reflection of our faith. James reminds us that we use the same mouth to praise God as we do when we speak poorly of people in our lives. It is the difference between hearing God's Word and doing God's Word. It is the difference between having a real faith that is seen throughout your life and having a faith that is managed to Sunday mornings. We are not meant to come on Sundays to hear God's Word then forget what we heard throughout the week. A real faith means that we are to be consistent doers of God's Word—no matter where we are or who is around.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

2. What areas of your life do you need to actively demonstrate your faith in God? What steps can you take during the next week to make this happen?

DIGGING DEEPER

Many people have the mistaken idea that hearing a good sermon or Bible study is what makes them grow and receive God's blessing. It is not the hearing but the *doing* that brings the blessing. Too many Christians mark their Bibles, but their Bibles never mark them! If you think you are spiritual because you hear the Word, then you are only kidding yourself.

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Vol. 2, p. 347). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

RECONSTRUCTION

The main purpose of owning a mirror is for self-examination. You don't look into a mirror and see a huge smudge across your face and walk away thinking that everything is fine.

1 John 2:5-6 reads, "But if anyone obeys His Word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did."

Developing real faith requires self-examination. You need to daily examine your activities, thoughts, and attitudes to determine if you are living as Jesus lived. A thorough self-examination requires more than a quick glance. When you self-examine your faith, you cannot just look at your work and ignore your family, finances, or thought life. Developing a real faith means opening every room of your life to God and allowing Him to do His reconstructive work.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

3. In what ways can you help each other develop a real faith in your life?

The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” Stand firm in your faith. Don’t allow the actions or thoughts of others to deter you from demonstrating a real faith. In your house of life, if you open up the doors that need to be opened and clean up the areas that need to be cleaned, your work will certainly not be in vain. People will look at you and your faith and see a reflection of Jesus in your life.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

4. How would you define faith to someone who doesn’t believe in God? In what ways can you illustrate your definition by examples in your life?

5. James 1:22 reads, “Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” How do people deceive themselves by listening to God’s Word, but refusing to allow it to affect their life?

6. What causes some believers to close off areas of their life and not allow God into them?

7. Read 2 Peter 2:5-9. In this passage, the Apostle Peter lists out attributes of real faith. What is the difference between having a faith with these attributes and having a faith without them?

8. Having a real faith doesn't mean you will not struggle at times. What benefit is it to be surrounded by fellow believers when the messy circumstances of life shake your faith?

9. It is easy to fall into the trap of comparing your faith to the faith of someone else. What danger is there in using the faith of others as the tool for examining your own faith?

10. What role does the church have in helping believers develop real faith? How can the church help people develop a real faith that extends beyond Sunday mornings?

11. Matthew 17:20 reads, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” What does this say about your faith? What can you do to increase your level of faith?

FURTHER STUDY

Attributes of God (A.W. Tozer)

THIS WEEK’S MEMORY VERSE

“Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” James 1:22

Lesson 3 | Real Faith

Study Text: Ephesians 6:10-17

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

OVERVIEW

What are thirty seconds worth? Probably throughout your day thirty seconds would not be worth a whole lot. If you take that same thirty seconds and use it for a Super Bowl commercial this year, it would be worth more than \$4 million. Why would any business pay \$4 million for just thirty seconds of your time?

The answer is simple: we live in a consumer-driven society. Our society is defined by choices. Businesses realize that all of us have a choice when it comes to buying a product. Something as simple as buying a cell phone is no longer that simple. Whether you buy online or at a store, there are hundreds of choices depending on what you want to do with your phone. There are smart phones, conventional phones, flip phones, texting phones, prepaid phones, or unlocked phones. Almost every day, in practically all aspects of your life, you get to pick and choose what you want depending on your desires.

From a very early age, all of us are bombarded with marketing. This can lead to a mindset of thinking we can pick and choose in every area of our lives; including when it comes to our faith. With our thirty-second consumer-driven mindset, we can fall into the trap of treating our faith like an all-you-can-eat buffet. We go through and put a big pile of grace and mercy in our lives, but we skip over the surrender and humility parts. We like the idea of community, but not service; missions, but not tithing; or Jesus, but not life change. We have allowed our faith to be defined by our needs instead of

God's desire for us.

Throughout this lesson we are going to explore the topic of a real faith that is uncompromising and bold. This real faith is not like an all-you-can-eat buffet or a consumer mentality where you can pick and choose.

PICK AND CHOOSE

Take a few moments and imagine a first century Roman soldier getting ready to head off to war. He goes into the barracks over to his equipment and looks over his shield, sword, boots, helmet, and belt. He has a choice to make. Is he going to put everything on, or is he going to pick and choose what he wants? It would seem ridiculous for him to take everything but his boots, or to leave his shield and take his helmet. No matter what he left behind, he would be leaving himself vulnerable to the enemy's attack.

This is the illustration the Apostle Paul uses in Ephesians 6 when he writes about the full armor of God. Ephesians 6:11 tell us to "Put on the full armor of God." Paul does not give an extensive list of a Romans soldier's equipment and correlate it to the Christian faith. His main point is that believers are to put on the full armor of God and not pick and choose.

What does picking and choosing look like? For a lot of believers it looks like compromise; having faith in Jesus up to the point where it requires change in your life. Most believers have areas where their faith is strong and other areas where they struggle.

A simple illustration of this can be in the area of honesty. Believers are called to live honest, God-fearing lives (put on the belt of truth). Proverbs 19:1 reads, "Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool." For eleven months out of the year, maybe walking with uncompromising integrity is not be an issue for you—until it is time to file taxes. There is the temptation to compromise your faith in order to save money.

Another area of compromise might be in the desire to be liked by others. Words are said and actions are taken where your faith is compromised in order to fit in with the crowd at work or at school. This is not referring to a complete denial of your faith. Compromise is allowing chinks in your armor where you become vulnerable to fall. Chances are it is probably not one huge compromising frontline battle decision that is going to lead you away from Christ, but the everyday choices where you pick and choose.

DIGGING DEEPER

Roman soldiers were equipped with large rectangular wooden shields, four feet high, the fronts of which were made of leather. Before battles in which flaming arrows might be fired, the leather would be wetted to quench any fiery darts launched against them. After Roman legionaries closed ranks, the front row holding shields forward and those behind them holding shields above them, they were virtually invulnerable to any attack from flaming arrows.

New American Standard Bible: 1995 update. (1995). (Pr 19:1). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. Discuss as a group some common areas where Christians pick and choose their faith.

ALL OR NONE

Roman soldiers did not go and fight battles all on their own. They formed legions, walking side-by-side, with their shields overlapping

the soldier next to them. Each soldier would not only benefit from his shield, but also from those they did battle with. It was this shoulder-to-shoulder interlocking unit that made a Roman legion impenetrable.

The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12 that our struggle is not against flesh and blood. Christians need to walk side-by-side with overlapping shields forming an impenetrable wall of faith. The devil will try any tactic to cause division and break ranks.

What if one soldier was not all the way committed when it came to actual battle? He would do all the training and stay in unison, but when things got hard, he fall away. He dressed like a soldier, talked like a soldier, but quickly compromised when it came to battle.

Christians can fall into this same trap. They like the thought and look of Christianity until it requires life change. Ephesians 4:22-24 says, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." You can look the part and talk the talk, but the testing of your faith will occur when temptations come around and when the struggles of life hit. It is during these times you will know if you are all in.

Wilbur Rees once wrote a poem called “Three Dollars Worth of God Please.” It reads: “I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine... I want ecstasy, not transformation. I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want about a pound of the eternal in a paper sack. I'd like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.”

Soldiers do not get the benefit of deciding if they are all in or not. They are either 100% soldier or not at all. They cannot just decide to be a soldier until the time of battle begins. The same is true for Christians. God wants all of you, and you need all of Him. This requires an uncompromising faith that brings about life change.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

2. How does a believer know if they are all in or not? What does their faith look like?

DIGGING DEEPER

“The belt of truth” is openness and honesty that create a climate of trust and unity. “The breastplate of righteousness” is moral purity. “Feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace” is the full acceptance of others, despite race or social class, that enables us to experience the peace Christ made between us through the Cross. “The shield of faith” is confidence in the supreme power of Christ, our living head. “The helmet of salvation” is realization of our new identity in Christ as God’s new creations. Only “the sword of the Spirit” is defined in the armor passage, and this is because Paul has not mentioned the Word of God earlier in his letter.

Richards, L. O. (1991). The Bible reader's companion (electronic ed., p. 802). Wheaton: Victor Books.

BATTLE CRY

The battlefield has been set. The lines are drawn and the war is ready to begin. All around, soldiers are yelling and getting pumped up for a fight, each one motivated by the boldness of the soldiers around them. If just one soldier wasn’t bold and pumped for battle, it could affect the entire legion. If one soldier quietly whispered “Go team” instead of yelling with enthusiasm, he would certainly stand out. There is no room for the timid when the enemy is set to attack.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

3. What does boldness look like when it comes to faith? How can a believer be bold and not offensive?

In Ephesians 6:11, the Apostle Paul tells his readers to stand against the enemy. Paul wants his readers to be bold in the face of opposition, not willing to back down or compromise. God will fight the battle. He simply requires believers to have a bold faith, not willing to back down when the devil comes against them. Boldness means not picking and choosing. Boldness means no compromise. Boldness means being all in. Boldness means living a life changed by faith. Boldness means standing firm when those around you don't believe and when the struggles of life come. When believers are bold, they can stand in unison, motivating those around them by striking fear into the enemy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

4. Describe a time when you felt like your faith was under attack. What was occurring and what did you do in response?

5. How does a believer receive the strength to stand firm against the schemes of the devil?

6. Ephesians 6:11 tells us to "Put on the full armor of God." In what ways can picking and choosing faith not only affect the believer, but also those around them?

7. Discuss some areas where the church is under attack. What can the church do to make sure it stands firm? How can the church make sure the next generation of believers is standing firm as well?

8. Read Hebrews 4:12-13. In what ways is the Word of God like a sword? How does God's word strengthen and shape your faith?

9. Read Colossians 3:5-11. What can Christians do to help each other in areas of weakness? In what ways can believers help transform each other and put on the full armor of God?

10. Romans 10:14-15. A fundamental responsibility of all Christians is to share the gospel. In Ephesians 6:14, the Apostle Paul tells his readers to have their "feet fitted with the readiness." How can Christians be bold and ready to share their faith? What are some obstacles people struggle with when sharing the gospel?

11. Discuss a time when you felt like you were being guarded spiritually by someone else's faith. Also discuss a time when you used your faith to help someone who was struggling.

12. Putting on the full armor of God doesn't mean that life will not have its temptations and struggles. What steps can you take to make sure you and those around you are standing firm?

13. What does a bold faith look like in your home? How does it affect your relationship with your spouse, your kids, or your parents? What new habits can you begin to form to strengthen your family?

FURTHER STUDY

The Pursuit of God (A.W. Tozer)

THIS WEEK'S MEMORY VERSE

"For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." 2 Timothy 1:7

Lesson 4 | Real Impact

Study Text: Acts 16:11-40

Acts 16:11-15 Story of Lydia

Acts 16:16-21 Story of the Slave Girl

Acts 16:22-40 Story of the Jailer

OVERVIEW

The year 2014 is well underway, and for a lot of people it has come with several changes. Some people pick a single word that will be their guiding point and inspiration for the year. This single word needs to be selected with careful consideration and not just picked at random. It should have significance in your life and relate to situations you will face in 2014. For most of us, it is easier to pick words for things we do *not* want to be part of our lives. Hopefully nobody would want “anger” to be their word for the year. Nor would anybody want “frustration” to be their guiding point. It is interesting how something as small as a single word can make such a huge difference when we choose to focus.

DIGGING DEEPER

Philippi was a minor village of Thrace (known in antiquity as “The Springs”) until about 357 B.C., when the father of Alexander the Great, Philip II of Macedon, conquered the site and rebuilt it. He gave the village his name (“Philip’s City”), fortified it as a military stronghold in subduing the area, and exploited the nearby gold mines. Two hundred years later, in the Roman era, it became a chief city of one of the four Roman districts into which Macedonia was divided. It was about 10 miles inland from the port of Neapolis.

Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In Tyndale Bible dictionary. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

If you had a lot of frustrations in 2013, maybe your word for the New Year is “patience.” For some, their word might be “hope.” They want hope for a better tomorrow or hope for new beginnings. For others maybe their word is “strength.” They need to focus on the strength that only God can provide them in their lives.

There are thousands of choices depending on what you are going through. You can choose joy, study, grow, gratitude, love, or grace.

What if your word for 2014 was “impact”? You want this year to be the year when you have an impact for Jesus with your neighborhood, work, and friends. How can these six simple letters be your guiding point for the year? Every

situation and moment will be viewed through the lens of impact. You will need to ask, “How can I have an impact for Christ right here, right now?”

In the book of Acts, we read about three people who had a huge impact on the town of Philippi. Throughout this study, we are going to read about how these three people with vastly different backgrounds became a new church.

BY THE RIVER

Paul and Silas found themselves in the city of Philippi on the Sabbath looking for a place to pray. Traditionally, in order for a town to have a synagogue it needed at least ten Jewish men. Since Philippi did not have a synagogue, the Jews in that area would look for a quiet place (often near water) to pray.

The closest place with flowing water was about one and a quarter miles from Philippi. It was here, by the river, that Paul and Silas met a business woman named Lydia. She was a dealer in purple cloth. The color purple was not easily come by. It was a highly prized dye that was extracted from sea snails. Typically only the wealthy could afford such a luxury. Given that Lydia was a dealer in a high luxury item, more than likely she had acquired wealth.

What was the difference between Lydia and anyone else by the river that day? She was a worshiper of God and she had an open heart to hear Paul’s message. Lydia did not just accept the gospel and say, “Thank you God for saving me.” She took this message back to her household so everyone could hear it. Acts 16:15 reads, “she and the members of her household were baptized.” Lydia’s household would have included friends, family, workers, and anybody else that was staying with her. Her personal response immediately had an impact. It is from this encounter at the river that the church in Philippi began.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. Discuss as a group what obstacles stop people from having an impact for Christ on those around them. Is it lack of confidence, knowledge, desire?

WRONG MOTIVES

Not everyone who had an encounter with the Apostle Paul did so out of wanting to hear the gospel message. This is certainly the case with the

DIGGING DEEPER

The English words, “a spirit by which she predicted the future,” translate two Greek words, “a spirit, a python.” This concept goes back to the Greek city of Delphi where the god Apollo was believed to be embodied in a python snake. The original priestess at Delphi was purported to be possessed by Apollo and thereby able to predict the future. Therefore, anyone possessed by the python spirit could foretell coming events. No doubt an actual demon gave such a person predictive powers. Demons took advantage of people’s worship of false gods.

Toussaint, S. D. (1985). Acts. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, p. 399). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

demon possessed slave girl in Acts 16. She followed Paul and Silas around for days shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” This seems like a good message to say on behalf of Paul and Silas. She was letting everyone know that these men served the Most High God and had a message of salvation.

We need to remember, though, that God does not need any help from the devil when it comes to sharing the gospel. This girl’s boldness was not done with a heart of wanting to see people accept Christ. After several days of hearing her shouting, Paul finally commanded the evil spirit to leave the girl. Instantly her life was changed.

This girl was a source of income for her owners by working as a fortune teller. Needless to say this girl did

not have much going for her. She was a slave. She was possessed by a demon. She was being exploited by her owners. The idea of living a life other than the one she currently had probably never crossed her mind. Upon seeing their source of income ruined, the slave girl’s owners had Paul and Silas beaten and thrown into prison.

We don’t know what became of the slave girl after her encounter with the Apostle Paul. It would be difficult to imagine her life not dramatically changing. We do know that God used this encounter to further His kingdom in Philippi. It is the encounter with the slave girl that will lead to the jailer’s entire household being saved.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

2. Do you know of anyone who originally came to church with the wrong motives, but ended up with a changed heart? Take a few moments and discuss how even wrong motives can still lead to a changed life.

JAILHOUSE ROCKS

It was supposed to be just another day on the job. Come to work, count the prisoners, execute those sentenced to die, and torture others. This was just a typical day in the life of a Roman jailer. The position of running a jail was usually given to hardened veterans. It was not until a soldier retired that they were allowed to marry and settle down.

Over the years, he had seen numerous prisoners come through his jail doors with probably very few getting the chance to leave. These two men, Paul and Silas, were different. The town magistrates gave him special instructions to watch these men carefully. He did not care that they had already been beaten. He did not care that their wounds needed attention. He took them to the inner prison and locked them in stocks. The stocks agitated their already beaten bodies. These miserable conditions only increased Paul and Silas' suffering. Over the years, the jailer's heart had become calloused. He was just doing his job.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

3. Discuss how people whose hearts have been hardened can come to accept the grace of God.

DIGGING DEEPER

According to Roman law, if a prisoner escaped, the jailer who had charge of him was compelled to suffer the penalty that was to have been inflicted on the prisoner. This accounts for the despair of the jailer in this case. He preferred death by his own hands to the death by torture, which probably was the fate awaiting some of the prisoners whom he thought had escaped.

Freeman, J. M., & Chadwick, H. J. (1998). Manners & customs of the Bible (p. 528). North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos

Hours have passed and night has fallen over the whole prison. Paul and Silas may have been in the same cell, but they could not see each other in the darkness. Imagine yourself in their position. The stench of a Roman jail, freshly open wounds, hands and feet in stocks, and locked in the inner most part of the prison—all for sharing the gospel message. What was going through their minds? They sat there not knowing their fate. Would they die tomorrow? Each one was probably wondering how the other one was doing. Stop for a moment and realize it was not just two men in that cell. Jesus was there with them. He had promised His spirit would be with them for

occasions just like this. We do not know whether it was Paul or Silas who started to sing, but sometime around midnight the darkness was shattered by praise. We may never know the original song, but imagine them singing these words:

“My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.

On Christ the solid rock I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand;
all other ground is sinking sand.”*

We do not know if any of the other prisoners heard their song, but we know that God was listening. The ground shook, the jail doors were opened, and their stocks fell off. The jailer came running out fearing for his life. He knew that if anyone escaped he would be executed only after being tortured. This veteran Roman soldier was shaking when he asked: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The jailer and his whole household believed and were baptized. The foundation for the church at Philippi has been set. There was a rich business woman, a demon-possessed girl, and a hardened Roman soldier. Years later it was to this church that Paul wrote in Philippians 1:3, “I thank my God every time I remember you.” Their time spent in Philippi was not easy, but God’s kingdom grew.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

4. As you read over the beginning of the church in Philippi, why do you think God chose to use people with such vastly different backgrounds to begin this church?

5. How do you see God using *your* giftedness and resources He has given you in the church?

* “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less” written by Edward Mote in 1837.

6. How would you define having an impact for Christ in your own life and the lives of those around you?

7. Romans 10:14-15 reads, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” Have a few members of the group discuss how they came to hear and believe in the Gospel message of Jesus. What would happen if everyone thought the job of sharing the Gospel belonged to someone else?

8. Read 1 Corinthians 3:6-9. Sometimes it is discouraging to share the Gospel message and not see results. How do you deal with disappointment when someone doesn’t believe or accept the Gospel message you have shared?

9. What impact do you see First MB having in God’s kingdom over the next year? What role do you see yourself having in this impact?

10. In what ways can First MB help equip and resource people to have an impact on those around them?

11. No church was ever started without a group of believers coming together to start it. Discuss as a group what you envision church planting looking like in the Wichita and surrounding areas. What role can First MB have in this process?

12. Read 1 Corinthians 10:3-5. The devil does not want anyone to have an impact for Christ. What steps are you taking to have an impact for Christ knowing that it involves a spiritual battle?

FURTHER STUDY

Crazy Love (Francis Chan)

Get Uncomfortable (Todd Phillips)

THIS WEEK'S MEMORY VERSE

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.” Philippians 4:4-5

Lesson 5 | Real Impact

Study Text: Matthew 5:13-16

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. 14 “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Matthew 9:10-13

10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” 12 On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

OVERVIEW

“One person’s junk is another person’s treasure” is a saying that you have probably heard at some point in your life. The truth behind this saying can be seen when looking at the variety of things people collect. Some people collect old stamps or coins, which are pretty normal collectibles. Others collect back scratchers, sugar packets, airline sickness bags, and even fish posters. These collections lean a little more toward the strange side. Some people have huge collections of Legos which require entire rooms to store them. The Lego collector sees it as an opportunity for limitless entertainment, but a non-Lego person may just see it as a pile of plastic.

Over the years all of us have accumulated stuff. This accumulation may fall under the category of a collection, or it may just be clutter. Usually every house has “that room” where stuff just seems to pile up. Some call it treasure while others call it junk.

The main problem with accumulating stuff is that there is only so much space to store everything. No matter what you collect, you will eventually run out of space. This same principle is true when it comes to your life. What are your mind and heart filled with? There are so many things in this world

competing for space. Your employer wants you to work harder. Marketers want you to buy more. Your bank account might be begging for a budget. Even your hobbies that you enjoy require an investment of time. If you are not careful, you can easily become consumed with all the cares of this world and not have space for the cares of God. He desires all believers to not be filled with the clutter of this world, but to have a true compassion for the lost (those who don't know Christ) and the poor. Throughout this lesson, we are going to explore how to have a real impact by de-cluttering our hearts and developing compassion.

OUTSIDERS

Who are the outsiders? By definition an outsider is merely a person who doesn't belong to a particular group. One of the dangers in forming any organization is that there will always be people on the outside looking in. Even though we want to believe this is not the case with church, too often the opposite is true.

In today's passage we read about the Pharisees asking Jesus' disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" These "tax collectors" and "sinners" were the outcasts of society. In all their religious study they could not comprehend associating with such an outsider group. They had cluttered their hearts with following all the rules without leaving room for compassion. They did not want to associate with the poor, the sinners, or basically anybody who did not hold the same values they did. The Pharisees had become so focused on religious activity that they even saw Jesus as an outsider.

DIGGING DEEPER

Mercy is a divine quality by which God faithfully keeps His promises and maintains His relationship with His chosen people despite their unworthiness. The biblical meaning of mercy is exceedingly rich and complex, as evidenced by the fact that several Hebrew and Greek words were used to express the concept. Consequently, there are many synonyms used to express the dimensions of meaning involved, such as "kindness," "lovingkindness," "goodness," "grace," "favor," "pity," "compassion," and "steadfast love." In the NT a very descriptive Greek word is used for Jesus' mercy toward the needy. It expresses his pity and compassion by means of an intense verb literally translated "to be moved in one's bowels." The Hebrews regarded the bowels as the center of the affections, especially that of the most tender kindness. Jesus was described as being deeply moved in his inner feeling of benevolence toward the needy and spontaneously acting to relieve their suffering.

Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In Tyndale Bible dictionary. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Who would you considered an outsider in the church today? This is a difficult question to answer. An outsider can be anybody who does not fit the church "mold." This can include the poor, homeless, drug addicts, prostitutes, or even the forgotten widow. The outsider is the man standing on the street corner holding a sign asking for food. It can be the widow nobody calls because she requires more time than anyone is willing to give.

Jesus did not just expect the church to open the front doors and expect the outsiders to come flooding in. He commanded believers to "GO," showing compassion and serving the less fortunate. When this does not occur, then the church's separation becomes its isolation.

Take a look around our church and see how many outsiders are (or are not) here today. With that in mind, listen to what was written in Zechariah 7:8-10: "And the Word of the Lord came again to Zechariah: "This is what the Lord Almighty said: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.'"

DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. In what ways do you believe the church has unintentionally created separation from outsiders and not shown compassion?

DE-CLUTTERING

How do you go about creating compassion for the poor and the unbelievers in your heart? Jesus did not spend all of His time at the temple waiting for people to come to Him; He went to where the people were. He went into their homes, ministered to them, and shared meals together. Part of the de-cluttering process includes creating opportunities for you to serve and interact with the poor and lost.

This will not occur by accident. It will require moving beyond your comfort zone and getting involved. This could involve going to the Giving Center at Lighthouse Community Church and helping some get groceries and other essentials for their house. Another opportunity could be becoming a mentor to an at-risk youth through Youth Horizons. Maybe you would like to help struggling pregnant teens at the Lady Bugg House or the Pregnancy Crisis

Center. All of these local opportunities exists, but require initiative on your part to make it something happen. Jesus' mission statement is not "wait and see what happens." He wants you to "go and serve."

We do well to consider substantially increasing our spiritual, evangelistic, and social outreach to minorities, the homeless, prostitutes, addicts and pushers, gays and lesbians, AIDS victims, and the like, as well as to the more hidden outcasts such as divorcees, single parents, the elderly, white-collar alcoholics, and so on. We must get to know them as intimately as Jesus did. Only close and trusted friends share fellowship over meals. *

DIGGING DEEPER

It is through Christ's atoning sacrifice that Christians also can offer acceptable sacrifices to God. Christ's sacrifice has introduced the age of the Holy Spirit, when all acceptable worship must be spiritual, that is, Spirit-inspired. The 'spiritual sacrifices' of Christians include acts of worship, such as praise and prayer, but also acts of witness and service, such as evangelism, gifts to the ministry and gifts to the poor, and comprehensive attitudes and expressions of devotion, such as faith, the consecration of one's life to the will of God and the laying down of one's life for the sake of the gospel.

Alexander, T. D., & Rosner, B. S. (Eds.). (2000). In New dictionary of biblical theology. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity

Opportunities do not matter unless your heart reflects God's heart. How does this occur? It means spending time in prayer and studying God's Word allowing Him to transform your heart. This requires time and discipline. It means reprioritizing your day so you have more time for what God cares about while spending less time dealing with the cares of this world.

Proverbs 14:31 reads, "Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God." Honoring God means to pattern your heart after His. Hosea 6:6 says, "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings." God does not want you to just go through the motions of religious rituals. He wants your heart transformed so it breaks over things

that break His heart and it rejoices over things the He rejoices over.

* Blomberg, C. (1992). Matthew (Vol. 22, p. 157). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Have you de-cluttered your heart? Do you spend more time on Facebook than in God's Book? Do you know more about world news than God's plan for the lost? God wants *all* of you, not just the leftovers. If you are willing, your heart can be transformed and you can have real impact.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

2. Over the next couple months, how do you plan on showing compassion for the lost and poor?

DIGGING DEEPER

"Works" is sometimes used to describe deeds of God. It refers to evil deeds and good deeds. In the OT forms of the Hebrew word (pa'al, po'al) describe the works of God in creation, providence, and judgment. In the NT forms of the Greek term (ergon) are common. Ergon is frequently used to describe the "works" of Jesus Christ. Used in all the Gospels, the word is used also to describe deeds of man. The Gospels asserted that believers demonstrate by good works that God is active in their lives. Works of the law are insufficient to earn one's salvation, while good works are a natural consequence of saving faith.

Rainey, J. (2003). Works. In (C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler, Eds.) Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

SALT & LIGHT

After you de-clutter your heart and recognize the opportunities to serve around you, it is time to go and be the salt and light. Throughout history, salt has been used as a preservative for food. Before refrigeration, it was used to keep food from rotting. In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus said that His followers are to be the salt and light of the world. In John 8:12 Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." Believers are supposed to be preserving agents of God's grace by serving the outsiders, poor, and the lost by infiltrating areas of moral decay. It is hard for salt to truly be salty if it is only around other salt. The same is true for light. It is best used in the midst of darkness. Nobody needs to go into a well-lit room with a flashlight, nor does anyone take salty food and add more salt to it. Jesus wants all of His followers to have an influence on society instead of society having an influence on His followers. This is the way real impact occurs.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

3. How can First MB be the salt and light to the Wichita area?

Being salt and light includes doing good deeds. These deeds are not done for personal recognition, but rather to bring glory to God. Jesus knew that doing good deeds would not only glorify God, but also be a way for believers to grow and trust in Him. It is in the midst of doing good deeds for the outsiders that you will need to trust and rely on God for strength and wisdom. He will not let you down. Take some time to think about those who need to know the love of God. Seek opportunities for demonstrating His love. Then go and be the salt and light of this world. By doing these things you can have a real impact.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

4. How would you define “de-cluttering your heart”? What steps can you take to have compassion for the lost and poor?

5. Why did Jesus spend so much time hanging around the outsiders of society? How can this be modeled in the church today?

6. The Pharisees asked, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” What do you believe happened to the Pharisees that they separated themselves from anyone who needed to know of God’s love? What are the danger signs of this occurring to Christians today?

7. Read James 2:1-7. Do you see discrimination occurring in the church today? How can a church prevent showing favoritism within the congregation?

8. It wasn't just the Pharisees that didn't like the tax collectors at that time; it was the Jewish society in general. Why do you think some people feel disqualified from going to church? How can the church reach out to even those who society has cast aside?

9. Read Micah 6:6-8. Jesus said, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." How can someone guard themselves against doing religious activities and forgetting to have compassion on others?

10. What do you think it means to be salt and light in the world today? What are some obstacles that prevent believers from living that way?

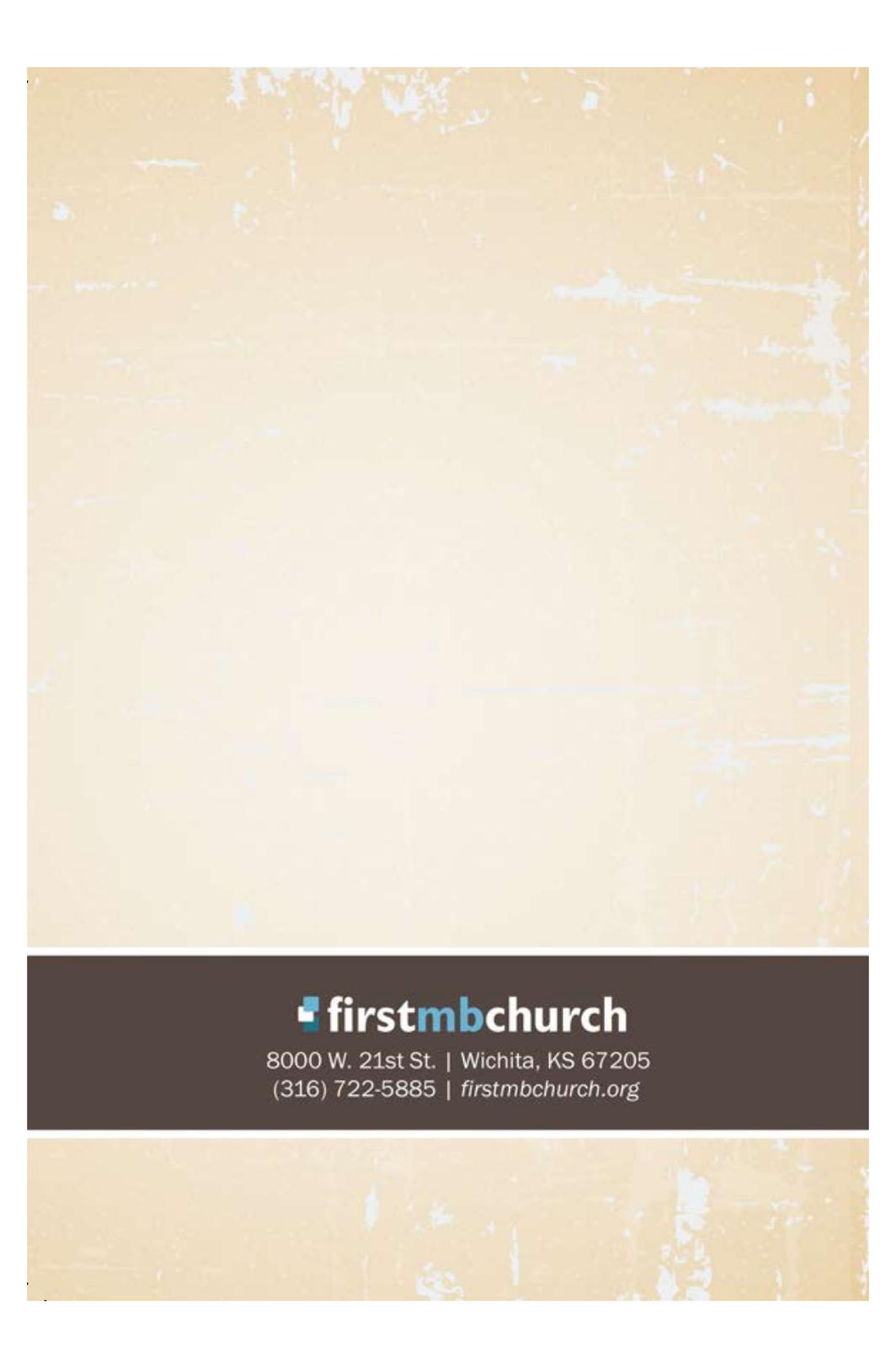
11. Discuss some practical ways your group can be the salt and the light to those who are spiritually furthest from God. Take some time to schedule a group service project that involves ministering to outsiders.

FURTHER STUDY

The Externally Focused Church (Rick Rusaw)

THIS WEEK'S MEMORY VERSE

“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.” Hosea 6:6



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