

NEW
EDITION



GROW
GROUPS

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH JACKSONVILLE

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

OUR MEMBERSHIP COMMITMENTS

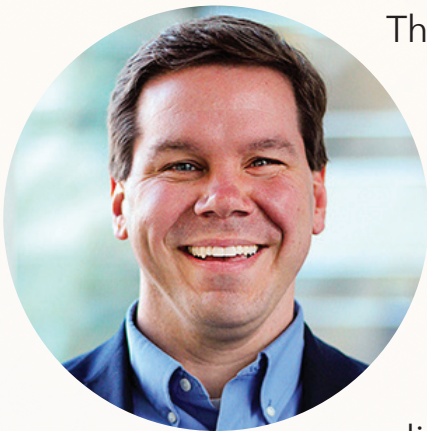
WORSHIP in a service.

GROW in a group.

SHARE where you are.

GIVE to the mission.

SERVE on a team.



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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SHARE WHERE YOU ARE - CHECK-INS

Every four weeks, complete a "Share" check-in with your group using the following format:

PRAY

Take time to share prayer requests related to sharing where you are. 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 praise updates related to sharing where you are. 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 your 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 any progress you've made sharing where you are. This will help you hold one another accountable and encourage one another to continue making progress.

PLAN

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

SECTION 1

OUR MISSION

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 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, we find ourselves in a very similar scenario from a human perspective. 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 odds, 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

Our church's mission statement is "reaching all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life." Let's break down this statement to understand what it means and then discuss why we must accomplish it.

UNDERSTANDING OUR MISSION

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 spiritually dead, people who are following 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 for at least three reasons:

1. 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).

2. 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).

3. 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 place - the city of 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 - lives 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.

ACCOMPLISHING OUR MISSION

Now that you understand what our church's mission is, we have a very important question to answer: How will we accomplish it?

FINDING A WAY (ACTS 28:28-31)

The crucial call of every member 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.

1. 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 ministering 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 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.

2. 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. "Is this whole mission of reaching our city with all of Jesus for all of life just a fool's errand?" we wonder.

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 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 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

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 with 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.

VERSE FOR MEDITATION

Matthew 28:19-20

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."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. 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?
2. 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 have you failed to do what God has called you to do?
3. 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?

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

OUR CORE VALUES

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.

In this session 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.

DIGGING DEEPER

WHO JESUS IS

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 is 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:

1. 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.

2. 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).

3. 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).

4. 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).

WHAT JESUS HAS DONE

THE LIFE OF JESUS

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 his death in several wonderful and glorious ways:

1. 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!

2. 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).

3. 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 sins, 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:

1. 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).

2. 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.

VERSE FOR MEDITATION

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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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

2. How would you explain who Jesus is and what he has done to someone who has never heard it before? What passages of Scripture would you go to?

3. 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?

PRAYER

- Spend time praising God for who Jesus is and what he has done.
- 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.

GETTING STARTED

Why would a group of people commit themselves in totality to a book? And why is this the book we call the Bible?

In this session, we will answer that question by exploring what the Bible is and learning how to build our lives upon it.

DIGGING DEEPER

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

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 completely 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 faith in 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 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.

THE BIBLE AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Jesus teaches us how we should relate to the Bible in our Christian lives. He does this by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

Consuming food is important to sustain our physical lives. But even more importantly,

consuming the Word of God is vital to sustain our soul. What does it look like to be a Christian that consumes the Bible?

PREPARING TO CONSUME THE BIBLE

Before we discuss the various methods and practices of taking in the Bible, let's consider a few ways we can prepare our hearts to receive the Word:

1. 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!

2. 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.

3. 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:

1. 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 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 in worship and obedience 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.

2. 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.

VERSE FOR MEDITATION

James 1:22

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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

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

3. In what ways has the Bible sufficiently addressed the concerns and struggles of your life?

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 in Christlikeness in every area of life.
- Ask that God would help you grow in the discipline of consuming the Bible.
- Pray for the other members of your Grow Group - that he would help them grow in receiving his Word and that God would transform them by the power of his Word.

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 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. This change happens when we recognize why we need genuine care and how God empowers us for genuine care.

DIGGING DEEPER

WHY WE NEED GENUINE CARE

We need genuine care because we are broken people living in a broken world. This reality is summarized for us in 1 Thessalonians 5:14: "We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone" (1 Thess. 5:14).

This verse shows us three important categories of broken people living in a broken world who need genuine care. At one point or another, each of us will fall into each of these categories.

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

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.

Jesus is the greatest encouragement that we can give to one another amid our suffering because Jesus entered into suffering to accomplish our salvation (Heb. 2:10-11). By taking on human flesh, Jesus joined 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

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).

GOD'S POWER FOR GENUINE CARE

It is very difficult to love and serve other people. A church that is committed to 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.

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:

1. 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.

2. 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).

3. God's Redemptive Power Leads to Forgiveness (Eph. 4:31-32)

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.

VERSE FOR MEDITATION

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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some burdens that you are carrying that you need others to help you carry?
2. 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?
3. 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?

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

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 whomever 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.

This week, we learn about the what, why, and how of serious joy in 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).

A worshipper is someone whose heart is gripped by the grace of God and whose life is marked by obedience 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.

WORSHIPPERS 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.

WORSHIPPERS 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 a living sacrifice (v. 1). They realize that worship isn’t just about singing on Sunday morning; it is about offering ourselves to God with every breath we take, every thought we think, every decision we make, every action we take.

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

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

WHY WE WORSHIP

BECAUSE GOD IS PASSIONATE ABOUT OUR WORSHIP

God is absolutely passionate about our worship. The instructions that God gave his people of 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 worshiping 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:

1. 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 - worshiping 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.

2. 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.

BECAUSE GOD IS WORTHY OF OUR WORSHIP

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).

HOW WE WORSHIP

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 each Sunday to worship God through song, through observing the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and through the reading, praying, and preaching of God's Word.

On Week 9: Worship in a Service, we'll discuss corporate worship in more detail.

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).

VERSE FOR MEDITATION

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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think about a normal day in your life. How would it be different if you offered yourself wholly to God?
2. What does worship look like in your life? What are your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to worship?

3. 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?

PRAYER

- Ask God to renew your mind and transform your life into a life of worshipping him.
- Ask that God would give you the humility and motivation to allow others to care for you in your suffering or struggles with sin.
- Pray for our church - that God would help us to worship him in spirit and truth and with serious joy during our worship services.

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

A MULTIGENERATIONAL PURSUIT OF GODLINESS

GOD DESIRES A YOUNG 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:

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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:

1. 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.

2. 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.

PASSING THE BATON

The image of passing the baton 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.

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:

1. 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.

2. 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 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 THAT EACH GENERATION 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 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.

VERSE FOR MEDITATION

Psalm 145:4

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How has God used a younger and/or older generation in your life to help you pursue Jesus?
2. How would you describe the legacy that you desire to leave in this world?
3. What are some of the ways that you are striving to pass the baton of godliness on to your children or to a younger generation? What are some ways that you would like to grow in this?

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

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.”

DIGGING DEEPER

WHY WE HAVE A BOLD PASSION FOR OUR CITY

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 the 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.

FOUR ESSENTIAL TRUTHS TO PREPARE US FOR REACHING OUR CITY

Our bold passion for our city motivates us toward a great plan: First Baptist Church will own the responsibility to share the gospel with every person in Jacksonville, Nocatee, and the surrounding regions. We believe that this goal is attainable with the help of God and the commitment of every single one of our church members.

But as we strive to reach this goal, there are four essential truths that we need to know about so that we are grounded on the right foundation.

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!

VERSE FOR MEDITATION

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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think Jesus would see and say if he took a walk with you in your neighborhood? How should this impact the way you view our mission to this city?
2. What is one story you have about how someone responded when you tried to share your faith with them?
3. Based on this week's discussion, what is the next step you need to be involved in reaching our community for Christ?

PRAYER

- 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.
- 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.

GETTING STARTED

From his time at Wheaton College, Jim Elliot had a burning passion for reaching lost people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In 1952, this passion took Elliot to the jungles of Ecuador with his friend Pete Fleming, where they would strive to engage and reach primitive tribes. Elliot would marry his wife Elisabeth in 1953, and they would have their daughter Valerie in 1955.

In 1956, Elliot and four other missionaries—Nate Saint (a missionary pilot), Ed McCully, Roger Youderian, and Pete Fleming—embarked on “Operation Auca” to make contact with the Huaorani people. Using Nate Saint’s plane, they began dropping gifts to the tribe from the air, hoping to build trust. Eventually, they landed on a sandy riverbank, setting up camp, and attempting to meet the Huaorani face to face.

Initially, their contact with the tribe seemed positive. A small group of Huaorani visited their camp and interacted with the missionaries. However, just days later, on January 8, 1956, the five missionaries were ambushed and killed by a group of Huaorani warriors. Their bodies were discovered later, floating in the river or on the riverbank, speared to death. Since the time of this tragedy, many have been critical of the actions that Elliot and his team took, saying that they should have not taken such great risks to reach a tribe that was known to be hostile to outsiders. Critics say that the missionaries should have left the tribe alone, without any attempts to engage them with the gospel. They say that Elliot wasted his life in vain.

At First Baptist Church, we don’t believe that these critics are correct. We believe that Jim Elliot and his companions died striving to accomplish the greatest mission the world has ever known - the mission to reach the nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The goal of this session is to show you why we believe that. We’ll discuss why we have a radical ambition for the nations at our church, and then we’ll discuss how we apply a radical ambition for the nations at our church.

DIGGING DEEPER

WHY WE HAVE 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.

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.

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.

HOW WE APPLY A RADICAL AMBITION FOR THE NATIONS

There are several different ways that we live out our radical ambition for the nations at our church.

MISSIONARY SENDING

As we saw earlier, Romans 10:13-15 stresses the importance of sending missionaries so that people can hear and respond to the gospel.

This is the vital mission that God has given to the church – proclaiming the gospel to and making discipling of all nations.

What this means is that we should be willing to send some of our best people out across the globe to spread the good news of the gospel. This goes against the grain of the way we typically think about church. Our instinct is to keep our best people and use them for the ministry that we are involved in. But God is drawing people to himself from **every** tribe, tongue, and nation, and that means that sending our best people is one of the greatest investments that we can make in his kingdom.

It is our hope that college graduates, young families, retired couples, and all kinds of people would launch from our church onto the mission field. You should seriously consider whether God is calling you to this great work!

MISSIONARY CARE

It is very common for missionaries to go onto the mission field and feel forgotten. We have a commitment that **none** of the missionaries that we send from our church will ever be forgotten.

As William Carey said to the friends that sent him onto the mission field, “I will go down into the pit, if you will hold the rope.” As our church’s missionaries descend into the darkness of a lost world, it is our responsibility to hold the rope for them.

There are several different ways that we do this:

- **We Pray:** Each year, our church produces a Missions Prayer Guide that lists all our church’s missionaries and their prayer requests. We encourage all our members to regularly pray through this guide, and we pray for one mission partner weekly in each of our Sunday School classes.
- **We Advocate:** Our church has a team of “missions advocates” that receive regular

updates from our missionaries and share those updates with their Sunday School classes. This ensures that our missionaries receive constant care, that their needs are met, and that they are able to share their most urgent prayer requests.

- **We Visit:** Our church regularly sends pastor led teams to visit our missionaries, refresh them in the Word, and meet any needs that they have.

SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIPS

Most of the people who end up on the mission field were inspired by a short-term mission trip that they went on. This is especially true for students and young adults.

Because of this, our church strives to provide as many opportunities as possible for our members to go on short-term mission trips. We especially focus on providing opportunities for "Next Gen" trips for First Students and College & Career.

Over the past year, we have seen missional zeal sparked in students and young adults who went on short-term mission trips. We designed these trips to not only give participants an opportunity to serve in a foreign country, but also to introduce them to as many missionaries as possible and allow them to learn what life on the mission field is truly like.

We focus on going on short-term mission trips that serve to accomplish the core missionary task of evangelism, discipleship, and church planting.

HE IS NO FOOL

Was Jim Elliot's death in vain? Our answer is a resounding "no". God's mission is to gather that nations to himself to worship the risen Lord Jesus Christ. And he has called us to participate in that mission by going. Jim Elliot died pursuing this great task.

Jim Elliot himself summed it up best. He wrote in his journal, ""He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Elliot understood that there are more important things than our physical life on this earth. There are eternal matters that are worth dying for. The great mission of the church - to reach the nations with the gospel - is one of them.

There is another wonderful sense in which Elliot's death was not in vain. His story took a remarkable turn when, years later, Elisabeth Elliot, Jim's widow, and Nate Saint's sister, Rachel, returned to live among the Huaorani. These women shared the gospel with the very people who had killed their loved ones, leading many Huaorani, including some of the murderers, to become Christians. The tribe, once feared for its violence, was profoundly transformed by the gospel.

And so, the vision for which Jim died - the conversion of the Huaorani - was fulfilled. Jim Elliot gave what he could not keep to gain that which he could not lose. May the same be true of each of us. May we give our time and money and energy and our whole lives for the sake of the Great Commission.

VERSE FOR MEDITATION

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!"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been on a mission trip or participated in missions in any way? If so, where did you go and/or what did you do? How did the experience shape you?

2. Which reason for our church's radical ambition for the nations jumped out to you most? Why?

3. What are some specific ways you can get involved in living out a radical ambition for the nations at our church? What are your next steps?

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

**OUR MEMBERSHIP
COMMITMENTS**

GETTING STARTED

Church membership comes with real commitments. We live in a world where people are increasingly afraid of commitment.

However, the commitment that we make in church membership is one of the greatest blessings in the whole world. You aren't just committing to an institution; you are committing to a family that loves and cares for one another. You aren't just committing to an idea; you are committing to the greatest mission the world has ever known - addressing the great problem of lostness that pervades our world.

That's why First Baptist asks every church member to make five membership commitments. These commitments are basic commitments for every Christian who desires to grow in Christlikeness.

The first commitment is that we ask every member to commit to worship in a service.

In Hebrews 10:25, the author of Hebrews charges Christians to "not neglect meeting together." In other words, one of the major commitments that a Christian should make is to regularly gather with the church for worship. Since this is true, at First Baptist we ask every member of our church to commit to worshipping in a service weekly.

Our hope is that church attendance would become a non-negotiable habit of your life. Of course, life happens - there are vacations, illnesses, and other circumstances that would prevent you from being at church. But those should be the exception, not the norm.

In this session, we'll dig deeper into this first commitment by looking at what worshipping in a service means and what worshipping in a service looks like.

DIGGING DEEPER

WHAT WORSHIPPING IN A SERVICE MEANS

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 (worshipping

God together with the whole church) from a biblical perspective, you will find that gathering 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.

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 to 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).

WHAT WORSHIPPING IN A SERVICE LOOKS LIKE

We encounter God through his Word. Because this is true, the Bible takes center stage in our corporate worship. When you worship in a service weekly, the worship service will center around the Word of God in the following ways:

THE READING OF 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.

THE PREACHING OF 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.

THE PRAYING OF 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.

THE SINGING OF 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.

THE SEEING OF 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.

TIPS FOR WORSHIPPING IN A SERVICE

It is possible to be in a service without worshipping in a service. Because of this danger, below we have included some tips that will help you be an active, engaged participant in worship when you come to church:

- **Get Ready the Night Before:** Sunday morning church is a Saturday night decision. When Sunday morning comes around, you don't want to have to be preoccupied with finding and ironing your clothes, making sure everyone gets fed, putting gas in your car, etc. Make all the preparations you can on Saturday night so that you can wake up on Sunday morning and focus on preparing your heart to worship the Lord.
- **Come to Church Prayerfully:** As you are getting ready for church and driving to church, pray that the Lord would prepare your heart to worship him in spirit and truth. While you are at church, continue praying that God would help you focus on worshipping him and serving his people.
- **Listen to the Sermon Actively:** What do you normally think about during the sermon? Are you thinking about God and his Word, or are you thinking about lunch? You should commit to doing whatever you need to do to listen to the sermon actively, whether that's taking notes, turning off your phone, or sitting on the front row.
- **Worship by Singing:** At First Baptist we are committed to congregational singing. That means that the goal of music on Sunday mornings isn't entertainment, but rather worship. Even if you think you have the worst voice in the world, it pleases the Lord when you lift your voice to him in song along with our congregation during worship.
- **Worship Thoughtfully:** It is very easy to just "go through the motions" on Sunday mornings. You come to church, you smile and shake hands at the right time, you repeat the lyrics of the songs, you get the gist of the sermon, you say the last "amen," and then you leave. But God's desire for you is so much deeper than that. Sunday morning is about having an encounter with God together with his people. This means that you should really think about what you are doing on Sunday morning.

You should think about the words of the songs you are singing, you should meditate on the truth you are hearing from the Bible, and you should consider the weightiness of what you are doing - worshipping the true and living God!

VERSE FOR MEDITATION

Colossians 3:15-17

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 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. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. 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 joined one?
2. 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?
3. How would Sunday morning be different for you if you actively and passionately believed the truths and applied the tips we discussed this week? What are the obstacles you need to overcome to wholeheartedly embrace corporate worship?

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

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

HOW TO GROW IN A GROUP AT FIRST BAPTIST

SUNDAY SCHOOL

The primary place where “growing in a group” happens at First Baptist is in our Sunday School classes. If you want to grow at our church, you need to get connected in a Sunday School class!

We summarize our vision for Sunday School at First Baptist using 4 C’s:

- **Content:** Each week in Sunday School, one of our gifted and trained Sunday School teachers will teach a lesson that is filled with biblical, Christ-focused, and practical content. We are currently on a 12-year journey through the books of the Bible in which we tackle a new book of the Bible each quarter. Our hope is that the rich content you receive in Sunday School will catalyze your relationship with Christ and help you to grow in Christian maturity.
- **Community:** Sunday School is the place in our church where godly friendships grow and blossom. Each class is made up of various table groups so that you can belong to a smaller community of believers who discuss the lesson together, pray together, and share life together.
- **Care:** Sunday School is the place where the body of Christ grows in love for one another through sharing burdens, meeting needs, and prayer. This mutual care happens in Sunday School through our table groups. When you have a need that arises in your life - whether it is a need for prayer about a big decision or a need for meals because you just had a baby - your table group is the front line of care who

will help you, pray for you, and ensure that your needs are met.

- **Connection:** Sunday School is the place where you get connected to the larger life of the church. This connection happens weekly in Sunday School. Each week, our classes provide announcements about upcoming church events, initiatives and service opportunities and they pray for significant church prayer requests and for our church's missionaries. Being a member of a Sunday School class enables you to stay connected to all the ministry opportunities at our church.

GROW GROUPS

While Sunday School is the main way to grow in a group at our church, Grow Groups provide an opportunity for you to go even deeper.

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, provide good deeds, and 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.

Over the past several weeks, you have been growing in these ways in your Grow Group 1.0. However, there is still plenty of opportunity for you to continue to grow in these ways through Grow Group 2.0 and 3.0.

HOW GROWTH WORKS

As you commit yourself to growing in a group at First Baptist, it is important to know how that growth works. The way to grow in the Christian life is by following Jesus. The biblical word for this is discipleship. A disciple is someone who follows Jesus with all of life and for all of life.

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:

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).

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).

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.

It is important that you are growing in a group at our church. But what is even more important is that you are growing by following Jesus. Because when you are following Jesus, you receive the transforming power of his grace that not only provides eternal forgiveness, but also revolutionizes your life right here and right now.

VERSE FOR MEDITATION

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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you are already in Sunday School, which class are you in? What is it like? If you aren't in Sunday School, what is your plan to get involved?
2. 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?
3. Think about your relationship with Jesus in 30 years. What do you want it to look like then? What do you most want to change in your walk with him between then and now? How can you begin working toward that change today?

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

The Navy SEAL training program (known as BUD/S) is widely regarded to be one of the most intense training programs in the entire world. It includes all kinds of strenuous mental and physical preparation. But perhaps the most intense aspect of the training is a grueling five-and-a-half-day period where trainees sleep less than four hours total and perform intense physical training for more than 20 hours daily. Many trainees fall out of the program amid this portion of the training.

Why is the Navy SEAL training so intense? The reason can be explained by the age-old adage, "You don't rise to the level of your expectations; you fall to the level of your training." Navy SEALs face some of the most brutal and intense combat and operations situations in the entire world. Amid such circumstances, they will only be able to perform up to the level that they have been trained.

The goal of this session is very similar to Navy SEAL training. Our goal as a church is not to train you for military engagement, however. Our mission is much greater than that. Our goal is to train you to be ready, at any time, to share the gospel with your friends, neighbors, family members, and anyone else with whom the Lord opens the door.

In those moments of opportunity, you'll fall to the level of your training. So, don't miss this opportunity to be trained to engage in gospel conversations!

DIGGING DEEPER

HOW TO GET TO THE GOSPEL

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. Below are several strategies you can employ to get to the gospel during normal, everyday conversation.

EXPLORE 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:

1. 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.

2. 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.”

EXPLORE 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 are 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).

EXPLORE 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 is 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:

1. 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 for you that Christ will give you this peace."

2. 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."

HOW TO SHARE THE GOSPEL

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:

SHARE THE GOSPEL THROUGH 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 you 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

SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH 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

SHARE THE GOSPEL IN FOUR WORDS: 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:

1. 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).

2. 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).

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).

4. 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).

VERSE FOR MEDITATION

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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. 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?
2. 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.
3. Prepare a 5-minute gospel presentation using "God, People, Christ, Response" and share it with your group.

PRAYER

- Ask God to open the door for you to share the gospel with someone this week (Col. 4:3).
- Ask that God would soften the heart of those you are striving to share the gospel with.
- Ask that God would grow your confidence in sharing the gospel.

GETTING STARTED

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 whom or what we worship and love most.

This is one of the key reasons why one of our membership commitments at First Baptist is that we give to the mission. This week we'll discuss why we should give to the mission and how we should give to the mission.

DIGGING DEEPER

WHY WE SHOULD GIVE TO THE MISSION

Jesus' teaching in the Gospels provides us with two key reasons why it is good for us to resist the love of money and instead to freely give our money for the sake of his kingdom.

LOVE OF MONEY HINDERS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

Below are two examples from Jesus' teaching of the danger of loving money:

1. 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.

2. 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

1. 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.

2. 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.

HOW WE SHOULD GIVE TO THE MISSION

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 of results about how to accumulate more wealth, but you would probably be hard pressed to find results about how to give your money.

But the Bible has very clear instructions on how we should give.

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 to 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 or 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!

VERSE FOR MEDITATION

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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Jesus spent so much time talking about money? Based on the passages we've studied this week about giving to the mission, what changes do you need to make and when and how will you make them?

2. 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?

PRAYER

- Ask God that the reality of your salvation would transform the way you relate to money.
- Ask that God would help you invest yourself and your money in his kingdom for his glory.
- Ask that God would help you be a secret, systematic, and sacrificial giver.

GETTING STARTED

At First Baptist, we want every member to serve on a team. This isn't a random commitment. 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.

This week, we'll see a biblical picture of what it means to be a servant, and then we'll discuss why we should serve on a team in the local church.

DIGGING DEEPER

A BIBLICAL DESCRIPTION OF SERVANTHOOD

WHAT IS A SERVANT?

Below are two biblical descriptions of what it means to be a Christlike servant.

1. 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).

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)

HOW TO LIVE 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?

1. 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.

2. 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!

WHY YOU SHOULD SERVE IN THE CHURCH

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 1,500-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! Sundays 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 like 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?

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!

VERSE FOR MEDITATION

Mark 10:43-45

But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you normally respond if someone treated you like a servant? What does your response say about what you think of yourself?
2. 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?
3. Which of the reasons for serving the church that we discussed here is most compelling to you? Which is most challenging?

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 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.

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 2,430 groups in five years

So even if we just had three people in each group, in five years time we could have over 7,000 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 the 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 “Grow in a Group” session. 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, 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 are some ways you can do that:

- Set long-term goals: “This quarter, I want to grow in Christ by...”
- Set specific goals: “This week, let’s all take one step toward sharing the gospel. We’ll check in next week.”
- Check in on weekly personal holiness and Scripture memory.
- Share 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 in the future?

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 thirteen sessions. 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.

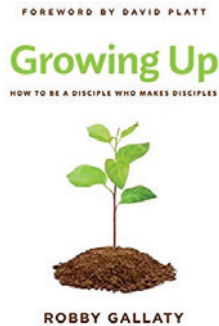
The Benefit

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.

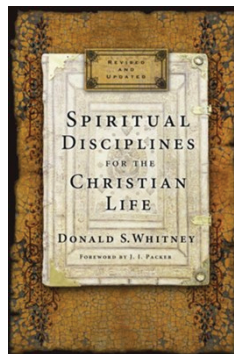
But the ultimate benefit of leading a Grow Group is that it gives you an opportunity to serve and glorify God. Week by week you will have the assurance that you are fulfilling the call that Jesus placed on your life: "Go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19). As you work week by week to help the members 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