



A Study Guide for Groups & Individuals

Presented by the Embrace Louisville Initiative
of Middletown Christian Church



Middletown
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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SHARING OUR FAITH WHERE WE
LIVE & WORK **EVERY DAY**

Out of 132 contacts that Jesus had with people recorded in the New Testament, 6 were in the temple, 4 were in the synagogue, and 122 were out in the mainstream where people worked and lived their ordinary lives. This series will explore how we can follow Jesus out of the building into the real world to share our faith too. Waiting for people to walk into a church building isn't working anymore.

Everyday Faith is a series is about...

- preparing people to share their faith where they live and work.
- helping people understand that everyone has a faith to share.
- helping people become more confident when sharing their faith.
- opening our hearts and lives to people where we live and work.
- acknowledging that Jesus has made our life better, and believing he can make their life better too.



Over the coming weeks, we will be reading scripture, asking important questions, listening to sermons, and engaging in practical experiments to apply what we are learning. We will discover the impact that is possible when we live and love like Jesus outside the walls of our church building. We will also experience the joy of going on a faith adventure that challenges us to move beyond our comfort zones.

Week 1: Too Good to Be True ... Radical Love

Week 2: Don't Send in the Clones ... Freedom of Belief

Week 3: For Christ's Sake, Be Normal ... Real Conversations

Week 4: Ditch the Hazmat Suits ... Sacrificial Service

Week 5: I'll Have Some of That ... Infectious Community

“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”

2 Corinthians 5:16-20 (NIV)

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE: RADICAL LOVE

“I could more easily contain Niagara Falls in a tea cup than I can comprehend the wild, uncontainable love of God.” • Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*

ANCHOR VERSES

- Romans 8:37-39
- I John 4:16, 19
- Mark 1:40-45

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

Jesus talked about God in such a way that people often said “this is too good to be true.”

Jesus shared the unconditional radical love of God in a manner that was different from anything anyone had experienced before. He placed no limits on love and shared love with all people, regardless of their past or race or heritage. Radical Love is the all-inclusive, unconditional love of God that forgives, heals, inspires, unites, and even embraces its enemies. We will know that we are living the Radical love of Jesus when the people in our everyday life say “that’s too good to be true.”

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

We aren’t in touch with the way the Radical Love of God has reached us, so we are not moved to share it. We don’t know how loved we are by God, so we don’t live it in a radical way ourselves. Sometimes, we think we have somehow earned it, so we place limits on the love that we give to others. We try to guilt people into following him, and raise a high bar for them to climb over. Knowing the story of God’s Radical love for us is the first step in sharing it. You can’t live it and share it, if you don’t know it.





RADICAL LOVE: DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Share your favorite moment from Jesus' life when he demonstrated Radical Love.
- What's the most radical thing Jesus did to demonstrate God's love? What did it cost him?
- When have you been most aware of the Radical Love of God? How has it impacted your life and relationships?
- What would your family, job, neighborhood and world be like if you loved this way?
- What are some of the ways we can demonstrate Radical Love that will cause people to say that "this is too good to be true?"

RADICAL LOVE: GO AND DO ACTIVITIES

[PICK ONE TO FULLY COMMIT TO THIS WEEK]

- Make a list of the ways Jesus' Radical Love has impacted you.
- Recall a time when someone showed you Radical Love. Write them a letter and tell them how their gift of Radical Love impacted you.
- Live out that all-inclusive Radical Love by volunteering or donating time to people or causes outside your comfort zone and everyday life.
- Find a way to share Radical Love with someone at work - surprise them.
- Think of the most difficult person in your life – do something outrageously generous for them.

DON'T SEND IN THE CLONES: FREEDOM OF BELIEF

“Sometimes it is better to be kind than to be right. We do not need an intelligent mind that speaks, but a patient heart that listens.” • Unknown

ANCHOR VERSES

- Colossians 2:2
- Ephesians 2:10
- Luke 7:1-10

DON'T SEND IN THE CLONES

Jesus encountered people with different beliefs, yet people from all backgrounds felt safe to approach him.

Freedom of Belief is creating a space that encourages questions and faith exploration. It's respecting and celebrating the different ways we interpret the Bible. God can't be limited or narrowed to only one way of believing. God is bigger than our own beliefs and experiences. People who follow Jesus believe many different things and live their faith in many different ways. He doesn't send us into the world as clones to make more clones who all believe and worship God in the same way.

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

We talk more than we listen and our fear of people who are different from us holds us back. We don't like having our beliefs challenged and we feel threatened by people who hold different beliefs. As a consequence, we don't create a safe space for people to share their beliefs. People are often hesitant to share what they believe because they are afraid they will be judged or because they've had negative experiences with religious people in the past. Talking about our faith has been made more difficult by how polarized people have become about religion and politics.



FREEDOM OF BELIEF: DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Think about a time when you didn't agree with another's point of view / belief.
 - ◊ How did you handle it?
 - ◊ What was the outcome?
 - ◊ What would you change?
- How is diversity of thought a strength? For our church? In our everyday lives?
- What can you gain from exploring someone else's beliefs that are different from your own?
- What are the biggest challenges of working in a place where people hold many different beliefs?
- What are some of the highlights from your faith story? What are some of the reasons you give for being a Christian?

FREEDOM OF BELIEF: GO AND DO ACTIVITIES

[PICK ONE TO FULLY COMMIT TO THIS WEEK]

- Select someone in your everyday life that you would like to know more about. Ask them what they are passionate about and why. Spend at least 15 minutes listening and asking questions designed to get a deeper understanding about them.
- Pick a weekend and attend a worship service somewhere else (mosque, synagogue, Catholic mass, another Christian service different from ours).
- Do research on the reasons the number of people who claim no religious affiliation is growing.
- Ask a young adult why so many young adults do not belong to a church. Ask a young adult to tell you what issues matter the most to them.

FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, BE NORMAL: REAL CONVERSATIONS

"Be yourself because the people that mind don't matter and the people that matter don't mind!" • Dr. Seuss

ANCHOR VERSES

- Colossians 3:12
- 2 Corinthians 12:9-10
- Luke 18:9-14

FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, BE NORMAL

People were comfortable having Real Conversations with Jesus about their real lives.

When we are open about the things we struggle with most in life, such as fear, doubt, and problems, people around us are more likely to share their struggles with us. The best thing we can do when sharing our faith is to be normal people talking about real life. You don't have to wait until you get everything figured out, all your problems solved, and all your questions answered before you share your faith. The best way to meet people where they are is to be who you are.

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

We think we have to have all our questions answered and all our doubts resolved before we can share our faith. The problem with that strategy is that we will never fully reach perfection and get all our questions answered. Sometimes we are just too busy to take the time to have a Real Conversation with someone. Other times, we stereotype and label people and never move beyond those perceptions. It could also be that we fear Real Conversations because we think they will cause conflict and damage our relationships.





REAL CONVERSATIONS: DISCUSSION STARTERS

- What does it mean to “be real”?
- When is it most difficult for you to be real?
- Tell us about a real conversation that was a game changer for you? In your faith? Your work? Your family?
- What would it take for you to initiate more real conversations in your everyday life?
- How does sharing your doubts and fears open up real conversations?

REAL CONVERSATIONS: GO AND DO ACTIVITIES

(PICK ONE TO FULLY COMMIT TO THIS WEEK)

- Pick someone from your everyday life with whom you may be experiencing some conflict. Invite them to have a conversation where you share your hurts and invite them to share their experience to create mutual understanding.
- Make a list of 5 people that may include friends, neighbors, co-workers, etc. Ask them to sit down and share 1 or 2 things you could do to be a better friend, neighbor, co-worker, etc.
- Ask someone who has different beliefs to sit down and share why they believe what they do and ask if you can share why you believe what you do.
- Take some of our youth from Church for ice cream and ask them questions about what they are worried about in today's world. Sit in on a youth meeting at church and just listen.

DITCH THE HAZMAT SUITS: SACRIFICIAL SERVICE

“The more I get to know Jesus, the more trouble he seems to get me into.”

• Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*

ANCHOR VERSES

- Mark 9:35
- Philippians 2:5-8
- Luke 8:40-56

DITCH THE HAZMAT SUITS

Jesus lived his life up close and personal with the rejected, hurt and lost. He got his hands dirty.

It is time to take off the protective gear and get up close and personal with the real world. Sacrificial Service is about demonstrating the life of Christ in the way we live, the places we go, and the choices we make. It is discovering what you are passionate about and finding a way to put that passion to good use where you work and live. It's crossing boundaries to build friendships with people who have had very different experiences in life. It's sacrificial because it's going to cost you something, make you uncomfortable, and your hands will get dirty.

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

We don't want to be uncomfortable and Sacrificial Service requires getting outside our comfort zone and taking risks. What if I give too much and I don't have enough for my family? What if I get hurt? What if it is too dangerous? Often, we lack awareness about the needs of others around us and miss everyday opportunities to sacrificially serve. Sometimes we are infected by greed and selfishness, and at other times we are worried about what other people might think.





SACRIFICIAL SERVICE: DISCUSSION STARTERS

- How did Jesus demonstrate Sacrificial Service? What can we learn from him?
- What does “sacrificial” mean to you? What differentiates Sacrificial Service from other types of service?
- Share an example of when you have offered or been the recipient of Sacrificial Service – which did you prefer? Why?
- What will you have to let go of to truly be in Sacrificial Service to others?
- What is holding you back from Sacrificial Service?
- What are some ways you can immediately serve others where you work? In your community? In your everyday life?

SACRIFICIAL SERVICE: GO AND DO ACTIVITIES

[PICK ONE TO FULLY COMMIT TO THIS WEEK]

- Identify something you are passionate about and build a plan for how to put that passion to work for others.
- Do something that will require you to let go of something that is important to you, something that will require a sacrifice (ex: time, money, fear, ego).
- Find something to do at work that would demonstrate Sacrificial Service
- Identify someone who has lived a very different kind of life from you and find a way to meet some need they may have.

I'LL HAVE SOME OF THAT: INFECTIOUS COMMUNITY

“Love does whatever it takes to multiply itself and somehow along the way everyone becomes a part of it.” • Bob Goff, Author of *Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World*

ANCHOR VERSES

- John 13:34-35
- Matthew 9:9-12
- Acts 2:42-47

I'LL HAVE SOME OF THAT

The love of Jesus was infectious and people were drawn to him.

Infectious Community is about sharing life together in grace-filled relationships. It is living in such a way that people want what we have because they can see how we love, support, and encourage one another. They are drawn into a community that welcomes them and meets them where they are and they can find a place to belong. When we live our core values of Radical Love, Freedom of Belief, Real Conversations, Sacrificial Service, and Infectious Community, people will say “I’ll have some of that!”

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

We think that following Jesus is more about what we believe than living out the love of Jesus. We turn the church into an exclusive club for members only. We only let people in the club who look like us and think like us. Sometimes we get so busy doing projects that we forget that the relationships we are forming are more important. Perhaps, we haven’t experienced community for ourselves so we don’t know how to create it for others.





INFECTIOUS COMMUNITY: DISCUSSION STARTERS

- What was it about Jesus that made him so infectious?
- What makes religious people seem to be so unapproachable?
- What are some qualities that make a community infectious?
- How do our core values make us more approachable? More attractive?
- When were you attracted to community? How did you engage?
- How can we be more infectious in our faith at work, at home, in our community?

INFECTIOUS COMMUNITY: GO AND DO ACTIVITIES

(PICK ONE TO FULLY COMMIT TO THIS WEEK)

- Invite some co-workers that you don't know well to share lunch with you. Ask them about their hobbies, their families, what most interests them.
- Plan a party for people in your neighborhood and invite the neighbors you don't know to attend.
- Make cookies and tuck in your favorite Bible verse with an invitation to attend Middletown - pass them out at a local farmer's market or event where you encounter folks from all walks of life.
- Volunteer to participate in a community clean up – invite a group from Middletown to join you.
- If you don't belong to a small group, join one to experience community for yourself.

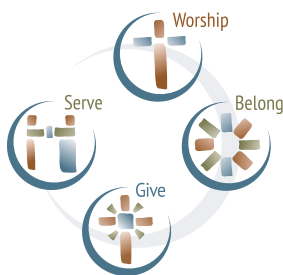
NOTES



Mission

Living out the love of Christ by embracing people where they are!

Strategy



Tagline

Live it out!

Our Values

Radical Love

sharing the unconditional love, grace, and forgiveness that God offers to all people

Freedom of Belief

creating a space that encourages questions and faith exploration through prayer and study of Scripture

Sacrificial Service

reflecting the life of Christ in the way we live, the places we go, and the choices we make

Real Conversations

growing together with openness, honesty, and transparency

Infectious Community

sharing life together in grace-filled relationships

Marks of a Disciple

Intimacy with God

"Have I met with Christ today?"

Crossing Boundaries

"Have I embraced someone different from me?"

Good News to the Poor

"Where am I good news?"

Outrageous Generosity

"What am I giving up?"

Accountable Relationships

"Who's on my speed dial?"

Christ Likeness

"Who saw Christ in me today?"