

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

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in ACTION

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Don't Just Go To Church

BE THE CHURCH !

What Does This Mean?

Too often, we get caught up in thinking of church as a place or event. Something with an address, a time frame, a boundary. In this sense we might ask, “Where do you go to church?” or “What time does church end?”

In a critical sense, what happens at the church building during worship services is the core of the church's existence. Worshipping God together is a primary reason for our creation and the first fruit of our salvation.

But in another vital sense, “the church” is more than a place, a weekly event or an institution. The church is *us*—the people of God in whom the risen Lord lives. And being the church means living out Jesus' teaching and example in our world today. This means showing love as Jesus did in practical ways to neighbors near and far. This means being “God with skin on” to those who are most vulnerable and least valued in the world's eyes. Being the church means putting our faith into action, so that the world can see the difference that knowing Christ makes.

The Faith in Action curriculum is a tool to help expand your insight and impact as you share God's love with others.

What can you expect from your Faith in Action experience?

This Program Will:

- Educate you about local and global needs, about the biblical mandate for compassion and about how you can make a difference.
- Encourage you to apply the Bible's teachings in your life through tangible expressions of your faith.
- Energize your relationship with God as you reach beyond the walls of the church.

SmallGroupDiscussions

FourSessions: **Detour**
Lens
Drop
Party

SessionOne: Detour

Open with prayer.

- **View Detour DVD SegmentOne:** *(Allow 3 min.)*

1. Group Discussion: Warm Up *(Allow 10 min.)*

Introduction: *(Read aloud)* Let's face it. Most of us don't like interruptions. They slow us down. They gobble up our precious time. They may even force us to take a detour from our already crammed schedules. Yet as Christians, our spiritual journey calls us beyond managing our to-do lists and into a faith-in-action lifestyle that welcomes divine detours—those opportunities to demonstrate God's love to people in need. Today, we'll begin to see how we can make small adjustments to our lives so that we are prepared to take divine detours to care for others.

Q. What are two interruptions you dislike most and why?

Q. What will you always let yourself be interrupted for and why?

- **View Detour DVD SegmentTwo:** *(Allow 3 min.)*

2. Group Discussion: Focus on the Word *(Allow 15 min.)*

The story of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25–37:

(Read aloud, then discuss) Let's begin by dissecting the response of the Good Samaritan. As the story unfolds, this unlikely hero was ready to respond—and that response is as much about what he didn't do as about what he did. He didn't let his schedule dictate his response. He didn't weigh the personal consequences of helping. We are told he simply “went to him and bandaged his wounds ...” The world is full of people who need their “wounds” bandaged. How can we make ourselves available to take detours—to cross the road—to bandage others' wounds?

- Q. In verse 27, the expert in the law clearly knew what God required of him to inherit eternal life—love God, love your neighbor. Yet the expert in the law was testing Jesus and wanted his “neighbor” defined. Considering that the Jews in Jesus’ time despised Samaritans and even refused to speak to them, how do you think the crowd responded to the parable of the Good Samaritan? Who might you consider modern-day “Samaritans”—those shunned and ignored?
- Q. Re-read Luke 10:34–35. What did the Good Samaritan have that he shared with the man in need? What does his willingness to share whatever he had at his disposal say about Christ’s call on our lives?
- Q. Re-read Luke 10:25–29. Part of being equipped is having the right attitude toward helping others. What attitude did the lawyer who questioned Jesus have toward helping his “neighbor?” How was this different from the attitude and actions of the Samaritan?
- Q. The religious leaders in Jesus’ story were weighed down by regulations and the expectations of others, and these would have contributed to their decision to ignore the injured man. What are the personal “rules” and assumptions that weigh you down? How can you balance the things that “weigh you down” with Jesus’ call on us to care for others?

- **View Detour DVD Segment Three:** *(Allow 3 min.)*

- **3. Group Discussion:** Run the Race *(Allow 15 min.)*

(Read aloud) As Steve shared in the video, Jesus was intent on ministering to those God placed before him—and he calls us to do the same thing. The Good Samaritan, then, was a reflection of Jesus because he was ready to disadvantage himself to advantage others—even a stranger. He not only made himself available, the Good Samaritan also was ready to use whatever resources he had with him at the time to help another. Today, the story of the Good Samaritan is so lasting and universal that hospitals, churches, foundations, and even laws are named after the parable's hero. Yet even more moving is that every day across the United States and around the world, people make decisions about whether they will take detours—big and small—to care for those in need:

- A 17-year-old Omaha, Neb., boy was inspired to help the victims of the December 26, 2004 tsunami. He not only enlisted his Scout troop to collect school supplies to assist tsunami-affected children in returning to school, but also inspired his friends to write letters to encourage tsunami survivors.
- Dozens of church groups from across the United States devote a week each summer to living in Appalachia's Chestnut Ridge, a struggling West Virginian community that lost much of the little it had when coal mines closed decades ago. These church youth groups, men's groups and family groups come to encourage residents and help revive their communities. "God can really change you when you help others," said one participant of the Appalachia outreach. "You give, but in return you get even more back. It's amazing what happens within yourself when you give up your desires and just go."
- A woman in the grocery store checkout line in Auburn, Wash., noticed that the teenager ahead of her didn't have enough money to pay for his soda. She paid for the teenager's drink—leaving a lasting impression on the surprised youth.
- Two women in Chicago have joined forces to renovate houses for struggling families in the city's poor neighborhoods. Together, they fulfill their mission one family at a time, block by block, encouraging and inspiring

as they hammer and drill. “My work is about touching the people closest to me,” one of the women said.

The Good Samaritan’s story inspires us because he was quick to respond, willing to get involved and ready to sacrifice his time, energy and money for a stranger. This also is true of these modern Good Samaritans—they helped when they didn’t have to, and their kindnesses have had big returns in the lives of others. Let’s explore how we can integrate Jesus’ teaching about loving our neighbor into our own lives by not only being available and equipped, but alert to others’ needs.

- Q. Share a kindness someone did for you that surprised you—an offering of his or her time, talent or treasure. How did that person’s generosity affect you?
- Q. What about you is like the Good Samaritan? What about you is like the priest and Levite?
- Q. Read John 20:21 and Luke 9:1–2. Where is Jesus sending his disciples? What is Jesus calling his followers to do? How do you think this calling relates to you and your lifestyle?

4. Your Faith in Action Assignment: *(Allow 5 min.)*

Try an experiment this week. How can you be available, equipped and alert to help just one person? Share one way you can help someone else. At our next group gathering, we will share how each of us was able to reach out this week to at least one “neighbor”—what you did, how it felt and what you learned.

- Spend some time this week assessing your ministry potential (and that of your family, if applicable) by reflecting on the **Ministry Opportunities Inventory** (p. 64). Please bring your completed assessment to our next session so we can share what we have discovered and plan our next steps of Faith in Action.

Today, we close with this insight from “The Contemporary Christian” by theologian John Stott:

“Jesus sends us into the world, as the Father sent him into the world ... In other words our mission is to be modeled on his. Indeed, all authentic mission is incarnational mission... It means entering other peoples’ worlds as he entered ours, though without compromising our Christian convictions, values, or standards.”

Next session, we’ll look at adjusting our personal “lens” to see the world more like Jesus saw it—so that we are better prepared to act on our faith the way Jesus did.

Your FaithStep Devotional this week will take you on a personal journey of study, reflection and discovery of how you can be ready to take God-ordained detours to care for others.

Close with prayer.