



# The 4th Focus

## “Don’t Eat Roadkill”

My kids are getting older, and are beginning to pay more attention to what it takes to drive. As they pay more attention, they’ve noticed the large number of dead animals on the side of Michigan highways. I’m proud to say that not once has one of my children asked if we could pull over and scrape up some dead deer for dinner. They somehow internally know that good meat doesn’t come from the side of the road.

Apparently though, not everyone knew this, because God gave Israel a law about eating roadkill. At the end of Exodus 22, God tells the people they are not to eat dead animals they find lying around. God essentially tells the people, “Don’t eat roadkill.” Part of this is hygiene and health, part of this is God’s standards of holiness for his people, not defiled by anything in the world. It seems like a weird law to include, but clearly God didn’t think so.

Exodus is full of laws that make sense, laws that have hidden meaning, and laws that make us scratch our heads wondering why that was even included.

When we read these laws, sometimes we want to shout to the world, “See world, God said that’s not okay!” or maybe, “See world, God said you are supposed to do this!!” But what we’ve seen so far in this series, is that God’s law is for God’s people, to mark them as different from the world.

We often look at the law as a list of what to do to keep God happy, or to be a good Christian. But what if I told you that the law was given so we would know God better. In other words, the law reveals the character of God. It shows us what God says is important to him. Through the entire law, and especially what we see modeled in Jesus, we come to understand that God wants our love and he wants us to love others, too.

In Luke 10:27 Jesus boils the whole law down to this, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” We can get so caught up in the minutia of the law that we completely lose sight of why God gave it. He gave it so we would know how to love him with everything we have, and love our neighbors with ridiculous love.

God wanted Israel to be marked for him and shine like a beacon in the world. We, as Jesus followers living today, are marked for him when our lives are defined by loving God and loving people.

If you grew up in the church, you’ve heard that a thousand times. But have you ever really thought about how you’re doing in terms of loving God and people? Have you ever asked a close family member or friend, what would you say is most important in my life? Or maybe something like, how have you seen me love God this week? Or, do I treat the people around me, even the ones I don’t like, with the same love God shows to me?

We live in a socially fragmented world where we are taught that the most important person in the universe is you. Our culture puts marks on us every day teaching us how to think, what to buy, how to express ourselves, where to eat, and what image is best. And with each whisper from the culture that we subscribe to, we bear a greater resemblance to the world of sin, than we do of Jesus.

Jesus was marked for you on the cross. His hands, feet, side, back, and brow pierced and slashed because Jesus loved his Father, and he loves you. Jesus bore the weight of all the sinful lies we’ve believed, and all the sin we’ve produced. Jesus was marked for you, will you be marked for him?

One of the ways we talk about being marked for Jesus at Fourth is through our mission statement, which is *Empowered by the Spirit to follow Jesus together, serve others, and share God’s love*. Pray that God will work through his Spirit to mark you for Jesus, to radically love him and others every day. Pray that God will give you courage to share the gospel, and the obedience to follow in the footsteps of Christ. And as we pray these things, and seek to grow in faithfulness, I believe we will see God use us to be a light for the world.

GEMS has had one event this summer filled with laughter and food! Our first attempt at preparing and eating a meal together had all of the fixings: silly songs in the kitchen, forgotten ingredients, every counter space being used all at once, and devouring of delicious homemade chicken alfredo and mashed potatoes!

These summer events are always fun to be able to interact with the girls in a different way. We did a seating lottery which allowed us all - leaders and girls alike - to eat a family style meal by people we maybe wouldn't normally interact with on a regular night at one BIG table for 22 people! And dinner together isn't the only new something for GEMS...

We are kicking off a new chapter of the GEMS ministry this year with some changes in the fall that will allow for a more focused program catered to a smaller age group, but still allowing us to engage the full gamut GEMS at Fourth has come to serve!

We will make the GEMS programming more geared toward the 1st-5th graders in the group activities. The 6th-8th grade girls will be encouraged to attend as what GEMS calls "CITs"- Counselors In Training! They will be helping with games, crafts, music, and Bible challenge to have a hands on application of being Christian leaders. They have already noticed a change in being asked to help with different things and take on some responsibilities they may not have had in years past. While the 1st-5th graders split into small group studies to grow in relationship and knowledge of Christ as usual, the CITs will meet for a study and fellowship time geared to help them grow in their gifts and talents for serving Christ through the GEMS program and beyond.

It will be exciting to be able to serve the younger girls in a slightly different way with group activities, as well as empowering our young women to see that they are parts of the body of Christ today and to tangibly see that the Christian life is a continual merging of learning and leading - and that is what Christ calls every one of his people to be a part of. No matter how young!

If you would like to get your 1st-8th grader involved, please contact Kristi Dennis at 989-251-3224 or email [gemsatfourth@gmail.com](mailto:gemsatfourth@gmail.com)!

## July

2 - Jerry Wierenga  
8 - Connie Larson  
8 - Jeff Broene  
13 - Dave Portinga  
14 - Ed Reitsma  
22 - Jonathan Brinks  
23 - Avery Gleason  
23 - Kate Schalk  
24 - Wendy Wetzel  
28 - Branson Parler  
29 - Erica Stone



## August

3 - Charlton Meyer  
2 - Gail Spangler  
5 - C. Scherpenisse  
5 - Ella Schalk  
5 - Jackson Bolt  
5 - Alexis Bolt  
8 - J. Van Neuren  
11 - Cale Broene  
12 - Rick Berthiaume  
15 - Betty Webster  
17 - Darold Parks  
19 - Nick Dobkowski  
21 - Christian Parler  
22 - Jacob Tubergen  
24 - Lynn Simone

### ADULT



#### **The Gospel Comes with a House Key**

by Rosaria Butterfield  
Highly recommended!

Rosaria calls us to love our neighbor with sacrificial hospitality. To see our homes as not our own, but as God's tool for the furtherance of his kingdom.

### CHILDREN

#### **Lizzy the Lioness** by Lisa Bevere

Lizzy learns that being brave isn't something you do all by yourself - and that asking help from God and grownups can be the bravest thing of all.

## Youth Group

We wrapped up this past school year attending a concert in Holland and getting ice cream afterwards. We are very grateful for our volunteers this school year - please go out of your way to thank Erin Broene, Branson, and Sarah Parler for their work with our youth!!

A few weeks ago, we went with six of our youth to Detroit on the church mission trip. We worked hard every day we were there and were blessed by the hospitality of the churches in the area who opened their doors to us so that we could do the work that we did. It was incredible to see the way that God was working in the hearts of our youth to study their own lives and hearts to see how they could come home and better serve God every day, when there wasn't someone lining up the next project.

Coming up this summer we have a few youth events open to anyone entering 6th grade all the way to entering their senior year of high school! We will be doing a photo scavenger hunt July 22nd as well as having a pool party on August 8th. Put August 19th on your calendars for a church family picnic right after church, hosted by the youth! Our kick-off event for the coming school year will be on September 9th and we will be having a fall retreat in October.

# Sharing God's Love in Detroit



The crew with Mrs. Brown.

On Friday, June 22, 13 people from Fourth set out for Detroit. We had a good group of volunteers: Philip Brinks, Amy, Caleb and Zach Coeling, Sam and Kristi Dennis, Beka and Ellie McDowell, Eric, Abbie and Josh Schalk, Nicholas Walton and myself. While in Detroit, we were hosted by Lake Shore Presbyterian Church in St. Clair Shores. They were great hosts, providing not only a place to sleep, but also provided a variety of food and snacks for our group, including a hot breakfast on Sunday, as well as a good place to hang out in the evenings.



After arriving on Friday, our group connected with Mary Lloyd, our site coordinator through World Renew and the Southeast Michigan Long Term Recovery Organization. Mary works to connect volunteer teams like ours with homeowners who need work done but do not have the ability (financial or physical) to do the work themselves. At present, she has over 700 homes on her list, so the need is great!

We spent Friday afternoon doing yard clean up on a home that had much to be done. In about 3 ½ hours, we filled 34 yard waste bags with several mulberry trees, all kinds of vines plants, and tree limbs. On Saturday, the team started the day working on the home of Mrs. Brown. Mrs. Brown's husband, a pastor, passed away 13 years ago, and her basement had been damaged by flooding. Previous volunteers had helped to clean and prep the basement for priming and painting, which we did over three days. While part of the team worked on Mrs. Brown's house, another essentially a hoarder home. Though it was difficult, the team pressed on and did what they could to help the homeowner.



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God was working through this trip, and a couple of things have stuck with me. First, throughout our time with Mrs. Brown, she kept repeating, "Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus." She said this when the team first entered her home and on Monday when we left. This stood out to me because she saw us as ambassadors of Jesus. We know that we can't fix everything that needs fixing—there were many needs still unmet in Mrs. Brown's house. But the goal of this mission trip was to share God's love; to be a sign of God's presence and love. I'm convinced that we did that in a very practical way. All through the New Testament, God is clear: to love people means to care for their everyday needs. That's a big part of what our team did.



Another thing that stood out to me was the way that God used many people, all playing a part, to accomplish his work. This includes our team. We had a variety of skills and abilities, but every single person did their part, and it was amazing to see what we accomplished. This was true even in our experience of the broader body of Christ—Lake Shore Church showed us great hospitality, Hope Community Church let us use their facilities to eat our lunches, Mary was a great connector, and the body at Fourth supported us through prayer and giving. It was a great reminder that there's a vital place for each of us in the body of Christ. Everyone has a role to play; everyone has a gift to use.



Those are a couple of things that stood out to me about this trip. I would encourage you to talk to other members of the team. Ask them what they learned (or their favorite quote from the trip!) and how God used that time to teach them something new. The whole team is very grateful for the prayer and financial support from our church family. God is working through us to accomplish the mission of sharing his love!

- Branson Parler

# Disability and the Stranger (a.k.a. the Outcast and the Foreigner)



During the month of May, Fourth was privileged to have Terry DeYoung, who is the RCA coordinator for Disability Concerns, with us. For three Sundays Terry worshiped with us and then led the adult education class. These classes were very informative and well attended. The Inclusion Team would like to thank all of you who attended and contributed to the class discussion. Your attendance was an indication that there is a need at Fourth to appraise how we relate to

those with special needs and to the stranger. For those of you not in attendance, let me fill you in with a quick review.

Week One was titled Disability and Sin. Is an individual's disability the result of sin? How would you feel if you were told your disease or disability is the result of your sin? Do parents blame themselves for their child's problems? In the end it is the church's responsibility to say that disability is not the result of divine punishment.

Week Two's discussion was around Disability and the Sovereignty of God. Is my disability a result of God's plan or will for my life? Why did this happen? God does not enjoy the existence of disease. But in order to serve His own purposes He does allow disease and suffering to exist. "All things work for the glory of God."

The final class brought us Disability and Welcoming the Stranger. Are people with disabilities treated like strangers? How do we exactly treat strangers? Are we uncomfortable around people with disabilities and why? Might strangers and those with disabilities represent the presence of Jesus? Who really needs help: those with disabilities or the non-disabled? In the end it's not just about giving help to a person who is disabled, but being able to recognize the gifts that the person with disability and the stranger has to offer and finding ways for them to use their gifts.

So there's your quick review. See what you missed! But now let me cover a few other pearls of interest. Have you ever heard of the 5 stages of Disability Attitudes? In order the stages are: Ignorance, Pity, Compassion, Friendship and lastly, Co-laborer. I think the stages are self-explanatory. The question is, how do we get to the point where everyone is equal and are co-laborers for the Kingdom of God? And, equally important: at which stage is Fourth? How do we engage not only the person with a disability but also the stranger and get them to become a part of the team?

The Inclusion Team has been working to identify and recommend physical changes to our facility that would make Fourth more accessible and handicap friendly, things like: parking, handicap restrooms, removing hallway obstacles and improving sound. Some of these suggestions may be realized through the ReNew Campaign. Of course these things are important and will help with inclusion, getting a person with disability in the door. However, it was suggested that inclusion is not enough. We cannot just treat persons with disabilities as a problem to be included. If we are to be co-laborers for Jesus Christ it has to be more than us and them. How do we make sure that a stranger or a person with disability becomes a part of the church, not just in it?

In the end it is more than Inclusion, it is a feeling of Belonging. And the more that Fourth can grow in its ability to welcome the Outcast and the Foreigner, the more deeply our church will welcome and serve Jesus. Everybody belongs and everybody serves.

If you find yourself with questions, concerns or suggestions regarding the inclusion of the stranger or the disabled please feel free to seek out a member of the Inclusion Team.

- Don Coutchie for the Inclusion Team

(Portions adopted from Spirituality and Hospitality: What the Church Can Learn by Welcoming Persons with Disabilities, RCA 2008)



♥ Our delightful GEMS! ♥

Seat belts on and ready to go! 

