

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH JACKSONVILLE



**GROW**  
GROUPS



## GROW GROUP REQUIREMENTS

I will commit to the following expectations:

1

I am eager to grow in my relationship with the Lord as I am entering into a year of accelerated pursuit of godliness.

2

I will meet with my Grow Group for approximately one hour every week, unless providentially hindered.

3

I will complete all my assignments on a weekly basis before my Grow Group meeting in order to contribute to discussion.

4

I will seek to contribute to the conversation with humility, transparency, and genuine care for others.

5

I am open to leading a Grow Group in the future.

*Taken from Growing Up by Robby Gallaty (p. 161)*

## OUR MISSION

Reaching all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life

## OUR CORE VALUES



REAL LOVE FOR JESUS



TOTAL COMMITMENT TO THE BIBLE



GENUINE CARE FOR PEOPLE



MULTI-GENERATIONAL PURSUIT OF  
GODLINESS



SERIOUS JOY IN WORSHIP



BOLD PASSION FOR OUR CITY



RADICAL AMBITION FOR THE NATIONS

## WHAT WE CULTIVATE

People who WORSHIP

People who GROW

People who SHARE

People who GIVE

People who SERVE



The most frequently repeated command of Jesus in the Gospels is “Follow me.”

Jesus is interested in people who turn from sin, trust in his life, death, and resurrection, and then spend the rest of their lives taking up their cross and following him. He is interested in discipleship. That is why one of the most significant values of First Baptist Church is our commitment to a multi-generational pursuit of godliness. We want all of our members, in all age ranges, pursuing godliness as part of their commitment to Christ. We want everyone, not just to know Jesus, but to grow in Jesus.

This resource is one of our efforts to have a church committed to pursuing godliness. We want you to know the joy and excitement of following Jesus and growing in your knowledge of Scripture, and of doing that in the context of other Christians who are experiencing it as well.

As you go through this resource pray that God uses it in your life to make you more like Christ. Pray that God uses it in the lives of those in your group to make them more like Christ. And pray that God uses it in the life of our congregation to have a church that is growing in their commitment to love and follow Christ.

Growing with you,  
Pastor Heath



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SECTION 1  
**OUR MISSION**

### GETTING STARTED

In the world of gardening, it is common knowledge that certain plant combinations have the extraordinary ability to help each other grow. Scientists who study this phenomenon call it companion planting – when two or more companion plants grow better together with one another than they do apart from one another. For instance, it is common to plant cabbage and dill together, since the cabbage helps support the floppy dill and the dill attracts the wasps that protect the cabbage from worms and other pests. Both of these plants – cabbage and dill – can grow on their own. But they grow much better with one another.

Like certain garden plants, Christians grow better when they grow alongside one another. You will multiply your growth in Christ when you get involved with a small group of fellow Christians who are pointing one another to Jesus, studying the Bible together, and holding one another accountable to live for Christ.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### WHY GROW GROUPS?

The main reason to join a Grow Group is to grow in Christ. Like companion plants, you will multiply your growth in Christ when you are growing together with other believers.

The purpose of your Grow Group is for you to grow with others in four specific areas:

#### **GROWTH IN GODLINESS (1 TIM. 4:8)**

Just like discipline in physical exercise is oftentimes forged in the fires of accountability, you will abound in the discipline of godliness as you and the other members of your Grow Group speak truth to one another in love and hold one another accountable to Christ.

#### **GROWTH IN KNOWLEDGE (COL. 1:9-12)**

As you study biblical passages and concepts with your Grow Group week after week, you will grow in your knowledge of God's Word and in your knowledge of God himself. Pursuing the knowledge of God is one of the most important pursuits in the world, since Jesus defines eternal life as possessing a deep, relational knowledge of God (Jn. 17:3).

#### **GROWTH IN GIFTING (2 TIM. 3:16-17)**

God has specifically gifted each member of the church with gifts that they are to use for the building up of the body of Christ. One of the purposes of your Grow Group is that, as you give yourself to the study and application of God's Word, you would grow in your competency to use your God-given gifts for the sake of God's glory and the good of God's people.

## **GROWTH IN COMMUNITY (HEB. 10:24-25)**

Growth in godliness, knowledge, and gifting happens most effectively in community with other believers. God has given us the Spirit-empowered ability and responsibility to stir one another up to love and good deeds and to encourage one another.

But as we are helping one another grow, another amazing thing happens: We grow closer to one another. By God's grace, at the end of this year you will have several new friends who will continue challenging you in your faith and helping you grow in Christ for years and years to come.

### **WHAT TO EXPECT**

Joining a Grow Group is a major commitment that you shouldn't take lightly. As you commit to this Grow Group, it is important for you to know what you are signing up for. Below are the expectations that you are committing to fulfill when you commit to this Grow Group:

- I am eager to grow in my relationship with the Lord as I am entering into a year of accelerated pursuit of godliness.
- I will meet with my Grow Group for approximately one hour every week, unless providentially hindered.
- I will complete all my assignments on a weekly basis before my Grow Group meeting in order to contribute to discussion.
- I will seek to contribute to the conversation with humility, transparency, and genuine care for others.
- I am open to leading a Grow Group in the future.

### **EACH GROW GROUP MEETING WILL FOLLOW THE SAME BASIC OUTLINE:**

- Arrival/general conversation/opening prayer (10-15 minutes)
- Open discussion about weekly reading material (10-15 minutes)
- Focused discussion following the Group Discussion section (30-35 minutes)
- Closing prayer following the Group Prayer section (10-15 minutes)

### **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group meeting.*

#### **Ephesians 4:15-16**

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

What's your story? Where are you from? How did you end up in Jacksonville? How did you end up at First Baptist? Do you have a family? What do you do? What are some of your interests and hobbies?

What is your testimony? Think of your testimony this way: Who you were before Christ, how you came to Christ, and what your life has been like since you've come to know Christ.

Read 1 Timothy 4:8, Colossians 1:9-12, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, and Hebrews 10:24-25. Of the four areas of growth we discussed in the Digging Deeper section, which area do you feel strongest in? Which do you feel weakest in? Which do you wish to make the most progress in by the end of the year? Why?

What has God been doing in your life lately? How have you been growing? How have you been struggling? What has he been convicting you of? What has he been showing you?

How can the group pray for you on a regular basis?

In what areas of life can the group hold you accountable? Where do you need accountability in your life?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Pray that God would provide abundant growth in your life and in the life of your Grow Group over the next year.
- Pray specifically that you would grow in godliness, knowledge, gifting, and community.
- Pray that God would use Grow Groups in the life of our church to make us as a whole body of believers more like Jesus Christ.

### GETTING STARTED

Having a clear mission in the Christian life and as a church is absolutely essential. Jesus helps us in this regard by telling us exactly what our mission is:

*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you. (Matt. 28:19-20).*

Here at First Baptist, we apply Jesus' mission for our lives with the following mission statement:

*Reaching all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life*

This is the mission that undergirds everything we do as a church and that every single member of our church signs on for when they join us in membership.

In this session, we will overview and discuss the mission of First Baptist Church: *Reaching all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life.*

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **A MISSION LOCATED IN A PARTICULAR PLACE: ALL OF JACKSONVILLE**

In the book of Jonah, God called Jonah to the great city of Nineveh – a city great in number and in wickedness – to proclaim the message of repentance and faith in God. Though Jonah stubbornly resisted God's call, in the end he used Jonah's preaching to save this great city.

God has likewise called us to the great city of Jacksonville. He has called us to proclaim the good news of the gospel to this city and to labor toward the salvation of its citizens. Like Nineveh, many in our city are great in wickedness and desperately need the hope of the gospel.

When we look across the landscape of our city, we see people who are dead in their sin, people who are following after Satan, people who are captive to their own sin, people who are objects of God's wrath (Eph. 2:1-3).

God has placed First Baptist Church in Jacksonville to pierce through this spiritual darkness with the brilliant light of the gospel.

We are called to reach a particular place: *all of Jacksonville.*

## **A MISSION CENTERED ON A PARTICULAR PERSON: ALL OF JESUS**

The call on our church is very distinct: We are striving to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus. Jesus is at the very center of our mission. And Jesus is at the very center of our mission for at least three reasons:

### **JESUS IS AT THE CENTER OF THE CHURCH'S MISSION**

Like the Apostle Paul, we must determine to make Jesus and his cross the centerpiece of our message (1 Cor. 2:2) because we know that this good news of the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).

### **JESUS IS AT THE CENTER OF SALVATION**

We strive to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus because it is only in Jesus that Jacksonville can receive the love and mercy and grace of God. It is only in Jesus that Jacksonville can be brought from death to life. It is only through repentance and faith in Jesus that Jacksonville can be saved (Eph. 2:4-9).

### **JESUS IS AT THE CENTER OF ETERNAL LIFE**

We want the city of Jacksonville to have eternal life. We want the city of Jacksonville to be happy forever. And Jesus tells us exactly how a person can have the joy of eternal life: by knowing him (Jn. 17:3). We want to introduce every citizen of the city of Jacksonville to Jesus Christ so that they can receive the gift of eternal life.

## **A MISSION AIMED AT A PARTICULAR PURPOSE: ALL OF LIFE**

God has placed us in a particular city – Jacksonville. He has centered our mission on a particular person – Jesus. And he has called us to fulfill a particular purpose – changing lives. We strive to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life.

We include this final element of our mission statement because this is what will happen when we reach Jacksonville with Jesus – the lives of the people of Jacksonville will be transformed (2 Cor. 5:17-19).

As we strive to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus we desire and expect to see people who were once dead in sin come alive to God through Christ and have their lives infused with a radically new purpose – to live for his glory in every area of their lives (Eph. 2:10).

This is why the mission of our church is *reaching all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life.*

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **Matthew 28:19-20**

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Do you have a personal mission statement for your life? If so, what is it? If not, what would it be?

Read Ephesians 2:1-3. How does this passage help us understand the spiritual condition of many in Jacksonville? When you think about the darkness many in Jacksonville are walking in, what emotions do you feel? What actions are you motivated to take?

Read Ephesians 2:4-9. How does this passage help us understand the hope that we have to offer the city of Jacksonville? Who is one person in the city of Jacksonville that you can begin extending this hope to? How and when will you do it?

Why is it so important for our church to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus? Wouldn't it be just as legitimate for our mission to be reaching all of Jacksonville with merciful care? Or passionate worship? Or authentic life? Why or why not?

Read Ephesians 2:10. What is God's purpose for our new life in Christ? What are some ways you need to grow in fulfilling this purpose?

### GROUP PRAYER

- Plead with God to help our church fulfill its mission to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life.
- Ask God to give you clarity on what part you will take in helping our church fulfill its mission.
- Praise God for giving our church this mission. Thank him for giving us the opportunity to be ambassadors of his kingdom in the city he has placed us in (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

### GETTING STARTED

Last week we discussed the mission of our church: Reaching all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life. This week we will discuss how our church carries out this mission with a church-wide strategy we call REACH.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **REACH: WHAT IS IT?**

The goal of REACH is to give every person in Jacksonville an opportunity to personally hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the past we could reach this goal by hosting large evangelistic meetings in stadiums or canvassing neighborhoods and knocking on doors. But our culture has changed and these methods no longer work.

So, we have a new strategy for reaching every person in Jacksonville with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that new strategy is you. We will reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life when every member of First Baptist shares the gospel of Jesus Christ with every person they know.

This is called “relational evangelism” – sharing Christ with your family members, your neighbors, your co-workers, and anyone else who is inside of your relational circle.

#### **REACH: YOUR “ONE”**

The goal of REACH and your role in it might seem a little overwhelming to you. There are a lot of people in Jacksonville. And you personally know a lot of people. How are we going to reach all of them?

We are setting our sights high with this goal. This is a bold plan that we desperately need God’s help for. But we can start small and slowly work our way up to our ultimate goal.

Here’s how we want you to begin participating in REACH this year: Intentionally invest in reaching one neighbor, one co-worker, one friend, or one family member who lives in Jacksonville.

Don’t get overwhelmed at the prospect of trying to reach everyone you know. Just focus on reaching one person. Invest all your evangelistic energy into getting to know and sharing the gospel with just one person (Lk. 15:1-32).

#### **REACH: THE 7 RELATIONAL STEPS**

We have developed a relational roadmap that you can follow to build a deep, gospel-focused relationship with the one person you are striving to reach:

### **1. PRAY FOR YOUR ONE**

Pray that God helps you know your one. Pray for their salvation. Pray that God would give you boldness and opportunity to talk to them and to share the gospel with them.

### **2. GREET YOUR ONE**

If you don't already know your one, make an intentional step to greet them in a warm and friendly manner. Learn their name so that you can pray for them by name!

### **3. GET TO KNOW YOUR ONE**

Invite them to your home, take them out to lunch, linger in conversation with them at your driveway, ask them questions about how they came to Jacksonville, what they do in their job, how their family is doing, how you can pray for them, what their beliefs are, etc.

### **4. SERVE YOUR ONE**

Take opportunities to show them the love of Christ through caring for and serving them. Bring them a gift. Roll their trash can back to their house after trash pick-up. Write them a note if a loved one dies. Bake them cookies. Babysit for them.

### **5. EXTEND A SOCIAL INVITE TO YOUR ONE**

Invite them into your home for dinner. Host a neighborhood barbecue at your house and invite them. Ask if they want to join you for a family beach day. This will help you cultivate a deeper, more genuine relationship with them.

### **6. INVITE YOUR ONE TO CHURCH**

This won't happen by happenstance – you'll need to take a step forward and extend the invite to them. You can do this by having a conversation with them or by writing them a note (perhaps sent along with a gift). Even if they decline your church invite, this may open up your relationship to deeper conversations. They may ask about your faith or tell you about their past experiences with church. These are all opportunities to have a spiritual conversation with your one.

### **7. HAVE A GOSPEL CONVERSATION WITH YOUR ONE**

The biggest and most important step in your relationship with your one is the gospel conversation. Because we have a bold passion for the city of Jacksonville, because you have a compassionate love for your one, this is your ultimate goal – for them to have the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **Acts 1:8**

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth.

### REACH CHECK IN

Instead of a normal group discussion, this session we will do our first monthly REACH. In each REACH Check-In, you will do the following: *Pray, Praise, Present, Plan.*

#### **PRAY**

Take time to share prayer requests related to your “one.” We can labor hard and long but if God doesn’t give the increase our efforts are in vain (Psalm 127:1-2). Spend time as a group praying for one another and for those you are striving to reach.

#### **PRAISE**

Discuss any REACH praise updates. We want to celebrate all that God is doing through you reaching out to others. Be sure to celebrate even the “smallest” steps taken such as getting to know someone more or inviting them over to a home. Be sure to celebrate gospel conversations and certainly rejoice when someone trusts in Jesus Christ.

#### **PRESENT**

Use this as a time to present to your group where you are in the REACH process with your “one.” This will help you hold one other accountable and encourage one another to continue making progress.

#### **PLAN**

After hearing where each group member is in the REACH steps, help one another plan the next step forward. For instance, if someone is stuck in the step of “greeting” and is afraid to get to know someone more, then brainstorm questions they can ask their neighbor next time they see each other. If someone has invited someone over for dinner two or three times, but is now scared to share Christ, then help them plan ways they can engage their neighbor in a gospel conversation.

### GETTING STARTED

The 291st Engineer Combat Battalion was a group of young, inexperienced engineers that got dropped straight into the European Theater of War during one of the bloodiest and most brutal times of World War II. During the Battle of the Bulge, the German forces were advancing into Allied territory and were set to strike a decisive blow to the Allied forces through their capture of the town Antwerp. Only one thing stood between the Germans and their goal: a small group of engineers from the 291st Engineer Combat Battalion. Being greatly outnumbered and outmatched – the Germans had thousands of soldiers in the area and numerous Panzer tanks, while there were only a few engineers and they only had their rifles and some explosives – the engineers devised and executed a plan: each time the German forces attempted to cross a bridge that would lead to Antwerp, the engineers got there before them and blew up the bridge, impeding their advance. This game of war chess continued until there was nowhere left for the Germans to cross. The engineers, against all odds, had found a way to accomplish their unlikely mission.

When we think about the mission of our church to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life from a human perspective, we find ourselves in a very similar scenario. In many ways, we are outmatched: We live in a city that is increasingly hostile to the gospel and therefore increasingly uninterested in coming to church or listening to what we have to say about Jesus. We are certainly outnumbered: We are a church of a few thousand people trying to reach a city of a million people. And yet, in the face of these difficulties, the call on our lives is the same as the 291st Engineer Combat Battalion: we must find a way to accomplish our unlikely mission of reaching all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### FINDING A WAY (ACTS 28:28-31)

The call of the day for believers at First Baptist Church of Jacksonville is that we must find a way to reach our city with the good news of the gospel. We must do this for at least two reasons.

#### IT IS CRITICAL

The end of the book of Acts finds the Apostle Paul on house arrest in Rome. He has traveled far and wide across the ancient world sharing the gospel, planting and building up churches, and ministers in the name of Jesus Christ. He has experienced all kinds of trouble and persecution along the way. And he has done it all for one the sake of one, central overarching message: “Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles...” (Acts 28:28a).

When we think about our mission to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life, we are thinking about a life or death mission. There is only one way for the people of Jacksonville to experience salvation, and it is through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, who lived and died and rose again for our salvation. It is absolutely critical that we share this message of good news with the city of Jacksonville. Because without it, they have no hope of salvation.

## IT IS POSSIBLE

When we look out on the lostness of our world, it can be easy to despair. “The world is just too far gone,” we say. “My neighbor is never going to listen to me when I talk about Jesus or come to church with me when I invite them,” we think. We wonder: “Is this whole mission of reaching our city with all of Jesus for all of life just a fool’s errand?”

Amid these doubts, we would do well to pay attention to the Apostle Paul. Note his confidence as he considers his mission to share the good news of the gospel with a lost world: “They will listen” (Acts 28:28b). Paul believes in the power of the gospel. Paul believes that as he is faithful to preach Christ and him crucified, God will provide the fruit. God will unstop ears and open up hearts and draw people unto himself. If you doubt this, consider how he has done this in your own life!

We should also consider Paul’s example: “He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:30-31). Here is Paul, on house arrest in Rome, in the middle of an overwhelmingly Christless and pagan culture, and he is abounding in gospel ministry. He is welcoming people into his home and boldly and freely preaching the gospel to them.

The question for you is this: If Paul could find a way to fulfill his gospel mission while on house arrest in Rome, shouldn’t it be possible for you to find a way to fulfill your gospel mission here in the city of Jacksonville? Like Paul, we must find a way. We must find a way to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life.

## FINDING YOUR WAY

The question is: What does that look like for you? What is the unique way that you can contribute to our church’s mission of reaching all of Jacksonville for all of Jesus for all of life?

Perhaps it looks like throwing a quarterly backyard barbeque in your neighborhood, or hosting an evangelistic Bible study at your house, or knocking on doors and handing out gospel tracts in your area, or being faithful to attend and build relationships at events in your community, or going to the same restaurant every week and asking for the same server, or playing basketball at the same court with the same group of people every weekend.

These are just a few examples of the innumerable things that you can do to find a way to build relationships and share the gospel with lost people in our city. Let’s follow Jesus, let’s follow Paul’s example, and let’s find a way to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life.

## VERSES TO MEDITATE ON

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week’s Grow Group session.*

### Acts 28:30-31

He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Read Acts 28:28-31. What jumped out to you and what was encouraging and/or convicting to you about this passage?

What are some of the struggles that you've had with reaching people with the gospel? What hard circumstances have you faced? In what ways you have failed to do what God has called you to do?

Brainstorm with your group some ideas about how you personally can find a way to reach people with the gospel. What unique opportunities do you have? What groups of people do you have influence and relationships with that no one else does?

Now that you have brainstormed some ideas with your group, spend time planning together. How will you execute your idea to reach people with the gospel?

### GROUP PRAYER

- Praise God for the power of the gospel – when the gospel is faithfully proclaimed, people will respond with repentance and faith in Christ.
- Ask God to help you find a way to reach people around you with the wonderful and powerful news of the gospel.
- Ask God to establish the work of your hands – as you plan to reach people, ask that God would guide and prosper your plans.



SECTION 2  
**WHO WE ARE**

### GETTING STARTED

At First Baptist Church we have a real love for Jesus. This core value has marked our church since its inception in 1838 and will continue to be at the heart of who we are as long as we exist.

Over the next two sessions we will look at the reasons why First Baptist Church has always had and will always have a real love for Jesus. While in one sense the reasons for our real love for Jesus are as infinite as Jesus himself, we can express them in two categories. We have a real love for Jesus because of 1) who he is and 2) what he has done. This week we will discuss who Jesus is.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### JESUS IS GOD

The first reason we love Jesus is because he is God. This truth about Jesus is clear both from the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old Testament prophets look forward to a “Son of Man” (Dan. 7:13-14) and “Son of David” (2 Sam. 7:12-13) who would receive worship from all the nations and reign over God’s people in an eternal kingdom.

The New Testament makes clear that the person the prophets were looking forward to was Jesus, since Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man (Matt. 25:31-32) and Paul identifies him as the Son of David (Rom. 1:2-3).

The New Testament shows us that Jesus is God in many other ways too: Jesus equates himself with God (Jn. 8:58) and does the works of God (Matt. 9:1-8; Col. 1:15-20), other New Testament authors call him God (Titus 2:13), and believers are called to hope and trust in him as our Lord (Eph. 3:11-12) and to worship him (Rev. 5:11-12).

#### JESUS IS HUMAN

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ, who is fully God, also became fully human.

The New Testament shows us that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of his human mother and was born as a baby (Matt. 1:18). He had a human body that experienced growth (Lk. 2:40) and tiredness (Jn. 4:6) and hunger (Jn. 19:28) and thirst (Matt. 4:2) and weakness (Matt. 4:11). He had a human soul with inner thoughts and desires (Matt. 26:39) and the full range of human emotions, like sorrow (Jn. 11:35), compassion (Matt. 9:35-38), and joy (Heb. 12:2).

But Jesus differs from us in his humanity in one important way: his sinless perfection. The Bible

makes crystal clear that Jesus lived a perfectly righteous and sinless life – glorifying, obeying, and honoring God in every respect (Acts 3:14; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15-16; 1 Pet. 1:19).

## **JESUS IS FULLY GOD AND FULLY MAN**

The truth that Jesus is both God and human is of vital importance for several reasons:

### **JESUS, OUR IMMANUEL**

Immanuel means “God with us” (Matt. 1:23-24). God didn’t leave us in the dark to find our way to him (which we could never do!) Instead, he came to us in the person of Jesus Christ and personally secured the salvation of everyone who repents and believes in him.

### **JESUS, OUR REPRESENTATIVE**

Because Jesus is fully God and fully man, he is our perfect representative. While we all deserve to die because we followed the first man Adam in sin and rebellion against God, when we repent and believe in Jesus, God counts Jesus’ perfect life and perfect righteousness to us (Rom. 5:18-19; 2 Cor. 5:21).

### **JESUS, OUR PERFECT EXAMPLE**

Jesus is the humanest human that ever lived, because he lived a perfect, sinless life. He showed us what true, pure humanity before God looks like. As Christ-followers, we now have the perfect example of the human life of Jesus after which we pattern our own lives (1 Jn. 2:6).

### **JESUS, OUR SYMPATHETIC HIGH PRIEST**

The humanity of Jesus is a great source of comfort for us. Because he experienced the full range of humanity, he knows what it is like to be tempted and to suffer and to die. When we take our struggles to him, we can rest assured that we will be met by his full sympathy and compassion (Heb. 2:18; 4:15-16).

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week’s Grow Group session.*

### **Ephesians 6:24**

Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

What is your favorite passage in the Bible about Jesus?

Read Daniel 7:13-14 and then Matthew 25:31-32. What parallels do you see between these two passages? What do they tell us about who Jesus really is?

Read Exodus 3:13-14 and then John 8:56-59. What is Jesus saying about himself? Why do the Jews respond the way they do?

How does the truth that Jesus is God impact your life? How does it change your day today or tomorrow? How does it impact how you relate to and feel about Jesus?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:6. According to this passage, how did God bring us out of the darkness of our sin and rebellion? How does this truth impact your love for Jesus?

Read 1 John 2:6. What are some specific ways that you can strive to “walk as Jesus walked” this week? How and when will you make progress in doing this? How can your Grow Group support and help you?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Praise God for who Jesus is – fully God and fully man.
- Ask God to help you continue to grow in your understanding of who Jesus is.
- Ask God to help you continue to grow in your real love for Jesus.

### GETTING STARTED

Why was Jesus of Nazareth crucified on a Roman cross? How you answer that question has eternal significance. Some deny that Jesus was even crucified. Others believe that he was crucified but didn't die. Still others believe that Jesus died on the cross as a tragic hero.

All of these answers conflict with the way the Bible depicts the work of Jesus Christ. According to the Bible what Jesus has done – with his death on the cross in center focus – is the most significant event in all history. At First Baptist Church we have a real love for Jesus because of what he has done.

This week we will discuss what Jesus has done in three stages: his life, his death, and his resurrection.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### THE LIFE OF JESUS

Last session we considered the truth that Jesus became like us by taking on flesh and living a human life. But there is one aspect of Jesus' humanity that differs from ours: his sinless perfection. In his life on earth, he perfectly obeyed God for every second of his life and in every area of his life (Heb. 4:15).

In his perfect life, Jesus did everything that was required to be counted righteous before God (Matt. 3:15). And the amazingly good news of the gospel is that, when you are in Christ, Jesus' perfect life counts for you. God counts you righteous on the basis of Christ's perfect righteousness (Rom. 5:18-21).

#### THE DEATH OF JESUS

The death of Jesus is the pinnacle of his saving work. It is the climax of God's eternal plan to save his people. Jesus accomplished our salvation in several wonderful and glorious ways in his death:

##### HE DIED IN OUR PLACE

When Jesus died on the cross, he did so to take the penalty for our sins upon himself. Where we should have stood – under the full force of God's wrath – Jesus stood for us. And because of this, God's wrath no longer rests on those of us in Christ. Instead we receive the love and favor that only Jesus deserves (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus takes our spiritual bankruptcy upon himself and gives us his perfect credit in exchange. What an amazing exchange that is!

##### HE DIED AS OUR REDEEMER

The imagery of redemption is the imagery of purchase. Through the work of the cross,

Jesus purchased us as his people. We were once slaves to sin, but now through Jesus' redemption we are free from the dominion of sin and free to live for God (Titus 2:11-14).

### **HE DIED AS OUR RECONCILER**

The Bible also describes Jesus' work on the cross in relational terms – Jesus died to restore our relationship with God. We were once God's enemies. But now we have been reconciled through the death of Jesus (Rom. 5:10).

In even sweeter language, the Bible describes the work that Jesus accomplished in his death in familial terms: through Christ we have been brought into the family of God as adopted sons (Gal. 4:4-7).

### **THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS**

If the death of Jesus is the dark night of the work of Jesus, the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the bright and glorious morning. The resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate announcement of Jesus' victory over sin, death, and Satan (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

The resurrection of Jesus has massive implications for our salvation and for the Christian life. Here are a couple of those implications:

#### **THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS EMPOWERS OUR NEW LIFE**

Because Jesus Christ died for our sin and rose again to newness of life, all those who repent and believe in him also die to sin and rise to newness of spiritual life. God raises our dead hearts to life through the same resurrection power that brought Jesus back to life. This new life in Christ is a life of freedom from sin and freedom to obey God's commands and live for his glory (Rom. 6:5-11).

#### **THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS ENSURES OUR FUTURE RESURRECTION**

The resurrection of Jesus also gives us a future hope that at his return we will receive glorified resurrection bodies just like his (1 Cor. 15:20-23). This is a glorious promise of future joy and glory and grace for everyone who is in Christ.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group meeting.*

### **1 Timothy 1:15**

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Share about a time in your life when you really grew in your understanding of what Jesus did for you.

Read Romans 5:18-21. According to this passage, how did the life of Jesus contribute to our salvation?

Read Hebrews 4:14-17. How does the life of Jesus make a daily impact on your life? Give some examples of how you have seen this passage come alive in your life.

Read the following passages about the death of Jesus: 2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 5:6-11, Titus 2:11-14, 1 Peter 2:24. What do these passages say that Jesus accomplished in his death? How should this impact the way you live your life, the way you relate to others, and the way you relate to God?

What are some specific ways that you have experienced new life in Christ? What sins used to dominate you or enslave you that the Lord has given you resurrection power over?

How would you explain who Jesus is and what he has done to someone who has never heard it before?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Spend time praising God for all that he has done for you in Christ.
- Ask that God would keep growing your real love for Jesus.
- Ask that God would give you opportunities to share about who Jesus is and what he's done with others – coworkers, neighbors, friends, etc.

### GETTING STARTED

Why would a group of people commit themselves in totality to a book? And why this book we call the Bible? Why would we commit ourselves to a big book that is made up of 66 smaller books written by 40 different human authors over the course of 1500 years?

The answer to this question has to do with what the Bible is, which is the topic that we will explore this week.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD

One of the most amazing realities in the universe is that God has given us a book filled with his words and his voice (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God has spoken to us and perfectly revealed himself to us through the words of the Bible (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

This foundational truth drives our total commitment to the Bible. Because the God of the universe speaks to us in the Bible, we want to commit ourselves in totality to paying attention to what he has to say.

#### THE BIBLE IS WITHOUT ERROR

Since all the words of the Bible are the words of God, it follows that every word of the Bible is absolutely true and without error (Prov. 30:5).

Some people will say that the Bible conveys spiritual truth but still has some human error in it. This way of thinking is erroneous and dangerous. To say that there are errors in the Bible is to say that God made an error when he spoke. Or it is to say that God intentionally conveyed something as true that is not true. Both of these allegations are an affront to the character of God. God does not make mistakes and God does not lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).

Because the Bible is without error, we can trust it. We can trust that God has given us a perfect revelation of himself and that he has given us everything we need to know him and live for his glory in every area of life. The Bible will never fail us.

#### THE BIBLE IS UNDERSTANDABLE

One of the most amazing characteristics of the Bible is how understandable and clear it is. He gave us a book that anyone can understand – educated and uneducated, intelligent and unintelligent people alike can understand the basic story and message of the Bible (Ps. 19:7). He gave us a book that even children can understand (Deut. 6:4-7).

At the same time, none of us has perfect wisdom. There will always be things in the Bible that are difficult to understand and that faithful Christians even disagree about. But this is because we are limited in our wisdom and knowledge, not because the Bible is inherently confusing. The Bible is understandable and accessible to everyone who is open to seriously considering what God has to say.

### **THE BIBLE IS NECESSARY FOR SALVATION**

In the Bible God has given us the greatest gift ever: the good news about the way of salvation through Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 3:15). Without God's special revelation of himself to us in the Bible, we would never have known about Jesus Christ, and so we would never have had the opportunity to call upon him for salvation (Rom. 10:13-17).

Creation can tell us that God exists and that he is powerful (Rom. 1:20). Our own conscience can testify to God's moral standards (Rom. 2:15). But only the Bible, and the good news of the gospel that it reveals, is able to bring us to salvation in Christ (Rom. 1:16).

### **THE BIBLE IS SUFFICIENT FOR LIFE**

The wonderful thing about the Bible is that it is the gift that keeps on giving. It is "living and active" (Heb. 4:12). It grants us "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3).

This means that in the Bible God has given us all of his words that that we need to live our lives for his glory. Whether you are a preacher, a plumber, or a politician, God has given you everything you need to work for his glory. Whether you are struggling with depression, anger, anxiety, or lust, the Bible contains all of God's words that you need for help and change. Whether you are a child, a spouse, or a parent, the Bible contains all the wisdom from God that you need.

The all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise, infinitely loving God of the universe has spoken to us about life and godliness and salvation. Would such a God give us inadequate words? Would he leave his people lacking any knowledge or wisdom that is necessary for our lives and our souls? Certainly, he would not. And this is why First Baptist Church has a total commitment to the Bible.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

What is your life verse? If you don't have one, what would it be?

What has the Lord revealed to you from his Word recently?

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:20-21. What do these passages teach us about what the Bible is?

Read Romans 10:13-17 and 2 Timothy 3:15. How do these passages impact the way we approach reaching others with Jesus?

Think about your own testimony. How did God use the truths of his Word in your life to bring you to salvation?

In what ways has the Bible sufficiently addressed the concerns and struggles of your life and walk with him?

### GROUP PRAYER

- Praise and adore God for perfectly revealing himself to us in the Bible. Thank him that because of the Bible you can know him forever.
- Ask that God would help you to continue growing in your knowledge of and commitment to the Bible.
- Ask that God would use the Bible in your life to make you more like Christ and that he would allow you to use the Bible in other people's lives to help them grow in Christ too.

### **PRAY**

Take time to share prayer requests related to your “one.” We can labor hard and long but if God doesn’t give the increase our efforts are in vain (Psalm 127:1-2). Spend time as a group praying for one another and for those you are striving to reach.

### **PRAISE**

Discuss any REACH praise updates. We want to celebrate all that God is doing through you reaching out to others. Be sure to celebrate even the “smallest” steps taken such as getting to know someone more or inviting them over to a home. Be sure to celebrate gospel conversations and certainly rejoice when someone trusts in Jesus Christ.

### **PRESENT**

Use this as a time to present to your group where you are in the REACH process with your “one.” This will help you hold one other accountable and encourage one another to continue making progress.

### **PLAN**

After hearing where each group member is in the REACH steps, help one another plan the next step forward. For instance, if someone is stuck in the step of “greeting” and is afraid to get to know someone more, then brainstorm questions they can ask their neighbor next time they see each other. If someone has invited someone over for dinner two or three times, but is now scared to share Christ, then help them plan ways they can engage their neighbor in a gospel conversation.

### GETTING STARTED

Last week we saw that the Bible is God's perfect and authoritative revelation of himself to us. This week we are going to get more practical. If God has revealed himself to us through the Bible, then it is essential to grow skilled at paying attention to the Bible.

In this session we are going to explore a method for studying the Bible and then put it into practice. The first part of this session will explain the Bible study method that we are using and the second part will provide space for you to do your own Bible study with your Grow Group.

*(Note to Grow Group leaders: In your meeting that covers this session, lead your group through the FEAST Bible study method following the instructions below.)*

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### FEAST

As Christians we should have a burning hunger that can only be satisfied by the Word of God (Matt. 4:4). Because when we come to God's Word, we come to a delicious meal that satisfies us and sustains us and grows us in Christlikeness (Ps. 19:10). In what follows, you will learn a method for how to FEAST on God's life-giving, life-transforming Word on a daily basis.

The FEAST method shows us five things that we can do to savor God's Word every time we read it:

#### FRAME IT

When you read a passage of Scripture, it is like you are looking at a painting set in a frame. In order to appreciate the painting, you have to appreciate the frame.

The frame that every Bible passage is set in is called the context. When you appreciate and understand the context of a Bible passage, you will better appreciate and understand the passage itself.

Here are some questions you can ask of the passage to better understand its context:

- Who is the author of this passage? Who are they writing to? Why are they writing?
- When and where did they write it? What was the culture like in this time and place?
- Where does this passage show up in the Bible? Old Testament or New Testament?
- What comes before and after this passage? Why did the author place this passage here in the book?
- How does it fit into the larger point the author is making or the larger story the author is telling?

#### EXPLORE IT

Taking time to thoroughly explore the passage you are studying will always result in new and

deeper insights into God's Word. Here are some questions you can ask to aid your exploration:

- What strikes me from this passage? What am I seeing that I haven't seen before?
- What words or phrases stand out to me as important or interesting?
- What is the main argument or main point the author is making?
- How does this passage connect to who Jesus is and what he has done?
- What is this passage teaching me about God? About myself? About the world?

### **APPLY IT**

Bible study isn't complete until you have been shaped by what you have studied. Here are some questions that will help you apply the passage you are studying:

- What implications does this passage have for how I live my life?
- What commands are in this passage for me to obey? How and when will I obey them?
- What needs to change in my actions, thoughts, or affections for me to live in obedience to this passage?

### **STORE IT**

One of the most effective ways to grow in godliness is to store up God's Word in your heart and think about it all the time (Ps. 1:2; Ps. 119:11).

Choose one verse or one truth from the passage you are studying to memorize and reflect on throughout the day.

### **TELL IT**

God has placed a call on your life to share his Word both with other believers (Heb. 10:24) and with unbelievers (Rom. 10:14). You should always have a truth from God's Word that you are ready to share when God gives you the opportunity.

Choose one truth from this passage and one person with whom you will share it. Make a plan for how and when you will share it with them.

**\*Turn to the next page to work through a personal Bible study of John 14:1-14. Come to your Grow Group meeting ready to discuss your work!**

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group meeting.*

### **Psalm 1:1-3**

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.  
He is like a tree planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.  
In all that he does, he prospers.

Use the space below to work through a personal Bible study of John 14:1-14. Come to your Grow Group meeting ready to discuss your work.

**Frame It** – What is the context of this passage? (Go through “Frame It” questions)

**Explore It** – What did you find in your exploration of this passage? (Go through “Explore It” questions)

**Apply It** – How will you apply this passage? (Go through “Apply It” questions)

**Store It** – What verse or truth from this passage will you store up in your heart?

**Tell It** – What is one truth from this passage you plan to share? Who will you share it with? How and when?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Ask that God would cause the time you spent studying his Word to produce much growth in you and the other members of your group.
- Pray the truths of the passage you studied back to God. Praise him for his Word and what he revealed to you in this passage.
- Ask God to help you apply this passage. Confess sin that the passage exposed. Ask for power to obey his Word even when it is hard.

### GETTING STARTED

Over the next two weeks we will discuss our third core value as a church: genuine care for people.

So far, we have talked about how we are a Jesus-loving, Bible-committed church. Why is it also important to care deeply about one another?

Over the next two weeks we will strive to answer that question.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### THE PEOPLE WE ARE

The first reason we have a genuine care for people at First Baptist Church has to do with who we are. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 gives us three important categories that help us understand who we are:

*We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone (1 Thess. 5:14).*

#### WE ARE SINFUL PEOPLE IN NEED OF ADMONISHMENT

The Bible teaches that we have broken, sinful hearts that lead us to exchange the true worship of God for the worship of other, lesser things (Rom. 1:22-23). We forsake the all-satisfying fountain of living waters for broken containers that hold no water (Jer. 2:13).

Even after we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we are still engaged in a daily war against the passions of our flesh. These passions tempt us over and over again to forsake the God of our salvation (1 Pet. 2:11).

God has given us many resources to battle against our flesh. He has given us the power of worship, the power of his Word, and the power of prayer. But one of the greatest resources that God has given us in our fight against sin is one another. God intends us to show genuine care for one another by helping one another fight sin (Heb. 3:12-13) and pursue godliness (Heb. 10:24-25).

#### WE ARE SUFFERING PEOPLE IN NEED OF ENCOURAGEMENT

*We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone (1 Thess. 5:14).*

Because we live in a world where sin exists, we live in a world where suffering exists. God has gathered us together in community so that we can show genuine care to one another in our suffering.

One of the ways we can comfort one another in our suffering is by bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). This means that we don't let anyone carry the weight of their suffering on their own. We quickly step in and strive to make their burden lighter.

We buy groceries for the man who lost his job. We babysit for the parents who haven't had a break in months. We spend time with the elderly woman who was just diagnosed with terminal cancer. We shoot hoops with the teen whose girlfriend just broke up with him. We weep with the young woman who just unexpectedly lost her husband. But most importantly, we share Jesus with them.

Jesus is the greatest encouragement that we can give to one another amid our suffering, because Jesus entered into our suffering to accomplish our salvation (Heb. 2:10-11). By taking on human flesh, Jesus entered into the family of sufferers so that he could bring us into the family of God.

This brings us great comfort. Because Jesus carried our griefs in his body in his life and death, he has shown that he can bear our burdens better than anyone else (Matt. 11:28).

And it also brings us great hope. As our suffering Savior, he will one day completely deliver us from this world of suffering and pain.

### **WE ARE WEAK PEOPLE IN NEED OF HELP**

*We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone (1 Thess. 5:14).*

No one likes to admit that they are weak. That's why many of us labor so hard to make ourselves presentable and put together whenever we gather with our church community. Even when we feel our own weakness, we don't want others to know about it.

This is a façade that must be broken in our lives and in our church, because one of the main ways that God has called us to show genuine care for one another is by helping one another in our weaknesses.

God is pleased and glorified when we show genuine care for those who are especially weak (Jas. 1:27). Jesus even tells us that when we care for and serve the weakest among us we are actually serving him (Matt. 25:34-40). This kind of genuine care for the weak reflects God's own heart (Ps. 68:5-6).

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **1 Thessalonians 5:14**

And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

What are you most known for in your family? When your family tells stories about you, what stories do they tell?

Read Hebrews 3:12-13. Why is it so important that we admonish one another when we see sin in one another? What sin are you struggling with right now that you need help fighting against?

Read Hebrews 10:24-25. What are some specific ways you can stir others up to love and good deeds this week?

Read Galatians 6:2. What burdens are in your life right now that you need others to help you bear? Whose burdens do you need to bear? How do you plan to bear them?

Read Psalm 68:5-6. How have you experienced God's care for you in weakness? How does God's heart toward the weak impact the way you approach people who are experiencing weakness in your life?

Read Jeremiah 2:13, Matthew 11:28, and Matthew 25:34-40. How does who Jesus is and what he has done impact the way we show genuine care for one another?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Praise God for placing us in a community where we can give and receive genuine care.
- Ask that God would give you the humility and motivation to allow others to care for you in your suffering or struggles with sin.
- Ask that God would give you opportunities to show genuine care for others through helping someone else fight their sin, comforting someone in their suffering, or helping a weak person with physical needs.

### GETTING STARTED

This week begins with a confession: genuine care for people is not easy. It is very difficult to love and serve other people. A church that is committed to a genuine care for people is committed to a path that goes against the grain of our sinful flesh. Our sinful flesh does lead us to have genuine care. But it leads us to have genuine care for ourselves, not other people.

This means that we have a great need. We need God to change us if we are going to abound in genuine care for people. We need power that we don't naturally have within ourselves. We need the redemptive power of God to transform us and help us be the kind of people that genuinely care for others.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **GOD'S REDEMPTIVE POWER**

Left to ourselves and our sinful hearts, we are inclined against other people. We are prone to spend our lives in malice and envy and hatred toward other people. We are prone to spend our lives very genuinely caring for ourselves and not caring for others (Titus 3:1-3).

But the good news of the gospel is that God did not leave our souls in that terrible state. God gave us a precious gift of his kindness and love by sending his Son into the world for our salvation. Christ accomplished our salvation on the cross and purchased our forgiveness with his blood. And then the Holy Spirit effected our salvation at the moment we trusted in Christ by regenerating us and making us new. Through God's work of redemption on our behalf, we have become a new creation (Titus 3:4-7).

This changes everything about how we relate to one another. God's redemptive power transforms people who used to be defined by hate into people who are marked by the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Throughout the Bible we see many specific ways that God's redemptive power transforms the way we relate to others. Let's look at a few of those ways:

#### **GOD'S REDEMPTIVE POWER LEADS TO HUMILITY (PHIL. 2:3-11)**

God's redemptive power enacts the miracle of selflessness and humility within us. The humility of Jesus Christ in taking on human flesh and dying for us on the cross provides us with the example and the power that we need to live in humility toward others.

We can count the interests of others as more important than our own because Jesus did the same for us. We can be free from selfishness and empty conceit because Jesus freed us

from these sinful passions through his own selfless actions on the cross. The wonder and glory of the humility of Christ on the cross is the fuel that our hearts need to power our own selflessness and humility.

### **GOD'S REDEMPTIVE POWER LEADS TO PEACE (EPH. 4:1-3)**

In the book of Ephesians, Paul spends the first three chapters describing in wonderful detail God's plan of redemption that he has accomplished for us through Christ and applied in us by the Holy Spirit. Then in Ephesians 4-6 he gives us a picture of how the glorious work God has done inside of us impacts the interactions that happen between us. We now walk with one another in humility, gentleness, patience, love, unity, and peace. These virtues are evidence of the powerful transforming work of God's Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

### **GOD'S REDEMPTIVE POWER LEADS TO FORGIVENESS (EPH. 5:31-32)**

One of the greatest realities of our redemption is that we have been forgiven in Christ. When we really understand the gravity of our sin and the infinite weight of God's wrath that we deserved, this reality of our forgiveness can be truly overwhelming. Like the servant who owed the king more than he could ever repay (Matt. 18:23-35), we were beyond hope of repaying the debt of sin we racked up against God. But God, in his great compassion, forgave our debt in full through the work of Christ on the cross.

Jesus teaches that the fitting response of those who have been forgiven much is that they would forgive much. God's infinitely great forgiveness of us should lead to our great forgiveness of others. Christ shows us how that forgiveness works – he removes our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. But he also empowers us to forgive – he gives us the power that we need to forgive by captivating our hearts with his infinite love and compassion. We learn to forgive as we grow in our love for the one who has forgiven us perfectly.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **Ephesians 4:31-32**

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

What's the biggest fight you have ever had? How would things have been different if you had applied this week's discussion to it?

Read Titus 3:1-7. How does God's redemptive power effect change in our lives? Think about your own life before Christ: In what ways was your heart inclined against God and others? How has his redeeming power changed you?

Read Philippians 2:3-11. What is the "attitude...in Christ Jesus" that Paul refers to in this passage? How would your day be different if you adopted this attitude wholeheartedly? How does this passage, and the work of Christ it describes, help us when we are struggling to humbly serve others?

Read Ephesians 4:1-3. What are the virtues of peace that this passage describes? What are their opposites? How do these virtues (or their opposites) impact the quality of your relationships?

Read Matthew 18:23-35. How does God's forgiveness of you in Christ change the way you respond when someone wrongs you? How might this passage help you when you are struggling to forgive another person?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Spend some time praising and adoring God for the redemption that he has accomplished for you.
- Ask God to empower you to love, serve, forgive, and show compassion to others in the same way God has for you.
- Pray that our church would reflect the grace of God by being marked by genuine care for people.

### GETTING STARTED

Worship is when you pour out your whole self in loving sacrifice to God. It is when you give everything that you are over to him because you love him with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. The Bible calls us to pursue this kind of worship seriously and joyfully.

Later in this Grow Group Guide we will spend several weeks discussing how we can cultivate a heart of worship in our own lives. But this week we will discuss why we worship by focusing on who we worship.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **GOD IS PASSIONATE ABOUT OUR WORSHIP**

God is absolutely passionate about our worship. The instructions that God gave his people Israel when they were in the wilderness show this. As the people of Israel were getting ready to enter into the land that God had promised them, God instructed them about many things. But at the top of God's priority list was that they would be careful to worship him and him alone (Deut. 5:6-10). God even told them that he was "jealous" for their worship, and that his anger would be kindled against them if they failed to worship him and instead began worshipping the gods of other nations or gods of their own creation (Deut. 6:10-15).

Why is God so passionate about our worship? The Bible shows us several reasons:

#### **GOD CREATED US TO WORSHIP HIM**

God is so passionate about our worship because he created us to worship him. God has designed our hearts to worship him and him alone. As our sovereign Creator, God knows that we will experience ultimate joy and satisfaction when we are living according to his design for us – worshipping him and him alone. In him there is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11). So, for the sake of our eternal joy, he jealously calls us to forsake all objects of worship except him.

#### **GOD LOVES US**

God's passion for our worship is motivated by his love for us. He knows that if we try to drink from the "broken cisterns" of false idols, we will be left thirsty and destitute in a barren spiritual desert. Money, success, worldly pleasures and comforts, other people, ourselves – none of these things can truly satisfy us.

But God can. That's why he describes himself as "the fountain of living waters" (Jer. 2:13). We can go to him in worship and be fully satisfied forever. And that's why he is so passionate about our worship. He loves us and he wants us to experience the riches of his character. And he knows we will experience them when we give ourselves in worship to him.

## **GOD IS WORTHY**

When we think in human terms about someone being passionate for our worship, it seems absurd. If a member of your Grow Group came and told you how great they are and passionately called upon you to worship them, you would probably think one of three things: 1) they are playing a big joke on you, 2) they've gone a little crazy, or 3) they need some serious growth in humility.

This is because regular human beings aren't worthy of worship. Only God is worthy of worship. And because God alone is worthy of worship, in everything he does he rightly pursues his own worship and glory with holy passion (Isa. 48:9-11).

In the Bible we see God's ultimate worth most clearly in the person of Jesus Christ – who is himself the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). Jesus is so worthy of worship that ultimately *everyone* will worship him, either willingly or unwillingly (Phil. 2:9-11). But that worship will be especially sweet for those who trust in his name and who are covered by his redeeming blood (Rev. 5:1-14).

### **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

#### **Matthew 22:37-38**

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.

Think about the definition of worship we began with: “Worship is when you pour out your whole self in loving sacrifice to God.” Based on that definition, what does worship look like in your life? What are your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to worship?

Read Deuteronomy 6:10-15. How does God reveal his passion for our worship in this passage? What does it mean that God is a jealous God?

Read Jeremiah 2:13 and Psalm 16:11. How do these passages help us understand why God is so passionate about our worship?

What in your life are you tempted to worship other than God? Put it through the Psalm 16:11 test: How does this thing you are tempted to worship fall short of providing you fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore?

Many have read in the Bible about God’s passion for our worship and concluded: “This God of the Bible is so vain and self-centered!” How would you respond to this statement?

Read Revelation 5:1-14. How does this passage show us that Jesus is worthy of our worship? How does it lead you personally to pursue serious joy in worship?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Pray that God would align the passions of your heart with the passions of his heart – that you would passionately pursue serious joy in worshipping him and him alone.
- Ask that God would cast down any idols that exist in your heart. Ask that he would clearly show you how those idols are broken cisterns and how he is the fountain of living waters.
- Ask that God would open your eyes to see the glorious truth of who Jesus is and what he has done, that you would see how worthy he is, and that you would respond by worshipping him with serious joy.

## **PRAY**

Take time to share prayer requests related to your “one.” We can labor hard and long but if God doesn’t give the increase our efforts are in vain (Psalm 127:1-2). Spend time as a group praying for one another and for those you are striving to reach.

## **PRAISE**

Discuss any REACH praise updates. We want to celebrate all that God is doing through you reaching out to others. Be sure to celebrate even the “smallest” steps taken such as getting to know someone more or inviting them over to a home. Be sure to celebrate gospel conversations and certainly rejoice when someone trusts in Jesus Christ.

## **PRESENT**

Use this as a time to present to your group where you are in the REACH process with your “one.” This will help you hold one other accountable and encourage one another to continue making progress.

## **PLAN**

After hearing where each group member is in the REACH steps, help one another plan the next step forward. For instance, if someone is stuck in the step of “greeting” and is afraid to get to know someone more, then brainstorm questions they can ask their neighbor next time they see each other. If someone has invited someone over for dinner two or three times, but is now scared to share Christ, then help them plan ways they can engage their neighbor in a gospel conversation.

### GETTING STARTED

Last week we discussed why Christians should pursue serious joy in worship – God is passionate about our worship. This week we will get more practical by discussing how we can pursue serious joy in worship in the Christian life.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### SERIOUS JOY IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

The first way we pursue serious joy in worship is through corporate worship. This happens when we, as a local congregation of God's people, gather around God's Word.

When we gather together as God's people, there are several different ways that we gather ourselves around the Bible:

#### **BY READING GOD'S WORD (1 TIM. 4:13)**

It has been rightly noted that the public reading of Scripture is the only perfect part of the worship service. It is the time in our congregational gathering when we hear directly from God as we pay attention to the perfect and divinely inspired words of the Bible.

#### **BY PREACHING GOD'S WORD (2 TIM. 4:1-2)**

In many ways the preaching of God's Word is the climax of the worship service. It is when God's Word is explained and applied by God's chosen spokesperson to God's people. It is when the transforming power of the Bible is unleashed into the hearts of the congregation like a rush of raging water from the open gates of a dam.

#### **BY PRAYING GOD'S WORD (ACTS 2:42)**

When the church in Jerusalem was established, one of the first practices the gathered body devoted themselves to was prayer. What this practice communicates is that we as a congregation are wholly dependent upon God and in desperate need of his grace as we pursue serious joy in worship. We allow his words from the Bible to shape and inform the words that we pray to him as a congregation.

#### **BY SINGING GOD'S WORD (COL. 3:16)**

Corporate worship includes worshiping God by singing great biblical truths in beautiful musical arrangements. This not only reinforces in our minds the truths of Scriptures we learn through the preaching of the Word, but it also engages our hearts and emotions and directs them toward the beauty and wonder of God.

#### **BY SEEING GOD'S WORD (ROM. 6:1-5; 1 COR. 11:17-34)**

We "see" God's Word in our corporate worship services through participating in the ordinances of baptism (Rom. 6:1-5) and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34). In each of

these ordinances we see the truths of God's Word on display – in baptism through a picture of the saving work of Christ and in the Lord's Supper through a symbol of our great need of the broken body and poured-out blood of Jesus Christ.

There are many benefits to gathering together as God's people around God's Word. Here are two of the greatest benefits:

### **ENCOURAGEMENT IN OUR FAITH (HEB. 10:24-25)**

When we gather together for corporate worship, we have a God-given responsibility toward one another. We are called to carefully and intentionally encourage one another and challenge one another toward faithful and godly living.

### **PROTECTION FROM SIN (HEB. 3:12-13)**

God not only calls us to encourage and challenge one another in our faith. He also calls us to protect one another from our sin. When we gather together for corporate worship and encouragement, we are making war against sin and unbelief in our hearts. As we see the faith and holiness of our brothers and sisters on display, it breathes life into our own faith and softens our own hearts toward God and his Word.

### **SERIOUS JOY IN ALL-OF-LIFE WORSHIP**

Worship in the Christian life goes even deeper and wider than corporate worship. The Bible envisions our whole lives as an offering of worship to God – presenting ourselves to him in sacrificial love, growing in our knowledge of him and devotion to him (Rom. 12:1-2). That's why we pursue serious joy in worship not only through corporate worship, but also through all-of-life worship.

Our mission as a church is to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life. This means we want each member of our church growing in their desire to glorify God in every single aspect of their daily life, from their job (Col. 3:23-24) to their family (Eph. 5:25-6:4) and even to the food they eat (1 Cor. 10:31).

In later sessions, we will discuss in more detail how we can cultivate daily patterns of all-of-life worship (see sessions 17-21).

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **Colossians 3:16**

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

What is your favorite part of corporate worship? How does your favorite part of corporate worship help you to grow in your love for Jesus Christ and his people?

Read through the following key passages of Scripture about corporate worship: 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:1-2; Acts 2:42; Colossians 3:16; Romans 6:1-5; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. What do these passages say about the centrality of God's Word in corporate worship? Why does the Bible emphasize the importance of God's Word in worship?

Read Hebrews 3:12-13 and Hebrews 10:24-25. What is it about being together with God's people that leads to protection from sin and encouragement in godliness? How have you experienced this in your own life?

Read Romans 12:1-2. What does this passage teach about how we should worship God?

What are the areas of your life where you feel fully engaged in worship? What are the areas of your life that feel disconnected from your worship of God? How can you change in those areas?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Pray for our church – that God would help us to worship him in spirit and truth and with serious joy during our worship services.
- Pray especially that God would bless and empower the preaching of his Word during our worship services – and that the regular and faithful preaching of his Word would result in a full congregation of vibrant, serious, and joyful worshipers.
- Ask that God would help you to cultivate a full life of worship in every area of your life.

### GETTING STARTED

One of the most beautiful aspects of the church is its diversity. The church brings together diverse groups of people – diverse in economic status, ethnicity, interests, personality, and age – for one unified purpose: the pursuit of Jesus Christ.

Our congregation at First Baptist is made up of multiple generations, from great-grandparents to great-grandchildren and every generation in between. God desires that each of these generations be engaged in a unified pursuit of godliness.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **GOD DESIRES A YOUNGER GENERATION TO PURSUE GODLINESS**

When we dig into the teaching of the Bible, it is clear that God desires a younger generation to pursue godliness. Let's look at a few examples:

#### **JESUS' INVITATION TO A YOUNGER GENERATION (MARK 10:13-16)**

In Mark 10:13-16 Jesus offers an invitation to a younger generation: "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (v. 14). Jesus follows this invitation with a remarkable expression of love and care for these children as he holds them and blesses them (v. 16). He even rebukes his disciples because they don't seem to care about this younger generation (v. 15). This teaches us something about God's heart for a younger generation. Jesus wants the children to come to him. Amid all the pressures of his public ministry, he isn't too busy or too important for these children. They are precious to him. They are worthy kingdom candidates. Jesus wants even the little children among us to come to him.

#### **THE BIBLE'S INSTRUCTION TO A YOUNGER GENERATION (EPH. 6:1-3)**

The Bible is a book for a younger generation. We know this because the Bible speaks to children. That's exactly what Paul does in Ephesians 6:1-3 when he instructs children on how to pursue godliness. He teaches children that when they obey and honor their parents in the Lord, they will receive spiritual blessings – they will grow in godliness. This means that children not only have the opportunity, but also the responsibility to pursue godliness.

#### **THE BIBLE'S VALUE FOR A YOUNGER GENERATION (PS. 119:9)**

The Bible speaks not only to children, but also to young men and women. In Psalm 119:9 the psalmist teaches young men and women how they can walk the path of life in God-glorifying purity – by keeping their way according to the Word of God. Young men and women are called to let the Bible light their way as they navigate the winding paths of life. They are called, just like every other generation, to pursue godliness.

## **GOD DESIRES AN OLDER GENERATION TO PURSUE GODLINESS**

It is also clear from Scripture that God cares deeply about an older generation pursuing godliness. Many churches and organizations focus solely on a younger generation as a way to invest in the future. But the Bible never does that. Jesus' invitation to pursue him is just as open to an older generation as it is to a younger generation. Let's look at a few examples:

### **JESUS' REVELATION TO AN OLDER GENERATION (LK. 2:25-38)**

Luke 2:25-38 tells the story of two elderly people who got the chance to meet Jesus Christ. Simeon had spent his life waiting for God to fulfill his promise of the coming Messiah. And then, near the end of his life, God allowed him to see his hope fulfilled and to hold Jesus in his arms.

Anna was also elderly – eighty-four years old. She was also in the temple when Jesus came with his parents, and she also got to see him. She was so thankful for Jesus and so filled with hope in him, that she began to tell others about him.

Even in the twilight of their lives, Simeon and Anna had the opportunity to pursue and experience Jesus in new and exciting ways. God desires that everyone in an older generation have the same opportunity.

### **JESUS' COMPASSION FOR AN OLDER GENERATION (MARK 5:25-34)**

In Mark 5:25-34 we find Jesus walking through the crowds on his way to heal the dying daughter of Jairus. It is a very urgent situation – Jairus' daughter is very near death. But as Jesus is making his way to Jairus' house, an older woman touches his robe and Jesus feels power go out from him.

What Jesus does next is surprising – he stops. He stops, speaks to, cares for, and heals this woman who just touched his robe. Jairus' young daughter is waiting on him, every second brings her closer to death, and yet he takes precious time to show compassion to this older, feeble woman.

Jesus is not too busy for children. And he is not too busy for an older generation. Jesus desires that an older generation place their faith in him and experience peace in him just as much as a younger generation.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **Psalms 8:1-2**

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouth of babies and infants,  
you have established strength because of your foes,  
to still the enemy and the avenger.

If you have children, what have they taught you? If you don't have children, what's the biggest lesson you learned from your parents?

Read Mark 10:13-16 and Ephesians 6:1-3. What do these passages reveal about God's heart toward a younger generation? How do they challenge the way you think about children in your life?

Read Psalm 119:9. Why do you think this passage is specifically addressed to young men (and women)? What are some specific ways that we can participate in helping future generations to navigate their lives according to the bright light of Scripture?

Read Luke 2:25-38 and Mark 5:25-34. How do these passages show us God's care for an older generation? How do they challenge the way you think about an older generation in your life?

How has God used a younger and/or older generation in your life to help your pursue Jesus?

### GROUP PRAYER

- Pray that God would raise up a younger generation at our church that pursues him wholeheartedly.
- Pray that God would sustain an older generation at our church who continues to grow in godliness day by day.
- Pray that our church would be a place where all generations pursue him and grow in him – from young children to great-grandparents and beyond!

### GETTING STARTED

This week we are going to continue our discussion about a multigenerational pursuit of godliness by thinking about how each generation should relate to the other. And the best way to introduce that concept is through the image of passing the baton. This image comes from the sport of relay racing, where a team of runners works together to finish a race. One team member begins the race, and then passes the baton to the next team member who runs the next leg of the race, who then passes it to the next team member, and so on until the race is complete.

As multiple generations all run the race of godliness together, God desires that each generation pass the baton of godliness on to the other, so that we all can finish the race together.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **GOD DESIRES THAT OLDER GENERATIONS PASS THE BATON OF GODLINESS**

As we run the race of godliness together, older generations have the great privilege and responsibility of passing the baton of godliness on to younger generations. There are many passages in Scripture that show us this. Let's look at just a few:

##### **PASSING THE BATON AT HOME (DEUT. 6:4-7)**

God calls parents to diligently and regularly teach their children about the Lord. Every occasion of their lives together with their children – going to church, family devotions, afternoon walks, baseball games, dance recitals, etc. – is a divinely appointed opportunity to teach them the ways of God.

##### **PASSING THE BATON AT CHURCH (TITUS 2:3-8)**

The Bible also calls older generations within the church to instruct and encourage younger generations in godliness. This is one of the most important ways that men and women from older generations serve the church and advance the kingdom of God. Whether it's an older man taking a younger man out to lunch to talk about his problem with anger or an older woman meeting a younger woman over coffee to study 1 John, these investments from older generations into younger generations yield eternal returns.

#### **GOD DESIRES THAT YOUNGER GENERATIONS TAKE UP THE BATON OF GODLINESS**

While God calls older generations to pass the baton of godliness on to the next generation, younger generations also have the great privilege and responsibility of taking up that baton and running with it.

One of the most memorable moments of "passing the baton" in the whole Bible is when God called Joshua to succeed Moses as the leader of Israel (Josh. 1:1-9). The people of Israel were

getting ready to enter into the land that God has promised them, but they would have to enter in without Moses, their greatest leader. Because Moses had disobeyed God along with the rest of the “wilderness generation” of Israel, he would die before they entered the Promised Land. And this meant that the great privilege and responsibility of leading Israel would have to be passed down to a younger generation, and specifically to a younger man named Joshua.

This story of the passing of the baton from Moses to Joshua teaches us that we need to think of the younger generation in a different way. They are the ones who will very soon be responsible for leading our church and our families in faithfulness to Jesus. They have the responsibility and the privilege to take up the baton of godliness and to run the race of faith for years and years to come.

## **GOD DESIRES EACH GENERATION TO HELP THE OTHER FINISH THE RACE OF GODLINESS**

The goal of the Christian life is to finish the race of godliness – to endure and to grow until your last breath and to enter into the presence of your master and hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

We are engaged in a multigenerational pursuit of godliness, and we are engaged in it together (1 Jn. 2:12-14). And the Lord is calling us to help one another finish the pursuit. Older generations are called to instruct and encourage younger generations. Younger generations are called to honor older generations and perpetuate the godliness they passed down. Each generation is called to spur the other on and to help one another prepare for the ultimate finish line of our faith: the day we get to see Jesus face to face.

### **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week’s Grow Group session.*

#### **Psalm 145:4**

One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

How would you describe the legacy that you desire to leave in this world?

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-7. How does this passage call parents to relate to their children?

If you are a parent, what are some of the ways that you are striving to pass the baton of godliness on to your children? What are some ways that you would like to grow or feel that you need help with this?

Read Titus 2:3-8. How does Paul instruct older and younger generations to relate to one another in this passage? What are some examples of how you can apply this instruction in our church?

Read Joshua 1:1-9. In what specific ways do you see Joshua taking up the baton of leadership over Israel? How should this impact the way we think about younger generations and their role in our church?

What are some specific ways that we can encourage one another to finish the race of godliness? How can younger generations help older generations? How can older generations help younger generations?

### GROUP PRAYER

- Pray for older generations at our church – pray that they would finish the race of faith well and that they would continue to pursue godliness to the end. Pray also that they would be active and diligent in passing the baton of godliness to younger generations.
- Pray for younger generations at our church – pray that they would seize the baton of godliness for themselves and that God would prepare them to be the future leaders of our church.
- Pray that God would help you in your own pursuit of godliness. Pray the same for the other members of your Grow Group.

### GETTING STARTED

Jesus defined the mission of the church when he called us to “go” and “make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:18-20). Many read these words from Jesus and immediately think about global missions – reaching all the nations with the good news of the gospel. And while it is certainly true that Jesus wants us to have a global reach in our gospel ministry, that reach must begin at home.

Before we can have a radical ambition for the nations, we must have a bold passion for our city. Before we can bring the gospel to all the nations, we first must bring the gospel to our homes and to our neighbors and to our city.

That is why the mission of our church is specific to our city: Reaching all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life. And that is why one of our core values as a church is “a bold passion for our city.” This week we will discuss why we have a bold passion for our city.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **A BOLD PASSION FOR OUR CITY BECAUSE OF WHAT JESUS HAS DONE**

The fan that blows our bold passion for the city of Jacksonville into a white-hot flame is the great work that Jesus has done for us.

In the Bible we see people responding to the work of Jesus with a passion for going and telling others in their own towns about it:

- Jesus exorcises a legion of demons from the “demoniac man,” and the man immediately goes away “proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him” (Lk. 8:39).
- Jesus has a conversation with the Samaritan woman and immediately she goes back to her city and invites everyone she can to meet Jesus: “Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?” (Jn. 4:28-30)

These examples provide us with a template for how we should respond to the great things Jesus has done for us. God does not want us to stay silent about them. He doesn’t want us to merely enjoy them from the safety and comfort of our church or living room walls. He wants us to boldly proclaim them to our city. He wants us to passionately plead with Jacksonville to come and see this Jesus so that they might experience these great things too.

More than anything else, God wants us to tell our city about the gospel, because the gospel is the good news about greatest thing that God has done for us in Christ (1 Pet. 2:9). God has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. He has redeemed us from the deep dark pit of our sin, and he has raised us into the sunlit highlands of salvation. Although we were

once God's enemies, because of what Jesus has done for us in his death and resurrection we are now God's sons. For our sin we deserve God's wrath, but because of Jesus we get God's favor.

### **A BOLD PASSION FOR OUR CITY BECAUSE OF WHAT OUR CITY NEEDS**

Our city desperately needs to hear about the great things that Jesus has done. Our city desperately needs the good news of the gospel. As we look out at our city on our drive to church or on our commute to work, or as we spend time with our family at the park or the beach, we should put on Jesus' perspective.

If we were to take a walk with Jesus through our city, like the disciples did through all the cities and villages of the Judean countryside, we would see Jesus burn with a bold passion for Jacksonville. He would burn with a bold passion for our city because he would see how greatly in need the people of our city are. He would see that they are in desperate need of a good shepherd. He would see that they are in desperate need of harvest workers who would go to sow and reap the bountiful seed of the gospel in their lives (Matt. 9:35-38).

Jesus has compassion on the city of Jacksonville because he knows that Jacksonville needs him. We should look on our city with this same compassion. And we should respond to that compassion by burning white-hot with a bold passion for making the gospel of Jesus Christ known to every man, woman, and child in the city of Jacksonville.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **1 Peter 2:9**

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

What is your favorite part of Jacksonville? Least favorite? What do you love most about Jacksonville?

Read Luke 8:26-39. What great things do you see Jesus doing in this passage? How does the “demoniac man” respond to these great things that Jesus did for him?

What great things has Jesus done in your life? What would it look like for you to respond to these great things that Jesus has done for you like the “demoniac man” did?

Read 1 Peter 2:9. According to this passage, what is the greatest thing that Jesus has done for you? How does this passage call you to respond?

Read Matthew 9:35-38. How does Jesus respond to the crowds that he sees?

What do you think Jesus would see and say if he took a walk with you in your neighborhood or in Downtown Jacksonville? How should this impact the way you view our mission to this city?

### GROUP PRAYER

- Pray that God would help you to see, experience, and believe the great things that Jesus has done for you.
- Pray that the great things that Jesus has done for you would fan a white-hot flame of bold passion for our city in your heart.
- Pray that God would give you opportunities to live out your bold passion for our city by sharing the good news of Jesus with others.

**PRAY**

Take time to share prayer requests related to your “one.” We can labor hard and long but if God doesn’t give the increase our efforts are in vain (Psalm 127:1-2). Spend time as a group praying for one another and for those you are striving to reach.

**PRAISE**

Discuss any REACH praise updates. We want to celebrate all that God is doing through you reaching out to others. Be sure to celebrate even the “smallest” steps taken such as getting to know someone more or inviting them over to a home. Be sure to celebrate gospel conversations and certainly rejoice when someone trusts in Jesus Christ.

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**PLAN**

After hearing where each group member is in the REACH steps, help one another plan the next step forward. For instance, if someone is stuck in the step of “greeting” and is afraid to get to know someone more, then brainstorm questions they can ask their neighbor next time they see each other. If someone has invited someone over for dinner two or three times, but is now scared to share Christ, then help them plan ways they can engage their neighbor in a gospel conversation.

### GETTING STARTED

People who have a real love for Jesus and a genuine care for people won't stop at having a bold passion for reaching their city with the gospel. They will also have a radical ambition for the nations of the world to worship Jesus and enjoy salvation in his name. This is why our church has a radical ambition for the nations.

This week we are going to discuss three reasons why we have a radical ambition for the nations.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **A RADICAL AMBITION FOR THE NATIONS...FOR THE SPREAD OF GOD'S GLORY**

The ultimate motivation for global missions is the glory of God. This is true because God is infinitely worthy of all glory (Rom. 11:33). Just as God is worthy of being glorified in every area of our lives, so also, he is worthy of being glorified in every corner of our globe (Ps. 96:1-5).

In fact, Scripture teaches us that the reason why Jesus came to this earth and went to the cross and rose again was so that all kinds of people all across the globe could experience the mercy of God through repentance and faith in him (Rom. 15:9-12). God wants us to shine the light of the gospel among the nations so that God can be glorified and worshiped from all the ends of the earth.

#### **A RADICAL AMBITION FOR THE NATIONS...FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PLAN**

Spreading God's glory through the global mission of the church is not an idea that we innovated as a church. It is not a plan that comes from man. It is God's plan.

It is a plan that God established long ago (Isa. 42:6-7) and that Jesus commissioned the church to fulfill (Matt. 28:18-20).

Since God's plans are never thwarted or frustrated, we know that he will carry out his plans to spread the gospel of his glory to all peoples and nations.

In fact, he gives us this assurance in Scripture (Rev. 7:9-10). One day, God's plan to spread his glory across the globe will ultimately be fulfilled. Multitudes of people from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue will gather around the throne of God and worship him for the salvation he has accomplished for them in Christ.

#### **A RADICAL AMBITION FOR THE NATIONS...FOR THE GOOD OF ALL PEOPLES**

Our ultimate reason for having a radical ambition for the nations is the glory of God – we want to see God's glory spread across the whole globe. This has been God's plan from the very beginning – and our Lord Jesus Christ has commissioned his church to fulfill it.

This leads to our final reason for having a radical ambition for the nations – the good of all peoples. The way that God gets glory as his gospel is spread across the globe is through the blessing of salvation. As more and more people across the globe come to faith in Jesus Christ as a result of hearing the good news of the gospel, more and more people glorify God for the rich grace he has given them in Christ.

In order to spread the blessing of salvation across the globe, we have to spread the gospel across the globe. Because there is only one way that a person can experience God's grace in salvation – by calling on the name of the Lord. But in order to call on Jesus, they have to believe in Jesus. And in order to believe in Jesus, they have to hear about Jesus. And in order to hear about Jesus, someone has to preach the gospel to them. And in order for someone to preach the gospel to them, that someone has to be sent to them (Rom. 10:13-15).

This is why the world needs missionaries. This is why we have a radical ambition for sending missionaries to the nations. Because without missionaries going to the nations and preaching and inviting people to believe in Jesus, no one among the nations will be saved. And if no one among the nations is saved, then no one among the nations will worship and glorify God.

But when the grace of God (which comes to us through the gospel) spreads to more and more people, more and more people give thanks and glory to God (2 Cor. 4:15). This is our greatest desire – that God's grace would spread from First Baptist Church of Jacksonville to the nations, so that more and more people give thanks and glory to the God of our salvation.

## VERSES TO MEDITATE ON

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **Revelation 7:9-10**

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Have you ever traveled out of the country? If so, what was it like? What kinds of people did you meet? What did you learn?

Read Romans 15:9-12. How does this passage impact the way you view the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? How does this deepen or challenge the way you think about missions and missionaries?

Read Revelation 7:9-10. What does this passage tell us about God's plan for all the nations of the earth?

Read Romans 10:13-15. According to this passage, why does the world need missionaries?

Have you ever considered what your role is in spreading God's glory to the nations? Based on the passages we've read so far, how do you think God is calling you to contribute to this work?

What are some of the things that tend to distract us from a radical ambition for the nations? What will you do to rekindle a fire in your heart for the work God is doing across the globe?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Pray that God's name would be glorified among the nations.
- Pray that God would give us the privilege of being used by him to fulfill his purposes for the nations.
- Pray that God would grow our radical ambition for the nations as a church and your radical ambition for the nations as an individual.

## SECTION 3

# WHAT WE CULTIVATE

Over the past few months we have been focusing on our 7 core values at First Baptist Church:

- Real Love for Jesus
- Total Commitment to the Bible
- Genuine Care for People
- Multigenerational Pursuit of Godliness
- Serious Joy in Worship
- Bold Passion for our City
- Radical Ambition for the Nations

These are the 7 things that make up who we are as a church – the strands of our DNA. They are the things that will never change about us even if everything else changes.

Now that we have covered who we are as a church, we will use our remaining sessions to discuss what it means to be a member at First Baptist Church.

Merely stating who we are as a church doesn't go far enough. Now it is time to get into how our core values get down into the nitty gritty of your everyday life. As a church that's on mission to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life, there are 5 things that we hope to cultivate in every one of our members. We hope to cultivate:

- People Who Worship
- People Who Grow
- People Who Share
- People Who Give
- People Who Serve

We will spend time discussing each of these topics over our remaining sessions.

### GETTING STARTED

What comes to your mind when you think about worship? Maybe you think about singing hymns or going to church.

While these things are forms of worship, it is much more all-encompassing than that.

Everyone, whether they go to church or not, is a devoted worshiper. Because worship is about what we love and what we treasure, what we believe is supremely valuable. Worship is about what grips your heart and drives the way you live.

Think about it this way: your heart is a throne room. And at the middle of that throne room there is a golden throne. Whatever or whoever is sitting on that golden throne – whatever or whoever is king of your heart – is what you worship.

But the act of worship never stays contained in our hearts. It flows out into how we live our lives. Whatever or whoever we worship captains the ship of our lives. It commands the helm and steers our lives according to its will.

The man who neglects his family and works himself to the point of exhaustion is being steered by his worship of money or success. He thinks, “All this work will be worth it in the end.”

The woman who struggles in her devotional life because she is distracted with cleaning is being steered by her worship of perfection (Luke 10:38-42). She thinks, “I can’t do anything else until this place is completely clean.”

The Christian man who refuses to confess his hidden sin is being steered by his worship of his own reputation. He thinks, “I can’t bear the thought of people knowing what I’ve done.”

Everyone worships something. And the way that we live our lives is directed by what we worship. Christians are people who worship God. And over the next several weeks we are going to see what the life of a worshiper of God looks like. This week, we will begin by answering the question: What is worship?

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### WHAT IS WORSHIP

Romans 12:1-2 helps us understand what worship is:

*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1-2).*

In this passage, we see that a worshiper of God is someone whose heart is gripped by the grace of God and whose life is marked by obedience to God.

### **PEOPLE WHO WORSHIP HAVE HEARTS GRIPPED BY THE GRACE OF GOD**

Notice that in Romans 12:1-2 Paul urges the believers in Rome to worship “by the mercies of God.” Paul uses this phrase as shorthand to refer to the truth of the gospel he has been explaining in Romans 1-11. He is saying, “I’m urging you to respond to the grace that God has shown you in the gospel by worshiping him.”

When our hearts are gripped by the gospel of grace, the result is worship. When we realize that we are wicked sinners who deserve the holy wrath of a just God, but that we can be forgiven and made right with God through repentance and faith in his Son, whom he sent to die in our place and rise again from the grave, our hearts will respond in worship.

Worship starts when we stand in awe of all that God has done for us in Christ. This experience of God’s grace in Christ is the fountain from which our worship flows.

### **PEOPLE WHO WORSHIP HAVE LIVES MARKED BY OBEDIENCE TO GOD**

Whenever we are drinking deeply from the fountain of God’s grace, it overflows into our lives in the form of obedience. Worshipful obedience isn’t begrudging obedience that flows from fear or obligation. It is joyful obedience that flows from gratitude for what God has done for us in Christ.

We see this kind of worship described in Romans 12:1-2.

First, we see that people who worship present themselves to God as living sacrifices (v. 1). They realize that worship isn’t just about singing on Sunday morning, it is about offering themselves to God with every breath they take, every thought they think, every decision they make, every action they take with their bodies.

The second thing we see in Romans 12:1-2 is that people who worship experience transformation. This happens by the renewing of their minds (v. 2).

As their joy and awe of all that God has for them in Christ overflows into obedience in their lives, their minds are continually renewed and transformed. Their thoughts begin to line up with God’s thoughts that he has revealed in his Word. Their desires begin to match God’s desires. They begin to love what God loves and hate what God hates.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week’s Grow Group session.*

### **Romans 12:1-2**

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

If you grew up in church, what is your favorite childhood memory from church? If you didn't grow up in church, what did you think about church before you became a part of one?

Read James 4:1-2. Explain how worship is working in the hearts of the people described in this passage. What are the desires of your heart that tend to control how you think and what you do?

Read Romans 12:1-2. What are the "mercies of God" that Paul describes in verse 1? How would you describe them in your own words? What are some practical ways you expose your heart to the gospel on a daily basis?

Think about a normal day of your life. How would it be different if you offered yourself wholly to God?

Which areas of your life have you seen God transform? Which areas of your life do you desire God to transform?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Pray that God would help you identify and repent of false worship in your life.
- Ask God to grip your heart with his grace on a daily basis.
- Ask God to renew your mind and transform your life into a life of worshiping him.

### GETTING STARTED

Disney World is often called “the happiest place on earth.” If you have ever been, you know that it really does feel that way! When you step into Disney World you step into a world of magic and joy. There are happy faces of Disney characters and tourists all over the place. There are rides and attractions that exist to maximize your capacity for fun. There is a firework show every...single...night...

But as amazing as Disney World is, and as much as it feels like the happiest place on earth, for the Christian there is a place of happiness that Disney World can't even compete with. And that place is church.

That might sound a little crazy. But when you think about corporate worship (worshiping God together with the whole church) from a biblical perspective, you will find that gathering together with the people of God to worship God is one of the greatest sources of joy in Christian life. That's why Homer Lindsay, Jr. once said that missing Sunday morning worship is like missing a whole chapter of your life!

The reason for this is because of what corporate worship is. In a sentence, corporate worship is an encounter with God, together with the people of God, that feeds our soul.

This week we will discuss each piece of that sentence separately.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **CORPORATE WORSHIP IS AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD**

The most amazing thing about corporate worship, the thing that really makes it a source of joy for Christians, is that in corporate worship we encounter God. When we go to church, we get the glorious opportunity to have a meeting with the living God.

God meets with us in two ways during corporate worship.

The first way is through his Word. The Bible is God's all-powerful, fully authoritative revelation of himself to us (Isa. 55:11; Matt. 7:24-28). So, when we fill our worship gatherings with the Bible, we get the opportunity to meet with God!

The second way we encounter God in corporate worship is by focusing on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The spotlight of our worship services shines on who Jesus is and what he has done for us because God's Word ultimately points us directly to him. Every song we sing, Bible passage we read, prayer we pray, and sermon we preach should have Jesus at the very center of it as the hero. Because Jesus is at the very center of the Bible itself (Col. 3:15-17).

## **CORPORATE WORSHIP IS AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD TOGETHER WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

You can encounter God in a closet. You can have a great worship service between just you and Jesus. But that's not how we experience the wonders of corporate worship. Corporate worship is an encounter with God together with the people of God.

The first reason we worship together with God's people is because as God's people we are united in Christ. Corporate worship is an expression that each of us, though diverse, are washed by the same blood of Christ and filled with the same Spirit of God (Eph. 4:1-6).

The second reason we worship together is because we need mutual encouragement. It is tempting for Christians to think that they can sustain their own faith through Bible reading and prayer. Many are tempted to take a "just me and Jesus" approach to the Christian life. But this kind of thinking is dangerous. We desperately need regular encouragement from our brothers and sisters in Christ so that we do not fall away from Christ (Heb. 3:12-13). Corporate worship provides a regular, weekly opportunity for God's people to mutually encourage one another.

## **CORPORATE WORSHIP IS AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD TOGETHER WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD THAT FEEDS THE SOUL**

We live in a consumerist society. When we go out to a restaurant or a department store, we tend to think in terms of the services those places provide. The purpose of a restaurant is to serve me good food. The purpose of the department store is to sell me good products.

We should be cautious of thinking about church this way. It is true that church isn't all about what we can receive from others, but rather about how we can serve others.

But there is a sense in which corporate worship is about consumption. Corporate worship is meant to be a feast for our souls. It is a time for us to push pause on the craziness of life and feed Jesus to our hungry and starving souls.

Because in corporate worship we see Jesus in all of his glory. We remember the wonderful news of the gospel – what Christ has done for us on the cross. And as we see him, his image begins to reflect back on us and we are transformed from one degree of Christlikeness to another (2 Cor. 3:18).

### **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

#### **Hebrews 3:12-13**

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

What is your favorite Disney World story?

Read Acts 2:42-47 and Colossians 3:15-17. What do these passages suggest should be at the heart of our corporate worship?

In what ways can you grow in focusing on God's Word and Jesus Christ in your heart during corporate worship? When are you most focused? When do you tend to get distracted?

Read Hebrews 3:12-13. According to this passage, why is corporate worship so important?

Share one way that another believer at First Baptist has encouraged you or helped you overcome struggles in your life.

How would Sunday morning be different for you if you actively and passionately believed the truths we discussed this week? What are the obstacles you need to overcome to wholeheartedly embrace corporate worship?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Thank God for giving us something as wonderful and exciting as corporate worship.
- Ask that God would use corporate worship in your life to grow your love for him and his people.
- Ask that God would help you to make Sunday morning the best and most important part of your week.

### GETTING STARTED

P.G. Wodehouse once described what he thought to be the true test of a man's character: "To find a man's true character, play golf with him."

His point, of course, is that the adversity and frustration that the game of golf entails brings to the surface the ugly aspects of our hearts and lives that we tend to mask at places like church.

But even more than the golf course, your home is the place where your heart truly gets put on display. Home is the most intimate place in the world. It is the place where you can kick back and relax and just be you. What you are in the arena of the home is what you are.

It is very easy to have two versions of yourself – the church version and the home version. The church version is nice and sweet and worshipful, while the home version is snippy and bitter and worldly. It is important for us to admit that if this is you, the real version of you is the home version.

But it is also important for us to see that God doesn't desire for you to live with this inconsistency. He doesn't want the real you to keep looking like the home version of you. Instead, he wants us to be worshipers of him while we are at church and while we are at home.

This week we are going to focus on how it looks to have a worshipful home life. We are going to see that a worshipful home life is a gospel-reflecting home life and a disciple-raising home life.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **A WORSHIPFUL HOME IS A GOSPEL-REFLECTING HOME**

As Christians, we are people who are shaped by the gospel – the good news that a holy and loving God chose to send his Son to die for our sins and be raised from the grave, so that anyone who repents and believes in him would receive forgiveness and eternal life.

This gospel shaped identity should not just mark us only at church, but also at home. Specifically, it should mark how we treat one another in our homes. One very practical way we can reflect the gospel in our homes is by reflecting the gospel in the way we relate to our family members.

What God has done for us in Christ should trickle down into how we relate to one another. God forgave us in Christ, so we should forgive one another (Eph. 4:31-32). God loved us in Christ, so we should love one another (Eph. 5:1-2; 25).

When we relate to one another in this manner at home, we are putting the gospel on display in a powerful way. And there is nothing more worshipful than exalting the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ with our lives.

## **A WORSHIPFUL HOME IS A DISCIPLE-RAISING HOME**

God wants you to worship him in your home every day by diligently growing the members of your household to be worshipers of Jesus (Deut. 6:1-9).

### **FAMILY WORSHIP**

One of the simplest ways to do this is to regularly practice family worship. This is a time for the whole family to come together and focus their attention on Jesus by reading the Bible, singing, and praying.

For married couples and families, family worship looks like the husband/father leading his wife and family in a time of reading the Bible, singing, and praying. For singles, this can look like reading, singing, and praying with your roommate or on your own.

Family worship can be intimidating at first, but here are answers to some of the most common objections:

*“I’m not a gifted teacher. How can I lead family worship?”*

God’s will for you is to worship him in your home. God will always enable you to do what he has called you to do. Family worship doesn’t have to be a time of deep and profound Bible study. It can be as simple as reading a portion of Scripture, singing a hymn, and praying a short prayer. You will be amazed at how God will work powerfully in your life and in your family’s life as you consistently devote yourselves to him and his Word.

*“I don’t have time for family worship.”*

Family worship doesn’t have to be a long ordeal. Especially for families with small children, family worship only takes 5-7 minutes. That’s about how much time it takes to read a few verses, sing a song, and pray.

*“My children don’t pay attention.”*

Family worship probably won’t be a sensational experience. It probably won’t feel like revival is breaking out in your home. Your children will try to play and talk during family worship. But none of these things mean that family worship is ineffective. Over time, as you continue to faithfully point your children to Christ and the gospel through his Word and through songs and through prayers, God will use family worship mightily in your life and in your family.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week’s Grow Group session.*

### **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

What are your most interesting or beloved family traditions?

Read Ephesians 4:31-32, 5:1-2, and 5:25. What is the relationship between how Jesus treated us and how we're called to treat each other?

What would be different about your relationships at home if the gospel was always reflected there?

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9. According to this passage, what does it look like to worship God at home?

What excites you about this week's discussion of family worship? What about it intimidates you?

Share about what God has done in your home as you have sought to worship him there. Share some ways you need to grow in worshipping God at home.

## GROUP PRAYER

- Praise God for being worthy of worship in every area of life, even at home.
- Ask God to help you worship him by reflecting the gospel in the way you treat your family.
- Ask God to help you worship him by making disciples in your home.

## **PRAY**

Take time to share prayer requests related to your “one.” We can labor hard and long but if God doesn’t give the increase our efforts are in vain (Psalm 127:1-2). Spend time as a group praying for one another and for those you are striving to reach.

## **PRAISE**

Discuss any REACH praise updates. We want to celebrate all that God is doing through you reaching out to others. Be sure to celebrate even the “smallest” steps taken such as getting to know someone more or inviting them over to a home. Be sure to celebrate gospel conversations and certainly rejoice when someone trusts in Jesus Christ.

## **PRESENT**

Use this as a time to present to your group where you are in the REACH process with your “one.” This will help you hold one other accountable and encourage one another to continue making progress.

## **PLAN**

After hearing where each group member is in the REACH steps, help one another plan the next step forward. For instance, if someone is stuck in the step of “greeting” and is afraid to get to know someone more, then brainstorm questions they can ask their neighbor next time they see each other. If someone has invited someone over for dinner two or three times, but is now scared to share Christ, then help them plan ways they can engage their neighbor in a gospel conversation.

### GETTING STARTED

John's alarm goes off at 7:30 am, but he keeps on hitting snooze until it is past 8:00 am. He finally rolls out of bed and feels a tinge of panic: "Ugh, I'm going to be late again." He drags his feet to the bathroom and starts getting ready for work. He knows he should hurry, but the motivation just isn't there. By the time he gets in his car he knows he'll be late. As he sits in the car, he thinks, "Maybe I should just call in sick. I hate my job, and I just want to stay home and relax. God, please give me some relief."

Karen's alarm goes off at 6:30 am, but she's already halfway through the morning business reports. It's time for her to get on the road and into the office – she'll get the promotion if she puts in more hours than Bob. As she drives through the dark on the empty road, she contemplates her calendar: A full docket of meetings until 7:00 pm and a business dinner thereafter. She'll arrive at the office while it's still dark and she'll leave the office after the sun goes down. She won't see her family until late that night. And that's exactly how she likes it. In the end everyone will see her success, and that will make it all worth it.

What do these two situations have in common?

John and Karen are both thinking about work with wrong motivations. They are using work to worship something other than God. John desires comfort and peace that his job can't provide, so he dreads going to work and under performs. Karen desires the worldly success that her job can provide, so she devotes her life to work at the expense of her family.

This week we are going to focus on worshiping God at work. We will explore what it looks like to relate to our work with hearts that worship God, not self.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### THE CREATION OF WORK

God created us to worship him through work. In Genesis 2:15 we see God putting Adam into the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it. God created Adam to worship him through cultivating and keeping and working. God is a working God – he worked for six days and created the universe. And we get to reflect his image by working for his glory.

#### THE CORRUPTION OF WORK

But because of sin, our relationship to work is broken. Part of the curse of sin is that what used to be a completely enjoyable act of worship to God is now tainted and filled with strife (Gen. 3:17-19).

This cursedness of work impacts every single human being (other than Jesus). Because of our own broken and sinful hearts, we tend to approach work with sinful motives. Like John and Karen, our natural bent is to use work to please ourselves, not God.

## THE REDEMPTION OF WORK

In Christ, God has given us the freedom and power to work for the right reason – as an act of worship to God.

We see this in Colossians 3:22-25, where Paul shows us two ways we can make our work about worshiping God, not men:

### **WORK OUT OF A SINCERE HEART THAT FEARS THE LORD (COL. 3:22)**

This means that when we go to do our work – whether that is raising your children or replacing the countertops or reading a coursebook or running a company – our deepest motivation should be a breathtaking awe of who Jesus is and what he has done (Col. 1:13-17).

In the same way countless romantics have been compelled to pen a poem or sing a song because of the stunning beauty of their partner, so the marvelous work of Christ for us should compel us to work heartily for him.

### **WORK FOR THE PLEASURE OF THE LORD (COL. 3:23-25)**

As soon as we begin to work for ourselves or our family or our boss, we are missing out on the glory of work. The glory of work is that each one of us gets to spend our lives in the service of the king of the universe. There can be no greater purpose.

When we change our perspective from working for ourselves or others to working for the Lord, it transforms even the most mundane of jobs. Whether your job is to lick stamps or lead a Fortune 500 company, God wants us to work for him, in his service, for his purposes.

And that transforms how we experience our work. It means that God has grand and mighty purposes for our work, no matter what it is. Why? Because he is grand and mighty, he is infinite and eternal, and we are working for him.

## VERSES TO MEDITATE ON

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **Colossians 3:23-24**

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

What is your work? What do you love about it? What do you dislike about it?

Is your relationship with work closer to that of John or Karen? How so?

Read Genesis 3:17-19. In what ways do you experience the cursedness of work in the work that you do?

Read Colossians 3:22-25. How does this passage help us understand how to worship God at work? What needs to change in your heart to bring you into full obedience to this passage?

What would be different about your workday if your heart was sincerely and solely fixed on pleasing Jesus Christ?

What are some specific ways you can increase your attitude of worship at work?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Confess to God the specific sinful motivations you have had toward work.
- Ask that God would help you to be motivated in your work by the fear of the Lord and for the glory of the Lord.
- Pray that God would use you and your work to glorify his name and to be a witness to others. Pray for the specific people who are impacted by your work – children, co-workers, clients, customers, etc. – that they would come to know Christ through your work and your witness.

### GETTING STARTED

Good restaurants. Movies. Destination vacations. Grandchildren. Sports teams. What do all of these things have in common?

These are all things that we love to tell other people about. You go with your spouse to a new restaurant, experience a mouthwatering meal, and the first thing you want to do is tell your friends all about it. Your favorite sports team blew out their opponent on Sunday afternoon and you post all about it on social media by Sunday evening. If you are a grandparent, who haven't you told about your beautiful grandchildren?

Why do we do this? Why do we love to share these kinds of things with other people? Here's the reason: When we delight in something, when we really love it, we are compelled to share it with others. We experience so much joy in the thing that we love, that we want to bring others into that joy with us. It actually increases our joy when we do it.

This truth about us is the reason why worship and evangelism are so closely connected. Evangelism happens when we love Jesus so much, we delight in him so wholeheartedly, that we can't help but tell others about him. Evangelism is an overflow of worship. As our hearts swell in response to who Jesus is and what he's done, our mouths open to tell others the good news that has so fully captivated us. We find so much joy in worshiping Jesus that we can't help but invite other people into that worship with us.

### DIGGING DEEPER

In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus reveals two truths about himself that lead us to worship him and that motivate us to embark on the disciple-making mission he has called us to. Those two truths are the absolute authority of Jesus (v. 18) and the everlasting presence of Jesus (v. 20).

#### **THE ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY OF JESUS (MATTHEW 28:18)**

The claim that Jesus makes in verse 18 is massive. It is the foundation of our mission as a church. It is the key motivator for our evangelistic efforts. He says, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth."

Jesus tells us that he is the ruler of the universe. Standing before the disciples, issuing the marching orders of the greatest mission the world has ever seen, is the Almighty God himself, ruler and maker of heaven and earth.

This truth about Jesus should lead us to bow down and worship him like the disciples did in Matthew 28:17 – "When they saw him, they worshiped him." But it should also lead us to stand up, put on our sneakers, and run with the good news of the gospel to as many friends and neighbors and nations and peoples as we can.

Jesus is the king of the world, so we should desire to bring as many people as we possibly can into his kingdom with us. And Jesus is our king, so we should respond in joyful obedience to his authoritative command for us to make disciples.

### **THE EVERLASTING PRESENCE OF JESUS (MATTHEW 28:20)**

Jesus reveals another precious truth about himself in Matthew 28:20: “And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Evangelism can be a scary and uncertain business. Although in our society we don't often face persecution to the extent of physical danger, it is nonetheless scary to put yourself out there by proclaiming a gospel message that most consider offensive. And we can't be certain how it will turn out. Will they mock us? Will they report “inappropriate behavior” to our boss? Will they stop being our friend? Will they think we are crazy fools? Or, will they repent and believe in Jesus? We just don't know. The results are uncertain.

But here is one certainty that can give us confidence and hope when we share the gospel: Jesus will always, always be with us. When we are scared or nervous, he will be there with us to embolden and strengthen us. When we share the gospel and are unsure how people will respond, we can know that the God of all authority and power is right there with us, and that he has the power to change this person's heart.

These truths about Jesus should captivate our hearts and lead us to worship. They should produce a burning desire within us to tell everyone we know about our absolutely authoritative and ever-present King Jesus.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **2 Corinthians 5:20**

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

What are the things in your life that you delight in most? What can you not help but share with others and bring them into?

What is evangelism like for you? What have been your greatest evangelism failures and victories?

Read Matthew 28:18-20:

- How should the absolute authority of Jesus impact the way you approach sharing your faith?

- How should the everlasting presence of Jesus impact the way you approach sharing your faith?

What concrete steps do you need to take with your REACH contact based on this week's discussion?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Pray that your affections for Jesus would be so great that you can't help but talk to others about him.
- Ask that God would give you many opportunities to worship him by sharing the gospel with others.
- Thank God for giving you the great privilege of being his ambassador – that he makes his appeal to a lost world through you.

### GETTING STARTED

At First Baptist we want to be people who grow. And to find out how to be people who grow, the first question we need to ask is this: Where does growth begin in the Christian life?

We can find an answer to this question in Luke 14:25-33. The answer that we find in that passage is this: growth in the Christian life begins with Jesus. Growth begins when we follow Jesus. The biblical word for this is discipleship. A disciple is someone who follows Jesus with all of life and for all of life.

### DIGGING DEEPER

In Luke 14:25-33, Jesus exhorts us to consider the cost of discipleship. In doing so, he teaches us three truths about what discipleship is:

#### **1. DISCIPLESHIP IS ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS.**

When you hear the word discipleship, what comes to mind? For many of us, discipleship is synonymous with a Saturday morning men's breakfast or a Tuesday women's luncheon. We often define discipleship as an event to attend. But in Luke 14:25-33 Jesus talks about discipleship in a radically different way. He defines discipleship not as an event to attend, but rather a person to follow.

At the very center of Christian discipleship is Jesus Christ. He is the goal. The call of Christian discipleship is the call to follow after Jesus wherever he goes. Jesus tells his disciples: "come after Me" (Lk. 14:27). To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to pattern your life after his life. We are called to "walk in the same manner as He walked" (1 Jn. 2:6).

#### **2. DISCIPLESHIP IS ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS WITH YOUR WHOLE LIFE.**

Following Jesus means going all in with all of life. It means holding nothing back from Jesus. It means that he is Lord over everything in our lives. He rules over our families, our relationships, our bedrooms, our possessions, our minds, and even our lives. It means that every single aspect of our lives is now about following Jesus.

This is what Jesus is talking about when he calls us to take up our cross (Lk. 14:27). What do you think of when you think of a cross? Perhaps you think about church architecture or jewelry or decorations in your house. The disciples would have thought about a Roman death instrument. This is what the imagery of a cross meant for them. Jesus is calling the disciples to die to themselves, to forsake ownership of their lives for the sake of following Jesus, to die to the pursuit of self-satisfaction so that they may pursue Jesus (Mark 8:34-35).

### **3. DISCIPLESHIP IS ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS FOR YOUR WHOLE LIFE.**

Discipleship is not a one-time event. Discipleship is not just walking an aisle and making a one-time decision to follow Jesus. It is daily walking with Jesus and daily making decisions to follow him for the rest of life. A disciple is a lifelong follower of Jesus.

Jesus makes this clear in Luke 14:28-30:

For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who are watching it will begin to ridicule him, saying, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish."

What is important here is not this man's initial decision to build a tower, but his ability to complete the tower. The man faces ridicule precisely because he decided to begin building but was not able to finish building.

A true disciple of Jesus is one that becomes a disciple of Jesus and stays a disciple of Jesus for life. Certainly, there are ups and downs and ebbs and flows, but the life of the disciple is the life of enduring fruit.

True discipleship isn't flashy and temporary like a firework show. It is consistent and enduring like an ever-burning candle or a city set on a hill. Jesus teaches us that true disciples of Jesus Christ continue to pursue him for all of life.

#### **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

##### **Mark 8:34-35**

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

What is the most significant thing that you do in your life that you know you wouldn't be doing if it wasn't for your relationship with Jesus?

Read Luke 14:25-33. How does Jesus' definition of discipleship differ from how we usually think about discipleship?

Read 1 John 2:6. How would your life look different if you patterned it after the life of Jesus?

What is in your life right now that is holding you back from Jesus? What is your motivation for keeping it there? What would it look like to get rid of it?

What would a Monday morning look like for you if you denied yourself and pursued Jesus wholeheartedly?

Think about your relationship with Jesus in 30 years. What do you want it to look like then? What do most you want to change in your walk with him between then and now? How can you begin working toward that change today?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Praise God for all that he is for you in Christ.
- Pray that God would give you grace to follow Jesus with all your life and for all your life.
- Pray that your discipleship group would be a place where you are helped to follow Jesus and where you help others follow Jesus.

### GETTING STARTED

People who grow are people who change. When God saved you, he removed your heart of stone and replaced it with a heart of flesh – a heart that responds to his Word and gradually transforms to look more like Christ. Today we are going to discuss some biblical principles concerning how that process of change happens in the Christian life.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **PEOPLE CHANGE THROUGH RADICAL AMPUTATION (MATT. 5:27-30)**

All sin is serious. Every single time we sin we commit an infinite offense against an infinite God. Just one sin is enough to condemn us to hell forever. This is why Jesus had to become a man and die for us.

But there are some sins in the Christian life that take such a deep hold on our hearts that we will never stop doing them until we completely cut ourselves off from them. Until we take very practical steps to cut off every possible avenue of access to these sins, our enamored hearts will keep bringing us back again and again.

Jesus teaches us what we have to do with sins that have a stronghold in our hearts. We have to cut them off. We have to take the radical measure of amputating them from our lives.

This means doing whatever it takes – throwing away your phone, changing your job, deleting your social media accounts, ending a relationship – to sever pathways to sin from your life. For instance, if you are overcome with envy every time you open your Facebook, you should delete it. If every device with internet on it in your home tempts you to look at pornographic images, you should cancel your internet and throw away your devices. As John Owen said, “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”

#### **PEOPLE CHANGE THROUGH PUTTING OFF AND PUTTING ON (COL. 3:8-14)**

The Bible regularly talks about change in the Christian life with the language of “putting off” and “putting on.” We change in the Christian life by putting off the old self and putting on the new self.

We put off the attitudes and emotions and practices of sin that accord with our old manner of life because this is no longer us. We have been renewed. We have been set free. We have been redeemed in Christ. So, day by day we seek to gradually put off this old manner of life.

And the way that we do that is by putting on the new self. The new self is our identity in Christ – it is the new us that was created when we were born again to a new and living hope.

Change in the Christian life looks like putting off sin and putting on Christlikeness. Jesus is at

the very center of this change. We put off sin because we know how grievous our sin is to God, so grievous that Christ had to die for it on the cross. We put on Christlikeness by looking to Christ's supreme value and worth, believing that in him is the path to life, in him is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11). The truth of the gospel motivates us day by day to put off sin and put on Christlikeness.

For instance, in the Christian life we put off malice and anger and we put on love and forgiveness because of the way that God has loved and forgiven us in Christ (Eph. 4:31-5:2). The gospel truths of God's grace and love and forgiveness in Christ are what motivate us to forsake hate and embrace love toward others.

Not only is Jesus at the center of this change, but the Holy Spirit empowers this change. The Spirit renews our minds and gives us the power we need to put off the works of the flesh and to put on the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-24).

### **PEOPLE CHANGE THROUGH GRADUAL PROGRESS (2 CORINTHIANS 3:18)**

Growth in the Christian life is a gradual process. People change to become more like Christ over years of faithfully putting off sin and putting on Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18 shows us how someone progressively changes over time to look more and more like Christ. It's really quite simple: they look at Jesus. They stare at Jesus day after day and as they stare at him, they become more like him.

This is by no means a call to inaction. Looking to Jesus day after day is war. Sin is like a lion crouching at your door waiting to devour you. It will distract you and eventually destroy you if you let it. The way that you will grow in the Christian life is to fight day after day to see and savor Jesus Christ (Heb. 12:1-2). Fight to love him more supremely. Fight to trust him more deeply. Fight to share him more fervently. And as you fight day by day, you will progressively grow in Christlikeness.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **Galatians 5:22-23**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

In what ways have you seen God transform you since you came to know Christ?

Read Matthew 5:27-30. Why do you think Jesus is so serious about sin here? What sins exist in your life that you need to radically cut off?

Read Colossians 3:8-14. Describe the process of change that Paul lays out for us in this passage. What do you need to put off and put on in your life? What motivates this change?

Read Hebrews 12:1-2. What in your life tempts you to turn your eyes away from Jesus? How can we help one another fix our eyes on Jesus?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Praise God for removing your heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh that responds to his Word and is able to be transformed into his image.
- Ask that God would help you to kill sin aggressively in your life.
- Ask that God would give you a new and fresh desire for seeing and savoring Jesus.

### **PRAY**

Take time to share prayer requests related to your “one.” We can labor hard and long but if God doesn’t give the increase our efforts are in vain (Psalm 127:1-2). Spend time as a group praying for one another and for those you are striving to reach.

### **PRAISE**

Discuss any REACH praise updates. We want to celebrate all that God is doing through you reaching out to others. Be sure to celebrate even the “smallest” steps taken such as getting to know someone more or inviting them over to a home. Be sure to celebrate gospel conversations and certainly rejoice when someone trusts in Jesus Christ.

### **PRESENT**

Use this as a time to present to your group where you are in the REACH process with your “one.” This will help you hold one other accountable and encourage one another to continue making progress.

### **PLAN**

After hearing where each group member is in the REACH steps, help one another plan the next step forward. For instance, if someone is stuck in the step of “greeting” and is afraid to get to know someone more, then brainstorm questions they can ask their neighbor next time they see each other. If someone has invited someone over for dinner two or three times, but is now scared to share Christ, then help them plan ways they can engage their neighbor in a gospel conversation.

### GETTING STARTED

The Bible is the fuel that causes the engine of change to run in the Christian life. People who grow are people who are deeply devoted to hearing and reading and studying and memorizing and meditating on and applying the Bible (Psalm 1; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3-12).

If you want to be a person who grows in Christlikeness, you will be a person who is deeply devoted to the Bible. You will be a consumer of the Bible. This week, we will discuss how to change through consuming the Bible.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### PREPARING TO CONSUME THE BIBLE

Before we discuss the various methods and practices of taking in the Bible, we need to discuss how we prepare our hearts to receive the Word.

#### RECEIVE THE WORD REVERENTLY (1 THESS. 2:13)

The Bible is the Word of God. It really is! If you want to hear the voice of God, all you have to do is open your Bible and start reading. As we approach the Bible to receive its teaching, it is important that we approach it with a reverence that reflects what we are reading – the words of the God of the universe to us!

#### RECEIVE THE WORD DEPENDENTLY (1 COR. 2:14)

It is important that we realize that we cannot truly understand the words of God revealed to us in Scripture without the Holy Spirit illuminating them for us. When we come to take in the Bible, we need to do so with a posture of conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit to help us understand God's Word and apply it to our hearts and lives.

#### RECEIVE THE WORD ACTIVELY (JAS. 1:22)

We cannot expect to remain unchanged when we devote ourselves to God's Word. It isn't like a Tom Clancy novel that we read for entertainment and leisure. The Bible is "living and active" (Heb. 4:12). When we come to the Bible we have to be ready to act upon its instruction as it acts upon our hearts.

#### HOW TO CONSUME THE BIBLE

Now we will discuss the various avenues by which we can take in the Bible.

#### HEARING THE BIBLE (NEH. 8:8)

Regularly listening to the Bible is one of the fundamental ways to receive the Word in your life. The primary way that every Christian should hear the Bible on a weekly basis is

through sitting under faithful preaching. As you gather together with your church family for corporate worship, the very center of the service is the reading and preaching of God's Word.

You shouldn't take this opportunity to hear the Bible lightly. As you hear the Word read and proclaimed, you should be expecting God to transform your heart and you should be looking for ways to respond to God as he speaks to you through his Word.

In addition to sitting under the preaching of the Word during corporate worship, there are other ways you can devote yourself to hearing the Bible:

- Attend Sunday School
- Listen to an audio Bible while you drive, exercise, etc.
- Listen to sermon podcasts

### **READING THE BIBLE (MATT. 22:31-32)**

The next foundational avenue of taking in the Bible is reading the Bible. Jesus (and the biblical authors) simply assume that people who desire to grow in their relationship with God will be faithful readers of the whole Bible.

What follows are some practical tips that will help you establish a Bible reading routine in your life:

- Set your time. Bible reading is a discipline. It is an infinitely valuable daily appointment with God. Your schedule should reflect the importance of this appointment. Ask yourself the question: When are you most likely to be attentive and responsive to God's Word? Are you a morning person? Late night owl? Mid-afternoon warrior? Give the best time of your day to the disciplined reading of God's Word. Hearing from God is the most important part of your day.
- Set your pace. You should come to your Bible reading time with some idea of how much you will read. You need to know your limitations concerning how much you can read while still retaining it.
  - Read widely. Reading through the whole Bible in one or two years is a great goal. Plenty of guides and resources are available to help you do this. Ask a pastor or your Grow Group leader to recommend one.
  - Read deeply. Slow down your pace and read over a smaller portion of Scripture slowly and meditatively. Like a good steak, you want to take small bites and really savor the flavor. Take a small passage and read it over and over again. Seek to understand every aspect of it. Use the FEAST method to get as much out of it as you can.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **James 1:22**

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

What Bible devotion routines do you have in your life? Based on this session, how would you like to strengthen them?

Read Psalm 1, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, and 2 Peter 1:3-12. According to these passages, what impact does Bible consumption have on the Christian life?

What is the biggest change you need to make to prepare better for consuming the Bible?

What is your favorite method of consuming the Bible? Why?

Read Psalm 119:11. Why is it important to store God's Word in your heart? What role does Bible memory and meditation play in your life? How can you grow in this area?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Praise God for revealing himself to us in his Word. Thank him especially for the sufficiency of the Bible – that it is adequate to grow us into Christlikeness in every area of life.
- Ask that God would help you to grow in the disciplines we discussed this week – hearing the Bible, reading the Bible, and memorizing the Bible.
- Pray for the other members of your Grow Group – that God would help them grow in receiving his Word and that God would transform them by the power of his Word.

### GETTING STARTED

Last week we discussed the discipline of consuming the Word – people grow as they hear, read, and memorize God’s words to us in the Bible. This week we are going to discuss another pillar of growth in the Christian life: prayer.

Prayer is both an attitude of our hearts and an act of our will. In our hearts we lean upon God in dependence moment by moment. As we constantly lean on him, we express our great need to him in the words of prayer. People grow through prayer as they consciously and consistently express to God their utter dependence upon him.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### WHY SHOULD YOU PRAY?

Most of us assume that we should pray. But oftentimes our motivations are misplaced: We pray because “it’s what good Christians do.” We pray before a meal out of social obligation. We pray in an attempt to earn God’s favor.

The Bible helps us understand the proper motivations for prayer. Below are a few of the most important ones: Jesus enables our prayers (Eph. 2:18).

One of the greatest blessings of our redemption is that we now have unlimited access to God. Hebrews tells us that by the blood of Jesus we have unfettered access to God’s presence (Heb. 10:19). As adopted children we can now draw near with confidence to his throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace in time of need (Heb. 4:16).

#### **GOD EXPECTS OUR PRAYERS (MATT. 6:6-8)**

Jesus assumes that his disciples will pray. God expects that his children will talk to him and depend upon him in prayer. It is the great privilege of the children of God that the all-powerful, sovereign King of the universe hears and answers our requests.

#### **GOD ANSWERS OUR PRAYERS (1 JN. 5:14-15)**

Amazingly the sovereign God of the universe, whose decree stands from the beginning to the end, hears the prayers of his children and answers them. This is the greatest motivation to prayer in the life of the Christian. Prayer is effective. It is powerful. God uses our prayers to bring his sovereign purposes to pass. This glorious truth should drive us to pray fervently for every matter that burdens our hearts, no matter how small or how big that matter may be.

#### HOW DO YOU PRAY?

Now that we have discussed the motivations for prayer, we can move on to the practice of prayer. Below are some practical steps that you can take to grow in your prayer life and as a result grow in Christlikeness.

## PRAY.

This may seem simplistic, but it is true. The most basic way that you will grow in your prayer life is by praying. Prayer is a discipline. It is something that is learned. And like any discipline, the way to grow in it is by practicing it over and over again.

So, determine to pray. Make a plan that includes a scheduled time and a plan for what you will be praying about – a passage of Scripture, a list of names, a prayer book like *The Valley of Vision*, etc.

## PRAY THE BIBLE

“I lose focus.” “I run out of things to say.” “I’m not sure if I’m praying the right things.” These are some of our biggest barriers to prayer. We get distracted. The thoughts and words just don’t come to us. We doubt whether our prayers please God.

One surefire way to overcome all of those barriers is to pray the Bible. You can take any passage of Scripture and turn it into a prayer. You can add this to your morning devotion. Spend five minutes reading a passage and meditating on it. And then spend another five minutes praying through that passage. Read one verse and then pray it back to God. Thank him for its truth. Ask him to help you apply it. Pray about whatever that truth brings to your mind.

## PRAY WITH OTHERS

Praying together with other Christians provides multiple opportunities for growth in your prayer life. Not only do the members of the prayer group hold one another accountable to prayer, but they also learn from one another’s prayers.

In addition to small groups that are dedicated to praying with one another, there are other ways to learn from the prayers of others:

- **The prayers of Scripture** – When you come across someone praying in Scripture (David in the Psalms, Jesus in the Gospels, Paul in the Epistles, etc.), make note of how they are praying and strive to emulate their example.
- **Church services** – Pay attention to the prayers of your pastors and other leaders. Seek to imitate them in prayer as they imitate Christ.
- **Books** – Books of prayers like *The Valley of Vision* can provide great examples for prayer. Christian biographies of godly men and women often include some of their written prayers that you can learn from.

## VERSES TO MEDITATE ON

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week’s Grow Group session.*

### Matthew 6:6

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

How is your prayer life? What are you happy about in your prayer life? What are your greatest struggles and failures with prayer? What one step of growth would you like to take in your prayer life?

When in your life have you been most motivated to pray? When have you most lacked motivation to pray?

Read Ephesians 2:18, Matthew 6:6-8, and 1 John 5:14-15. How do these passages motivate us to pray?

What specific changes do you need to make to your prayer life to improve it? How and when will you implement these changes?

### GROUP PRAYER

- Open up Psalm 23 with your Grow Group and pray through it together until you get through the Psalm or you run out of time. Follow the instructions for praying the Bible: “Read one verse and then pray it back to God. Thank him for its truth. Ask him to help you apply it. Pray about whatever that truth brings to your mind.”

### GETTING STARTED

This week we are going to discuss a topic that may seem out of place here: helping others grow.

People who grow also help others grow. One of the biggest steps of growth you can take in the Christian life is to become a person who helps other people grow. The biblical terminology for this is “making disciples.”

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### THE REASONS TO HELP OTHERS GROW

Why should we help others grow? The Bible gives us several reasons:

##### THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

The way that Jesus turned the world upside down was by choosing twelve people and intentionally helping them grow. He imparted the gospel to them and empowered them to take it to the ends of the earth. He called them to go and help others grow in the same way he helped them grow. And the result is that the world was turned upside down.

If we want to turn our city, our country, and our world upside down with the power of the gospel, we will follow Jesus’ example of making disciples.

##### THE COMMAND OF JESUS (MATT. 28:18-20)

According to Jesus, the mission of our lives is to help people follow Jesus in obedience. The mission of our lives is to help people grow.

##### THE EXPERIENCE OF JOY (1 THESS. 2:19-20)

When God works through us in another person’s life to help them follow Jesus more fervently and love Jesus more passionately, we get the joy of seeing the fruit of our labor for the Lord. We get the joy of looking forward to the day when Jesus returns and all the work that God did through us in the lives of others is revealed in full.

##### THE GLORY OF GOD (2 COR. 4:15)

We help people grow because we want God to get the maximum amount of glory from our lives and from the lives of others. The more people that you help to see and savor Jesus Christ, the more people that will give thanks to God for the indescribable gift that we have in him. And the more thanksgiving abounds, the more glory goes to God.

#### THE RESOURCES TO HELP OTHERS GROW

So how do we actually help people grow? Here are some of the primary tools that God wants us to use in making disciples:

### **THE BIBLE (2 TIM. 3:16-17)**

The Bible is the most important tool in your disciple making tool belt. It is the primary means by which we will help people grow to be more like Christ.

The Bible should take center stage when you meet together with the person you are helping to grow. Read through books of the Bible together. Read books about the Bible together. Talk about the Bible together. Pray through Bible passages together. Use the Bible in their life for its intended purpose: “training in righteousness.”

Our call as people who help others grow is to pass on the transforming power of the Bible to the ones we are helping (2 Tim. 2:2).

### **LOVE (1 JN. 3:16)**

We will help others grow when we love them like Christ loved us. Christ laid down his life for us at the cross. We lay our lives down for others by serving them, weeping and rejoicing with them, investing time in them, having hard conversations with them about sin in their life, and much more.

This commitment to a loving relationship is essential to truly help people grow in Christ. People grow when the truth of God’s Word is imparted to them in the context of a loving relationship (Jn. 1:38-39; 1 Thess. 2:8).

### **INTENTIONALITY (HEB. 10:24)**

Helping others grow is not a passive affair. It takes intentionality. It takes planning and effort and diligence and discipline. Here are a few of the ways you can be intentional in helping others grow:

- Be intentional about who you disciple. Jesus went on a mountain and prayed all night before he chose his disciples. We should be intentional in our pursuit of disciples too.
- Be intentional about what you say. Always strive to be intentional about speaking the truth in love. Don’t just lecture; relate. Don’t just wing it; consider how to stir up your brother or sister for love and good deeds.
- Be intentional with your time and activities. Use your time to help others grow. This doesn’t just mean scheduled meetings in your office or at a coffee shop. Invite them over to your house for family dinner. Take them along with you to the grocery store. Ask them to help you do the yard work. This example will be impactful and transformative for them.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week’s Grow Group session.*

### **2 Corinthians 4:15**

For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

Have you ever been disciplined by someone else (other than in this group)? If so, what was it like? What did you gain from it? How did it impact your life?

Read Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, and 2 Corinthians 4:15. Which of these biblical reasons for helping others grow compels you the most? Why?

What obstacles exist in your life that make it hard for you to help others grow? How has this discussion addressed those obstacles? What do you need to do to overcome those obstacles?

Read 2 Timothy 2:2, 1 Thessalonians 2:8, and Hebrews 10:24. Which resources for helping others grow are you strong at using? Which are you weak at using? How can you use your strengths and grow in your weaknesses?

Where would you need to grow the most to lead your own Grow Group next year?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Praise God for allowing us to be a part of his mission for the world – to make disciples of all nations. Ask that God would allow you to take part in that mission through helping others grow.
- Ask that God would motivate your heart and equip you to help others grow.
- Pray that God would reveal three to five who you can lead in a Grow Group next year.



# LOOKING AHEAD

Over the last several weeks, we have been discussing the vital importance of growing in the Christian life. We ended that discussion this past week with the topic of helping others grow. The kind of people who grow in the Christian life end up being the kind of people who also help others grow (2 Tim. 2:2).

Now that we are over halfway through this Grow Group guide, it is an appropriate time to look ahead. What will be your next step once you have completed this Grow Group?

Our hope is that your next step would be to start up and lead your own Grow Group. Here's what that would look like:

- Identify a group of three to five people of your same gender
- Invite them to commit for one year to weekly Grow Group meetings led by you
- Walk them through this same guide over the course of a year

Just imagine the impact your Grow Group could have at our church if each person in your group launched their own Grow Group in the future. Say there are five people in your group. That means this time next year there would be five groups meeting. If each of those five groups had five members in it, and they each started their own group, the next year there would be twenty-five groups. Add another year to that and there would be one hundred twenty-five groups, then six hundred twenty-five the next year, and so on. In several years' time, thousands of people could be impacted by your work in leading a Grow Group.

Wouldn't you love to see a discipleship movement like that happen at our church over the next five years? Here are two things that you can begin doing right now to see that vision fulfilled:

- Ask God to show you three to five people for you to disciple next year in a Grow Group
- Start a dialogue with your Grow Group leader about your desire to lead your own group

### GETTING STARTED

What would compel a person to pour out their life for the sake of others? This is a question we are confronted with as Christians as we think about what Jesus did for us. He laid down his life on this earth so that we might have life for eternity.

But it is also a very relevant question for your life today. Because Jesus not only laid down his life for us, but he also calls us to lay down our lives in service to others (Mark 10:45).

This call of Jesus on our lives to serve others is why we at First Baptist are committed to cultivating people who serve. We want you to pour out your life in service to God and others. This week we will discuss why you should and can do that.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **THE CALL OF JESUS: THE ROAD TO GREATNESS (MARK 10:32-44).**

In Mark 10:32-45 Jesus shows us that the true pathway to greatness is found through serving.

Perhaps that seems a bit strange to you. What do you usually think of when you think of greatness?

If you were to ask a child what they want to be when they grow up, odds are they wouldn't say, "I want to be a servant." No, they would say, "I want to be an astronaut," or, "I want to be president," or "I want to be a pro football player." These responses reflect the definition of greatness that we use. We nod in hearty approval at these aspirations. Greatness means power, prosperity, possessions, popularity, prestige. It means you have everything that everyone wants. Or you have the authority to make others do what you want.

In this regard, we are much like James and John and the other disciples, who all wanted the position of primacy in Jesus' kingdom (Mark 10:35-41), or the rulers of Gentiles, who glory in their authority and lord it over their subjects (Mark 10:42). From a worldly perspective, a church filled with people pursuing greatness through serving one another is a strange spectacle.

But Jesus gives us a radically different definition of greatness in the kingdom of God – "whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all" (Mark 10:43-44). Greatness in the kingdom of God means servanthood; it means being a slave.

#### **THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS: THE ULTIMATE SERVANT (MARK 10:45)**

Jesus not only defines greatness for us, he also embodies it. Jesus is the ultimate servant: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). And as the ultimate servant, he exemplifies servanthood by sacrificially

giving himself over to the suffering of the cross for us (Mark 10:32-34). Jesus most fully revealed himself as the ultimate servant when he served us by walking Calvary's Road to the cross.

Little did anyone in attendance on Good Friday know that the road of pain and suffering and humiliation that Jesus was walking on was actually the road to greatness! When Jesus went to the cross to suffer and bleed and die, he did it to serve us by redeeming us. And God proved the greatness of Jesus' service when he exalted him on the third day by raising him from the grave.

Jesus shows us what serving looks like: pouring out our lives for the good of others. When we see Jesus' great example of servanthood, we are compelled to follow him on the path to greatness.

### **THE GRACE OF JESUS: THE FUEL OF SERVING (TITUS 2:11-14; 3:1-7)**

While Jesus' example of servanthood is inspiring, it is also insufficient. As broken, self-centered sinners, we need more than a great example to turn our hearts toward true greatness. We need Jesus to transform us. If we are going to trudge the long and arduous road to greatness by pouring out our lives in service, we are going to need him to empower us, we are going to need his grace.

Paul teaches us in Titus 2:11-14 and Titus 3:1-7 that the grace of Jesus is the fuel that ignites our passion to serve. The grace of Jesus, which "appeared" most clearly when he went the cross for our redemption (Titus 2:11; 3:4), not only saves us from the penalty of our sin, but also transforms our selfish, pleasure-seeking, other-hating hearts into hearts that desire to glorify God and love others. It is by the power of Jesus' transforming grace working in us that we can pour our lives out for the good of others. When Jesus served us on the cross, he paved the way for us to walk the road to greatness in the power of his grace.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **Mark 10:45**

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

When you think of greatness, what examples come to mind?

Read Mark 10:32-44. What is the difference between Jesus' definition of greatness and the world's definition of greatness?

Read Mark 10:45 and Philippians 2:3-11. How did Jesus embody and exemplify the greatness of servanthood?

In what situations of life is it easiest for you to live out Jesus' call to selfless service? When is it most difficult?

Read Titus 2:11-14 and Titus 3:1-7. Where do we get the power to serve others? What truths from these passages do you need to embrace and remember to help you serve others?

### GROUP PRAYER

- Thank God for sending Jesus to serve us by being a ransom for many.
- Ask that God would help you follow Jesus' example by journeying the road to greatness through serving.
- Ask for the grace of Jesus to ignite a passion for humble, selfless service in your heart.

### **PRAY**

Take time to share prayer requests related to your “one.” We can labor hard and long but if God doesn’t give the increase our efforts are in vain (Psalm 127:1-2). Spend time as a group praying for one another and for those you are striving to reach.

### **PRAISE**

Discuss any REACH praise updates. We want to celebrate all that God is doing through you reaching out to others. Be sure to celebrate even the “smallest” steps taken such as getting to know someone more or inviting them over to a home. Be sure to celebrate gospel conversations and certainly rejoice when someone trusts in Jesus Christ.

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Use this as a time to present to your group where you are in the REACH process with your “one.” This will help you hold one other accountable and encourage one another to continue making progress.

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After hearing where each group member is in the REACH steps, help one another plan the next step forward. For instance, if someone is stuck in the step of “greeting” and is afraid to get to know someone more, then brainstorm questions they can ask their neighbor next time they see each other. If someone has invited someone over for dinner two or three times, but is now scared to share Christ, then help them plan ways they can engage their neighbor in a gospel conversation.

### GETTING STARTED

At First Baptist we want every member to be a servant. This isn't a random desire. Our goal to cultivate people who serve isn't an arbitrary goal. The reason why we want our members to be servants is because servanthood is at the heart of every Christian's identity. What it means to be a Christian is to have Jesus Christ as your master.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### REDEEMED FROM YOUR SIN

Christians are people who have been redeemed from their sin. This redemption was accomplished for us on the cross, where Christ died in our place, taking away the wrath of God that we deserved (Gal. 3:13), lavishing his grace on us in forgiveness through his blood (Eph. 1:7-8), and delivering us into his eternal kingdom where we will reign with him forever (Col. 1:13-14).

This is the identity of every person who has repented and believed in Jesus. We abandoned our master by serving ourselves and our sin instead of him, but in his grace he has forgiven us and redeemed us. Now, more than ever, we should willingly pour out our lives in grateful and glad service to him (Rom. 12:1-2).

#### RECLAIMED FOR YOUR MASTER

As Christians, we are a redeemed people. We have been freed from our bondage to sin. But the reality of our redemption is even greater than that. We haven't only been freed from sin. We've also been freed for God. When God redeemed us he also reclaimed us. He freed us from the illegitimate master of sin and brought us back to our true master: the Lord Jesus Christ. No longer are we servants of sin. We are now servants of God (Rom. 6:22).

Our identity as redeemed servants of God leads to a radical transformation of how we live our lives:

- We now live for God's glory (1 Cor. 6:19-20)
- We now pursue God's righteousness (Rom. 6:19)
- We now proclaim God's excellencies (1 Pet. 2:9)
- We now serve God's people (Mark 10:43-45)

#### LIVING AS A SERVANT

How do you live out your identity as a redeemed and reclaimed servant of God? This is a counter-cultural life. Our culture teaches us that the goal of life is to have as many other people serve us as possible. It even teaches us that God exists to serve us. How do you live as a

servant of God in such an environment? How do you resist the temptation to demand immediate praise and recognition for your good works? How do you live as a servant of the Lord with humility and joy?

### **ACTIVELY EMBRACE YOUR ROLE (LK. 17:7-10)**

Jesus helps us answer these questions with a powerful parable in Luke 17:7-10. We need to actively embrace the reality that we are unworthy servants. We don't even deserve to be servants. We don't deserve to be in the service of the king. We deserve wrath. We deserve hell.

But as unworthy as we are, we are recipients of God's grace through Christ. We have been redeemed from sin. We have been rescued from God's wrath. We have been reclaimed by God's kingdom and given eternal life. And because of these glorious realities – because God has served us in our salvation – we should count it an absolute privilege to be his unworthy servants. We should actively embrace this role.

### **EAGERLY AWAIT YOUR REWARD (LK. 12:35-37)**

God's grace is more abundant and lavish than we could possibly imagine. It is our privilege to be in the service of our master Jesus Christ. We would be infinitely blessed to continue serving him forever and ever without any recognition or reward.

But the truth is that there is a wonderful reward in store for the servants of God. The master will one day return and do the unimaginable – he will put on servants' clothes and wait on his slaves. Those who humble themselves in this world to serve the king with joy and humility, oftentimes going unnoticed and unpraised, will one day be exalted by the king himself. What a precious reward that awaits all those who serve King Jesus faithfully!

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **Romans 6:22**

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

How would you normally respond if someone treated you like a servant? What does your response say about what you think of yourself?

Read Galatians 3:13, Ephesians 1:7-8, and Colossians 1:13-14. What impact does the redemption that Christ accomplished for us have on our lives? What are some specific ways you've experienced freedom from sin in your life? Where in your life have you struggled to break free from sin's power?

Read Romans 6:22. How does our relationship to sin and to God change when we are redeemed? How does this change the way we live on a daily basis?

What are some ways you've seen yourself grow in having a servant's heart toward God and others? What are some ways that you need to grow more in this area?

Read Luke 17:7-10 and Luke 12:35-37. What do these parables teach us about our identity as servants?

### GROUP PRAYER

- Praise God for the redemption that he has accomplished for you in Christ. Praise him for setting you free from sin and bringing you into his service.
- Ask that God would help you to live as his servant by living for his glory, pursuing his righteousness, proclaiming his excellencies, and serving his people.
- Ask that God would help you resist the temptation of self-exaltation. Ask that he would help you actively embrace your role as an unworthy servant and eagerly await your final reward of exaltation.

### GETTING STARTED

Brett is a senior in college with a lot on his plate. By day he is a busy student, by night he is a waiter, and in between he's dating his girlfriend and saving up for an engagement ring. By the time Sunday morning rolls around he is exhausted. He rolls into church a few minutes late, drifts in and out of consciousness during the service, grabs lunch with some friends after, and heads home for an afternoon nap.

Doug and Janet are in the trenches. They have four under five in a 1500 square foot house. Doug has been working overtime to feed mouths and fund diaper supplies. Janet lives in a state of constant sleep deprivation and frenzy as she tries to manage the kids and the house. By the time the day is over they are both exhausted – they read a Psalm together, pray, and embrace the reprieve of sleep. Sunday morning comes around before anyone is ready for it. They are late every week, but they enjoy the opportunity to sit in silence for the first time all week as they listen to the sermon.

William and Ruth thought that things would slow down. Boy, were they wrong. Empty nester life presents all kinds of new occupations. They are travelling all the time to visit their children and grandchildren, Ruth's parents are beginning to require more and more of their attention, and they've visited more doctor's offices this year than in the past five years combined! Sunday's are the best day of the week. They enjoy their Sunday School class and the church service. But the day has just begun. Next is lunch with Ruth's parents. Then the grandkids who live in town are coming over.

As these stories show, busyness has a way of finding us. It also has a way of challenging what's important to us. When our lives look the ones we just looked at, we have to prioritize and spend our time on what we think is most important.

The question we are discussing this week is: Why should you, amid the busyness of life, make serving your church a priority?

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### WHY SERVE THE CHURCH?

Scripture gives us several reasons why this is a special calling on every Christian's life:

#### **WE SERVE THE CHURCH OUT OF LOVE FOR GOD (1 JN. 3:16-18)**

In 1 John 3:16-18 we are told how we can know that the love of God abides in us: when we love our brothers and sisters in Christ the same way that Christ loved us – by laying down our lives for them.

This love might look like working in the nursery, meeting a younger brother or sister in Christ

once a week at a coffee shop to talk about the Bible, visiting a shut-in, serving as an usher or a greeter, or teaching a Sunday School class. The point is that the local church is the main arena in which the love of God abiding in us is put on display.

### **WE SERVE THE CHURCH IN SERVICE TO CHRIST (MATT. 25:31-40)**

Jesus says that when we serve his brothers (our brothers and sisters in Christ) we are actually serving him. What an amazing reality!

Whether you serve in the nursery and change a diaper for your fellow church-member's child, clean toilets on a Saturday morning, or teach a Sunday School class, you are serving Jesus Christ.

### **WE SERVE THE CHURCH AS THE FAMILY OF CHRIST (MARK 3:31-35)**

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ reorients everything about your life – even who your family is. Jesus says that those who do the will of God (those who are his disciples) are his family. The church is his family. The church is our family. We really are brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our commitment to serving the church should reflect this reality – we are serving our family. This isn't a call to abdicate your responsibility to your flesh and blood family (1 Tim. 5:8), but rather an invitation to answer the special call that God places on every Christian: do good to the members of the household of the faith (Gal. 6:10).

### **WE SERVE THE CHURCH AS A TESTIMONY TO UNBELIEVERS (JN. 13:34-35)**

This might seem a bit counterintuitive. Surely, the way to be a testimony to unbelievers is to get outside of the church and show the love of Christ to those who don't know anything about it.

This is true (Matt. 28:18-20)! But that's not all Christ has called us to do. The mission field isn't just outside the church. It's also inside the church.

Jesus tells us that one of the most compelling markers of the disciples of Jesus Christ is the way they love one another. We can attract people to Christ and to the gospel by simply loving and serving one another in the church!

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **John 13:34-35**

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

What are the busyness factors in your life?

Read 1 John 3:16-18. What does love look like? What should it look like in your life?

Read Matthew 25:31-40. What is Jesus teaching in this parable? How should it affect our perspective on serving the church?

Read Mark 3:31-35. What claim is Jesus making about family in this passage? How does this challenge the way you think?

Read John 13:34-35. How does serving connect with reaching others? What are some ways that you can connect your REACH contact with other Christians from our church?

Which of the reasons for serving the church that we discussed here is most compelling to you? Which is most challenging?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Ask God to give you grace in the busyness of life.
- Ask God to tear down any barriers that are stopping you from serving the church.
- Ask God to supply the grace and strength and time and energy that you need to fulfill the special calling of serving the church that he has placed on your life.

### GETTING STARTED

How do you serve? Where do you get equipped to do it? How do you know where to do it?

The answer to each of these questions is the same: God uniquely and purposefully gifts every member of the church to serve.

This week we will unpack the following truth: God has gifted you to serve at First Baptist Church.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **THE SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (1 COR. 12:4-11)**

As Christians, each of us has received the Holy Spirit. The Spirit who lives inside of us sovereignly equips us with spiritual gifts so that we are able to serve Christ and his bride.

This is an amazing reality. It means that none of us has received a spiritual gift by accident. It means that as widely diverse as our gifts are, they all have a unified purpose in the sovereign will of the Spirit.

The Spirit has perfectly equipped each member of the body of Christ to fulfill their role for the sake of the whole body. Just like life gets hard when you are missing a body part like a hand or an eye, the body of Christ is harmed when one member forsakes their divinely appointed role (1 Cor. 12:12-26).

#### **THE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

God the Holy Spirit is the source of spiritual gifts. This means that our spiritual gifts are infused with divine purpose. That purpose is two-fold:

##### **GOD GIFTS US TO BRING HIMSELF GLORY (1 PET. 4:10-11)**

The ultimate purpose of spiritual gifts is the glory of God. The gifts that we receive from God are manifestations of his manifold grace – we don't deserve them. But God has given us the great privilege to be used by him for his kingdom purposes.

One of those purposes is that we would use the gifts that he gives us to serve one another – that the love of Jesus Christ would be put on full display as we pour ourselves out for one another's sake using the gifts that he has equipped us with and the strength that he supplies. When we serve one another in this way, the result is that God is glorified through Jesus Christ.

##### **GOD GIFTS US TO BUILD HIS CHURCH (1 COR. 14:12)**

When we use our spiritual gifts to serve one another, we contribute to the building up of the

church. As we teach one another and encourage one another and help one another and exhort one another and spur one another on to love and good works, we are glorifying God by building one another up in Christ. This is the purpose of spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:11-16).

## **IDENTIFYING AND USING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

Now that we know what spiritual gifts are and where they came from, we come to a crucial question: How do you find out what your spiritual gifts are?

### **SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES**

The Bible is the best place to start when it comes to discerning your spiritual gifts. As you study the Bible, look for ways that God has gifted and used others. Read through Old Testament narratives and discover how God used the saints of old to bless his people. Study the example of Jesus and his disciples in the Gospels. Examine the epistles and find out the different ways God intends his people to serve for his glory and his church.

### **ASK THE LORD**

As you search the Scriptures, ask God to burden you. Ask him to give you a passion and desire to serve God's people. Ask him to help you understand how you are to fulfill that passion and desire at First Baptist Church. Ask him to make the way clear for you.

### **SERVE**

As you are searching the Scriptures and devoting yourself to prayer, don't sit on your hands. Get to work! Find out what the needs are right now. Don't just stick to your comfort zone. Do things for the Lord and his people that are outside of your comfort zone. Who knows how God might grow you and what he might show you about yourself!

### **SEEK AFFIRMATION**

Identifying and using your gifts is a community project. God has placed you in a church community so that you can be encouraged and sharpened by those around you. As you serve where the needs are, seek affirmation from pastors and other lay leaders about your spiritual gifting. Ask a pastor to sit in on your Sunday School lesson and give you feedback. If you serve on a team like choir or Guest Services, ask your team leader to speak candidly about ways the Lord is using you and ways you can grow. Be open to critical feedback and suggestions for ways the Lord may have gifted you that you didn't know about.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **1 Peter 4:10-11**

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

What are some of the ways that you have served the church in the past? What are some of the ways that you are serving right now?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. According to this passage, what is the source of every spiritual gift? Why is that significant?

Read 1 Peter 4:10-11. What story can you tell about how God has brought himself glory through your serving or someone else's?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:12 and Ephesians 4:11-16. How does your current serving role result in the church being built up? What are some other ways that you can personally take initiative to build up the church?

Based on the discussion above, what practical steps do you need to take to identify your spiritual gifts?

### GROUP PRAYER

- Praise God for the gift of the Holy Spirit who lives in you. Praise him for the unity that exists in the church since we all have the same Spirit dwelling in us.
- Ask that God would help you to use your gifts for his glory and for the upbuilding of his body.
- Start praying that God would help you identify and use your spiritual gifts at First Baptist Church.

### GETTING STARTED

In order for a fishing expedition to be successful, there are many things you need to know before you go. You need to know the weather forecast to make sure that the seas will be suitable for your watercraft. You need to know the tides: Will it be high-outgoing tide, low-incoming tide, mid-tide? You need to know what kind of fish you will be attempting to catch and what kind of gear you will be using.

The same is true when it comes to being fishers of men. There are several things we need to know before we go. Today we will look at four things we need to know before we go to share the gospel with our friends, neighbors, co-workers, and family members.

### DIGGING DEEPER

Before we set out on the journey of sharing the gospel, we need to know:

#### **WHO WE ARE REACHING (MARK 4:1-20)**

In Mark 4:1-20, Jesus helps us understand the four spiritual categories that every single person we talk to falls into:

##### **ROAD SOIL (V. 4, 15)**

When you share the gospel with this person, Satan immediately comes and snatches the Word away. Their heart is hard, and they reject the gospel outright.

##### **ROCKY SOIL (V. 5-6, 16-17)**

When you share the gospel with this person, they immediately receive it with joy, but their faith proves to be surface level and false. They may love the good promises of life and peace and eternal security that the gospel gives, but they don't love the Christ who delivers these promises.

##### **THORNY SOIL (V. 7, 18-19)**

When you share the gospel with this person, they immediately receive it, but their faith is later proved false as it is choked out by the thorns of worldliness. They may be attracted to Christ and the gospel, but they ultimately love the world and the things of the world more than they love God.

##### **FRUITFUL SOIL (V. 8, 20)**

When you share the gospel with this person, they receive it and their life bears the fruit of true faith in Christ. This is the only soil that represents true saving faith.

#### **HOW THEY CAN RESPOND (ACTS 17:32-34)**

Acts 17:32-34 shows us that there are several ways that people can respond when you share the gospel with them:

**Rejection** – “Some began to sneer” (v. 32a)

**Consideration** – “We shall hear you again concerning this” (v. 32b)

**Saving faith** – “Some men joined him and believed” (v. 34)

It is tempting to think that we have only succeeded in sharing the gospel if someone responds with saving faith. But Jesus challenges our thinking on this point. He says that we are still blessed even when we are insulted and persecuted for sharing our faith (Matt. 5:10-12). In the face of rejection, we can still rejoice!

For the Christian sharing the gospel is always a winning choice. Because whether our gospel falls on rocky soil or fruitful soil, whether our call to repentance is met with faith or rejection, we know that we are doing the will of our Lord Jesus Christ and that he will bless us.

### **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE (EZEK. 33:1-6)**

In Ezekiel 33:1-6, God uses the illustration of a watchman to help us understand who is responsible when we share the gospel. The job of the watchman was to look out for any threats on the city and to make everyone aware when a threat was coming.

God says if the watchman sees a threat and speaks up, but the people in the city don't heed his warning and are killed, the people are responsible for their own lives.

But if the watchman sees the threat and he doesn't speak up and the people perish, the watchman is the one who is responsible for the lives of the people in the city.

The same is true in evangelism:

- We are responsible to speak the truth of the gospel and to call people to respond.
- They are responsible to respond to the truth of the gospel in repentance and faith.

### **WHO TO TRUST (1 COR. 3:5-9)**

We need to know that God is the one who causes our proclamation of the gospel to grow into the fruit of faith in a person's life. God is the one who breathes life into the words of the gospel as they come out of your mouth.

This means that that our fumbling of words can't stop God from working in a person's heart. It also means that there is no amount of articulateness or profundity in speech that can work the miracle of faith in a person's heart. We must trust that God will take our proclamation of the gospel and make it effective in that person's heart and life. God, and God alone, gets the glory when someone repents and believes!

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **Matthew 5:10-12**

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

What is the craziest story you have about how someone responded when you tried to share your faith with them?

Read Mark 4:1-20. How does Jesus explain the four soils? How might this parable help you make sense of how unbelievers in your life respond to the gospel? Which soil describes your REACH contact?

Read Matthew 5:10-12. How does this passage challenge the way you think about sharing the gospel?

Read Ezekiel 33:1-6 and 1 Corinthians 3:5-9. How do these passages clarify our role in sharing the gospel?

Based on this week's discussion, what is the next step you need to take with your REACH contact?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Ask the Lord to give you insight and wisdom into the spiritual state of your friends, neighbors, co-workers, and family members.
- Ask the Lord to help you be faithful to the call he has placed on your life to speak the gospel to as many people as you possibly can.
- Pray that God would help you to trust him to work mightily as you are faithful to share the gospel.

**PRAY**

Take time to share prayer requests related to your “one.” We can labor hard and long but if God doesn’t give the increase our efforts are in vain (Psalm 127:1-2). Spend time as a group praying for one another and for those you are striving to reach.

**PRAISE**

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After hearing where each group member is in the REACH steps, help one another plan the next step forward. For instance, if someone is stuck in the step of “greeting” and is afraid to get to know someone more, then brainstorm questions they can ask their neighbor next time they see each other. If someone has invited someone over for dinner two or three times, but is now scared to share Christ, then help them plan ways they can engage their neighbor in a gospel conversation.

### GETTING STARTED

Most of us have seen someone do the right thing with the wrong motive. A child obeys his mother and picks up the toys in his room not because he loves obedience but because he knows that he won't get that ice cream cone unless he does it. A politician spends the day picking up trash on the beach not because she cares about the environment but because it is really good PR. A husband cleans the dishes not because he loves serving his wife but because he's hoping it will put her in a good mood.

We can also do the right thing with the wrong motive in the Christian life. For instance, we can obey God's commands not because we love him but rather because we are afraid of the worldly consequences of not obeying him. We can read the Bible every morning not because we have a desire to know God more but rather because we are creatures of habit and we've done it for years.

This is even true of sharing the gospel. It is possible to share the gospel and have wrong motives when we do it. For instance, Paul tells us about one group of people that was motivated by selfish ambition when they preached the gospel (Philippians 1:15-18).

We want to guard ourselves from being like this group of ill-motivated gospel preachers. That's why in this session we will be discussing the right motivations for sharing the gospel.

### DIGGING DEEPER

We can summarize the right reason to share the gospel with one word: love.

#### **LOVE FOR PEOPLE (MATT. 9:35-38)**

Scripture teaches us that love for lost people should motivate us when we share the gospel. In Matthew 9:35-38, Jesus has compassion on people because they are lost – they are like sheep without a shepherd. He knows that if they do not repent and believe in him they will go astray into eternal destruction. The weight of his compassion for them leads him to focus on God's mission: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (v. 38).

#### **THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS' LOVE FOR PEOPLE**

We should strive to be like Christ by having compassion for our co-workers and neighbors and family members who don't know Christ. We should realize that they are on the path of eternal destruction and this should break our hearts. We should be willing to risk an awkward moment or a social offense in order to share with them the message of salvation through Christ.

## THE MOTIVATION OF JESUS' LOVE FOR PEOPLE

We can be confident that when we share the gospel with the lost people that we love, Jesus loves them infinitely more than we do. We will never be able to muster the same level of compassion that we see Jesus displaying in this passage. Why? Because the compassion of Jesus we see in this passage is the compassion of an infinite God of infinite love. This gives us confidence that as much as we love the people we are sharing with, God loves them infinitely more. This confidence should charge our evangelism and free us up to share the gospel boldly.

## LOVE FOR GOD

### COMPELLED TO PRAY (PS. 67)

More than perhaps any other passage in the Bible, Psalm 67 directs us toward God-centered motivations for sharing the gospel. We love God so much that we desire that his name be praised everywhere. This passage is a prayer to God that lost nations would praise God and bring glory to his name and fear him and experience his goodness and find joy and gladness in him. It is a wonderful prayer for you to pray for the lost people in your life.

### COMPELLED TO PERSUADE (2 COR. 5:11-15)

The ultimate right motivation for sharing the gospel is love for God. That's what Paul is talking about when, in 2 Corinthians 5:11-15, he says, "Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men." He is saying that we should be so awestruck and captivated by who God is for us in Christ, that we are compelled to persuade other people to repent and believe in him.

We desire for our Lord to be glorified so much that we aren't content when we are personally living for him; no, we desire for other people to live for him too. We have experienced the precious glory of worshiping the one true and living God to such an extent that we want everyone else we know to experience it too.

## VERSES TO MEDITATE ON

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### Matthew 9:35-36

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

What are some examples in your life of when you have done the right thing for the wrong reason?

Read Matthew 9:35-38. What does this passage show us about Jesus? How does it inform the way you should feel about the lost people in your life?

Read Romans 9:1-5. What is Paul expressing about his heart in this passage? How does this challenge the way you think about the lost people in your life?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-15. What role does the love of Christ play in your desire to share the gospel with others? What are some specific ways you can cultivate the love of Christ in your heart?

Based on this week's discussion, what needs to change in the motives of your heart? How and when will you work toward this change?

## GROUP PRAYER

Pray for your REACH contact using Psalm 67 as a guide:

- Pray that they would experience God's grace (v. 1)
- Pray that they would know God (v. 2)
- Pray that they would praise God (v. 3, 5)
- Pray that they enjoy God (v. 4)
- Pray that they would experience God's goodness (v. 6)
- Pray that they would fear God (v. 7)

### GETTING STARTED

When we enter into a conversation with someone, there are several connection points we can make between what they are telling us and the good news of the gospel. This week we will discuss how to get to the gospel in everyday conversations.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS

When you are in a conversation with someone, one of the best ways to pivot toward the gospel is by steering the conversation toward spiritual topics. There are several ways you can do this:

##### ASK ABOUT THEIR CHURCH EXPERIENCE

- “I had a really interesting experience at church this past week. What have your experiences with church been like?”
- “I’m having some friends over from my church tonight for a barbeque. Some great people. What have your interactions with church people been like?”

These are examples of open-ended questions that can help people come out of their shell and interact with you on a spiritual topic. They can be a great set up for a gospel conversation.

- If someone responds that they have met some really nice people at church, you can respond by explaining why church people are so joyful – they know the Savior Jesus Christ.
- If someone responds that they have had terrible experiences with church, you can respond by acknowledging that church should have been a place where they experienced the welcoming love of Jesus because Jesus shows us his welcoming love in the gospel.

##### LISTEN FOR SPIRITUAL LANGUAGE

Oftentimes unbelievers will use spiritual language to describe or interpret their experiences. Here are some examples and how you can use this spiritual language to steer the conversation toward the gospel:

- **Them:** “Who knows where I’d be if it wasn’t for the man upstairs.”
- **You:** “Well I’m glad you are here. I didn’t know you believed in God. Tell me more about that.”

#### SIN CONNECTIONS

Oftentimes in our conversations with people, they will share with us how sin is affecting their lives (*even if they don’t know that’s what they are doing*). You can get into this kind of conversation with someone by asking a simple question: “What’s been the most difficult part of your week?” Or even simpler, “How was your week?” Here’s some of the things that this question may reveal:

- **Conflict:** “I had a big argument with my wife. It really gets under my skin when she spends too much money at the store.”
- **Hopelessness:** “I can’t stop thinking about the shooting that happened this week. It’s all over the news. Will this ever stop?”
- **Guilt:** “I missed my son’s basketball game again. I feel like a lousy father.”

Each of these responses provides you a connecting point to talk about sin and how it relates to Christ:

- **Conflict:** “Jesus reconciles us to God and others” (Eph. 2:11-22)
- **Hopelessness:** “Jesus is our living hope” (1 Pet. 1:3)
- **Guilt:** “Jesus provides forgiveness to guilty sinners who repent and believe” (1 Jn. 1:9)

## SUFFERING CONNECTIONS

Identifying a person’s sorrow, suffering, or needs is another great way to steer the conversation toward the gospel. Jesus came to bring hope to the brokenhearted (Isa. 61:1), and you can be the agent of that hope in your conversations.

One of the best ways to identify how someone suffering is by asking how you can pray for them. People oftentimes respond to this question by sharing the things that are weighing most heavily on their heart. Once they share, you can respond in two ways:

### GIVE THEM GOSPEL HOPE

- **Them:** “Pray for my health. I was just diagnosed with cancer.”
- **You:** “I am so sorry to hear that. I completely understand why you are worried. Jesus tells us that we can come to him with these kinds of burdens and he will give us rest (Matt. 11:28). He says those who repent and believe in him can be at peace no matter what is going on because their eternity is secure. I’m going to pray you that Christ will give you this peace.”

### PRAY THE GOSPEL OVER THEM

One great way to share the gospel in this context is to do what you’ve already asked them about: pray for the burden they shared. When you pray, don’t just pray for physical healing or relief. Pray the truths and promises of the gospel over them:

“Father, I pray that Joe would experience the comfort and peace of knowing Jesus Christ during this time. I pray that he would rest in the promise that those who repent and believe in Jesus have an eternity of joy ahead of them. I pray that you would even use this circumstance to help him to turn to Jesus.”

## VERSES TO MEDITATE ON

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week’s Grow Group session.*

### Colossians 4:3-4

At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

What are some methods that you have used in the past to get to the gospel in your conversations with unbelievers? Which have worked well? Which ones haven't worked?

Read Acts 17:16-34. How did Paul approach his conversations with the Athenians? What can we learn from this?

Read Matthew 11:28, Ephesians 2:11-22, 1 Peter 1:3, and 1 John 1:9. How do these passages show the relevance of the gospel for everyday life? What other passages in the Bible show this?

What are some specific ways you can implement the things you've learned in this discussion in your conversations with your REACH contact? What spiritual, sin, or suffering connections can you make between them and the gospel?

### GROUP PRAYER

- Ask God to open the door for you to share the gospel with your REACH contact this week (Col. 4:3).
- Ask that God would open your mouth to share the gospel this week (Eph. 6:19).
- Ask that God would help you have a heart of worship toward him in evangelism – that you would be a person who shares because you love Christ and enjoy telling others about him.

### GETTING STARTED

So far, we have discussed how to prepare your heart and mind for sharing the gospel and how to get into a conversation about the gospel. To use a maritime metaphor, we have discussed how to prepare the boat for sailing and how to launch the boat. Now it is time to set sail on a gospel conversation.

### DIGGING DEEPER

Remember that the gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ died and rose for sinners so that whoever repents and believes in him might receive forgiveness and eternal life. There are several ways you can share this message that can take anywhere from two minutes to two hours. Here are a few you can use:

#### YOUR TESTIMONY

Telling the story of your testimony can be a simple and effective way to share the gospel. The key in using your testimony to share the gospel is ensuring that the gospel is present in your testimony. Use the following format to ensure organize your testimony in a gospel-rich manner:

- Who I was before I came to know Christ
- How I came to understand the gospel and respond to it
- What my life has been like since I have known Christ

#### THE ROMANS ROAD

The Romans Road is a great collection of passages that you can use to take someone through the basics of the gospel. Since there are only five verses, you can commit these to memory without much difficulty. But you can also use this if you are talking with someone with a little more time and willingness, spending several minutes on each verse:

- Romans 3:10 – Core gospel truth: No one is righteous
- Romans 3:23 – Core gospel truth: Everyone has sinned
- Romans 5:8 – Core gospel truth: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us and rose again
- Romans 6:23 – Core gospel truth: The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord
- Romans 10:9 – Core gospel truth: A saving response to the gospel includes submitting to Jesus as Lord and embracing him as Savior

#### GOD, PEOPLE, CHRIST, RESPONSE

This is a simple, but more detailed explanation of the gospel that you can use to have a longer and more thorough conversation:

##### **GOD IS OUR CREATOR**

As the holy, righteous, loving, and eternal creator of all things (Gen. 1:1), God is the rightful owner and king. He has the right to tell his creation and subjects how to live. He deserves

our full obedience and total devotion. He is a God who abounds in love and forgives sin, but as a God of righteous and justice he will not leave the guilty unpunished (Ex. 34:6–7).

### **PEOPLE ARE GUILTY SINNERS**

God created Adam and Eve to worship and love their creator (Gen. 1:26–31). Instead, Adam and Eve rejected God’s authority and disobeyed his command by eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3).

The result is that sin has totally infiltrated our world and our hearts. The Bible says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” and “none is righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:23; 3:10). Our sin separates us from our creator and leaves us dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1–3).

### **CHRIST IS OUR SAVIOR**

God has responded to our helpless state by taking the initiative in saving sinners (1 Jn. 4:10). The Bible is a story of God redeeming rebellious people and reversing the effects of the curse, which began with the first sin in the garden.

God’s most decisive act in saving sinners came when he sent his only Son, Jesus Christ. Fully God and fully man, Jesus lived a perfect life on our behalf and then allowed himself to suffer and die a painful death on the cross. His death was offered as a substitution, as he took the place of guilty people whose sin earns them death (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:21).

But on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead, evidencing God the Father’s acceptance of his offering for sin and demonstrating himself to be the victorious king who now sits enthroned in heaven (Heb. 1:3).

### **OUR RESPONSE IS FAITH AND REPENTANCE**

The story of the gospel requires a response: faith and repentance (Mark 1:14–15).

Faith is reliance on God and trust that Jesus’ life and death counts for ours, so that we can have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. We acknowledge that we do not deserve these things and that, were it up to us, we would be declared guilty. But by faith in Christ alone, we are counted righteous (Rom. 4:4–5).

If faith is turning toward God through Christ, repentance is turning away from our sin. It is a commitment to hating and forsaking the sins that once separated us from our creator (Acts 3:19–20). Repentance is an ongoing reality of the Christian life, and will be until we die. No one reaches perfection in this life, but the Holy Spirit truly bears fruit in our lives as we regularly, by God’s grace, repent of our sins and trust in the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 7:9–10).

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week’s Grow Group session.*

### **1 Corinthians 15:3-4**

For I handed down to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

What gospel-sharing methods have you used in the past? Which ones have worked well and which ones haven't?

Prepare a 5-minute version of your testimony using the above format and share with the group how you would use it to share the gospel.

Prepare a 5-minute gospel presentation using "God, People, Christ, Response" and share it with your group.

Which gospel-sharing method do you need to use with your REACH contact? How and when will you use it?

### GROUP PRAYER

- Ask that God would help you clearly explain the gospel to your REACH contact.
- Ask that God would soften the heart of your REACH contact to the truth of the gospel.
- Ask that God would grow your confidence in sharing the gospel.

### GETTING STARTED

At First Baptist Church of Jacksonville we strive to cultivate people who give. We desire to see our members abounding in generosity. But that brings up the big question: Why? Why are we going to spend the next four weeks talking about money? Why do we as a church strive to cultivate people who give?

The simple answer to that question is because Jesus himself spent a lot of time talking about money. In fact, by some calculations 15% of everything Jesus said that is recorded in the Gospels is related to the topic of money. That's more than his teachings on heaven and hell combined.

Why did Jesus spend so much time talking about money? The reason is because money, and the way we relate to it, gives us a window into our hearts like most other things can't. How we use our money is a clear indicator of our spiritual condition. How we use our money demonstrates who or what we worship and love most. We will look at several passages in Scripture that drive this truth home.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### LOVE OF MONEY HINDERS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

##### **THE REJECTION OF THE RICH YOUNG RULER (LK. 18:18-30)**

When the rich young ruler asked Jesus what he must do to be saved, Jesus wisely challenged him at the heart level: "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Jesus was not saying that you have to sell all your possessions to be saved. He was revealing what this man truly worshiped.

This man loved his money so much that he chose to keep his money and lose Jesus rather than lose his money and gain Jesus. He loved money more than Jesus. He was a worshiper of money, not a worshiper of God.

His unwillingness to part with his money for the sake of Jesus revealed his unrepentant heart. His unrepentant love for money hindered his ability to follow Jesus.

##### **THE FOLLY OF THE RICH FARMER (LK. 12:15-21)**

In this parable Jesus shows us that a foolish use of money reveals a foolish heart. What made the "foolish rich man" foolish was not that he was rich or even that he enjoyed the produce of his riches. Rather, it was that he attempted to use his riches to gain lasting security. He invested in earthly comfort rather than his eternal well-being. And it turned out

to be a disastrous investment – the very night he made the purchase that he thought would bring him lasting ease, his soul was required of him and he lost it all.

How we use our money reveals what our true spiritual values are. It reveals whether worldly folly is bound up in our heart or godly wisdom is flowing from it. Jesus shows us here that foolish people trust in their riches in the place of God to their own eternal destruction, while wise people spend their riches for the glory of God to their own everlasting joy.

## **LOVE FOR JESUS TRANSFORMS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH MONEY**

### **THE SALVATION OF ZACCHEUS (LK. 19:1-10)**

In Luke 19:1-10 we find the story of Zaccheus' salvation. We see how his salvation transformed his entire life, and how this transformation was most clearly demonstrated in how he used his money.

When Zaccheus encountered Jesus his relationship with money was completely transformed. Instead of hurting others to get more money the way he did previously, he was now willing to give half of his possessions to the poor and give four times as much back to anyone he defrauded.

These actions did not save Zaccheus. Jesus saved Zaccheus. Salvation only comes through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. But the evidence of his salvation was a transformed life and attitude toward his money. Whereas before he was consumed with greed and sacrificed others at the altar of money, his love for Jesus led him to freely use money to honor God and love people.

### **THE GENEROSITY OF THE WIDOW (MK. 12:41-44)**

The story of the wise, poor widow is a glorious picture of what it looks like to be rich toward God. She did not have much, but she realized that what she did have belonged to God and was meant to be used for his glory. She made a worthy investment of her two cents that Jesus honored. She made an even more worthy investment than the rich people who put in large sums, because her total investment indicated that her heart belonged totally to the Lord.

How we use our money reveals our spiritual values. The foolish rich man valued his own worldly security and comfort. The wise poor widow loved her God supremely, even to the point of sacrificially giving for his glory.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **1 Timothy 6:10**

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

How would you describe your relationship with money?

Why do you think Jesus spent so much time talking about money?

Read Luke 18:18-30. How does the rich young ruler relate to his money? What does he do when he is presented with the choice to either keep his money or follow Jesus? What does this indicate about his spiritual condition?

Read Luke 19:1-10. How does Zaccheus' relationship with money change after he encounters Jesus? What does his new relationship with money say about what has happened in his heart?

As you think about your own relationship with money, who do you most resemble from the passages we have studied this week? Why? What changes do you need to make and when and how will you make them?

### GROUP PRAYER

- Ask God that the reality of your salvation would transform the way you relate to money.
- Ask that God would help you to relate to money in wisdom and not folly.
- Ask that God would help you invest yourself and your money in his kingdom for his glory.

### **PRAY**

Take time to share prayer requests related to your “one.” We can labor hard and long but if God doesn’t give the increase our efforts are in vain (Psalm 127:1-2). Spend time as a group praying for one another and for those you are striving to reach.

### **PRAISE**

Discuss any REACH praise updates. We want to celebrate all that God is doing through you reaching out to others. Be sure to celebrate even the “smallest” steps taken such as getting to know someone more or inviting them over to a home. Be sure to celebrate gospel conversations and certainly rejoice when someone trusts in Jesus Christ.

### **PRESENT**

Use this as a time to present to your group where you are in the REACH process with your “one.” This will help you hold one other accountable and encourage one another to continue making progress.

### **PLAN**

After hearing where each group member is in the REACH steps, help one another plan the next step forward. For instance, if someone is stuck in the step of “greeting” and is afraid to get to know someone more, then brainstorm questions they can ask their neighbor next time they see each other. If someone has invited someone over for dinner two or three times, but is now scared to share Christ, then help them plan ways they can engage their neighbor in a gospel conversation.

### GETTING STARTED

Advice abounds on how we should spend our money. A simple Google search reveals an infinite number of merchants who would tell you that you should spend your money on their product. Other sites tell you how to conduct a money makeover – kill debt, live on budget, exist within your means, invest wisely. Some advertisements even promise you a guaranteed path to being a millionaire in your 20s and a retired millionaire by your 30s.

While some of this advice is certainly good, and we want to do our best to be good stewards of the resources God has given us, none of it helps us with the subject we are covering this week. A Google search on how you should spend your money will yield plenty results about how to accumulate more wealth, but you would probably be hard pressed to find results about how to give your money.

The Bible has very clear instructions on how we should give. And that is the subject we will be discussing this week.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **GIVE SECRETLY (MATT. 6:1-4)**

Matthew 6:1-4 gets to the heart motive of our giving: Who are we giving for? If we are giving to be praised by people, we will make sure they know all about it. We will be glad receive the earthly reward of people's praise, but we will receive no reward in heaven.

But if we are giving to please God, we won't care who else knows about it. If this is our motive, we may not receive any earthly rewards for our giving, but we will receive an even better reward from our Father who sees us.

Jesus' emphasis here is on the motives of our heart. Do we give for the praise of man? Or do we give for the pleasure of God?

#### **GIVE SYSTEMATICALLY (1 COR. 16:1-2)**

The Apostle Paul teaches that our giving should be systematic.

This instruction includes regular giving - "On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save" (1 Cor. 16:2a). In application this could mean that you give every week or that you set aside funds every week (or pay period) and give once a month.

Paul's instruction here also includes proportional giving – "as he may prosper" (1 Cor. 16:2b). This means your giving should be in proportion to your income. As you receive income, you give out of your income

Regular and proportional giving is important because it supports the gospel ministry of the

local church (1 Cor. 16:1). Your regular and proportional giving to First Baptist Church funds the church's mission to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life and the church's desire to take the good news of the gospel from Jacksonville to the nations.

### **GIVE SACRIFICIALLY (2 COR. 8:1-9)**

In 2 Corinthians 8 Paul shows us two examples of sacrificial giving.

The first example is the Macedonians (2 Cor. 8:1-4). The giving of the Macedonians is remarkable because they gave even during a time of poverty. They gave according to their ability and even beyond their ability.

The second example is Jesus Christ – the ultimate example of sacrificial giving. We are called to give in the same way that Jesus gave for us: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

So, what does sacrificial giving look like?

It can start small. It can start with setting aside your Starbucks money and giving it away instead. That can be the beginning of sacrificial giving.

But inevitably sacrificial giving will include pain, because it hurts to sacrifice. It will mean doing without. It might mean skipping out on the new iPhone or eating out on the second vacation.

It will surely lead to a new lifestyle. It will mean that you don't live at the same level as others who have your same income and don't give. It will lead to a new understanding of the purpose of your money – you will begin thinking less about self-indulgence and more about God's mission and how your money will support it.

Ultimately, sacrificial giving will look like Jesus Christ. Sure, sacrificial giving is painful. Sure, it means your life will look different. But sacrificial giving is glorious. Because it puts the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ on display – that Jesus Christ gave of himself for us and for our sake. How sweet it is that we get to put that reality on display in the way we give!

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **2 Corinthians 8:9**

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Why do you think advice on how to accumulate wealth is so popular while instruction on how to give away wealth is so unpopular?

Read Matthew 6:1-4. What is the primary heart issue that Jesus is addressing in this passage? What does it look like for you to live in obedience to this passage?

Read 1 Cor. 16:1-2. According to this passage what is the purpose of systematic and proportional giving? Why is it important to keep this purpose in mind when we give?

Read 2 Cor. 8:1-9. How does our sacrificial giving connect to who Jesus is and what he has done? How does this change or challenge the way you think about giving?

What needs to change in the way you give based on the passages we discussed this week? How and when will you make that change?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Praise and adore God for the generosity of Jesus Christ toward you.
- Ask that God would help you be a secret, systematic, and sacrificial giver.
- Pray that God would be glorified and the gospel would be displayed through your giving.

### GETTING STARTED

In any great story the hero of the story has to overcome obstacles in order to accomplish his goal. Frodo Baggins has to overcome a long journey through rough terrain peppered with menacing orcs and giant spiders and evil men. He has to overcome the internal obstacle of the tempting Ring of Power that he carries around with him.

It is no different in the Christian life. To grow into the kind of people that God intends us to be we have to overcome obstacles. This week we are going to take one growth step as disciples of Christ by working together to overcome some common barriers to giving.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **BARRIER #1: LACK OF CONTENTMENT**

It is easy to buy into the logic of our culture when it comes to wealth and possessions. This logic says that ultimate contentment will come from maximum purchasing power. If we can purchase anything we want, then nothing will stop us from being happy. As everyone who reaches maximum purchasing power finds out, this is a lie from the devil. When we look to wealth and possessions for contentment, we are left unsatisfied.

The Bible teaches us a better way to relate to wealth and possessions by showing us several important truths:

#### **THE NATURE OF STUFF (1 TIM. 6:6-10)**

The reality of stuff is that we can only possess it while we live in this world. We didn't have it before we came into this world and we won't have it after we leave this world. Though we are called to use our wealth and possessions in eternally valuable ways, in and of themselves they have no eternal value. In fact, Paul is telling us here that the love of money is one of the most eternally dangerous things in the world. When we give ourselves to money instead of God, we are in eternal danger.

#### **THE CONTENTMENT OF CHRIST (PHIL. 4:10-13)**

While stuff will leave us ultimately lacking, Jesus will leave us ultimately satisfied. This is because he understood that an eternal relationship with God through Christ is the only thing that can satisfy the longings of the human heart (Psalm 16:11).

#### **THE MOTIVATION OF THE GOSPEL (2 COR. 8:9)**

Christ made himself poor by becoming a man and dying for us in order to give us the greatest possession in the universe – eternal life. This gift should drive us to contentment in him and willingness to give our treasures for his glory.

#### **BARRIER #2: LACK OF TRUST**

Some people struggle to give because they have a lack of trust in how their money will be used.

This concern is oftentimes rooted in a good desire to steward your resources well. You want your resources to be used for kingdom work.

But this concern can also be rooted in a lack of trust in God. You don't trust that God has grand purposes for your giving and that he is using your church to accomplish those purposes.

The best cure for this concern is knowledge. It is our commitment as a church to do everything that we do – including the stewardship of the financial resources you contribute – to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life.

We hold ourselves accountable to this commitment with our financial resources through the approval of our budget by our members, the oversight of our budget by our trustees, the communication of our budget through monthly financial statements, and the accountability of our budget through annual independent audits.

### **BARRIER #3: LACK OF URGENCY**

This barrier to giving can be found in questions such as:

- “Should I give now or wait until my investments perform well so that I can give more in a year or two?”
- “Should I give now or leave a large portion for my church in my will?”

These are great questions that have excellent motives behind them. Investing is one way to wisely steward your resources and increase your giving over time. Legacy giving is a wise, generous, and God-honoring use of your resources.

However, there are some real risks to playing the waiting game when it comes to giving. The economy may crash and you'll have even less to give. Or your passion for giving may wane and you won't follow through with your giving the way you planned to. Or your life may end before you gave what you wanted to give. When we consider our giving, we have to remember that only God knows and controls the future (Lk. 12:13-21).

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **Psalm 16:11**

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy;  
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

What have you learned so far about giving that you didn't already know? What has challenged you or encouraged you the most?

Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10. How does this passage combat the materialistic view of contentment that is pervasive in our culture?

Read Philippians 4:10-13. According to this passage, what is the source of true contentment? How have you found this to be true in your own relationship with Christ?

Read Luke 12:13-21. What does this passage teach us about the urgency of giving?

What additional barriers to giving might there be that we didn't discuss yet?

## GROUP PRAYER

John Wesley said, "Money never stays with me. It would burn me if it did. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible, lest it should find a way into my heart."

God gives us such clear instruction about giving in his Word because he wants our hearts. He wants to use your giving to move your heart toward him.

Pray that the Lord would use your faithful giving to move your heart in the following ways:

- Move your heart to care more about lost souls who are headed to hell.
- Move your heart to resist the lure of materialism and greed.
- Move your heart to care more about Christ's kingdom than your kingdom.

### GETTING STARTED

Over the past several weeks we have been discussing the topic of giving. At First Baptist we strive to cultivate people who give to the glory of God. But one important aspect of being a faithful and cheerful giver is your ability to steward the resources that God gives you.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### WHAT IS A STEWARD?

A steward is someone who has been given the right and responsibility to manage the resources of another. Their job is to take care of and improve the resources of their master.

A great example of what a steward does comes from J.R.R. Tolkien's classic story *The Lord of the Rings*. In the story one character named Denethor had the role of the steward of Gondor. His job was to care for and prosper the kingdom of Gondor until the day when the rightful heir to the throne of Gondor returned. While Denethor generally ruled the kingdom of Gondor well, he had one major flaw – he began to see himself as the king of Gondor instead of the steward of Gondor. He began to view the king's throne as his own throne, and this ultimately led to his untimely death.

Stewards are servants. They take the resources of their master and use them for their master's pleasure and honor. They use them according to their master's purposes.

#### OUR CALL TO FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

In many ways, the call to stewardship in the Christian life transcends finances. Everything we have is from God (Ps. 24:1). We are called to steward our children, our personal ministry, the good news of the gospel we have been entrusted with, and much more.

But our call to stewardship certainly includes our finances. The money and possessions that we have are God's money and possessions. They were given to us by him. And he intends for us to use them for his glory, according to his purposes.

When it comes to stewarding our finances well, there are several different biblical concepts we must consider:

#### **WORKING (2 THESS. 3:10-12)**

God commands us to work for our living. We produce the financial resources and possessions that he calls us to steward through hard labor.

Not everyone works in the same way. Some people work for hire and receive a paycheck. Other people work for the sake of others – such as a stay at home mom who works hard to raise her children, support her husband, and order her household. Others work in volunteer

or other informal capacities. Retirees have ceased from the day to day labor in which they engaged in their younger years, but they still manage the fruits of their labor through their 401k, pension, social security, etc.

## **BUDGETING**

A budget is a plan for how you will manage the wealth God has given you. It is your best effort at planning to use the resources God has given you in a way that pleases him and accomplishes his purposes. This includes what you will give, what you will spend, what you will save, and what you will invest.

In Luke 14:28-30, Jesus stresses the importance of counting the cost of building something before you actually build it. Otherwise, you'll get halfway done and have to endure the shame of overseeing a job that never reached completion. Jesus is mainly talking about counting the costs of discipleship. But it has a major application for budgeting too. When we plan ahead how we will allocate our resources for God's glory, we prevent the calamity of waste and financial failure.

In Matthew 25:1-10, Jesus tells a parable about ten virgins – five wise and five unwise – to stress the importance of being ready for his return. The wise and foolish virgins give us a good paradigm for the usefulness of budgeting. The five foolish virgins didn't plan ahead, and were left without the resources they needed. The five wise virgins planned ahead, and they were ready for the bridegroom to come.

Budgeting is all about thoughtful planning and disciplined appropriation of resources. When we are careful to budget our money wisely, we can use it freely to advance God's kingdom.

## **ENJOYING (ECCL. 5:18-20)**

Our call to financial stewardship – earning and managing the resources God has given to us – is not meant to be merely carried out with drudgery and dry obligation. It is meant to be carried out with joy and gladness of heart. God wants us to see the resources he has given us to manage as a gift from him. He wants us to enjoy those resources and allow our enjoyment of them to roll up into enjoyment of him.

## **VERSES TO MEDITATE ON**

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **Psalm 24:1-2**

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

How does viewing yourself as a steward of your financial resources rather than the master change the way you think about and relate to them?

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:10-12. What does this passage teach us about the role that work plays in the Christian life?

What physical and spiritual benefits has work yielded in your life? What difficulties and struggles has it introduced into your life?

Read the parables in Luke 14:28-30 and Matthew 25:1-10. What principles about budgeting can we learn from these parables?

What budgeting tools and methods have you used successfully that you might be able to share with the group?

Read Ecclesiastes 5:18-20. What does this passage teach us about enjoying the resources that God has given us to steward? What are some of the things that you most enjoy about the gifts that God has given to you? How does your enjoyment of those gifts roll up into enjoyment of God?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Praise God for the material and financial resources that he has given you to enjoy and steward.
- Ask that he would help you to cultivate a heart of gratefulness toward him.
- Ask that God would use your money in a mighty way in his kingdom.

SECTION 4  
**RECAP AND REVIEW**

## GETTING STARTED

If you have made it to this session, that means that you have spent almost an entire year in your Grow Group. That's amazing! Our hope is that you have experienced significant growth in the Lord over this past year. After all, the purpose of discipleship is that we grow together in the knowledge and likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## DIGGING DEEPER

One of the most encouraging things to do in the Christian life is to reflect back on how God has been faithful to you in the past. This is not only a way to be encouraged by what God has done, but it is also a way to gain confidence that God will continue to be faithful to you in the future. The psalmist shows us the importance of this practice in the Christian life:

*I shall remember the deeds of the Lord;  
Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.  
I will meditate on all Your work  
And muse on Your deeds.  
Your way, O God, is holy;  
What god is great like our God?  
You are the God who works wonders;  
You have made known Your strength among the peoples.  
You have by Your power redeemed Your people,  
The sons of Jacob and Joseph  
Psalm. 77:11-15*

It is our prayer that you have grown in the Lord in four very specific ways over the past year:

- **Character** – We hope that you have grown in godly character.
- **Content** – We hope that you have grown in your knowledge of God and his Word.
- **Competence** – We hope that you have grown more equipped to live the Christian life and to serve in God's kingdom.
- **Community** – We hope that you have grown strong godly relationships with your fellow Grow Group members that will continue to encourage you and sharpen you for years to come.

## VERSES TO MEDITATE ON

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

**Psalm 77:11-12**

I shall remember the deeds of the Lord; I will certainly remember Your wonders of old.  
I will meditate on all Your work, And on Your deeds with thanksgiving.

This week, we would love for you to spend some intentional time reflecting on how you grew and how you want to keep growing in each of these areas. Use the verses and questions below to recap how the Lord has worked over the past year. Use this opportunity to write down any impactful stories or lessons or insights that you gained. Use it to reflect on God's faithfulness to you through your Grow Group.

### **CHARACTER**

Read *1 Timothy 4:8* and discuss the following questions:

What is this passage teaching about the Christian life?

In what ways have you grown in “disciplining yourself for the purpose of godliness” this year? How have you grown in godly character? How are you more like Christ after this year?

In what ways do you desire to keep growing in godliness?

### **CONTENT**

Read *Colossians 1:9-12* and discuss the following questions:

What is the passage teaching about the Christian life?

In what ways have you “increased in the knowledge of God” this year? What have you learned about who God is? What have you learned about the Bible? How have you grown closer to God?

In what ways do you desire to continue growing in your knowledge of God?

## COMPETENCY

Read *2 Timothy 3:16-17* and answer the following questions:

What is this passage teaching about the Christian life?

How has this past year in your Grow Group helped you to be “equipped for every good work”? In what ways are you more equipped to serve God after this year? How have you grown in your gifting this year?

Where do you want to grow more in your equipping for work in the kingdom of God and in the church?

## COMMUNITY

Read *Hebrews 10:24-25* and answer the following questions:

What is the passage teaching about the Christian life?

In what ways did you grow in godly relationships with your brothers or sisters in your Grow Group? How did they encourage you? How did they stimulate you to love and good deeds? How did they help you overcome sin? How did you help them do these things?

How do you want to continue growing in deep gospel centered relationships in the future?

## GROUP PRAYER

- Spend time praising and adoring God for the faithfulness that he has shown you over this past year.
- Ask that God would use this time of intense and deep discipleship in your life to set you on a lifelong trajectory of growth.
- Pray for the other members of your Grow Group – that they would see God’s faithfulness over this past year and that they would continue growing in Christ too.

### **PRAY**

Take time to share prayer requests related to your “one.” We can labor hard and long but if God doesn’t give the increase our efforts are in vain (Psalm 127:1-2). Spend time as a group praying for one another and for those you are striving to reach.

### **PRAISE**

Discuss any REACH praise updates. We want to celebrate all that God is doing through you reaching out to others. Be sure to celebrate even the “smallest” steps taken such as getting to know someone more or inviting them over to a home. Be sure to celebrate gospel conversations and certainly rejoice when someone trusts in Jesus Christ.

### **PRESENT**

Use this as a time to present to your group where you are in the REACH process with your “one.” This will help you hold one other accountable and encourage one another to continue making progress.

### **PLAN**

After hearing where each group member is in the REACH steps, help one another plan the next step forward. For instance, if someone is stuck in the step of “greeting” and is afraid to get to know someone more, then brainstorm questions they can ask their neighbor next time they see each other. If someone has invited someone over for dinner two or three times, but is now scared to share Christ, then help them plan ways they can engage their neighbor in a gospel conversation.

### GETTING STARTED

Congratulations! You have made it to last session of your Grow Group. But even though in one sense your Grow Group is coming to an end, we hope that in another sense it is just beginning. We hope not only that you have built lifelong friendships with the other members of your Grow Group, but also that you have caught a vision for the necessity and impact of growing together with other believers. We hope that your experience with your Grow Group over the past year has inspired you to begin and lead your own Grow Group in the coming year.

### DIGGING DEEPER

#### WHAT'S NEXT?

One of the biggest steps that you can take in your walk with the Lord is transitioning from being disciplined to being someone who disciplines others. God wants you to take the godly growth that has been entrusted to you and pass it along to others who need to grow.

Just a little over halfway through this Grow Group guide, we encouraged you to begin considering being a part of a discipleship movement at our church by leading your own Grow Group. Here are the steps we encouraged you to take:

- Ask God to show you three to five people for you to disciple next year in a Grow Group
- Start a dialogue with your Grow Group leader about your desire to lead your own group

Now that you have been working on those three steps over the past few months, it may be time for you to take the next three steps:

- Identify a group of three to five people of your same gender
- Invite them to commit for one year to weekly Grow Group meetings led by you
- Walk them through this same guide over the course of a year

Below is the set of expectations that you agreed to that you can share with the prospective members of your group:

- I am eager to grow in my relationship with the Lord and I am entering into a year of accelerated pursuit of godliness.
- I will meet with my Grow Group for approximately one hour every week, unless providentially hindered.

- I will complete all my assignments on a weekly basis before my Grow Group meeting in order to contribute to discussion.
- I will seek to contribute to the conversation with humility, transparency, and genuine care for others.
- I am open to the possibility of leading a Grow Group in the future.

## VERSES TO MEDITATE ON

*Work on memorizing the following in preparation for this week's Grow Group session.*

### **2 Timothy 2:1-2**

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

Spend your final Grow Group session discussing your next steps:

What is God calling you to do next?

If you desire to start your own Grow Group, what stage of planning are you in? What are all the details? How can the other members of your Grow Group help you get your group started?

If you desire to start your own Grow Group, what are you most excited about? What are you most burdened to “entrust to faithful men (or women) who will be able to teach others also”?

What are your biggest concerns about starting your own Grow Group? What challenges do you think you will face?

How can the leaders of our church further equip you to take the step of becoming a Grow Group leader?

### GROUP PRAYER

- Pray that God would produce much fruit in the lives of each person in your Grow Group as a result of your time together over the past year.
- Pray that God would multiply the disciple-making capacity of our church through new Grow Group being formed, even out of your group.

The goal of Grow Groups is to help our church accomplish its mission of reaching all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life.

Here's how Grow Groups can do that:

### **ALL OF JACKSONVILLE**

The beauty of Grow Groups is that their goal is multiplication. Our vision is that each member of your current Grow Group would become a Grow Group leader next year, and then the members of their Grow Group would become Grow Group leaders the next year, and so on. If each group had three members, here's how many groups we could raise up:

30 groups this year becomes 90 groups next year

90 groups next year become 270 groups in three years

270 groups in three years become 810 groups in four years

810 groups in four years become 2430 groups in five years

So even if we just had three people in each group, in five years times we could have over 7000 people being disciplined through Grow Groups at our church. And that's only in five years!

*That's how you reach all of Jacksonville.*

### **ALL OF LIFE**

Our mission isn't just to get all of Jacksonville to attend First Baptist. Our mission is that all of Jacksonville would have their lives transformed from the inside out by Jesus Christ.

In order to accomplish that mission, we have to disciple people. We can't just get them to our church. We have to invest time into them teaching them how to live for God's glory in every area of their lives.

We can't do that on our own. We need to mobilize our people to become disciples of Jesus Christ who make disciples of Jesus Christ. And that is exactly what Grow Groups are designed to do.

What that means is that it is important that we do Grow Groups well.

### **SECTION 1: HOW TO LEAD YOUR GROW GROUP WELL**

Four practical ways to help the members of your Grow Group grow:

## I. GRIP THEM WITH THE VISION

Jesus gripped his disciples by teaching them about his vision for their lives. From the beginning to the end of his ministry on earth with the disciples, he was inspiring and motivating them with his ultimate missional goal for them:

*While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19-20).*

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).*

The vision for Grow Groups is that the people in your group would be:

- Growing disciples of Jesus Christ...
- Who make disciples of Jesus Christ

Leading with this vision and letting it grip the members of your group will lead your group toward right trajectory to accomplish our mission. Your goal is that your group would be the nucleus for a discipleship movement that will one day include thousands, and that the growth in Christ your group experiences would pass through them into the lives of others.

We want the members of your group to catch that same vision and begin working toward it under your leadership.

What are some specific ways you can do this?

### **1. Grip them with the vision when you invite them into your group.**

The vision of Grow Groups should be part of the first conversation you have with potential Grow Group members. Setting the long-term vision up front will help that person have the right expectations and hopefully will excite and motivate them to join a discipleship movement.

### **2. Grip them with the vision during your first meeting.**

Once you have your whole Grow Group assembled and you have your first meeting, this is another great time to remind your group of the long-term vision.

### **3. Grip them with the vision on a regular basis.**

Throughout the duration of our Grow Group, we should regularly remind them of the long-term vision. You can do this in various ways:

In your group prayer time, ask that the Lord would raise your group up as disciples of Jesus Christ who make disciples of Jesus Christ.

- A little over half-way through the Grow Group guide, you will come to the "People

Who Grow” sessions. The last session is “Helping Others Grow.” This will be a great opportunity to reemphasize the long-term vision.

- As the Lord leads, take opportunities to remind the group that the long-term vision is that the growth they are experiencing now would pass through them into the lives of others.

## **II. REACH THEM THROUGH GENUINE CARE**

Grow Groups are not just another Bible study. They are not just a social club.

Our goal is to build growing disciples of Jesus Christ who will go and make more growing disciples of Jesus Christ. In order for us to effectively accomplish this goal within one year, we must reach the members of our groups on a personal and relational level. We must reach them with genuine care.

This was the Apostle Paul’s model of ministry:

*But we proved to be gentle among you. As a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children, in the same way we had a fond affection for you and were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us (1 Thess. 2:8)*

Paul didn’t just preach the gospel to the people he disciplined (though he certainly did do that!), he also cared for them like a nursing mother cares for her children. He shared his life with them.

And the result was effective, fruitful ministry in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:2-10).

In a similar way, we want to foster growth in the members of our groups by reaching them with Genuine Care.

Here are some specific ways we can do that:

### **1. Pray for them regularly**

#### ***In private***

Add them to your prayer list and pray for them regularly.

Pray specific passages over them.

#### ***With the group***

Pray for them when you are praying together. This will help them see your love and care for them.

### **2. Invest in them relationally**

You should be making intentional efforts to invest in your relationship with each member of your group. Here’s some ways you can do that:

#### ***Ask genuine and loving questions***

- Ask for specific ways you can be praying for them and then ask for updates.

- Ask how their family is doing – learn the names of their spouse and children.
- Ask for updates on concerns, burdens, struggles, important events, etc. that they told you about.

***Spend time with each individual member outside of regular group meetings***

- Have their family over to your house or vice versa
- Include them in what you and your family are already doing
- Serve together at church or at a church or city serve project
- Plan a fun event together. Here are some ideas:
  - Attend a sporting event
  - Go shooting
  - Do an escape room
  - Play golf
  - Have a spa day
  - Go out to dinner with your families
  - Have a Christmas party

**III. ORIENT THEM TOWARD GODLINESS**

*Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4:15-16).*

The pursuit of godliness is a community project. As Grow Group leaders we are project managers. It is our job to set our Grow Group members in a direction that leads to godliness and Christlikeness.

Here are three ways that you can cultivate godly growth among your group members:

**1. Cultivate good accountability**

Growth in godliness is a discipline. And just like any other discipline, good accountability is key to cultivating it. You want to build an accountability culture in your Grow Group, where you are all walking in the light together. Here's some ways you can do that:

- Set long-term goals: "This year, I want to grow in Christ by..."
- Set specific goals: "This week, let's all take one step toward sharing the gospel with our one. We'll check in next week."
- Check in on weekly personal holiness and Scripture memory.
- Make sure to complete monthly REACH Check-Ins.
- Lead by confessing your own sin struggles – be transparent.

**2. Facilitate good discussions**

The key word here is "facilitate." The goal is not for you to be the master teacher and for your group to be the pupils. The goal is for you to draw them into discussions about the

Bible and about their lives and about how the two intersect.

Below are some general tips for how to lead an effective group discussion:

***Prepare***

- You shouldn't need to spend more than a couple of hours per week preparing to lead the Grow Group discussions.
- However, it is important to review each session carefully and to thoroughly think through each discussion question.
- Carefully plan how much time you will spend overviewing the content of each session. Make sure that you spend most of the time with your group in the discussion questions.

***Ask open-ended questions***

- Your task is not to teach a lesson or provide Bible answers, but rather to facilitate discussion.
- Asking open-ended questions helps facilitate thoughtful and engaging discussion in your Grow Group.

***Ask follow-up questions***

- Sometimes a person will speak up, but what they say is relatively surface level.
- Asking follow-up questions helps the person go deeper and helps the conversation move forward.

***Listen well***

- Some of us may be tempted to slide into "teacher mode" and make the discussion time about delivering content.
- You can serve your Grow Group well by listening well when people speak up and basing your facilitation of the discussion on what they say.
- Keep an eye on the clock.
- A good, well-rounded Grow Group discussion usually takes about 45 minutes
- If the discussion goes much past an hour, people generally begin getting antsy.
- Try to bring the discussion to a close when you start approaching the hour mark.

**WITH THESE TIPS IN MIND, A GOOD, HOUR-LONG GROW GROUP SESSION PROBABLY LOOKS SOMETHING LIKE THIS:**

**BEGIN WITH RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

*(15-20 minutes)*

- Ask about highs and lows from the week.
- Follow up on specific challenges or growth steps from the previous week.

- You can ask the group to come ready to talk about something: “How are you using the Bible to disciple your family?”
- Check in on evangelism, personal holiness, and Scripture memory.

### **SUMMARIZE THE SESSION FOR THE WEEK**

*(5 minutes)*

- Explain the week’s topic and the main points of the session.
- You may also ask a group member to come prepared to do this.

### **DISCUSS THE SESSION FOR THE WEEK WITH YOUR GROUP**

*(35-45 minutes)*

- Go through discussion questions.
- Ask open-ended questions like, “What stuck out to you from the session this week?” or “What was encouraging or convicting to you?”
- You may also ask a group member to come prepared to do this.

### **CLOSE IN PRAYER**

*(5-15 minutes)*

- Invite the members of your group to pray.
- Pray through the suggested prayer prompts in each section.
- Pray for one another.

### **3. Expect Real Growth**

We are viewing the members of our Grow Groups as the nucleus for a church-wide, and by God’s grace, city-wide discipleship movement. If that’s the case, we should raise the bar for what we expect from our Grow Group members.

- Expect them to attend your Grow Group meetings
- Expect them to do all their work
- Expect them to share openly about their struggles
- Expect them to take real steps of godliness, even uncomfortable ones

### **IV. WATCH THEM FOR MULTIPLICATION**

The ultimate goal of Grow Groups is multiplication. The growth in Christ that our Grow Groups experience should multiply out exponentially. The three people who are growing in Christ in your group should turn into nine people growing in Christ next year, and twenty-seven the year after that, and so on.

So, we should be carefully watching our Grow Group members for signs that they are growing into the kind of people who can replicate their growth in Christ in the lives of others.

Paul encourages Timothy to watch for these kinds of people:

*And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2).*

Here are some questions you can ask yourself to evaluate where your Grow Group members are at:

- Are they growing in their love for and knowledge of God and his Word?
- Are they growing in their love for others and skill in genuine care for others?
- Are they growing in godliness? Has there been measurable growth in their walk with Christ?
- Are they ready to lead a Grow Group session?

Once you start noticing growth in these areas in some or all of your Grow Group members, you should start empowering them as future leaders:

- Talk to them about how you lead your Grow Group
- Ask them to lead a Grow Group session
- Encourage them to begin intentionally engaging others in discipleship relationships and to give you feedback about it

## **SECTION 2: HOW TO INVITE SOMEONE INTO MY GROW GROUP**

Choosing who will be in your Grow Group is one of the most important decisions you will make for the fruitfulness of your group.

### **WHO SHOULD I INVITE INTO MY GROW GROUP?**

As you are praying and looking for people to invite to your group, remember that you are looking for people who ACT:

#### **A - Available**

Availability is the basic requirement for someone you would invite into your Grow Group.

- Can they make themselves available for weekly Grow Group meetings?
- Will they have time to read the material, answer the discussion questions, and memorize Scripture?
- Are they open to giving more of their time and energy to grow in Christ and help others grow in Christ?
- Are they open to the possibility of leading their own groups the following year?

#### **C - Committed**

Potential Grow Group members need to be not only available, but also committed.

- Do they faithfully attend church?
- Do they faithfully serve in the church?

- Have they shown commitment in other groups in the past?
- Are they committed to growing in Christ and helping others grow in Christ?

### **T - Teachable**

A humble and teachable spirit is an absolute necessity for a good Grow Group member.

- Do they have a desire to learn and apply God's Word?
- Do they respond to the teaching of God's Word with faith and obedience?
- Are they open to loving criticism and correction?
- Are they prone to dominate and hog time in group conversations? Or do they listen well and contribute when appropriate?

## **SECTION 3: THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF LEADING A GROW GROUP**

Helping others to grow to know and love and honor Jesus is what Jesus has called each of us to. It is costly work, but it is glorious work. Below are some of the costs and benefits of leading a Grow Group.

### **THE COST**

The first thing we have to acknowledge is that there will be a cost to leading your Grow Group. It will be a sacrifice. Consider the cost of leading a Grow Group from two different angles:

#### *The Cost of Time*

Leading a Grow Group will cost you time. For starters, you have committed to meet with this group for forty sessions over the next year. But this is just the tip of the iceberg in a healthy group. For starters, you will need to spend time in study preparing for those sessions.

Then, if your group is connecting well and you are leading them faithfully, the members of your group will want to meet with you one-on-one to talk through specific things, you will have evening phone calls with them and field late night text messages from them. They will ask you to pray for them in various ways, which means that you will need to spend extra time in your prayer life praying for their requests. You will become a significant leader and example in their lives, which inevitably means that you will begin spending more of your time with them and praying for them.

All this means that leading your Grow Group will cost you time.

#### *The Cost of Love*

As the leader of your Grow Group, you have been called to care for the members of your group with the love of Jesus Christ. This means that you have been called to persevere in pursuing them even when they are avoiding you. This means that you have been called to keep loving them even when they are being difficult. This means that you have been called to ask for forgiveness when you sin against them, and to forgive them when they sin against you. This means that you have been called to humbly receive criticism from them when they give it, and to humbly provide criticism and correction to them when they need it. This means that you are going to have to have hard and uncomfortable conversations with them even when you don't know how they are going to respond.

This is what love looks like in a discipleship relationship. And this is the price you are signing up to pay.

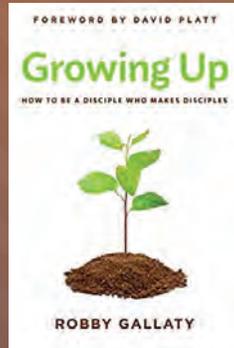
### *The Benefit*

While the cost of leading a Grow Group is high, the benefit is glorious. By God's grace, you will get to see the members of your group growing and becoming more like Jesus. This will be an exhilarating and satisfying experience. There is something truly wonderful about watching God use your feeble and meager efforts to do something glorious in another person's life.

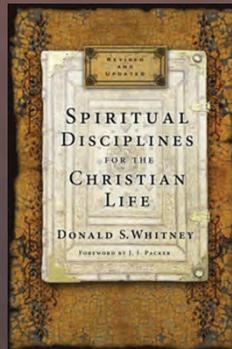
But the ultimate benefit of leading a Grow Group is that it gives you an opportunity to serve and glorify God. Week by week you will have the assurance that you are fulfilling the call that Jesus placed on your life: "Go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19). As you work week by week to help the members of your group follow Jesus, you can have the joy of knowing that you are working to bring God more glory by striving to shape the members of your group into more faithful God-glorifiers.

*For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God (2 Corinthians 4:15).*

# RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



GROWING UP  
Robby Gallaty



SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES OF  
THE CHRISTIAN LIFE  
Don Whitney





**FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH**  
JACKSONVILLE