Along the Way

“Salt for the City”

Teacher’s Guides: May 18th – June 1st

INTRODUCTION

Why does the Church exist? What is our purpose in a broken world? Do we hold ourselves at a distance from that brokenness, stand in judgment on that brokenness, or, do we rush toward it, believing that with God’s help, we can make a difference?

Jesus told his followers that we are to be salt and light. Salt doesn’t exist for its own sake, it’s only good if it’s spread around. Light doesn’t exist for its own sake. It’s always illuminating something beyond itself. That’s the purpose of the Church. God is far less interested in a Church that is seeking it’s own self-preservation. God wants our Church to be out in the World making a difference. That’s our purpose.

INTERGENERATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL

In this Salt for the City series we will dig deeper into what it means to be salt and light in our community. We are broadening that discussion by pairing up Sunday school classes of different generations to share their unique perspectives and experiences.

Over the course of this series, SS participants will share stories and ideas with one another about life in Wilmington and southeastern North Carolina and talk about how we are called to respond, as persons of faith and as a community of faith, when there is great need and often despair in places and in people, right here in our midst.

How do we bring hope?

How do we recognize the hope that is already present - in the many people and ways that God is even now at work in our community?

[For an interesting perspective on this topic, read this blogpost by Greg & Helms Jarrell at ABPNews http://www.abpnews.com/opinion/commentaries/item/28637-learning-to-listen#.U2FiQOi3vlU]

Our goal for this inter-generational series is three-fold:

1. To meet God in Scripture and hear a word for living as God’s people, becoming salt and light, in our city;

2. To build community with folks within our FBC family that we might otherwise not have opportunity to spend time with; and,

3. To share stories with one another of our experiences of loving and serving in our community, and how we have met God in those opportunities, that we may build each other up and encourage one another along the way.
We will also have an opportunity to BE salt and light and to be a witness to God’s kingdom in our city as we go out into our community as the hands and feet of Christ for Mission Possible Day on May 31st, helping with projects for those in need.

MISSION POSSIBLE DAY

Saturday, May 31, 2014
8:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

As we have said many times, words without actions often fall flat.

As an expression of the love for our city that God calls us to have and to share, we have scheduled our Mission Possible Day for Saturday, May 31st. While many of our church members are actively engaged in mission endeavors in our community on a daily basis, Mission Possible Day is a time when our whole church focuses our attention on being the hands and feet of Christ, together, in our city by helping those in need with various projects. Our two main locations for service will be Alderman Elementary School and PORTA, an inner-city child tutoring ministry located near our church.

Nothing bonds individuals or a church as deeply as serving together in Jesus’ name. That’s why, as a part of our inter-generational Sunday school experience, we have asked for each combined Sunday school class to have a group of folks that will work together and take on a part of one of these projects. There will be opportunities for all ages and abilities.

Mission Possible Day is a great opportunity for all members of First Baptist to “give their lives away” and for the Wilmington community to see by our actions that we love them.

Mark your calendar now and make Mission Possible Day a priority for you and your family this year.

If you are not part of a SS class but you are interested in serving at Alderman or at PORTA on Mission Possible Day, please contact Don Vigus at dvigus@fbcwilmington.org or 910-799-7564.
Today’s lesson introduces the series in which we will focus on our community, specifically, the city of Wilmington. We will be discussing some of the issues facing us as citizens; and how we, as a church and as individuals, can use our time and resources to help address these problems.

During these weeks, many Sunday School classes will be joining with others classes to share thoughts and ideas, and work together to address some of these needs. This is a great opportunity to make new friends and share different perspectives on the community we call our home.

BACKGROUND TO THE TEXT

Today’s passage from Jeremiah is the beginning of a letter Jeremiah wrote to the Jewish exiles that Nebuchadnezzar’s army had taken to Babylon. Many felt that God would not allow them to be held captive for long, and there were false prophets among them who were encouraging the belief that they would soon be released.

From Jerusalem, Jeremiah sends this letter to correct the notion that they would return home soon and to encourage the exiled Israelites to make the best of the situation in which they now find themselves. In commentaries on the passage by Matthew Henry and others, several important points are made:

First, God allowed this exile to take place, perhaps to teach His people a lesson of patient submission. In God’s time, the Babylonian Empire will fall; but, for now God wants his people to pray and work for peace in the city where they are and not practice sedition.

Second, the Israelites are told to take pleasure in the growth of their families. In this instruction, Jeremiah is reminding them that God’s plan for the seed of Abraham to multiply has not changed.

[The Student Lesson contains additional background information that will be helpful in explaining the context of the story found in this passage.]

WHERE DO YOU LIVE?

Use this exercise as a ‘getting to know you’ opportunity for the combined classes.

Supplies: A map and dots will be provided in your classroom.
On the map that has been provided, have class members put a dot to indicate where they live. (If someone doesn’t live in New Hanover County, they can still put up a dot in the appropriate geographical direction.)

Notice the clusters of dots on the map. Name 3 areas that are well populated by your class. Write them on the board. [We will continue to refer to these over the three weeks of this series so put them in a place where you will be able to refer back to them.]

Discuss the needs of those neighborhoods and the people who live in them. Just because some neighborhoods may not be areas of great poverty does not mean that they do not have ‘broken places.’ There may be spiritual, social, physical as well as economic needs. Write these needs down under the neighborhoods on the board.

Does it make a difference that there are a significant number of Christians from the same church family that live among these needs?

Discuss the idea of our neighborhood as a mission field. How does/should/can that change the way we see other people? The way that we think about needs, resources, opportunities?

Name a neighborhood in Wilmington that is not represented by any of the dots of your class members. What needs are present there?

Talk about the devotions from this past week written by FBC folks who are connected to some of the important ministries in our city. What needs are present in those places?

What can we learn from Jeremiah’s words to the Israelites in exile about how we are to live in our community? About the connection of our own lives to the lives of those around us in our city, even (and especially?) those who are strangers to us?

What does it mean to you to be Salt for the City?

**ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION TOPICS**

**Live Through Experiences as Faithful People**

Commenting on this passage from Jeremiah, Alan Brehm has said that if we “…accept the grace of God to thrive in surprising places, we may count on God never to forsake us.”

- What are situations where people may feel that God has forsaken them? (An example could be the plight of Syrian refugees or other refugees today.)
- Have there been times when you found yourself in a situation where you were forced to “count on God?”
- How can these experiences help us to grow in our faith?

**Lemonade from Lemons**
The writer of our lesson describes a time when she found herself stuck in a place she did not want to be. However, she discovered something that she really did appreciate about her situation and eventually learned to bloom where she was planted. Ask the class to share times when they have found themselves in similar situations, and how they worked through these times.

- What do these experiences teach us about God?
- What do we learn through these experiences about ourselves? About our faith?

**PRAYING FOR OUR CITY**

To be Salt for the City, we must have God’s heart for the City. Be intentional this week about praying for the City. Go for a prayer walk through your own neighborhood. Pray for the needs that you know about and for the ones that you don’t. Ask God to make you more mindful of those who live right around you and may need you to be the hands and feet and face of Christ in their lives.

Drive through the neighborhoods that were listed in class – the 3 where there are many class members and the one where there are none. Pray for those folks who live there. For the needs that were mentioned in class and for those unspoken needs that exist. Ask God to show you how he sees those places and those people.

Pray for the ministries that are the focus of the daily devotions. Pray for those who serve and for those who are in need. Ask God for a glimpse of how that are Salt for the City and a vision of how we could see even more of God in them and through them.

Write down things that come to mind this week as you pray and share them with the group next week.

**MISSION POSSIBLE DAY**

Saturday, May 31st, is Mission Possible Day for First Baptist Church. By May 18th, your combined classes will have been contacted about a project or projects that we would like you to help with on Mission Possible Day as a part of our church-wide effort. Take a few minutes to review your class’ project and to begin to garner commitments from folks as to their participation.
BACKGROUND TO THE TEXT

Today’s passage, Matthew 5:13-16, is found towards the start of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus speaks to a crowd that has come to him and assembled on the side of a hill near the Sea of Galilee. The record we have of the things that he said take up 3 long chapters and cover topics as diverse as adultery, prayer and anxiety. Looking at the things Jesus addresses, it is worth pointing out he doesn’t load them down with doctrine, he doesn’t quote Old Testament scriptures or address the Roman government oppressing them. He starts by letting them know the character they should have and then talks about the conduct that should come from that character. Literally “Here’s what you are and here’s how you should behave.”

The examples used in these verses are “salt” and “light.” They were as common and important in Jesus’ day as they are now. Salt is an enhancer and of great use only when retaining its flavor or saltiness. Salt was so in demand and of such great use that Roman soldiers had no problem taking it as their wages because it could be used the same as currency. In fact, the word “salary” is derived from the Latin form for salt.

Light was equally important because it drives away darkness and vessels for it could be found in use in every home and building. Using these two items as examples meant every one listening would connect what he was saying with the meaning he intended.

SALT & LIGHT

Jesus calls us to be Salt and Light in the world for his sake. What does that mean?

To better understand what Jesus is talking about, use one or more of the Discussion Topics below to help the class to tease out the many parallels between the properties and uses of salt and light and our own discipleship in the world, particularly in our city.

A lesson like this one is an excellent opportunity to engage the senses; to be visual and tactile. Having different types of salt and sources of light on hand as you go through the lesson can be effective tools.

Supplies: Sea salt will be provided for you. You may want to bring other types of salt as well as different types of light sources – flashlight, candle, etc. Find ways to engage the group through touching/tasting the salt, using the light (hide it under a bushel if you need to!), etc. Be creative!
1. Discuss the metaphor of Salt as an enhancer. Point out the ways that salt is used in cooking to bring out flavor. Have participants make a list of ways and places that they as Christians need to seek to be enhancers in the world.

2. Discuss the fact that Jesus pointed out that Salt is useless when it is no longer salty. Steer the conversation to reasons Christians might “lose” their saltiness in the world.

3. Ask for participants to give examples of people they see as “salt” in their lives, in the church, even on a national or international level. What makes them “salty”? What effect does that have on you? On others?

4. Bring up our dependence on light. Ask participants to discuss the darkness in the world that requires us to be the “light.”

5. Talk about the power of small amounts. Most recipes require only a pinch of salt for it to flavor the dish. There’s no darkness so black that a small candle or light can’t push away. Connect this to our lives and the things we can do to be salt and light in the world.

**SALT (& LIGHT) FOR THE CITY**

Refer back to last week’s lists of neighborhoods and needs. Talk about what it would look like to be Salt and Light in these places. Invite folks to talk about things that came to mind as they prayed for their neighborhoods and for our community.

The bottom line is that salt and light make a DIFFERENCE. It is what they are for. Salt will always change the taste and light will always take out darkness. Nobody puts salt in a dish unless they want it to impact the final flavor; to make it better. Nobody switches on a light or lights a candle and then covers it so they can stay in darkness. Christians aren’t just “called” by Jesus to make a difference. He tells us in this passage WE ARE the difference.

**MISSION POSSIBLE DAY**

Mission Possible Day is this Saturday, May 31st. Take some time to talk about your group’s project for Saturday. Finalize plans. Encourage everyone who can to be present. Make sure you will have enough folks to do the task that has been assigned to your group. Talk about ways you can have fun while you work – bring music, wear the same color t-shirts, bake cookies. Have fun with it and see it as a dual opportunity to serve our community in the name of Jesus AND get to know one another better.
BACKGROUND TO THE TEXT

In this passage, God is ordering Isaiah to remind the people of their rebellion. Their “religion” had selfish motives. The people needed to be brought back to the basic understanding of how to HONOR GOD! This passage is about proper devotion and the proper fruit of fasting. Most commentators agree that the catalog regarding proper justice found in vv.6-7 focuses on the specific need from bondage. (Gene M. Tucker, 499) It is assumed that such language from vv.6-7 come from the exilic discourse of hardships, bondage, oppression, and unmerited suffering. The Israelites were the victims of such bondage and yet they lost sight of their God, the God of Exodus, who frees his people. The whole point of this passage is to show that fasting is not for show, but meant to be a response of apology and repentance (like we see during the Lenten 40 day season between Ash Wednesday and Easter).

Fasting is a discipline of seeking God’s favor and getting back in tune with being God’s servant. Think about it, Jesus even fasted right before going into full time ministry! The prophet is condemning false righteousness and the statements in vv.8-10 are showing how true righteousness is the ultimate deliverer!


THE FAST GOD HAS CHOSEN

The goal of today’s lesson is to talk about our experiences serving on Mission Possible Day. In preparation for that conversation, read Isaiah 58:6-10. Be sure to have read Isaiah 58:1-5 as well to understand the context in which our lesson’s verses are found.

- How can religious activities become hollow? How can we lose our focus and do good things for not good reasons?
- How are the types of things described in Isaiah 58:6-10 an acceptable fast? What does it mean for a fast to be acceptable to God? Why do we fast in the first place? (Typically to hear a word of discernment from God, to become in sync with God’s will.)
- What is our motive for the type of fasting Isaiah describes?
- What is our reward?
- How does this passage illustrate what it means to be “Salt for the City”?
- Can we truly worship God and not be moved with compassion by the needs around us? By the chains that bind so many? By the injustices that oppress the powerless?
MISSION POSSIBLE DAY

Invite folks to share their experiences from Mission Possible Day. As stories are shared, continue to draw parallels between their projects, the people they met, their faith and the types of activities and individuals God describes in Isaiah 58.

- What were the details of your Mission Possible project?
- What did you expect from this experience?
- Were you blessed? Why or why not?

The whole reason for our service is because we love God. Even though our world says to work and to attend constantly to our “to-do” lists, God is saying HE IS LOVE, and we were created to LOVE others. We cannot do that if we are always busy doing less important things. Time and relationships is what is important.

I remember reading a devotional one time that spoke loudly to me. The writer talked about someone on their deathbed and how they never ask for one more look at their diplomas, money or awards, but instead asked for their family and friends. Relationships and people are what’s important because that is how God created us! Our reward is not here on earth, but our service shows others the love of Christ...a love that needs no words to feel.

Close the lesson by reading “THE PROMISE” found in the student lesson. May we truly become the “SALT FOR OUR CITY”!