

# BEYOND

## January 23 & 24: Beyond the Church to the Community

*This study guide provides suggestions for further Bible study and reflection. You may not wish to pursue all the questions or to consider all practical applications. This is intended to be a benefit to the small group, not a workbook to be followed rigidly. We recommend that you take time to read the Scripture passages listed in the Sermon Summary. All Bible references are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.*

### Overview

This series is focusing on the word BEYOND—that is the place God wants to take us. God is on the move, always leading us —BEYOND where we are now—to some place we would not go, and could not go, on our own.

#### Goals of the study guide:

- To look at what God's intention for the church really is.
- To consider how we can go BEYOND the walls of the church building and *be* the church in our community.
- To gain an understanding of what it means to cease to do evil, to learn to do good and to seek justice.

#### Key points:

- Jesus often leads us BEYOND our comfort zones so we can learn to care about the things He cares about.
- God actually gets angry when we get caught up in religious ritual or spiritual language but forget to meet the needs of those around us.



### Take a second look ... Sermon Summary

Sometimes Jesus leads us to the very places we *want* to go—He makes our lives better and makes our dreams come true. But sometimes Jesus has a way of pushing us, nudging us BEYOND our comfort zones or past barriers because He wants us to care about what He cares about.

What is important to God? Can we learn a little more about what God is like, what He cares about?

*Isaiah 1:11, "What makes you think I want all your sacrifices?" says the Lord. "I am sick of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened cattle. I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls and lambs and goats." (NLT)*

The point is that the people are whipping up some worship services that they think are really great, but God is saying, "That's not what I want." *Isaiah 1:13-15*

God says it's not just the stuff you do in this church building that matters, but it's what you do BEYOND the walls that matters.

*Isaiah 1:16-17, <sup>16</sup>Give up your evil ways. <sup>17</sup>Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows. (NLT)*

What does God care about? What is He interested in? God's concern is to bring about an environment in which justice happens and love reigns—the kind of love that would reach beyond the walls—to the orphans and widows and to anyone whom the world casts away, to those who bear the burden of troubling circumstances or who have become weary of life's brokenness.

*Deuteronomy 10:17-19, <sup>17</sup>For the Lord your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords. He is the great God, the mighty and awesome God, who shows no partiality and cannot be bribed. <sup>18</sup>He ensures that orphans and widows receive justice. He shows love to the foreigners living among you and gives them food and clothing. <sup>19</sup>So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. (NLT)*

#### 1. Give up evil ways.

I can't escape the challenge to deal with my *own* sin, to think of my *own* nets that are holding me back from following Jesus BEYOND the walls. While there are plenty of evil things I need to quit doing, perhaps my biggest evil is indifference—what I'm *not* doing.

#### 2. Learn to do good.

We aren't saved by good works; we're saved *up for* good works.

*Ephesians 2:8-10, <sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — <sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (NIV)*

We're not social workers; we're Kingdom builders—locally and globally. What if we were known for something different? What if we were known for doing good things rather than for just *hating* bad things?

God has called you and me to be living proof of a loving God to a watching world. He asks us to show up not just with our mouths but with our hands and feet to serve, and with our hearts wide open to the community that we live in—ready to love like Jesus.

### 3. **Seek justice.**

As we talk about justice and dream of a day when God's Kingdom will be established and no one will be lacking, we're living in a time where more and more of us feel like we've been kicked to the curb or left high and dry. Jobs have decreased, needs have increased. And while the government scrambles to figure out how to fix this mess, it has become increasingly clear that these are the days for the *church* to step up and *be* the church.



## Take it to the source ... Bible Study

**Introductory question:** What was one time when somebody brought the church to you instead of you going to church? How did it affect your view of the church, or of God?

### Opening thought:

*Being* the church in any and every situation is as important as bringing somebody *to* church. Use the experiences of your group to help everybody grasp this point and to start thinking about what it means to take the church to the community. You may want to revisit this question: **If our church disappeared, would anyone in the community care?**

### Read *Isaiah 1:11-17*.

1. Why was God tired of the sacrifices? What had made Him angry? How might this apply today?
2. Why can mere words or rituals be dangerous when it comes to our spiritual life? How might be this be a way of trying to manipulate God?
3. What are some practical ways that you can guard against hypocrisy?
4. How do your acts of obedience and justice during the week directly affect your worship on the weekend?
5. When people outside the church look at you, what do they see—lots of words without any positive actions, or actions that help communicate the message of Christ? Why does this matter so much?

#### Key points:

- God gets angry when our religion consists of all talk and no action. We don't necessarily offer sacrifices these days, but we can still go through the motions of worship and not really be doing what He is asking of us.
- Many of the people outside of the church view Christians as narrow-minded, angry and ignorant. But God has called us to be living proof of a loving God to those who are watching us.

#### Points to ponder:

- *Isaiah 1:12-15* describes a religion that has become empty and meaningless because it has lost its true purpose of connecting people to God.
- Verses 16-17 show a religion that is based on obedience to God's purposes, focusing particularly on justice to those who are oppressed, to widows and to orphans. These are the people who are especially vulnerable and without ordinary social protection and support.

**Read *Matthew 23:23, 24.***

1. Why is it so easy to get caught up in minor details and forget the major things that Jesus asks us to do? How can we guard against that tendency?
2. Can you think of an example of straining out a gnat but swallowing a camel? What effect does that action have on those outside the church who are watching what we say and do?
3. How could your group practically display justice and mercy and faith?

**Key points:**

- Sometimes people get obsessed with tiny details about a Sunday service or the color of the church carpet, but they don't worry about the things that God cares about like justice, mercy and faith.
- It might be a good time for your group to discuss how most of us have the ability to avoid anything that means leaving our comfort zone. We can be caught up with religious stuff but end up avoiding the issue of obedience to the call that Jesus is giving us.

**Read *Ephesians 2:8-10.***

1. The good things you do don't help you gain salvation, but they are a demonstration of your salvation. How do you display your relationship with God to those around you?
2. Paul says that God has created you in Christ Jesus for good works. How do you respond to the idea that God actually has things for you to do with your life?
3. What are some things that might help you learn to do good?
4. What keeps you from fulfilling your potential as God's workmanship?

**Key points:**

- The world is tired of Christians who say one thing and do another. (God is tired of that too.) Our actions don't put us in right standing with God, the work of Jesus Christ does that, but our actions do display the relationship we now have with God.
- Help your group to realize that God has plans for each one of them. He created them with positive things in mind, but it doesn't happen by itself. Each of us has to *learn* to do good. It requires effort on our part if we are going to go BEYOND our comfort zones and into all that God has for each one of us.



## Take it home ... Practical Applications

- As a small group, work together to fill one or more backpacks in the *Bag the Basics* backpack collection for the homeless. Fill them up and bring them back on **January 30 or 31.**
- Pool your resources to buy a gift card for the Connection Pointe Benevolence Fund. Bring it to the Small Groups Kiosk on **February 7 or 8.**
- Bring your change containers the *last Sunday of each month* and give *Change for Change* to help families who are in the process of adopting children.

**Sermons are just a click away!** Watch or listen to sermons online @ [ConnectionPointeChurch.org](http://ConnectionPointeChurch.org).