



### **Leader Notes:**

In general, you want to allow about 10 minutes for the icebreaker to allow the group to get “warmed up” and talking before the discussion. This also allows for a subtle introduction into the lesson.

You’ll also want to allow about 40 minutes to an hour for the lesson and discussion, and another 10-15 minutes for prayer at the end of the meeting. These times are for a one-hour meeting. Adjust the timing as needed based on your group.

It’s important that you keep in mind that this is a guide for group discussion. ***You should tailor this study to your group.***

### **Introduction/Icebreaker:**

- Ask group members, “What is something you never saw yourself doing...positive or negative? Something you’re surprised at yourself that you do now?”
- Allow time for discussion.
  - *This is the segue into the study. You’ll be discussing the importance of taking care of the needy, and what it looks like to actively be involved in providing that care. This may be something that the people in your group never saw themselves doing to the degree they do now. Or it may be something they want to see themselves do more of in the future.*

### **Sermon Discussion:**

- Ask the group:
  - Was there anything in today’s sermon or service that stuck out to you, challenged you, or really spoke to you?
- *You don’t have to ask these questions exactly, but a version of them. This gets your group thinking about the worship service, and this will help them develop the habits of engaging more actively and listening more intentionally during the service and sermon. Allow discussion on their responses.*

## **Scripture Discussion:**

(Notes, commentary, and possible answers are included in italics)

- **Read Matthew 25:31-46**
  - What is your first reaction to this story?
  
- Look at verses 34-36.
  - What are the six areas of serving the needy that Jesus identifies?  
*(feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming a stranger, clothing the naked, tending to the sick, visiting the imprisoned)*
  - Describe the needs met in each of these areas.  
*(These are basic needs. People need food, water, shelter, clothing, and health to survive. The last need is one of relationship. God created us for community, and even the prisoners needed people to befriend them.)*
  
- Look at verses 37-40.
  - What does the response of the righteous tell us about their intentions in serving the needy?  
*(They weren't doing it to earn brownie points with God. They didn't see it as a means to earn favor with God, but more as a way to fulfill the commandment to love one another.)*
  - What can we assume they were trying to accomplish when they served people?  
*(Because they weren't trying to win God's approval, it seems that they were simply trying to love people and treat them as they would want to be treated. They were simply trying to help people.)*
  - Remember that in that culture, at that particular time in history, there were many religious laws in place to help people maintain their ceremonial cleanliness. How might Jesus' response here challenge the religious system of the day?  
*(Dealing with sick people and prisoners would make someone unclean. Further, the laws were set up to protect religion, and strict adherence to the law was a display of religious zeal. But here we see Jesus, the Son of God, identify himself with the unclean.)*
  
- Look at verses 41-45.
  - What might these people have been trying to accomplish by not serving the needy?

*(They likely avoided the needy because they were, generally speaking, ceremonially unclean, and interacting with them would cause one to become unclean.)*

- How might we have a similar perspective as these people in our culture today? And why might we avoid helping those in need? Discuss some of the excuses you've heard, or maybe even used yourself, to avoid assisting the needy.  
*(Some people go out of their way to avoid those in need. They change what side of the street they're walking on to avoid a homeless person. They talk negatively of those in prison without offering suggestions for hope and help. You can add to this list in your group's discussion.)*
- Think about the irony of Jesus' teaching here.  
*(The very thing these people avoided in an attempt to be more religious was the very thing that God was calling them to do. They avoided the dirty people to stay clean, and God was calling them to get their hands dirty in his work of loving people.)*

- Look at verse 46.
  - Why is it important to serve those in need?
  - What might be the cost of refusing to do so?
- It's important to note what Jesus is NOT saying in this passage. **Look at Ephesians 2:8-9.**  
*(It may seem like the questions in this section are pretty basic, and they are. But sometimes it's good for us to be reminded that we don't need to overcomplicate our faith. We are saved by grace. It is a gift from God. We receive it by faith. Our goodness can't earn it nor merit it. Grace, salvation, and the love of God are underserved, but freely given. Our goodness, then, is a reflection of a transformed heart that loves God and loves others in response to God's love for us. It's simple, really. But we still manage to miss this point often, and we need to daily preach this gospel message to ourselves.)*
  - Paraphrase this verse in your own words.
  - How is a person saved?
  - What are we saved from?
  - Why can't works save us?
- **Read Ephesians 2:10.**
  - This verse states that we were created to do good works. Do you think this was the only we were created for?  
*(No. We were created to worship God, to be in relationship with God, to be in community with one another, to experience joy, etc...)*

- What do you think is meant by good works? Give some examples of what “doing good works” might look like.
  - Looking again at verses 8-10, describe the relationship of works to grace? Which comes first? Which is the response to the other? Can we negate either of them and still fully follow Christ?
  - What would be the result of trusting in ourselves, in our good works, to merit our salvation?
- **Read James 2:14-26.** Look especially at verses 17, 18, 26
    - Do you find it difficult to not think of God as tallying points for us based on our good deeds?
    - How might an imbalanced focus on works lead to problems in our spirituality? In our view of God? In our view of ourselves?
    - What does James say about a person who claims to have faith, but who never demonstrates it by action?
    - What is the warning that is issued here, similar to the warning found in Matthew 25:31-46?  
*(If you claim to have faith your life should demonstrate a love for God and love for people. If you neglect the basic needs of those around you, while claiming to love God, you may be in danger of forfeiting the salvation you claim to have found in Christ.)*

**Application:**

- Describe a time when you had needs beyond what you could meet and others stepped in to help meet your needs. How did this make you feel?
  - Describe a time when you helped meet someone else’s needs? How did this make you feel?
  - What can you do to help out someone in need?  
*(There’s a great danger in only talking about this subject without ever putting it into practice.  
 This may be the most stretching lesson of this series for your group. The lesson for this week is pretty easy in thought, but a little tougher in practice: reach out to people. Instead of only huddling up as a group and discussing the topic, and rather than just searching through the Scriptures to study more on the topic, follow the teaching found in James 2:22:  
 “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”  
 (emphasis added)*
- Study isn’t enough? Good Bible study and in-depth discussion are crucial elements for spiritual growth. But it takes more than just studying and listening. We don’t want to be people who hear a lot of good sermons and participate in a lot of good discussions, but who remain unchanged and inactive. We want West Side to be a community of people who actively listen to the Word of God, and then who go out and act on what they have heard and learned. Faithful obedience

to Christ is not simply the gathering of Christian information (though that's part of it), it's also active participation - doing what God has called us to do. We want to "know" and "do".

- So, this week's application is simply to find a way to reach out to someone in need. We recommend that you take your normal group time for this, thus eliminating some of the headache and challenge with trying to coordinate schedules of group members. We're providing you with a list of ways to reach out to people. Obviously this is not an exhaustive list. These are just some ideas to get you thinking of ways you can reach out to others, whether people you know or complete strangers, to impact and influence them for God.

### **Suggestions for Helping the Needy:**

- a. Help out at a nursing home
- b. Take dinner to someone in need
- c. Buy groceries for a needy family  
(contact Stephanie Dugan, Director of Community Care at WSCC at [StephanieD@wschurch.org](mailto:StephanieD@wschurch.org) or 793-2800 to get in contact with people with needs)
- d. Serve at the St. John's breadline  
430 N 5th St  
Springfield, IL 62702-5202  
Call: (217) 528-6098 to set up a date to help serve a meal
- e. Serve at the Ronald McDonald House  
610 N 7th St  
Springfield, IL 62702-5329  
(217) 528-3314
- f. Serve at Inner City Mission  
714 N 7th St  
Springfield, IL 62702-6320  
(217) 525-3940  
<http://www.innercitymission.net/MakeaDifference/WaystoGetInvolved/tabid/125/Default.aspx>
- g. Serve at Contact Ministries  
1100 E Adams St  
Springfield, IL 62703-1030  
(217) 753-3939  
<http://www.contactministries.net/help.php>
- h. Serve at Sojourn House  
1800 Westchester Blvd  
Springfield, IL 62704-5600  
(217) 726-5100  
<http://www.sojournshelter.org/vol.htm>
- i. Serve at Lewis Memorial Christian Village

3400 W. Washington St.  
Springfield, IL 62711  
(217) 787-9600

- j. Serve at Harvard Park School  
Attn: Tracy Deal  
2501 South 11th Street  
Springfield, IL 62703  
(217) 525-3214  
<http://www.springfield.k12.il.us/schools/harvardpark/>

**Prayer Direction:**

Pray that God would direct you to ways to meet the needs of others. Pray for your group members to have a sensitivity to the needs of others.