

REIMAGINING EVANGELISM

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE





DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

The United Methodist Church

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SESSION 1: FEARS

OPENING

Welcome everyone to the group and this time of study; invite everyone in the group to introduce themselves if the group does not yet know one another.

Begin the session with prayer.

Ask the group participants to reflect and respond to a question: *what do you think about when you encounter the word “evangelism”?* Invite participants to brainstorm key words or phrases. What emotions and images does the word evoke? Record the comments on flip chart paper, so that you can refer back to them in a subsequent session.

Share with the group that evangelism has been described as, *“Something you do to someone that you don’t want done to you.”*

Ask them how they feel about this quote, and whether it reflects their own sentiments.

APPROACHING THE THEME

Give the participants some time for individual silent reflection to consider the following questions:

- What has been your worst experience with evangelism?
- What made it such a negative experience?
- When you think about evangelism, what fears come to mind for you?

After their time of individual reflection, ask them to share their thoughts with a partner.

Once the partners have had time to share their stories, invite the partners to offer some of their reflections to the whole group, based on their comfort levels. Remind them that they

would not need to re-tell their entire story, nor their whole conversation; rather, they could offer a short summary. Ask them to also give particular focus to the fears that they named. Once all groups have shared, note that they will have more time to explore fears and negative experiences throughout the rest of this session and will have time to strategize about what to do about them.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read Exodus 4:10-17 (which is about Moses' call story). Invite the group to share initial reactions to the Scripture.

- What was Moses afraid of?
- What excuses did he raise before God?
- How does God respond to Moses?

Remind the group that Moses was concerned about self-judgement and that he was not good enough to do what God asked him to do. Invite the group to reflect silently about times when they might also have been self-judgemental about themselves, particularly as those times relate to evangelism. Affirm with the group that we are all called by God to do good work, and that God has been working in all of our lives.

Share with the group that they will now have an opportunity to reflect on their own life story. Affirm that we all have a story to tell. Participants can use a blank piece of paper, or a large flip chart paper and markers to write and reflect individually. Invite group members to note key events in their lives, and to draw a line in between them like a timeline.

- Looking back, how did they see God working?
- Are there portions of their lives where God was clearly working that they would not be afraid to share with others?

Ask them to keep their life maps for the next session.

CLOSING

Invite the group to reflect on key learnings from this session. Are there additional fears they have that could be addressed?

Close the session with prayer.



SESSION 2: EXCITEMENT

OPENING

Welcome everyone to this session. Begin the gathering with prayer.

Share with the group the following quote, attributed to an unknown person:

“The only difference between fear and excitement is your attitude about it.”

Invite the group to share their reflections about the quote with the whole group. What “attitude” might they have about excitement?

APPROACHING THE THEME

OPTION 1:

Invite the group to reflect on the life maps that they created in the previous session. Ask them to consider where in their life journeys was there excitement and joy? People could then share this aspect of their stories with a partner; or, if time allows, each person could share a brief story of excitement with the whole group.

OPTION 2:

Alternatively, if people were not in the first session, or if everyone did not have a chance to complete a life map, ask group members to reflect on a time when they were particularly excited about something.

- What happened that made them so excited?
- How did they convey their excitement with others?
- Were their senses (sight, smell, touch, taste, hearing) involved in the excitement in any way?

Invite them to share their stories with a partner. After sharing in pairs, give people the option to also share with the large group.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read Luke 9:18-20 (which is about Jesus asking Peter who people say that Jesus is). Invite the group to share initial reactions to the Scripture.

- How do the disciples respond to Jesus' question about who people say that he is?
- Why do you think that Jesus would ask the disciples this particular question?
- Do you think that it is significant that Peter declares that Jesus is "of God"? Why or why not?

RESPONDING TO THE THEME

Affirm with the group that Luke 9:18-20 is not the only Scripture reference where people are asked or wondering about who Jesus is. In biblical times, why do you think that people continued to ask about who Jesus really was? Advise the group that this Scripture takes place immediately after the miraculous feeding of the 5000 by Jesus.

- How might that lived experience of a miracle affect how people talked about Jesus then?
- What lived experiences might affect how people talk about Jesus now?

Let the group know that they will have some time to explore more about who Jesus is for them. There are a few options of how people can do this.

OPTION 1:

Invite people to write the name “Jesus” in the center of a blank page, and to draw a circle around it. Then, draw lines out from the central word—and write down major words or short phrases that relate to who they say Jesus is. People can then connect those phrases to one another or make new connections and draw new lines further outward. People can continue making connections and drawing new lines outward from their new words.

When they feel they have written all they can, invite them to look at their drawing. How have they described who Jesus is? In a few sentences, what would they say about him?

OPTION 2:

Invite people to write their thoughts by journaling about who Jesus is. If they are unsure how to start, they could be prompted with questions like these:

- What was their earliest memory of who Jesus is? Has that thought changed or evolved over time?
- What is their most memorable Scripture about Jesus?
- What do they find challenging or difficult about what Jesus said?
- What do they find exciting about Jesus?
- If they had to describe Jesus in a few sentences, what would they say about him?

CLOSING

Invite the group to reflect on key learnings from this session. Is there more that they might want to share about excitement and joy? What else might people want to share about who Jesus is for them?

Close the session with prayer.



SESSION 3: COMMUNITY

OPENING

Begin the session with prayer.

Share with the group the following quote, from an anonymous person:

“Creating community is an important part of receiving the support we all need to navigate through life.”

Ask the group to share reflections they have about this quotation and whether they agree or disagree. How might community be “created”?

APPROACHING THE THEME

OPTION 1:

Ask the group to share one key thought from the previous session about what they noted about who Jesus is for them. This could be from either their journal writing or their drawing. People could be invited to share their summary sentences with the larger group; then they could also reflect on the following questions:

- What might it mean to share their excitement about Jesus in the context of a supportive community?
- How was Jesus understood in the context of community?
- What does “community” mean?

OPTION 2:

Alternatively, if people were not in the most recent session, or if everyone did not have a chance to reflect on who Jesus is for them, they could also explore:

- What does “community” mean to them?
- Have they been able to find strength or support in community in their own lives? If so, ask them to share a few examples.

- What would an ideal community be for them?

Invite the group to share their initial reflections in groups of 3, and then each triad could share a few ideas with the larger group.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read Esther 4:5-17 (which is about Esther responding to community). Invite the group to share initial reactions to the Scripture.

- How did Esther respond to what was happening in the community?
- What relationships do you think were important in this story? Who were the relationships with?
- What do you think is meant by “for such a time as this” (verse 14)?

RESPONDING TO THE THEME

Esther was called by God to speak in that time and place. God’s voice, however, was not the only voice in that story—and some voices were encouraging the destruction of the people. Despite the many voices, Esther still heard what God was calling her to do.

- What does hearing God’s voice and God’s call mean for you?
- How might we listen for and hear God’s voice in the midst of other voices?
- In what ways do you think that Esther lived out her call in the context of community?

Ask the group to consider that Esther’s call story was not an overly dramatic one of conversion; rather, she lived out a call and spoke out in the context of community.

- How might we be like Esther for other people (by hearing God’s call and speaking at the right time)?

Esther lived out her call and affected her community. Invite the group to reflect on the following questions and to weave together a story.

- What has God's call meant in your own life?
- How have you heard God's voice in your life?
- Has community been part of your faith journey?

Invite each person to respond to these questions as a way of writing and telling his or her own faith story.

Explore with the group if group members would be willing to tell their testimonies on an upcoming Sunday worship time!

CLOSING

Invite the group to reflect on key learnings from this session. Is there more that they might want to share about community and call? Are there additional insights to share about speaking at the right time?

Close the session with prayer.



SESSION 4: CHANGES

OPENING

Begin the session with prayer.

Share with the group the following quotes:

"If we don't change, we don't grow. If we don't grow, we aren't really living." - Gail Sheehy

"The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance." - Nathaniel Bandy

Ask the group to share reflections they have about these quotations and whether they agree or disagree. If change is connected with fullness of life, why are we so hesitant to embrace change?

APPROACHING THE THEME

OPTION 1:

Invite the group to form pairs or trios and share their faith stories from the previous week and the places of intersection between God's voice in their individual lives and the role of community in their faith journey.

OPTION 2:

Alternatively, if people were not in the most recent session, or if everyone did not have time to process their faith story, they could also explore:

- Where are the places in your life where change is the most difficult?
- Where are the places where change comes easily or naturally?
- Why do you think change tends to be especially difficult in the church?

SCRIPTURE READING

Read Acts 9:1-15 (Paul's conversion story). Invite the group to share initial reactions to the Scripture.

- What were Saul's original direction and perceived mission in the story?
- Jesus didn't just tell Saul to quit what he was doing, but told him to take action in a different direction that was contrary to everything he had been taught and believed. What do you think was going through his mind?
- How would you have responded to Jesus if you were in Ananias' position?

RESPONDING TO THE THEME

Saul was a religious leader, firm in his convictions and beliefs. Then Jesus challenged him to not only quit what he was doing, but take a leadership role with those he was persecuting. In the meantime, Ananias is called to take Saul

under his wing and embrace a person who had sought to do him harm. We think of this story as the conversion of Saul, but there are actually two call and conversion stories.

- We often think of conversion as agreeing to a certain set of beliefs, yet Jesus called Saul to action. How has your faith called you to act differently?
- Saul was convinced he was doing the right thing prior to his Damascus Road experience. Are there any places in your life where your zeal might be misdirected from God's will?
- Are there people in your life who would be difficult to embrace or trust that God is doing a new thing and using them as part of God's plan?

Ask the group to consider that while Saul had a jarring, dramatic experience, he did not begin his public ministry immediately. There were several years between Damascus Road and his first missionary journey. He needed to spend time with Jesus and in discernment before he could serve as Christ's ambassador.

- Where are the places in your personal life or ministry setting that could use a period of discernment and alignment with Jesus?
- This story reminds us that God can take the "no's" and "we've never done it that way before's" and transform them into new ways of seeing, being, and acting. Where are the places where you need to let go and allow God's transforming power to work in your life and church?

CLOSING

Invite the group to reflect on key learnings from this session. Is there more that they might want to share about discerning God's call or places of transformation?

Close the session with prayer.



SESSION 5: WORDS

OPENING

Begin the session with prayer.

Share with the group the following quote attributed to Saint Francis:

“Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.”

Ask the group to share reflections they have about this quotation and whether they agree or disagree.

APPROACHING THE THEME

Give participants some time for individual silent reflection to consider the following questions:

- What are some ways one could preach the gospel without words?
- Are you more comfortable sharing the gospel with your words or actions? Why?

Invite the group to share their initial reflections in groups of 3, and then each triad could share a few ideas with the larger group.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read Ruth 1:15-22 (Story of Ruth and Naomi). Invite the group to share initial reactions to the Scripture.

- Why was Ruth willing to leave her homeland behind and follow Naomi?
- In the face of struggle and barrenness, Ruth finds God’s story, or at least Naomi’s relationship with God, appealing. How can God speak a word of hope to the places that seem impossible and barren?

RESPONDING TO THE THEME

Ruth felt like she belonged to Naomi's faith tradition and community before she adopted the beliefs or behaviors of Judaism. Yes, Ruth had immediate, physical needs that needed to be met, but she also needed to connect to community.

- Who were the people who helped you to have a sense of belonging in your Christian journey?
- Have you served as a Naomi for another person?
- How have you helped others to claim God's love and presence in their life?

Ask the group to consider:

- A recent study showed that many congregations struggle to differentiate between doing good because it's the "nice" thing to do or our civic duty and serving out of love and in response to God's love. What is your motivation for serving?
- Are you intentional to build relationships while serving, or do you usually just think about meeting a physical need?
- How would outreach be different if people's needs and longings were viewed holistically: physical, social, emotional, spiritual? What if we understood that some of the people who seem to be the most well-off financially may have some of the deepest longings in the other areas?

CLOSING

Invite the group to reflect on key learnings from this session. Is there more that they might want to share about helping others to experience God's love? Are there any additional insights about serving as a response to God's love?

Close the session with prayer.



SESSION 6: GO

OPENING

Begin the session with prayer.

Share with the group the following quote from Mother Teresa:
“If you want a love message to be heard, it has got to be sent out. To keep a lamp burning, we have to keep putting oil in it.”

Ask the group to share reflections they have about this quotation and whether they agree or disagree.

APPROACHING THE THEME

Give participants some time for individual silent reflection to consider the following questions:

- Do we understand ourselves to be sent people?
- Where are places in your community that could use a love message?

Invite the group to share their initial reflections in groups of 3, and then each triad could share a few ideas with the larger group.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read Matthew 28:16-20 (The Great Commission). Invite the group to share initial reactions to the Scripture.

- These are Jesus’ final words to his disciples in Matthew and serve not only as a charge, but a promise. We have been entrusted to continue Jesus’ work. What aspects of the Great Commission are the most challenging for you?
- The Greek word for “go” does not necessarily refer to physical travel, but places a sense of urgency on Jesus’ words. Do we operate out of a sense of urgency or complacency when we read this text?

- The text reminds us that Jesus has given us the authority to serve on his behalf and that we are never alone. In other words, Jesus is already there and working in every situation, and we are invited to join him in kingdom work. Does this acknowledgement help this work to seem less daunting?

RESPONDING TO THE THEME

Our denominational mission statement of “Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” is taken from the Great Commission.

- In recent decades, churches have focused more on making good members instead of making disciples of Jesus Christ. Do you see a difference between membership and discipleship?
- Do we understand church membership as the goal of Christian faith or a vessel through which we can find community and grow in our love and knowledge of God in order to transform the world?
- In a time when congregations and denominations are losing members, how do we not operate out of fear, but use the opportunity to go and see what new things God is doing beyond our walls?
- A major aspect of evangelism is paying attention: paying attention to God and paying attention to others. What are some ways that you practice paying attention to God in order to know what God is up to in your neighborhood?
- How are mission opportunities selected in your congregation? Are they based on assumed needs and member interests or are they a response to expressed needs by people in your community?

OPTION 1

If you are holding this study in your congregation, consider taking some time to examine current mission and outreach opportunities in your church. As you reflect on your setting, ask if your congregation is using its gifts and strengths to connect and offer hope to the community. Do your efforts

speak to the demographics of those beyond your walls? Consider obtaining some demographic information about your community and talking to community and civic leaders about the hopes and dreams of people in your area.

OPTION 2

Invite participants to consider “as they go” in their daily lives. Only a small portion of their week is probably spent at church. Where are the other places where they spend significant amounts of time? Encourage them to take some time to consider ways they could serve and join in what God is doing in their homes, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and other places where they spend time.

CLOSING

Invite the group to reflect on key learnings from this session. Is there more that they might want to share about going versus staying?

Close the session with prayer.

This Bible study was written by Heather Heinzman Lear, the Director of Evangelism Ministries at Discipleship Ministries, and Adele Halliday, the Team Leader of Discipleship and Witness for the United Church of Canada. This study is excerpted from a larger video study guide that will be available in 2016 and has been produced by Evangelism Connections. Evangelism Connections is an ecumenical group of North American Christians who strive to frame evangelism, hospitality, and church vitality in a 21st century context and provide shared resources toward that end. We invite you to participate, comment, and share your own thoughts and ideas on sharing Jesus' message in a postmodern world.

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