

ENGAGE



Engage the Gospel

Discipleship

Church Shifts

Your Community



Office of Evangelism, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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Table of Contents

2	Introduction
5	PHASE ONE: IGNITE—The Church Session
5	Gathering One: Engaging Your Story
7	Gathering Two: Resting in and Trusting Jesus
8	Gathering Three: God’s Story of Creative Purpose
9	Gathering Four: What Went Wrong?
10	Gathering Five: God’s Rescue Plan—A Special People
11	Gathering Six: Salvation Through Jesus
12	Gathering Seven: Salvation Through the Church
13	Gathering Eight: Putting Together the Stories
14	Gathering Nine: Sharing Your Faith Story
15	PHASE TWO: INSPIRE—Wider Group of Ministry Leaders
16	Gathering One: Overview of Personal Stories and the Gospel Story
17	Gathering Two: Styles of Evangelism
18	Gathering Three: Disciple-Making Leads to Social Action and Faith-Sharing
20	Gathering Four: The New Normal
22	Gathering Five: Do Our Hearts Break Over the Things That Break God’s Heart?
23	Gathering Six: Community Walk
24	Gathering Seven: What Did We Hear God Saying About Our Mission?
25	Gathering Eight: Connecting and Going Deeper With People in Our Spheres of Influence
26	Gathering Nine: Learning to Share Our Stories and the Gospel Story
27	Gathering Ten: Identifying Ministry Shifts in Order to Accomplish Our Work
29	PHASE THREE: EQUIP—The Congregation
31	Gathering One: The New Normal
33	Gathering Two: Engaging Your Story
34	Gathering Three: Sharing Your Faith Story
35	Gathering Four: The Big Story
35	Gathering Five: Connecting With Our Spheres of Influence
37	Gathering Six: Connecting and Going Deeper With People in Our Spheres of Influence
39	Bibliography
40	Suggested Resources



EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM IS part of a disciple-making church culture that emphasizes the importance of both social justice and faith-sharing. Evangelism begins with Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15). Our response to this question leads us into God's mission of rescuing and reconciling a broken creation. Our mission includes relieving suffering and offering people the fullness of life in Jesus Christ. The work of the church is a foretaste of the restored and healed creation.

"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful

scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

Ephesians 4:11–16 (TNIV)

The purpose of this resource:

Evangelism is good news. The good news is not about introducing a program, gaining more members, or increasing budgets. Evangelism is the good news of God's healing and saving love in Jesus Christ. Evangelism is a lifestyle in which a follower of Jesus Christ both shares faith and serves others in need. Even though evangelism is about bringing this good news into our communities, evangelism has become bad news to many of our churches.

This resource is designed to help churches recover the good news we have to offer one another and the people in our communities. In order to recover the best of what

evangelism has to offer our lives and churches, this resource will help people engage the gospel, discipleship, the community around the church, and shifts in church life that will move the church from a membership model of ministry to disciple-making. Defining Our Situation:

Jesus is the hope for the world. Being the body of Christ, the church bears witness to that hope in the world. However, many churches are in decline and are no longer pursuing God's mission of reaching people in our communities. Even though the church is to be salt and light in the world, recent statistics reveal that we are no longer bringing out the God flavors and reflecting the light of Christ in the world. In 2008, 75 percent of PC(USA) churches did not have a single adult baptism.

There are many reasons why we Presbyterians have abandoned the ministry of evangelism. We may be turned off by the many negative images of evangelism that manipulate and offend people. We may not hang out much with people outside the church. We may be uncomfortable talking about personal issues of faith. We may not believe we have a story to tell. We may not even understand our own story of faith found in Scripture.

If the church is to be an effective witness in our communities, then we are called to equip growing disciples of Jesus Christ to share faith and serve others. We are called to both embody and proclaim the faith. For the church to pursue its full redemptive potential, a passion for the life and work of Jesus Christ must be reclaimed.

This new evangelism resource is not another quick-fix remedy or program. The process will require a stance of humility. A faith community will need to spend significant time in prayer, with Scripture, and in meaningful conversations with one another. This Spirit-led time will initiate a journey of helping the church change habits that have caused Christians to pursue programs and plans not connected with discipleship. Effective evangelism comes out of a disciple-making ministry in which people are transformed by the life of Christ and then desire to see the same transformation in their friends and communities.

As growing disciples, we become people who live into and help others deal with the big questions of life:

- » Is there something more?
- » Does life have meaning and purpose?
- » Where do we belong? Where is our community?

Participants in this process will experience that the most compelling aspect of faith-sharing is the believer's own personal story and how that story connects with God's story of redemption in Scripture. Since churches are at different places in the faith journey and there are no quick fixes to our problems, this resource is designed to enable churches

and their leadership to begin a journey of prayer and faith-sharing. This journey will connect churches with their communities and equip members to live out and share their growing faith.

Evangelism will be experienced through three phases. The first phase, which is to be used with the Church's Session, will address our relationship with God; we will encounter what it means to have a personal relationship with God that is based in our Reformed understanding of Scripture. The second phase, which is to include a larger group of church/ministry leaders, will help participants work through the disciple-making capacity of the church. We will examine what it means to transition from a membership model of ministry to a disciple-making model. The third phase will immerse the congregation in an experience of evangelism, which helps

growing disciples claim the story of faith in Scripture, live into their own stories of transformation, become more aware of their own spheres of influence, and engage the mission of God in their communities.

If the church is to be an effective witness in our communities, then we are called to equip growing disciples of Jesus Christ to share faith and serve others.

Phase One: Ignite (The Church Session)

This phase will include the pastors and elders from each church (The Session) participating in the process. The nature and mission of the church are grounded in what God has done and continues to do in and through Jesus Christ. This Gathering will focus on the renewal given by the Holy Spirit when we begin a journey of claiming and reclaiming our own stories of transformation and encounter and examine God's story of transformation and renewal in Scripture.

Phase One begins with nine gatherings that take place at the beginning of each monthly stated Session meeting. The purpose of these gatherings is to dig deeper into our stories of transformation and the story of transformation in Scripture. Engaging this process will take forty-five minutes, and it can be done instead of the regular prayer and devotional time already scheduled. Although what we discuss above is optimal, churches are encouraged to use and develop this resource in ways that will be the most effective in their context.

Phase Two: Inspire (Wider Group of Ministry Leaders)

Our faith is meant to be lived and shared. The purpose of these gatherings is for ministry leaders of the church to connect personal stories of transformation with needs within the community. Frederick Buechner writes that one's calling is the intersection of the world's deepest need and our greatest joy (*Wishful Thinking*, p. 95). The goal of this phase is to help and encourage churches to engage ministries of disciple-making, which enable church members to claim their real lives in Christ through social justice and faith-sharing. During this phase, the leadership of the church will

The purpose of these gatherings is for ministry leaders of the church to connect personal stories of transformation with needs within the community.

examine how each ministry of the church does or does not help to develop growing disciples who will both serve others and share their faith. Small groups will be a critical part of this phase.

Phase Three: Equip (The Congregation)

Through a six-week congregational immersion experience, the congregation will have an opportunity to engage evangelism in worship and small-group discussion. Each Sunday, the worship experience will focus on the following themes: knowing God's story in Scripture; claiming and sharing your own story of transformation in Jesus; understanding our changing culture; becoming more aware of our spheres of influence; and engaging the mission of the church in the community. Following worship each week, members will have an opportunity to go deeper into the content of each theme in small-group discussion. These gatherings are designed to send the church out into a mission that includes serving and sharing of faith.

Other Options:

As we have received input regarding this resource, a few questions have emerged from church leaders: How can this resource work in a small-church setting? How can I tailor this resource to help fit my context?

Combine Phase One and Phase Two:

The purpose of having two distinct phases is to help churches use this resource to grow organically through the Session and then through a larger leadership team, so that more people in the congregation will have participated in

the process of engagement and change that this resource promotes. In a smaller church context, combining Phases One and Two (and even looking at how to group together a few of the gatherings) will help the whole congregation begin to experience and process together how God might be speaking into the life of individuals and the church. Depending on the size of the church, you may still want to have a time of discussion and conversation with the church Session first for several weeks. It might also be helpful to invite those who may not be in Session but still have a great deal of influence in the church to be part of the discussions about how to best use this resource. You may also want to combine the two phases if you want to shorten the process for your congregation. (Note, however, that we have found that changing the assumptions, beliefs, behaviors, and culture of any organization takes time and perseverance; there are no shortcuts.) After going through Phases One and Two, continue as suggested with Phase Three.

Meetings With a Meal:

One of the strengths of having a smaller church is the ability to experience community in an organic and tangible way. Whether you are a small church or not, consider having the gatherings while at the same time building community by sharing a meal together. There is something about breaking bread together, about sharing a meal, that promotes honest discussion, trust-building, and a shared vision.

Think Corporately:

Some have expressed a desire to use this resource as a Sunday school curriculum. Our suggestion is to resist the temptation to simply make it a Christian education experience for some in the church, but to help the congregation as a whole to experience this process together for the greater mission of the church. This resource is designed to be a corporate way of addressing how we can "be church" in a new way, focusing on being disciple-making, missional, transformed while transforming, and engaging an ever-changing culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this resource is to provide you with material for your use in your unique ministry context. Prayerfully tailor this resource to fit those needs. We are praying for you and your church to experience the in-breaking of God's reign in your lives and communities around the country. We join with you as we pray together, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

PHASE ONE: IGNITE

The Church Session

Igniting a Passion for Jesus by Engaging Personal Stories of Transformation and God's Story of Transformation in Scripture



Purpose:

This phase will enable growing disciples to connect with their own stories of transformation and God's story of redemption in Scripture. Participants will explore reasons why faith-sharing is awkward for many mainline denominations. The following attitudes contribute to the diminishing importance of faith-sharing in our churches:

- » Our faith is compartmentalized—we have our spiritual side of life, and then everything else.
- » Our vision for life is too small.
- » The gospel message does not sound like good news.
- » We do not understand how our stories are connected to the larger story of Scripture.

During this phase, participants will claim and share their own stories of transformation, dig deeper into God's story (Scripture) of redemption and rescue, and have opportunities to share faith with another person in the church. Each elder and pastor will be encouraged to have a conversation partner for this phase. The conversation partner should not be a "best friend," but someone in the church whom they don't know as well. The point of having a conversation partner is to become more comfortable talking about and sharing faith.

Gatherings:

Suggested Reading: *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In* by James Choung

Gathering One: Engaging Your Story

Tools:

- » Flip chart or whiteboard and markers
- » Poster board
- » Large sheets of paper for each participant
- » Colored markers or pencils for each participant

THINK:

This gathering will help participants look into their lives and engage their authentic stories of God's love for them in Jesus Christ. Each of us has a different story. Some of our stories are clear stories of conversion; we can clearly, distinctly mark that our lives were out of control and had little meaning until we met Jesus. Others of us have never known a day in which we did not have an experience of the love of God in



Jesus Christ. However, we are able to mark the time in our lives when our faith in God became our own personal faith and less the faith of those who encouraged us along the way. While it is easy to go through the motions of religious activity, our call, as followers of Jesus Christ, is to live and serve out of a personal relationship with God.

To experience the power of transformation, we are going to encounter Zacchaeus. Have someone in your group read aloud Luke 19:1–9. Try to imagine what it must have been like to have been Zacchaeus. Here are some things to ponder about Zacchaeus' life:

- » Scripture records that Zacchaeus was small and had to climb a tree to see Jesus. Apparently, he had no friends along the parade route to help him see Jesus. Zacchaeus worked for the Roman Empire. He not only collected taxes for the occupying power, but he also took extra taxes to increase his riches, which made him a despised man. As he scrambled through the crowds to get a glimpse of Jesus, not one person in the crowd said to Zacchaeus, “Hey, step in front of me; I want you to see him!”
- » The cool thing is that he climbs a tree to see Jesus, and Jesus notices him up in that sycamore. Jesus invites him to come down from the tree. And then Jesus takes another step toward intimacy: he goes to Zacchaeus' home.
- » Because of this personal relationship with Jesus, Zacchaeus' life is transformed. He makes amends with the people he has cheated, and he serves the poor.

Transformation has three main phases: the time before we encounter life's meaning, an experience of meeting the love of God in Jesus Christ, and life lived in response to God's love.

TALK:

In groups of three, share the name of a person who has helped you see Jesus, someone through whom you have experienced a life-changing relationship with God. Take turns praying for these people by offering God thanks and praise. Then, take the time to share and pray about people in your life whom you can help to see Jesus.

Leader Tip/Option: You may want to have people create a time line that is actually a “Life Line” where they share on a continuum (starting from birth to the present) the important events (both positive and negative) that have happened in their lives that have drawn them closer to God or taken them farther from God. You could also use this image from Ely Cathedral in Ely, England as an example of a continuum. You can use large paper or poster board as well as colored pencils or markers; get creative!



TRY:

As a group, reflect on how the major areas of ministry in the church help bring people closer to God. Another way of looking at this theme is to share about which church ministry is helping people draw closer to Jesus.

TAKE:

Read Luke 19:1–9 with your conversation partner and then spend about an hour sharing about the person who helped you see Jesus, and how that experience of Jesus has made a difference in your life. Help your partner share about the person who has helped him or her.

Gathering Two:

Resting in and Trusting Jesus

Tools:

- » Brennan Manning video *Live at Woodcrest* downloaded from YouTube.com
- » Photocopy of the quote from *Blue Like Jazz* by Donald Miller

THINK:

We all have a relationship with God. Each one of us can own and live into this reality. However, do we know that the core of this relationship is about God’s unconditional love? In this gathering we will examine what it means to trust the love of God in Jesus and to live by this love. We will look at our life’s orientation: do we have more of a tendency to rest in God’s love, or do we tend to strive to receive God’s love in Jesus? What drives our ministry? Are we driven by our own strength or by our relationship with Jesus Christ?

To understand where we are on the scale of resting and striving, we will use the following Scripture: John 15:1–8.

Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you (John 15:4, The Message).

This passage is a reminder that God wants an intimate relationship with us. In this relationship we discover the joy of living our real and lasting lives. The hard part about faith is that we can know a lot about God, yet never truly know God. If we don’t intentionally pursue a relationship with God, then we begin to live off our ideas about God. For example, we live out of the information we have received about Jesus from our tradition, religious experiences, and families. We teach about Jesus and serve on committees, but when it comes to a relationship with him, we have a difficult time with what this means.

It’s interesting that we cannot enter into this intimate relationship with Christ by striving to make it on our own; we must remain in Christ. The Greek root of the word remain is *meno*, which at its core means to lean into or to rest in someone else. This is what we mean when we refer to an intimate relationship. The same root word is used in John’s description of the Last Supper. In John 13:22–25, Jesus is

with his friends during a Passover meal before his arrest, which is a trying time of doubt, uncertainty, and betrayal. In this difficult time, the “beloved” disciple is reclining (*meno*) into Jesus with his head on Jesus’ chest.

In *Blue Like Jazz*, Donald Miller sheds some light on what it means to have a relationship with Jesus:

A guy I know named Alan went around the country asking ministry leaders questions. He went to successful churches and asked the pastors about what they were doing, why what they were doing was working. It sounded very boring except for one visit he made to a man named Bill Bright, the president of a big ministry. Alan said he was a big man, full of life, who listened without shifting his eyes. Alan asked a few questions. I don’t know what they were, but as a final question he asked Dr. Bright what Jesus meant to him. Alan said Dr. Bright could not answer the question. He said Dr. Bright just started to cry. He sat there in his big chair behind his big desk and wept. When Alan told that story I wondered what it was like to love Jesus that way (p. 233).

We have heard the news that we are loved by God. However, there are things in our lives that keep us from experiencing this love in our hearts. Sometimes it’s the lies we’ve learned to believe about ourselves that confine God’s deep love of us to information that stays in our brains, rather than a love that truly penetrates our hearts. At times, it’s our disappointment with God that causes us to believe that we must work harder or strive for a love that never seems to be ours. Our lives end up being more about doing than remaining in the Christ.

When this love penetrates our hearts our lives become different. We undergo transformation. The good news we talk about becomes the good news of our lives. This news shapes our lives; we live very different lives, and the world begins to change. Because of the love of God in Jesus, Jean Vanier started the L’Arche community, where people with mental disabilities share life with those without disabilities in biblical communities that practice radical hospitality. Dietrich Bonhoeffer stood against the evil of the Nazi reign in Germany because of the life-changing love of Jesus. Martin Luther King, Jr. was steadfast in his commitment to nonviolent reform even in the face of extreme provocation. Mother Teresa gave herself away to the poorest of the poor because of her relationship with Jesus. These are just a few examples of the transformative love of God in Jesus Christ.

TALK:

Share in groups of three your hopes and concerns about your relationship with God. Is it easy or hard for you to believe

that God loves you as you are and desires to be intimately involved in your life?

TRY:

Brennan Manning, in the YouTube video *Live at Woodcrest*, says that when he sees God face to face, he feels like the one question God will ask is, “Did you know how much I loved you?” He goes on to say that so many of us have talked and read about God’s love, but we have not actually believed that we are loved beyond imagining by God. (If you have access to the Internet, watch the video.)

In groups of three, share about a time when you felt the transforming power of love. Ask each other, “When and how did you hear God’s words of love for you?” Then share about a time when a period of striving left you feeling less than satisfied. Pray with one another by giving thanks for these moments of love that lead us into new life.

TAKE:

Read the Scripture passages listed below and think about a time when you have experienced God’s unconditional love for you.

Romans 8:31–39

John 8:1–8

Colossians 1:15–18, *The Message*

Write a few ways in which you might allow God to love you more fully.

Gathering Three: ***God’s Story of Creative Purpose***

Tools:

- » Photocopy of Genesis 1:1–23
- » Colored pencils or pens for each participant

THINK:

When we look at Scripture, we do not always get the big picture. The purpose of this time spent in Scripture is to understand and experience ourselves as part of God’s mission (*missio Dei*) to reach and rescue creation with a loving purpose. This mission is consummated by God. In other words, God will complete what God starts.

Spend time reading Genesis 1:1—2:35 and Revelation 21:1–5, 22–27; 22:1–5. In these readings we see that God creates a good and beautiful world, and in the end God completes this good and beautiful creation. Take a photocopy

of Genesis 1:1—2:3, underline the word “good” each time it occurs, and notice what in creation is very good.

The Christian story of creation is unique because the Christian worldview begins with goodness. Many primitive creation narratives begin with a battle between the gods, and out of this battle the world is made. But our story does not begin with conflict; rather it starts out as good. We have a purpose: to love God and one another and to care for creation.

We make a mistake when we begin the biblical story with sin. Our story does not begin or end with sin and brokenness. Our story begins with goodness and beauty and ends with goodness and beauty being restored. Our mission to our community would change if we truly lived into the good news that God not only created this good and beautiful world, but God is also restoring creation. Believing this, we would treat one another with more grace and be better stewards of creation. Perhaps then, people beyond the faith community would experience people of faith as people on a mission to rescue and restore a good but broken world. Maybe, just maybe, we would dispel the stereotype that Christians are known more for what we are against than what we are for.

TALK:

In groups of two, share and pray about the goodness you see in the other and the goodness you see in creation.

TRY:

During your Session meeting, notice how often your ministry is seen and talked about as good instead of as a ministry that needs to be fixed. Following the meeting, briefly share about how God has created a good creation and is restoring creation even now, and how this knowledge can make a difference in how your church Session handles any tension and negativity while doing ministry.

TAKE:

Take the time every day to write down the good things in your life, church, community, and world, such as family, Bible study, serving a neighbor, mentoring, and walking in the woods. Then share with your conversation partner the goodness in your life. Talk about the difference it makes that creation started off as good and that God will restore not only the spiritual, but the physical realm as well.

Gathering Four: What Went Wrong?

Tools:

- » NOOMA video *Lump*

THINK:

Even though creation started off as good, it is important to claim as part of our story that creation is broken by sin. How we address sin is critical to our understanding of the mission of the church. Invite someone to read Genesis 3:1–13.

According to Scripture, our sin was that we wanted to be God; we were not content with our purpose of loving God, loving others, and caring for creation. The Hebrew word for sin means that we have missed the mark. Missing the mark is the meaning behind eating the fruit in the Garden of Eden. In the creation story, the one thing the first humans could not do was eat from the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. To eat of this fruit displayed the desire to be God. Instead of loving God and serving God, the first creatures on earth decided they'd rather be in control. If humanity had not missed the mark, then we would not live in a world marked by racism, poverty, violence, greed, and pollution. Sin breaks our relationships with God, others, ourselves, and creation. Therefore, sin is both corporate and personal.

You can get a copy of the NOOMA video *Lump* by Rob Bell by visiting <http://nooma.com>.

It is a film about God's unconditional love, which loves us as we are, but loves us way too much to leave us as we are. In the film, a little boy has stolen a ball from his neighbor. When he is found out, he is filled with shame and hides under the comforter on his parents' bed. His father finds him, holds him, and tells him how much he loves him. The boy has to return the ball and make amends, but this act of making amends is done not from a place of shame, but from a stance of love.

When it comes to addressing sin, we seem to either stress grace and deemphasize obedience or overlook grace and begin with the message of getting one's life straight. But what if the two things actually go together? We are justified by an unconditional love and set on a path of sanctification that leads us into lives of obedience and holiness.

TALK:

Understanding that sin is missing the mark, share in groups of three what it means to you to miss the mark. How have you missed the mark? How has the church missed the mark? Share also about ways in which you have experienced grace and how that grace has changed your life.

TRY:

As a large group, share about ways in which your church has missed the mark. Maybe you have become more inwardly than outwardly focused. Maybe there's tension in the body that needs to be dealt with. Maybe there is some lingering resentment over a recent decision. Identify, confess, and pray together.

TAKE:

Spend some time in prayer. Following your prayer time, write out your understanding of forgiveness. How has forgiveness set you free? What are the consequences of sin? From what and for what are we saved? How does Jesus going to the cross provide the answer to the sin question? During a period of silent reflection and prayer, write down the things in your life that you want God to change. What do you need to give over to God so that you can experience strength and guidance?

- » Your job?
- » A relationship?
- » Inner conflict?
- » Some area in your life in which you have missed the mark?

Share your list with your conversation partner.

When it comes to addressing sin, we seem to either stress grace and deemphasize obedience or overlook grace and begin with the message of getting one's life straight. But what if the two things actually go together?



Gathering Five: *God's Rescue Plan—A Special People*

Tools:

- » Flip chart or whiteboard and markers
- » Paper and pens for each participant

THINK:

We believe that God created a good and beautiful world. However, this beautiful creation is broken because the first humans decided that they would be better off being God than serving God. Humanity continues to choose this path of destruction. The good news is that God is not content to leave us in our brokenness. God takes on human flesh and blood to rescue us and show us the way into life's purpose and meaning.

God does not leave us in our sin or abandon creation in its brokenness. In a broken world, God calls a broken, faithful man. Abraham is not perfect, but he has a longing for God. In a world that is terribly broken and makes little sense, Abraham knows there is a God reaching out to him. It is out of this experience of God that Abraham hears God's call to leave all he knows for a land he does not know. And there is a promise tied to this call: that Abraham and the people of the world will be blessed. The point of the blessing is that they will know the love of God and life's meaning and purpose, and have a community in which to grow up in a broken world. Today, God continues to call people to be a blessing.

The mission of God is revealed through the incarnational approach of God in Abraham, the people of Israel, and the prophets. God uses people like you and me to accomplish God's work of redemption and transformation. Abraham has a heart for God. Because Abraham steps out in faith trusting God, there is a promise that he will be blessed: that he will know the fullness of life that comes in a relationship

with God and that others will be blessed through him. In other words, through Abraham and his descendants, others will come to know the joy of living into God's purposes. This blessing becomes the call of Israel. However, when the people fail to live in response to God's blessing, the prophets continually call the people back to their purpose to be a blessing.

TALK:

Read aloud Genesis 12:1–15. In groups of three, share how you (personally and corporately) have stepped out in faith in ways that caused you to know more clearly the purposes of God for you and your church.

TRY:

As a group, list on a flip chart or whiteboard all the ways in which the church is currently blessing the community. Then list ways in which the church can be more of a blessing. Another way of looking at this second statement is to list what you believe to be the major areas of brokenness in your community and ways the church can participate in what God is doing to heal your community.

TAKE:

Find three people you can be a blessing to this month. One person can be a person who is hard for you to love. Examples of ways to be a blessing:

- » Rake the leaves or sweep the driveway of your neighbor.
- » Be intentional in conversation, inviting people to talk about their lives. (Listening is a great gift.)
- » Pay for the person behind you in a drive-through line.
- » Intentionally go to a place of business in a part of town that is struggling economically.
- » Let others go ahead of you in the checkout line.

Gathering Six:

Salvation Through Jesus

Tools:

- » Flip chart or whiteboard and markers
- » Photocopy of Walt Kallestad's story for each participant
- » Writing journals for participants who don't already have one

THINK:

Jesus was the one for whom generations had been waiting. Colossians 1:18–20 reminds us that our salvation is not about Jesus and something else. It's only about Jesus. Everything finds its meaning in Jesus. Our story of faith is about a loving God who pursues us and finds us in the love and life of Jesus.

Again, God does not leave us in our brokenness. God takes on human flesh and blood so that we will see God's compassion for us. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God reveals God's plan of redemption and restoration. To make things right, God pays a huge price.

We often miss the price paid on the cross for our sin because we have missed the enormity of the power of sin in our lives. The following story about a woman who stops at a truck stop for gas illustrates our tendency to miss the power of sin in our lives:

As she pulled onto the freeway she noticed a truck pulled out and followed her. No matter how fast she went, the trucker stayed behind her. This went on for several miles, until she pulled off onto the side of the road and jumped out of her car. As she ran away, she looked back and watched as the truck driver jumped out of the cab of his truck, ran to her car, threw open the back door, and dragged a man out of the back seat. To her horror, the woman realized that a would-be attacker had hidden in her car. The trucker had seen him and was trying to catch up to her to save her life (Walt Kallestad, *Christian Faith: The Basics*, pp. 32–33).

Many of us hear the language of needing a savior, but we're not really sure we need one. The powers of this world are very strong; we are tempted to hate people because they are different and we are tempted to do what we want when we want to do it. God's way of making right what is wrong by giving up life is the opposite way in which the powers of the world work. The powers and principalities of this world take and exploit life to get their way. But our story reveals that these powers are defeated by the love of God that is

willing to give up life to save life.

In the death of Jesus, we experience the price that is paid for our sin and God's victory over all that is against God. In the resurrection of Jesus we understand that there is nothing that can keep this way of life from being our lives now and forever. In Jesus, we not only experience the power of forgiving, sacrificial love, but we find the way to live our lives in Jesus' life.

Our approach to evangelism has to be about life being real and good in Jesus. He preached and lived the good news of the Kingdom of God. He preached: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). Salvation is about reconciliation, healing, and deliverance now and forever. It's not about being saved for heaven and continuing to live the old life of greed and resentment. By God's grace, we become like Jesus and become expressions of God's love in the world. In other words, we join God in God's mission. We become the kind of good we want to see in the world. And we realize that we need community to grow up into our real and lasting lives.

TALK:

We believe that Jesus is Savior and Lord. In groups of three, share your thoughts about what you believe you need saving from. In other words, why do we need a savior?

TRY:

How is Jesus Lord? If part of what it means that Jesus is Lord is that we follow Jesus into the mission of God, then list ways in which your church is engaging God's mission of reconciliation and redemption.

TAKE:

Part of the take-home work will be to write in your journal. When we experience God's work in Jesus, we encounter our freedom in Jesus' saving power, and we engage our purpose in Jesus' lordship. Take some time to reflect upon and write about what it means to you that there's nothing you can do to earn this freedom and purpose. Use Ephesians 2:8–10 as a focus of your reflection. Your freedom and purpose come freely as a gift from God. This is the meaning and power of grace. Share what you are learning with your conversation partner.



Gathering Seven: *Salvation Through the Church*

Tools:

- » Provide copies or encourage participants to buy the book *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In* by James Choung

THINK:

Read Mark 1:17–18.

If possible, watch the NOOMA video *Dust* at <http://nooma.com>. If not possible, refer to the following background information:

The disciples dropped everything to follow Jesus. Following a rabbi was a huge deal in that time. Basically, elementary school was about memorizing the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), and middle school was about memorizing the rest of the Old Testament. Following middle school, the best of the best went on to follow a rabbi. The rest went on to learn the family business. When Jesus called the disciples, they were not the best of the best; they were learning the fishing business. Jesus called them to follow him. He believed they could live his life! He believed they could take on his yoke. They dropped everything to live the life of their rabbi. They were signing on with Jesus to reach people.

The mission has not changed. We are signing up with Jesus to reach people, too. The message the church has to offer the world is about God, who has come to offer life to the human spirit.

TALK:

In groups of three, share what it means that you are a “sending” community. You are not in this community for yourselves; you are here for others. In the church, disciples receive nurture and training to live with others and invite

them into a way of life that will satisfy their deepest longings. “The kingdom of God isn’t there for the sake of the church. The church is there for the sake of the kingdom. So, all the church’s own concerns and interests must be subordinated to Jesus’ concern for God’s kingdom” (Jurgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today’s World*, p. 147).

We are missionaries to our culture. How are we living as missionaries? Do we know the language of our culture? How are we building trusting, authentic relationships with people outside the church? How are we relating the gospel to the needs of people in our culture?

TRY:

Read Matthew 6:5–14. What if our Christian rhythm is the living out of this prayer? The will of God in heaven is realized on earth through the work of the church. We cannot live by the values of the earthly realm and expect to realize heaven on earth. As you explore what it means to be missionaries in your community, share using these questions:

- » What are the values of this earthly realm?
- » In what ways has the church bought into these earthly values?
- » What are the values of God in heaven?
- » In what ways are we tempted into sin?
- » What is the evil we see in the world?
- » How has this evil invaded the ministry of the church?
- » How are we forgiving others and experiencing forgiveness?
- » How is the mission of the church advancing the will of God on earth as it is in heaven?

TAKE:

Read *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In* by James Choung.

Gathering Eight: *Putting Together the Stories*

Tools:

- » *The Big Story, Part 1* and *The Big Story, Part 2* by James Choung, downloaded from YouTube, James Choung's Web site, or the PC(USA)'s evangelism Web site
- » Paper and pens for each participant

THINK:

The purpose of this gathering is to begin to put together the story line of the good news of Scripture in a way that is clear and engaging to people outside the church. Participants will learn to engage the story of Scripture in a way that can be authentically shared with others. We have not only our story to share, but also the message of Scripture.

James Choung's book, *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In*, is very helpful in learning how to share the essentials of the faith with another person. His portrayal of the Big Story of Scripture is a very compelling and effective way of sharing God's mission. By telling this story, you are able to help people identify where they are and where they want to be in the faith. The major parts of the story are the following:

WE ARE DESIGNED FOR GOOD: Choung describes God's good creation and emphasizes God's purpose for human beings as loving God, one another, and caring for creation.

WE ARE DAMAGED BY EVIL: Creation is broken because of our desire to be God instead of trusting God and living into our purpose. All of creation is broken! Relationships are broken. Our lives are broken. Communities are broken.

WE ARE RESTORED FOR BETTER: The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ bring us forgiveness and hope and set us on a journey of healing the world.

WE ARE SENT TO HEAL TOGETHER: This is the mission of the church! This, and only this purpose, is the reason the church exists.

The videos *The Big Story, Part 1* and *The Big Story, Part 2* by James Choung are available on the following Web sites:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCVcSiUUMhY

www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4V60n6KiB8

www.jameschoung.net

www.pcusa.org/recommended-evangelism

Both videos are important to view.

TALK:

In groups of three, share and pray about what seems helpful and what seems difficult about this way of describing the gospel. If necessary, show the videos again.

TRY:

Without a partner, practice sharing the story in your own words.

TAKE:

Share *The Big Story* with your conversation partner. Also, begin to write out your own story of faith. Some helpful ideas to ponder are:

- » The closest I have felt to God in my life was . . .
- » If I could thank God for one person or circumstance in my life, it would be . . .
- » If I could name a turning point in my relationship with God, it would be . . .
- » How have you responded to a nudge from God?

The purpose of this gathering is to begin to put together the story line of the good news of Scripture in a way that is clear and engaging to people outside the church.

Gathering Nine: *Sharing Your Faith Story*

Tools:

- » Paper and pens for each participant
- » Whiteboard and markers

THINK:

Each of us has a story to tell. We have all been changed by the gospel. And people around us not only need to be served by us, but they also need to hear why we are serving our communities and living a different lifestyle. In this gathering we will work on and practice sharing our own stories of faith (testimonies).

One of the ways to write out our story is to use the following template:

- » My life before I committed my life to Jesus . . .
- » My life when Jesus became real to me . . .
- » My life following Jesus into meaning and purpose . . .

TRY:

Continue to work on your story. Use the following questions to guide your writing:

- » How is my life different because I am a follower of Jesus Christ?
- » Who were and are the people who have helped and are helping me grow in my commitment to God's way of life in Jesus Christ?
- » How has God worked in my life to help me grow as a disciple of Christ?
- » What is God doing right now in my life that is good news?

TALK:

In groups of three, take turns sharing your story (faith statement or testimony). As a large group, pray around the table for your church and community—that the Holy Spirit will lead you into a disciple-making ministry that will lead to faith-sharing and mission.

TAKE:

Share your faith story with your conversation partner.

Each of us has a story to tell.
We have all been changed by
the gospel. And people around
us not only need to be served
by us, but they also need to
hear why we are serving our
communities and living a
different lifestyle.

PHASE TWO: INSPIRE

Wider Group of Ministry Leaders

*Sharing and Living into the Story: Disciple-Making
That Leads to Evangelism and Justice*



Purpose:

During this phase the process will open up to a wider group of ministry and church leaders. This will be a time of engaging the story of the church and how that story has helped people live into, claim, and own their own faith stories. It will also be a time to address how the church is living into God's story of love and rescue (which is God's story of salvation). Participants will experience the material the Session covered in Phase One. Then the leaders of the church will engage in disciple-making and what God is doing to lead the church to reach the community. Participants will be placed in small groups. Elders will be trained to lead these groups. Gatherings lasting an hour and a half will take place once a month. Each participant will be encouraged to have a conversation partner who is a person outside the church.

The result of this phase will be an examination of the ministry of the church and the shifts in focus that must happen for the church to truly make disciples and release them into the community. The leadership will look at ministry shifts that lead to:

- » Small groups/accountability

- » Bible studies/personal and corporate
- » Faith-sharing training
- » Fellowship opportunities into which unchurched people can be invited
- » Service opportunities in which unchurched people can experience the faith community
- » Development of opportunities for unchurched people to explore the faith
- » Worship in the community and vibrant worship inside the church building
- » Development of a mentoring program

The result of this phase will be an examination of the ministry of the church and the shifts in focus that must happen for the church to truly make disciples and release them into the community.

Gathering One: Overview of Personal Stories and the Gospel Story

Note: Skip this gathering if you are combining Phases One and Two

If possible, hold Gathering One on a Saturday. During this retreat time, the participants will work through two sessions. If you are not doing a retreat, divide this gathering into two separate gatherings. The first session will work through the John 15:1–8 passage, as participants engage and claim their own stories of transformation. Session Two will involve working through the story of transformation found in Scripture. This retreat may be led by the pastor and elders of the church. Leaders are encouraged to use as much of the material in Phase One as is helpful.

Scripture:

John 15:1–8

Session One:

9:00–10:00 a.m. **Striving or Abiding**

Read John 15:1–8:

Background Information:

The Greek work for “remain” is *meno*, which means to lean into. This passage is about an intimate relationship with God. In John 13:22–25, we encounter a clear picture of what this intimate relationship looks like. This same root word is used in John’s description of the Last Supper. The context is Jesus sharing the Passover meal with his disciples. It’s a time of anxiety and fear. And the Beloved Disciple is described as reclining into Jesus. In other words, his head is resting on Jesus’ chest. That’s an intimate relationship. Think about the people with whom you have intimate relationships.

In groups of two:

- » Share about a time when you were held by someone or you held someone.
- » Talk about the fact that although we have heard we are loved by God, what keeps us from knowing this love in our hearts? (Maybe it’s the lies we’ve learned to believe about ourselves? Maybe it’s our disappointment with God? Maybe our faith has become more about *doing* than about *resting* in God?)

10:00–10:15 a.m. **Break**

10:15–11:15 a.m. **Claiming the Gift We Have to Share**

Video: Brennan Manning, *Live at Woodcrest*

In groups of three, discuss and share the following:

- » When have we experienced the love that Brennan talks about?
- » When have we known a time in which we are loved as we are, but loved way too much to be left as we are?
- » Was this love communicated through a person, a place, an event, or a circumstance?
- » Talk about a time when you knew you were loved by God.

The Scripture records that we will bear much fruit if we remain in Christ. The fruit of this kind of life is described in part in Galatians 5:22–23 as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” This is the very life that the forces of evil cannot defeat, and this way of life is revealed as the only life that will last.

The point is that if we believe this good news, our lives will change. As we live differently and share this good news with others, the world will begin to change.

11:15–11:30 a.m. **Break**

11:30 a.m.–12:00 **Write out your faith story with the help of the following questions:**

- » How is my life different because I am a follower of Christ?
- » What is God doing right now in my life that is good news?
- » Who are the people who have been important in my faith development?

12:00–1:00 p.m. **Lunch**

Session Two:

1:00–2:00 p.m. **The Story of Scripture: God on a Mission**

Creation

- » We are created for a relationship with God and others.
- » We are created to enjoy God and care for creation.
- » We are created to love God, neighbor, and self.

Crisis

- » We decided we would rather be God than be with God.
- » The result is sin; we became broken, isolated, and lonely.

Calling and Conversation

- » God uses Abraham and the people of Israel to reach creation.
- » We are blessed to be a blessing.
- » Reconciliation comes through incarnational redemption.

Gathering Two: Styles of Evangelism

- » When the people of Israel become like the other nations, the prophets call them back to their purpose of blessing others.

Christ

- » Jesus saves us from the sin of wanting to go our own way.
- » He rewires our hearts.
- » He points us along God's way.
- » We walk in his dust. (We learn from our rabbi.)

Church

- » We are the body of Christ on earth.
- » Acts 2:42–45 describes how disciples grow:

Teaching

Fellowship

Breaking bread together

Prayer

Worship

- » We are called to heal the nations (Ezekiel 47).

Consummation

- » What God starts, God completes.
- » Just as all creation has its meaning in Jesus, the world will find its meaning in Jesus. (Adapted from Brian McLaren's *The Story We Find Ourselves In*)

2:00–2:15 p.m. Break

2:15–3:15 p.m. Sharing the Story of God's Mission

(In Gathering Nine, you will explore this story more deeply.)

Watch *The Big Story*, parts 1 and 2, by James Choung

Questions for discussion (in groups of three):

- » What did you like about the presentations?
- » How did part 2 complete part 1?
- » How is this way of sharing the story of God's mission different from others you have experienced?

In groups of two, practice sharing this story with another person.

3:15–3:30 p.m. Break

3:30–4:30 p.m. Share your own faith story or testimony

Share your story with another person, and then debrief as a large group how you felt sharing your story and God's story (*The Big Story*, parts 1 and 2).

Close with a time of prayer.

Homework: Find your conversation partner.

Tools:

- » NOOMA video *Bullhorn*
- » Television and DVD player
- » Photocopy of the six styles of evangelism for each participant

THINK:

Every Christ follower has a story to tell. Each one of us has an authentic way in which we are wired to tell and share our story. The most important part of sharing faith is building relationships with people outside the church and praying for the people in our lives. But it is helpful to know that there are a variety of ways to share the faith.

As you walk through six styles of evangelism from the book *Becoming a Contagious Christian* by Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, you will encounter your own style for sharing the faith. You will also realize, depending on the situation, that you will find yourself using any number of these styles.

CONFRONTATIONAL STYLE:

Acts 2:38–41 is an example of this style. Peter tells people to repent and be baptized. He is in their face with the gospel. Billy Graham is an example of this style. He paints a clear picture of God's plan for life in Christ and leaves a person with a decision to make.

INTELLECTUAL STYLE:

Acts 17:16–34 is an example of this style. Paul is in the Areopagus, a place of debate and conversation, and he tells the people about God. He uses their desire for truth to introduce the nature of God revealed in Jesus. He uses a statue to an unknown God to tell them about the one true God. Lee Strobel is a modern example of this style. Lee was an atheist, and came to Christ through his wife's change-of-life transformation through the Christian faith. He had many doubts about the faith, but once he claimed a relationship with God through faith in Christ, he started to see how the Christian worldview made sense. He now writes and speaks about how a relationship with Jesus has changed his life and is changing the course of creation.

TESTIMONIAL STYLE:

John 9:1–34 is a biblical example of this style. The blind man is healed by Jesus, and his testimony is about how Jesus has changed his life. What he knows about Jesus is that before he met Jesus he could not

see! In an encounter with Jesus, his sight is restored.

INTERPERSONAL STYLE:

Luke 5:27–31 is an example of the interpersonal style. This style is conversational. Matthew, the tax collector, finds new life in following Jesus and invites his friends to a party where they can hang out with Jesus.

INVITATIONAL STYLE:

John 4:1–42 is an example of an invitational style. The woman encounters Jesus. She is a person who goes to the well in the heat of the day so that no one is around. She is the topic of conversation around the well because of her lifestyle. However, in Jesus she experiences the love of God. She experiences being loved as she is, but being loved way too much to be left as she is. Out of the change in her life, she bears witness to people in her village, both those who supported her and those who were against her.

SERVING STYLE:

Acts 9:36–43 is an example of the serving style of evangelism. People come to know the love of God because Dorcas cared about their human condition.

TALK:

In groups of three, share about your style of evangelism and briefly share what is difficult for you in faith-sharing. Following your discussion, spend time praying for one another. Pray that you will be more aware of the opportunities around you to share your faith. Pray that you will have the courage to share your faith. Begin to share about people in your life whom you'd like the group to pray for so that they will be open to faith-sharing.

TRY:

In groups of six, act out each style of evangelism. If possible, show the NOOMA video *Bullhorn* from <http://nooma.com> as an example of one of the reasons we formerly did not share faith.

TAKE:

Share with your conversation partner about your style of evangelism and how God can use your style to reach others. Talk about the reasons why evangelism has been de-emphasized in our churches.

Gathering Three: *Disciple-Making Leads to Justice and Faith-Sharing*

Tools:

- » Flip chart or whiteboard and markers
- » NOOMA video *Dust*

THINK:

Outside of disciple-making, evangelism becomes an awkward ministry that we feel we must do to grow our churches. However, we never truly own and live into evangelism because faith-sharing is not a natural part of our spiritual DNA. The path of discipleship leads to organic and authentic evangelism. The result of evangelism is not new members, but more people living out of their real and lasting lives and joining God's rescue mission through the church.

Read Acts 2:42–47 and Galatians 5:22. The Acts passage gives the reader a great description of the essentials needed to grow disciples of Jesus. The key essentials are worship, fellowship, learning, and serving. This community produces people who live together the life of Jesus. Galatians gives us an account of what the life of a follower of Christ looks like. Read again the fruit of the Spirit. It's interesting that a certain kind of community (Acts 2:42–47) produces a certain kind of people (Galatians 5:22).

If possible, watch together the NOOMA video *Dust* at <http://nooma.com>.

In this video, Rob Bell paints a picture of discipleship that is so much more than simply learning about God. Discipleship is about a relationship with God. The Jewish people in Jesus' day had a way of knowing God. Their elementary-school experience involved memorizing the first five books of the Bible. That's right—they memorized Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy! Middle school was about memorizing the rest of what we know as the Old Testament. Then, the best and the brightest would apply to learn from a rabbi. If the rabbi believed the student could live his life and take on his yoke, then the rabbi would invite the student to follow and learn from him. A student not yoked to a rabbi would learn the family business.

Where did Jesus find his disciples? They were already at work in the family business. They were not the best of the best! But Jesus invited them to take on his yoke because he believed they could live his life. Jesus believes that we can live his life! He believes that we can serve others and share our faith in ways that change our communities and world. God gives us a community in which we can grow up to live Jesus' life.



From Scripture we learn about the marks of a disciple-making community: prayer, Bible study, community, mentoring, giving, serving, tithing, and fasting. Spiritual disciplines increase our receptivity to grace. Grace is the experience of being loved as we are, yet loved way too much to be left as we are. The marks of discipleship lead us more fully into God's love and what God is doing to transform our lives. Dallas Willard writes, "The 'Christ focus' is sustained and developed by shaping our lives, with his help, around definite and time-proven practices that enable us to be kingdom people: to live in the presence and to obey his teachings from the inside out" (Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today*, p. 159).

Discipleship is learning to live the rabbi's life! When we live Christ's life, our behaviors change and we are transformed daily by God into the likeness of Jesus. Transformation takes place through Scripture, prayer, and community.

When we examine our church, in what ways are we helping people to engage and apply Scripture to their lives? How does prayer become a way of connecting with God and one another? How does the community hold us accountable to this new way of life?

TALK:

The following questions are designed to help you think and talk about disciple-making that leads to serving and faith-sharing. Share the following discussions in groups of three:

Prayer has to be more than opening and closing meetings. Prayer is our connection with God.

- » How much time do we spend in personal prayer?
- » How would each of us describe our personal prayer life?

- » How often do we pray for people who do not know the love of God to experience the fullness of life in Jesus Christ?
- » How often do we pray with a prayer partner for those in our community?

Bible study is critical.

- » What does it mean to you to set aside devotional time?
- » How many people among us are engaging others in the study of Scripture?
- » How can we design Bible study so that people look more like Jesus?
- » How do we or how could we engage those who are spiritually seeking in Bible study?

Mentoring is key.

- » How many people have a mentoring relationship in the church?
- » What would a mentoring ministry look like in our church?

Community holds us accountable to the new life in Christ.

- » Do you have a group in the church that you trust to hold you lovingly accountable to the life of Christ?
 - What's good about this group?
 - What's difficult?
- » If you are not in a group like this in the church, have you ever experienced the support and accountability that come from small-group life?
- » How do we set up community so that we receive support and accountability?

Worship is essential.

- » How much of our worship focuses on God's love?
- » How much of our worship examines and deals with the human condition and helps us grow into our baptismal vows as followers of Jesus?
- » How much of our worship encourages us to join God's mission of rescuing and reconciling a broken world?

Fasting draws us closer to God.

- » How does fasting draw us closer to God?
- » What other spiritual disciplines draw us closer to God and help us trust God?

Tithing is more than fund-raising.

- » How can tithing be experienced more as a discipline that draws people closer to God rather than as a church fund-raising ministry?

Most people grow the best through serving.

- » What are the serving opportunities we have through the ministry of the church?
- » Which ones do we connect with the most? Why?

TRY:

As a leadership team, take each of the above categories and examine your current ministry. What is actually helping to grow disciples of Jesus Christ? What needs to change or be added in our ministry so that we would have people growing through their faith in each of the above categories?

TAKE:

Talk with your conversation partner about the disciplines that help you grow in your faith and about what you need to grow even deeper in God's love.

Gathering Four: The New Normal

Tools:

- » Photocopy of the Past vs. New Normal list in the Talk section for each participant
- » "New Normal" video downloaded from www.pcusa.org/evangelism/engage
- » Television and DVD player

THINK:

Our denomination and churches are struggling to engage a radically changing culture. Statistics show that Americans are desperately searching spiritually, but the church is not connecting with the people we are seeking to reach. In this section, we want to look at how the culture around us has changed and how we can build bridges and engage with those searching and seeking for things that only God can satisfy and answer.

Together, look at a picture of a bridge in Honduras that is now on dry land. (Search Google images for "bridge in Honduras"; it is the first image that comes up.) The river has changed course and is flowing to the side of the bridge, making it irrelevant. In groups of four, talk about how this image may be an image for the church (bridge) and culture (river). Share the comments made in the small groups with the large group.

The reality is that the church must engage a world that is emerging into a postmodern, post-Christian, and image-based (and some argue, preliterate) culture. The culture is flowing right by the church as we focus on dwindling numbers and loss of influence, and fight over how we can return to the good old days. The truth is that we can't go backward; we have to look at what God is doing right now and at a way in which we should respond and engage the "New Normal" in which we find ourselves.

In his book, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . and Why It Matters*, author David Kinnaman interviews people outside the church, and he tells us honestly "what a new generation really thinks about the church." The words and accompanying images that the unchurched use are: judgmental; hypocritical; homophobic; too involved in politics; out of touch with reality; confusing; not accepting of other faiths; insensitive to others; old-fashioned; boring; and irrelevant. We don't just have an image problem; we have a problem connecting with and impacting those people God loves and wants us to reach with the gospel.

We don't just need to do church better. Instead, we need to understand and listen to those we want to reach, and rethink the ways in which we can authentically, personally, and intentionally share the gospel of Jesus Christ in our words and actions. As author/speaker Reggie McNeal puts it, "The culture around us does not wake up each day thinking they would go to church if only there were a good one to attend" (Reggie McNeal, *Present Future*, p. 10). In fact, the truth is even harder to accept. Not only are we failing to reach those who don't claim to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we are having difficulty keeping our own youth when they go to college, and even holding on to the members of our own churches!

TALK:

In groups of three or four, discuss the following changes in culture:

Post-Christian: Simply put, we have in a sense lost the home-court advantage in North America. Judeo-Christian background and belief are increasingly losing both influence and, in some arenas, relevance in the public sphere. For example, when formerly we used the word “God,” it would most likely take on the Judeo-Christian understanding. Now “God” could mean Yahweh, Allah, or a pantheon of many other gods. Many outside the church increasingly perceive the church as having no present effect in transforming the culture for good. In fact, many, including those being led by such New Atheists as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, see the church and religion in general as having a negative influence on society. Bono, the famous lead singer of the Irish band U2, has warned, “Faith and social action must go hand in hand; if the church doesn’t remember and reconnect with its roots, and its call to serve others, it will be dismissed as another irrelevant social club” (Greg Garrett, *We Get to Carry Each Other: The Gospel According to U2*, pp. 108–109).

Postmodern: For this discussion, let’s identify three aspects of postmodernism. First, there is a deep-seated feeling of disillusionment among the generations following the Baby Boomers. Science, economics, education, politics, and religion have all failed to solve the problems of humanity. The result is a generation left with radical doubt, skepticism, and cynicism. A second feature of postmodernism is *relativism*. It is a belief in its most extreme form that asserts that there is no truth, just what one experiences and how one interprets those experiences. It is the idea that there is no absolute truth. Therefore, what is true for one person might not be true for another; it is subjective to a person or a community. It is the embrace of the “both . . . and” instead of the “either . . . or.” This is an important hallmark of a generation that finds it difficult trusting others, that is suspicious of those claiming to have or know the truth, and that is repulsed by those they perceive as judgmental and exclusive. A third feature of postmodernism is, for our purposes, a culture of *religious pluralism*. It’s like when we were children and the first self-serve soda machines were installed in restaurants. We would fill our glasses with every variety of soft drink (and call that mixture a “kamikaze” because you had to be brave to drink that stuff)! In the postmodern world, people don’t commit to one religious belief system; they take a

little Christianity, and mix it with Buddhism, Hinduism, New Age spirituality and paganism and create their own belief system. This endless number of options has led to the customizing of faith, which is different from having a personal faith.

As Erwin MacManus writes in *Soul Cravings*: “What’s strange though, is that we seem more motivated to create our own truth rather than search for it . . . more is not always better . . . our souls are being spammed.”

Image-based Culture: Another feature of the changing culture and the influence of postmodernism is an increasing shift from a print-dominated culture to an image- and story-dominated culture. Some characteristics of a print-based and modernist view are individualistic, objective, abstract, linear, and rational. According to Shane Hipps in *Flickering Pixels*, “As image-based communication becomes dominant . . . it changes the way we think and determines what we think about. Images are not well-suited to articulate arguments, categories or abstractions. They are far better for presenting impressions and concrete realities.” This new generation responds far better to stories and personal illustration than to rational, linear argument/apologetic.

How does our perspective and even method of evangelism need to change in the “New Normal”? (adapted from Will H. McRaney, *The Art of Personal Evangelism*, p. 166)

Go over the following information together as a larger group:

Science, economics, education, politics, and religion have all failed to solve the problems of humanity.

Past	New Normal
Single encounter	Relationship building
Monologue	Dialogue/discussion
Gospel presentation	Story (personal/biblical)
Giving lots of information	Asking good questions
Presentation (apologetics)	Demonstration (embodied apologetic)
Individualistic	Community-centered
Being the expert	Being a fellow journeyer
Argumentation	Consideration
Ticket sales	Guided tours
Eternal benefits	Earthly impact and mission
Isolation/binary (us vs. them)	Community integration (we)

TRY:

Pick three or four categories from the list and act out the old way versus the new way.

Look at John 14:6 together. Talk briefly about how this passage might be important in responding to the questions and spiritual cravings of a new postmodern generation. Pray for each other as you prepare to think through how to share Jesus' own claims in John 14:6 with others.

TAKE:

Write down or simply think through how you might communicate the gospel in your life and with your words with others.

Gathering Five:

Do Our Hearts Break Over the Things That Break God's Heart?

Tools:

- » Photocopy of the community interview questions in the Talk section for each participant

THINK:

Instead of trying to figure out how the church can make a difference in the community, this is a time to pause and ask, "What is God already doing in our community that we can join God in doing?" In other words, "What breaks God's heart?"

When we begin to get a sense of the things that break God's heart, we begin to have a heart for the people around us. In Acts 17:16–34, we realize that Paul's heart is breaking over the things that break the heart of God. As Paul walks around Athens, he becomes angry over all the idols he sees. In other words, his heart breaks over all the ways people are trying to find and experience meaning and purpose in life that do not include the God who gives real and lasting life. Do we understand Paul's anger over all the idols that he sees in Athens? In our culture, family, politics, money, possessions, time, and even religion can become our idols. If we put our ultimate worth in something, then that particular thing or person has taken the place of God in our lives.

Paul spent time with people in the culture; he did not spend all his time at the synagogue! It's because he spent time with people that he was invited to the Areopagus to speak about God. We must earn the right to be heard! When we share our faith, people will fall into three main groups: some will be turned off, others will want to know more, and some will want Jesus when they hear of his real and lasting life.

TALK:

Next Saturday, we will spend time in our community in groups of three. We will go into such areas as coffee shops, parks, and pubs to engage people. We will ask them the following questions:

- » What do you believe is the greatest need in this community?
- » How do you see God at work in this community?
- » How could a church help this community?
- » How can we pray for you?

In groups of three, share around the following questions:

- » How do you feel about asking these questions?
- » Which question will be the hardest for you to ask?
- » What keeps you from talking about your faith?

Pray for one another.

TRY:

Prepare to walk your community. Talk about and decide on the three places in your community you believe would be the best places to visit. Once you are clear about the places you will visit, pray for one another and the areas you've chosen to visit.

TAKE:

Pray for the community visits. Pray that God will lead you to the people with whom you need to talk. Read *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In* by James Choung.

Instead of trying to figure out
how the church can make a
difference in the community,
this is a time to pause and ask,
"What is God already doing in
our community that we can
join God in doing?"



Gathering Six: Community Walk

Tools:

- » Photocopy of the questions in the Try section for each participant

THINK:

This session should be experienced on a Saturday. Meet at the church for Bible study and prayer. After thirty minutes of prayer and study, go to your designated neighborhood areas: a park, coffee shop, tattoo parlor, or pub. Spend about one and a half hours walking and talking with people. Return to the church for prayer and debriefing. The whole experience should take about three hours.

The following information is taken and adapted from the resource *Starting New Churches* by Brian Clark, et al.

Read Mark 6:7.

He [Jesus] called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.

Jesus sometimes sent disciples in twos to handle special assignments:

- » Jesus sent two disciples to fetch the donkey on which he'd ride into Jerusalem—Matthew 21:1
- » Jesus sent two disciples to prepare for Passover—Mark 14:13

TALK:

What ministry have you done/do you do with a partner

and why? What are the advantages of serving with another person?

- » Share with the group about a person with whom you've recently done ministry in partnership. After everyone has shared, take turns thanking God for and praying for that person in spoken prayer.
- » Encourage each member in the group to pray for something they hope will come from these visits.

TRY:

Divide into your groups to either walk or drive to the designated areas for visitation. Remember you have decided on three areas of town to visit. Once you get to your location, split up into groups of twos or threes. As you are walking to your location, pay attention to the surroundings in the part of your community you're visiting.

- » Who is there?
- » What are they doing?
- » Who are they in age? Gender? Race or ethnicity?
- » What are they talking about?
- » What language are they speaking?
- » How are they dressed?
- » Do they live in the area? Do they work in the area? Do they seem transient?
- » What sounds do you hear?
- » What levels of car/bus/foot traffic do you observe?
- » Are there sidewalks? Street lights? Signage?
- » What do the people you are observing already have?
- » What do they need?
- » What else do you notice?

Once you arrive at the coffee shop, restaurant, park, or

tattoo parlor, be open to engaging people in conversation. When appropriate, ask the following questions:

- » What is the greatest need of this community?
- » How could a church help meet this need?
- » How do you see God at work in the community?
- » How can we pray for you?

TAKE:

Prayer and Sharing (back at the church or in the community):

- » Pray for the people you observed and with whom you talked. Ask God to reveal if this might be where you are called to “do a new thing” in Jesus’ name.
- » Share your reflections. How were your observations similar? How were they different? What very specific details did you notice? What is your visceral response to this part of your community? How did you see the people and space through God’s eyes?

Gathering Seven: *What Did We Hear God Saying About Our Mission?*

Tools:

- » Paper and pens for each participant

THINK:

As we get a sense of what God is up to in our community and the ways God is calling us to reach out to people in our community, our eyes are opened to the people in our lives. We become more sensitive to people in our families, spheres of influence, and even the ones with whom we rarely or never spend time. In Acts 1:1–8, we discover that we are called to be witnesses to the life change we’ve experienced in Jesus. As we read through this passage, we are greeted with four categories of people.

We are called to be witnesses in Jerusalem—to the people closest to us. We are also called to bear witness in Judea—to the people who look, think, and act like us. We are also called to be witnesses in Samaria—to people we do not like. (Remember, Jews hated Samaritans! Samaritans were considered “half-breeds” who did not have the proper understanding of worship.) Also, we are called to be witnesses to the world.

TRY:

Make a list of people in your family who do not know the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Make a list of people in your neighborhood, work and community to whom you would like to talk about the fullness of life in Jesus.

Make a list of people with whom you feel uncomfortable. How would you get to a point where you could share your life and faith with them?

Make a list of people you have a heart for in other parts of the world.

TALK:

In groups of three, work through the following questions:

- » How is God leading us to bear witness in our community?
 - What if it really does start with your families?
 - Who are the people like us?
 - Who are the people not like us?
- » Who is our Jerusalem?
- » Who is our Judea?
- » Who is our Samaria?
- » On our community visits, what did it feel like to share faith with others?
- » Is there one outreach to which we are called?
- » Where do we see the church serving in ways that connect outreach with faith-sharing?

TAKE:

In the same groups of three, pray about each ministry and mission opportunity that’s lifted up. Pray for the courage to not only serve but to share faith. Make a prayer list of the people in your lives for whom you’re being called to nurture a relationship.

Pray about your sphere of influence (coffee shop, club, PTA) and discuss with your conversation partner why and how you can spend more time in this arena of your life. What would you need to give up in the church community to spend more time with people outside the church?



Gathering Eight: *Connecting and Going Deeper With People in Our Spheres of Influence*

THINK:

The purpose of this gathering is to go deeper into and become more intentional in our relationships with people around us. Don Everts and Doug Schaupp, the authors of *I Once Was Lost*, help the reader understand the context of sharing faith with unchurched friends and family. They lift up five thresholds through which people must move to become seekers and then pilgrims along the journey of faith.

Friends move from distrust to trust. Everts and Schaupp help their readers engage evangelism in a new cultural context. In our postmodern world, people are interested in Jesus, but not in the church. Many people are very suspicious of institutions like the church. Therefore, people need to experience Jesus through Christians who are loving and authentic. The best thing that can happen to a person who does not know God's love is to be in a relationship with a Christian who is both loving and accepting. God came into the world in the flesh and blood of Jesus to reveal God's unconditional love for humanity. People must trust us before they will hear one word we have to offer about real and lasting life.

Friends move from complacent to curious. Even though there is a longing in the human heart for something more, people don't always get the connections between their lives and the ways in which God is working to heal relationships and creation. As we are on the journey with another person,

we are called to be aware of the life events and experiences that open people to spiritual things. For example, many movies have spiritual themes and can become ways through which we talk about our brokenness and God's reconciling love.

Friends move from being closed to change to being open to change. When we are open and transparent about our lives, the door is open for our friends to see that things can change in their lives. How have you been open to change? It is helpful to others when we are able to share about times in our lives when we had to let go of something that was hurting us. Maybe we had to let go of control or an unforgiving spirit. Sometimes people have the belief that things are just the way they are, and that nothing can change!

Friends move from meandering to seeking. When we are engaging these sorts of conversations, it is important to be able to invite our friends into a group that is studying Scripture and investigating spiritual themes. This group can be a safe place for a seeker to explore the faith and to experience the faith of growing Christ followers.

Friends move from the threshold to kingdom life and work. Through prayer and nudging from the Holy Spirit, the time comes when you talk with your friends about joining God in God's mission of real and lasting life. In other words, there is an invitation into kingdom life.

TALK:

As you look at Acts 1:1–8 again, remember that we are called to bear witness to what we have seen and heard and experienced in Jesus. We are not called to condemn and judge others; we are called to bear witness to the saving power of God in Christ.



In groups of three, talk about where you need to spend more time to build relationships with people outside the church. Is it the PTA, a track club, a neighborhood association, a sports league, a coffee shop, or a place where you meet people through a hobby? Not only does the church need to connect with mission in the community, but growing disciples of Jesus are called to reach out to people in their lives.

Look at circles of influence:

- » Family and friends
- » Neighbors
- » Social contacts (clubs, work, coffee shops)
- » Countries or international communities
- » People groups in your community

In groups of three, share about where you are in the thresholds with your friends.

- » Are you just beginning to build trust?
- » Are you becoming more aware of the spiritual connections in your lives and culture?
- » Are you becoming more vulnerable with your friends in sharing how you have experienced your life changing in positive ways?
- » Are you looking for groups in which your friends may explore the faith more deeply?
 - Is it time to start such a group in your church?
- » Are you at the point in your relationship with a friend when you need to ask that person if he or she would like to join God's mission of real and lasting life? Does your friend want to enter into a relationship with God?

TRY:

Discuss the people who make up your Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and locate them in the five thresholds. Record the names of people in your life with whom you need to spend more time, so that your relationship is one of trust and honesty. List those who are moving to become more curious and open to change. Also list those you need to invite to a group in which people are investigating God. Then list those you are being led to invite into a relationship with Jesus. Pray about these people.

TAKE:

Plan to bless three different people in your life.

Examples of blessing:

- » Spend time with a relative, sharing coffee or a meal.
- » Mow your neighbor's yard.
- » Pay for the person behind you in a drive-through line.

Gathering Nine: Learning to Share Our Stories and the Gospel Story

Note: Skip this section if combining Phases 1 and 2.

THINK:

Watch James Choung's videos *The Big Story*, parts 1 and 2. These videos help growing Christians experience the larger picture of Scripture and find the words to share God's story of rescue and reconciliation with others. James Choung's book, *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In*, is the resource behind the videos. His video presentation divides the story of Scripture into the following areas:

DESIGNED FOR GOOD

The unique part of our story is that we are designed for good. We are created to love God, love others, care for creation, and enjoy what we've been given.

DAMAGED BY EVIL

In deciding that we'd rather be God than become part of God's design for us, we have experienced a very broken world. All of us have experienced this brokenness, which includes oppression, poverty, racism, greed, hatred, and more.

RESTORED FOR BETTER

God is not content to leave us in our brokenness and provides a way out in Jesus Christ.

SENT TO HEAL

We become part of a community in which we experience healing and are sent into the world to be agents of healing and reconciliation.

James Choung's work is a way for us to talk about the larger story in which we find ourselves.

TALK:

In groups of three, share the story with one another. Then begin to make it your own. How would you tell this story in your own words? Also, share how you would combine your own faith story with God's story of transformation in Scripture.

In the same groups of three, share the names of people with whom you are sharing your faith, and pray for these people.

TRY:

Share *The Big Story* with another person in the group.

TAKE:

Share *The Big Story* with your conversation partner. Ask your conversation partner where he or she is in the story. Also, practice writing out the story.

We are created to love
God, love others, care
for creation, and enjoy
what we've been given.

Gathering Ten: *Identifying Ministry Shifts in Order to Accomplish Our Work*

Tools:

- » Flip chart or whiteboard and markers

THINK:

How can we cultivate a culture of evangelism and disciple-making in our churches? In order for this to happen, the church needs to make three profound shifts in its thinking and behavior (adapted from Reggie McNeal's *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*).

The first shift is moving from an *inward focus to an outward focus*. Many churches assume that "if we just did church better, they would come." As Reggie McNeal puts it, "The culture around us does not wake up each morning thinking they would go to church if only there were a good one to attend." The church needs to intentionally engage its communities and culture. We need to see ourselves as missionaries to our communities. It's important to understand that the church engages the community and the people outside of the church not in order to grow membership or to increase budgets so that it can continue to exist; it engages those outside of the church because loving outreach reflects the heart and mission of God. This is why the church exists.

This understanding comes from Genesis 12:2–3, when God says to Abram, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. . . ; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Matthew 5 records the same theme: "You are the salt of the earth. . . . You are the light of the world." According to Reggie McNeal, the reality is that "loving God and loving our neighbors cannot be fulfilled at church. Being salt and light cannot be experienced in a faith huddle."

The mission of God is that Christians would be gathered in community for the purpose of being equipped and sent out into the world. One of the most evangelistic things the church can do is to simply be the church. Simply put: the role of the church is to bless the world!

The second shift that needs to take place is to move from a *program development focus to a people development focus*. Instead of focusing on programs, entertaining people, or maintaining the institution, churches need to focus on developing vibrant and transformed disciples of Jesus. If we are honest, many of our churches in North America are program-driven and have become vendors of religious goods and services that cater to our self-indulgent style of spirituality. We measure success by how many people are

involved in church programs, or how much our budgets have grown to help sustain these programs. McNeal describes our current situation with these alarming words: “We bought and paid for the lie that Six Flags Over Jesus was what the world really needed.” After years of the program-driven church, the verdict is that church activity does not equal spiritual vitality. This is evidenced by recent Gallup polls that showed that the only way to distinguish between Christians and those outside of church was not by lifestyle or behavior, but by self-identification.

There is growing murmuring in our churches from people who are frustrated with their spiritual growth and who long for something more significant, real, and transformative in their lives. This is not to say that we don’t need excellent programming, but it means we need to shift from a program-driven church culture, which measures its value by the quality of its programs instead of the quality of its people. In terms of evangelism, the church not only needs to help people learn “how to talk” but also “how to walk.” Christians need to be an “embodied apologetic,” being a witness in word and deed to the transformative power of Jesus. Evangelism and outreach must come from an overflow of a vibrant, authentic, transformed relationship with Jesus. Unless the church is focusing on developing vibrant disciples, then the shift from being inwardly to outwardly focused will become another program of community service or outreach, instead of an authentic expression of the culture and DNA of a church.

The third shift is moving from an *institutional perspective* to a *spiritual perspective*. Here is one example: Session meetings can become business meetings instead of times where spiritual growth is focused. Are church leaders chosen based on their management and administrative ability or are they chosen because they are the spiritual leaders in the church? Another question to ask is how decisions are being made. Are decisions made simply by looking at the *Book of Order* or because “we have always done it this way,” or is the leadership of the church spending significant time in prayer and discernment, trying to hear the prompting of the Holy Spirit? Are decisions made based primarily on how they help the church or institution, or on how they help our community or those outside the church?

TALK:

In groups of three, talk honestly about the following questions, and then share as a larger group:

- » Are you an inwardly focused church or an outwardly focused church? How and why are you that way?
- » Are you a program-driven/focused church or a people development-driven church? How and why are you that way?
- » Are you a church that functions with an institutional

perspective or with a spiritual perspective? How and why?

TRY:

As a large group, think through ways that you can make those three shifts happen. Be as specific as possible. Below are some ideas to help get the planning started. (See Reggie McNeal’s *Missional Renaissance* for more ideas.)

From inward to outward focus: spreading prayer boxes throughout the community; commissioning teams to be missionaries to a specific neighborhood or apartment complex; praying for community and community leaders in worship service; adopting a school and serving it in any way you can; allowing outside groups to use your church facilities; looking for off-site venues to serve as ministry venues to engage your community; establishing a 501(c)(3) to target ministry opportunities in your community; having testimonies at worship services (this can also help make ministry shift on the next point); avoiding taking people away from their relationships outside church (that is, don’t overprogram people around church activity); using technology as a way to connect with community, not just as a way to give information to your congregation; and helping people to consume media in a way that encourages them to dialogue with those outside of church.

From program development to people development focus: doing intentional debriefing with congregation members during the week and during worship (you might have a question of the week, such as, “What worries you most this week?” or have people turn to each other during worship and describe the best thing that happened to them this week); presenting ways people can apply information, rather than just giving them information when you teach; helping people find opportunities to grow through serving others; having a mentoring network in the church; using more time celebrating faith stories; having classes available to help people grow spiritually (as in disciplines) and in their biblical literacy (as in a Greek or Hebrew class).

From an institutional perspective to a spiritual perspective: spending less time on church business and more time on spiritual development for church leadership; shifting from “committees” to “ministry teams”; spending more time in prayer with and for each other; doing prayer walks in the community.

TAKE:

Pray for the Holy Spirit to direct the mission of the church so that you will make a difference in your community and share freely about the source of that difference: the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Share supper.

PHASE THREE: EQUIP

The Congregation *Congregational Immersion*



Purpose:

This phase is for the entire church congregation to go through together. This process is not about doing church better. Rather, we are making a transition from being a consumer-driven church to a faith community that gathers regularly for the equipping of people for the mission of God. This mission will involve serving and sharing faith. This mission is an authentic part of growing disciples of Jesus Christ. For the next six weeks, the entire church will have an opportunity to experience personal renewal and a corporate commitment to the mission of the church. Lent would be a good time to engage the entire congregation in this immersion experience.

These gatherings should be tied to the Sunday worship experience. Each Sunday, a theme will be presented in worship, which will be followed up with a time of learning and sharing in small groups. This small-group time can be realized in the context of the church's Christian education ministry: in Sunday school, small groups, or Bible studies. However, a session may decide to have small groups formed for the purpose of these gatherings. It is recommended that one of the leaders who experienced Phase Two lead the small group over the six weeks. During this phase, each participant is encouraged to have a conversation partner outside the church. It is preferable that this person be someone not involved in the life of a church community.

Note: The "Tools" section of this phase has been left out, because the same tools used in the previous phases will be used again in Phase Three.

Structure:

Worship Gathering: Sermon on the theme for the week

Midweek or Sunday Morning/Afternoon: Training on that particular theme using Engage materials (This can be done in a larger gathering or within small groups.)

WORSHIP THEMES:

Gathering One—The New Normal:

Scripture: Acts 17:16–34

Our culture has changed dramatically. People are not waking up on Sundays wondering which church to attend. Church is not on their radar. Even though people are spiritually hungry, many do not see the church as an answer to their spiritual longings. Therefore, we are called to live differently. We can no longer spend inordinate amounts of time trying to make our programs attractive for people outside the church. They simply are not going to show up! This is not to say, however, that we are not concerned with excellence!

Acts 17:16–34 is a wonderful example of mission to a

community. Paul's heart breaks over all the idols he sees in the city. People are searching for God, but in all the wrong ways. Paul is part of the faith community, but he does not remain there. He goes into the marketplace. He earns a right to be heard. Then he is invited to speak about God in a major gathering place. After the discussion, some are not convinced, while others want to hear more. But two people are convinced right away and join Paul in God's mission of restoration.

What breaks our hearts in our community? What does it look like for us to leave our churches to spend time with people in our community? Are we prepared for our congregation to receive people not like us? Notice the end of the passage: Dionysius and Damaris entered the community as new believers. Their names don't match the names of people already in the community, such as Mary and John.

Refer to the information in Gathering One, which small groups will be working through during the week.

Gathering Two—Engaging Your Story:

Scripture: John 15:1–8

Each one of us has a story to tell. We have been changed by what God has done in Jesus Christ. God's unconditional love has transformed our lives. However, there is a disconnection between this good news and the way in which we live our lives. One of the reasons we do not fully engage this relationship with God is that we continue to believe that there is something we need to do to earn this love. Another reason we do not fully claim this love is that we have grown up never knowing a day in which God has not been a part of our lives. But if we stop for a moment and rest in God's love of us, we begin to realize that our relationship with God is making all the difference. We realize we do have a story to tell about God's amazing love. It matters not how we came to faith; all that matters is that we have faith. And that faith is a gift.

Most of us have a tendency to believe that life and ministry are somehow up to us. We say we trust God, but our actions indicate that we believe it is up to us to take care of the little and big stuff. This kind of thinking leads to burnout and despair. Abiding in the vine is all about resting in God's

Our Scripture helps people see that a person comes to experience real and lasting life in Jesus through relationships with other people they trust.

love and trusting God's work in our lives and in our life together. But this trust begins with love.

If you have access to YouTube, watch the Brennan Manning video *Live at Woodcrest*. He does an excellent job helping people to encounter the life-changing meaning of God's love for us. For additional information and to connect with the information people will experience in their small groups, refer to the material in Gathering Two.

Gathering Three—Sharing Your Faith Story:

Scripture: Philippians 3:1–11

Paul shares his story in a particular way. There was a time in his life when his religious activity defined his existence. His worth was based on his tradition, activity, and ability to follow and keep the law. Then his life changed in an encounter with the living Christ. Because of God's love for him, he counts as rubbish all the ways in which he controlled and managed his life before Christ. The rest of his life is committed to proclaiming the good news and advancing God's kingdom of grace through the church.

During the small-group session, people will have an opportunity to look at their lives in the same way. They will look at what life was like before faith in Christ was their own. Then participants will begin to write and talk about the experience of Jesus becoming real to them. This is the point when the faith becomes more than words. For some people, there is a clear experience of what life was like before Jesus and what life is like knowing Jesus. For people who have always known the presence of God, this experience will be more of a process. They will examine the time in their lives when their faith became more their own than the faith of their parents.

For additional information, check out Gathering Three.

Gathering Four—The Big Story:

Scripture: Ephesians 2:1–10

This gathering is designed to help people see the big picture of Scripture. We have a tendency to get lost in the details of Scripture or we use Scripture to wage theological battles. Therefore, we miss the theme of God on a mission, reconciling a good but broken creation. We fail to see that God has set things right in Jesus and has offered us a way into healing and wholeness through the life of Christ.

The church is the gathering of people on a journey of becoming more and more like Jesus, so that when we live and serve in the world, we experience the healing love of God. In this saving love, people find their way home and enter into the same mission of rescue and reconciliation.

James Choung has written a helpful resource that enables and empowers growing Christians to share the core essentials of our faith with people outside the church. His book, *True*

Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In, describes the witness of Scripture in the following categories:

- » Designed for Good
- » Damaged by Evil
- » Restored for Better
- » Sent to Heal Together

This resource not only helps people see this big picture of Scripture, but also helps them learn to share it with others. He has two helpful videos: *The Big Story*, parts 1 and 2.

These videos can be found at www.pcusa.org/recommended-evangelism.

Gathering Five—Connecting With Our Spheres of Influence:

Scripture: Acts 1:1–8

We are called to be witnesses to the good news that has changed our lives. We are not called to win people to faith or to change them; we are simply called to be witnesses of Jesus' love. This Scripture is very clear about our spheres of influence. We begin in Jerusalem: with our family and close friends. We move into Judea: this is where the people look, act, and think like us. We are called to Samaria: there the people are not like us, and sometimes they're people we do not like! Ultimately, we are called to reach the world.

This gathering is a time to pay attention to the people in our lives and our spheres of influence. This would also be the time to lift up new initiatives into mission into the community. Please refer to Gathering Five for additional information.

Gathering Six—Going Deeper Into Our Spheres of Influence:

Scripture: Mark 2:1–12

Evangelism is changing dramatically. People are coming to faith through relationships. This postmodern context has led the church to make a shift in its ministries of outreach. The modern model was about getting people to believe the right things! Then, once their behaviors changed, they were invited into the faith community. Now, people want to belong. In the community, they experience a different set of behaviors, which leads to accepting beliefs.

Our Scripture helps people see that a person comes to experience real and lasting life in Jesus through relationships with other people they trust. When we share our lives with others, and we are honest about our own struggles and doubts, others are interested in exploring the faith. The church needs to have groups that enable people to explore the faith in a safe environment. In this community, the Holy Spirit works to open a person to a healing relationship with Jesus.

Gathering One: The New Normal

THINK:

Our denomination and churches are struggling to engage a radically changing culture. Statistics show that Americans are desperately searching spiritually, but the church is not connecting with the people we are seeking to reach. In this section, we want to look at how the culture around us has changed and how we can build bridges and engage with those searching and seeking for things that only God can satisfy and answer.

Together, look at a picture of a bridge in Honduras that is now on dry land. (Search Google images for “bridge in Honduras”; it is the first image that comes up.) The river has changed course and is flowing to the side of the bridge, making it irrelevant. In groups of four, talk about how this image may be an image for the church (bridge) and culture (river). Share the comments made in the small groups within the large group.

The reality is that the church must engage a world that is emerging into a postmodern, post-Christian, and image-based (and some argue, preliterate) culture. The culture is flowing right by the church as we focus on dwindling numbers and loss of influence, and fight over how we can return to the good old days. The truth is that we can't go backward; we have to look at what God is doing right now and at a way in which we should respond and engage the “New Normal” in which we find ourselves.

In his book, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . and Why It Matters*, author David Kinnaman interviews people outside the church, and he tells us honestly “what a new generation really thinks about the church.” The words and accompanying images that the unchurched use are: judgmental; hypocritical; homophobic; too involved in politics; out of touch with reality; confusing; not accepting of other faiths; insensitive to others; old-fashioned; boring; and irrelevant. We don't just have an image problem; we have a problem connecting with and impacting those people God loves and wants us to reach with the gospel.

We don't just need to do church better. Instead, we need to understand and listen to those we want to reach, and rethink the ways in which we can authentically, personally, and intentionally share the gospel of Jesus Christ in our words and actions. As author/speaker Reggie McNeal puts it, “The culture around us does not wake up each day thinking they would go to church if only there were a good one to attend” (Reggie McNeal, *Present Future*, p. 10). In fact, the truth is even harder to accept. Not only are we failing to reach those who don't claim to have a personal relationship

with Jesus Christ, we are having difficulty keeping our own youth when they go to college, and even holding on to the members of our own churches!

TALK:

In groups of three or four, discuss the following changes in culture:

Post-Christian: Simply put, we have in a sense lost the home-court advantage in North America. Judeo-Christian background and belief are increasingly losing both influence and, in some arenas, relevance in the public sphere. For example, when formerly we used the word “God,” it would most likely take on the Judeo-Christian understanding. Now “God” could mean Yahweh, Allah, or a pantheon of many other gods. Many outside the church increasingly perceive the church as having no present effect in transforming the culture for good. In fact, many, including those being led by such New Atheists as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, see the church and religion in general as having a negative influence on society. Bono, the famous lead singer of the Irish band U2, has warned, “Faith and social action must go hand in hand; if the church doesn’t remember and reconnect with its roots, and its call to serve others, it will be dismissed as another irrelevant social club” (Greg Garrett, *We Get to Carry Each Other: The Gospel According to U2*, pp. 108–109).

Postmodern: For this discussion, let’s identify three aspects of postmodernism. First, there is a deep-seated feeling of disillusionment among the generations following the Baby Boomers. Science, economics, education, politics, and religion have all failed to solve the problems of humanity. The result is a generation left with radical doubt, skepticism, and cynicism. A second feature of postmodernism is *relativism*. It is a belief in its most extreme form that asserts that there is no truth, just what one experiences and how one interprets those experiences. It is the idea that there is no absolute truth. Therefore, what is true for one person might not be true for another; it is subjective to a person or a community. It is the embrace of the “both . . . and” instead of the “either . . . or.” This is an important hallmark of a generation that finds it difficult trusting others, that is suspicious of those claiming to have or know the truth, and that is repulsed by those they perceive as judgmental and exclusive. A third feature of postmodernism is, for our purposes, a culture of *religious pluralism*. It’s like when we were children and the first self-serve

soda machines were installed in restaurants. We would fill our glasses with every variety of soft drink (and call that mixture a “kamikaze” because you had to be brave to drink that stuff)! In the postmodern world, people don’t commit to one religious belief system; they take a little Christianity, and mix it with Buddhism, Hinduism, New Age spirituality and paganism and create their own belief system. This endless number of options has led to the customizing of faith, which is different from having a personal faith. As Erwin MacManus writes in *Soul Cravings*: “What’s strange though, is that we seem more motivated to create our own truth rather than search for it . . . more is not always better . . . our souls are being spammed.”

Image-based Culture: Another feature of the changing culture and the influence of postmodernism is an increasing shift from a print-dominated culture to an image and story-dominated culture. Some characteristics of a print-based and modernist view are individualistic, objective, abstract, linear, and rational. According to Shane Higgs in *Flickering Pixels*, “As image-based communication becomes dominant . . . it changes the way we think and determines what we think about. Images are not well-suited to articulate arguments, categories or abstractions. They are far better for presenting impressions and concrete realities.”

This new generation responds far better to stories and personal illustration than to rational, linear argument/apologetic.

How does our perspective and even method of evangelism need to change in the “New Normal”? (adapted from Will H. McRaney, *The Art of Personal Evangelism*, p. 166)

Go over the following information together as a larger group:

Past	New Normal
Single encounter	Relationship building
Monologue	Dialogue/discussion
Gospel presentation	Story (personal/biblical)
Giving lots of information	Asking good questions
Presentation (apologetics)	Demonstration (embodied apologetic)
Individualistic	Community-centered
Being the expert	Being a fellow journeyer
Argumentation	Consideration
Ticket sales	Guided tours
Eternal benefits	Earthly impact and mission
Isolation/binary (us vs. them)	Community integration (we)

TRY:

Pick three or four categories from the list and act out the old way versus the new way.

Look at John 14:6 together. Talk briefly about how this passage might be important in responding to the questions and spiritual cravings of a new postmodern generation. Pray for each other as you prepare to think through how to share Jesus' own claims in John 14:6 with others.

TAKE:

Write down or simply think through how you might communicate the gospel in your life and with your words with others.

Gathering Two: *Engaging Your Story*

THINK:

We have a relationship with God. Each one of us can own and live into this reality. However, do we know that the core of this relationship is about God's unconditional love? In this gathering we will examine what it means to trust the love of God in Jesus and to live by this love. We will look at our life's orientation: do we have more of a tendency to rest in God's love, or do we strive to receive God's love in Jesus? What drives our ministry? Are we driven by our own strength or by our relationship with Jesus Christ?

In order to understand where we are on the scale of resting and striving, we will use the following Scripture: John 15:1–8.

Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you (John 15:4, The Message).

This passage is a reminder that God wants an intimate relationship with us. In this relationship we discover the joy of living our real and lasting lives. The hard part about faith is we can know a lot about God and never truly know God. If we don't intentionally pursue a relationship with God, then we begin to live off our ideas about God. For example, we live out of the information we have received about Jesus from our tradition, religious experiences, and families. We teach about Jesus and serve on committees, but when it comes to a relationship with him, we have a difficult time with what this means.

It's interesting that we cannot enter into this new life by striving to make it on our own; we must remain in Christ. The Greek root of the word remain is *meno*, which at its core means to lean into or to rest in someone else. This is an intimate relationship. The same root word is used in John's description of the Last Supper. In John 13:22–25, Jesus is with his friends during a Passover meal before his arrest.

It's a trying time of doubt, uncertainty, and betrayal. In this difficult time the "beloved" disciple is reclining (*meno*) into Jesus (his head is on Jesus' chest).

In *Blue Like Jazz*, Donald Miller sheds some light on what it means to have a relationship with Jesus:

A guy I know named Alan went around the country asking ministry leaders questions. He went to successful churches and asked the pastors about what they were doing, why what they were doing was working. It sounded very boring except for one visit he made to a man named Bill Bright, the president of a big ministry. Alan said he was a big man, full of life, who listened without shifting his eyes. Alan asked a few questions. I don't know what they were, but as a final question he asked Dr. Bright what Jesus meant to him. Alan said Dr. Bright could not answer the question. He said Dr. Bright just started to cry. He sat there in his big chair behind his big desk and wept. When Alan told that story I wondered what it was like to love Jesus that way (p. 233).

We have heard the news that we are loved by God. However, there are things in our lives that keep us from experiencing this love in our hearts. Sometimes it's the lies we've learned to believe about ourselves that confine God's deep love of us to information that stays in our brains. This love never truly penetrates our hearts. At times, it's our disappointment with God that causes us to believe that we must work harder or strive for a love that never seems to be ours. Our lives end up being more about doing than remaining in the Vine.

When this love penetrates our hearts, our lives become different. We undergo transformation. The good news we talk about becomes the good news of our lives. This news shapes our lives; we live very different lives, and the world begins to change. Because of the love of God in Jesus, Jean Vanier started the L'Arche community, where people with mental disabilities share life with those without disabilities in biblical communities that practice radical hospitality. Dietrich Bonhoeffer stood against the evil of the Nazi reign in Germany because of the life-changing love of Jesus. Martin Luther King, Jr. was steadfast in his commitment to nonviolent reform even in the face of extreme provocation. Mother Teresa gave herself away to the poorest of the poor because of her relationship with Jesus.

TALK:

Share in groups of three your hopes and concerns about your relationship with God. Is it easy or hard for you to believe that God loves you as you are and desires to be intimately involved in your life?



TRY:

Brennan Manning, in the YouTube video *Live at Woodcrest*, says that when he sees God face to face, he feels like the one question God will ask is, “Did you know how much I loved you?” He goes on to say that so many of us have talked and read about God’s love, but we have not actually believed that we are loved beyond imagining by God. (If you have access to the Internet, watch the video.)

In groups of three, share about a time when you felt the transforming power of love. Ask each other, “When and how did you hear God’s words of love for you?” Then share about a time when a period of striving left you feeling less than satisfied. In order to truly live into your call, what needs to be pruned from your life? Pray with one another by giving thanks for these moments of love that lead us into new life.

TAKE:

Before the next meeting, find a passage of Scripture that fits your experience of being loved as you are, but being loved way too much to be left there. If you do not have a passage in mind, here are some to consider:

Romans 8:31–42

John 8:1–8

Colossians 1:15–18, *The Message*

Another way of looking at this experience is to ask, “What’s my experience of Jesus that my neighbor can’t live without?” Then share your findings with your conversation partner.

Gathering Three: Sharing Your Faith Story

THINK:

Each of us has a story to tell. We have all been changed

by the gospel. And people around us not only need to be served by us, but they need to hear why we are serving our communities and living a different lifestyle. In this gathering we will work on and practice sharing our own stories of faith (testimonies).

One of the ways to write out our story is to use the following template:

My life before I committed my life to Jesus . . .

My life when Jesus became real to me . . .

My life following Jesus into meaning and purpose . . .

TRY:

Spend some time writing out your story. Use the following questions to guide your writing:

- » How is my life different because I am a follower of Jesus Christ?
- » Who were and are the people who have helped and are helping me grow in my commitment to God’s way of life in Jesus Christ?
- » How has God worked in my life to help me grow as a disciple of Christ?
- » What is God doing right now in my life that is good news?

TALK:

In groups of three, take turns sharing your story (faith statement or testimony). As a large group, pray around the table for your church and community—that the Holy Spirit will lead you into a disciple-making ministry that will lead to faith-sharing and mission.

TAKE:

Share your faith story with your conversation partner.

Gathering Four: *The Big Story*

THINK:

Watch James Choung's videos *The Big Story*, parts 1 and 2. These videos help growing Christians experience the larger picture of Scripture and find the words to share God's story of rescue and reconciliation with others. James Choung's book, *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In*, is the resource behind the videos. His video presentation divides the story of Scripture into the following areas:

DESIGNED FOR GOOD

The unique part of our story is that we are designed for good. We are created to love God, others, care for creation, and to enjoy what we've been given.

DAMAGED BY EVIL

In deciding that we'd rather be God than become part of God's design for us, we have experienced a very broken world. All of us have experienced this brokenness. There's oppression, poverty, racism, greed, and hatred. And the list is endless.

RESTORED FOR BETTER

God is not content to leave us in our brokenness, but provides a way out in Jesus Christ.

SENT TO HEAL

We become part of a community in which we experience healing and are sent into the world to be agents of healing and reconciliation.

James Choung's work is a way for us to talk about the larger story in which we find ourselves.

TALK:

In groups of three, share the story with one another. Begin to make it your own. How would you tell this story in your own words? Also, share how you would combine your own faith story with God's story of transformation in Scripture.

In the same groups of three, share the names of people with whom you are sharing your faith, and pray for these people.

TRY:

Share *The Big Story* with another person in the group.

TAKE:

Share *The Big Story* with your conversation partner. Ask your conversation partner where he or she is in the story. Also, practice writing out the story.

Gathering Five: *Connecting With Our Spheres of Influence*

THINK:

As we get a sense of what God is up to in our community and of the ways God is calling us to reach out to people in our community, our eyes are opened to the people in our lives. We become more sensitive to people in our families, spheres of influence, and even those with whom we rarely or never spend time. In Acts 1:1–8, we discover that we are called to be witnesses to the life change we've experienced in Jesus. As we read through this passage, we are greeted with four categories of people.

We are called to be witnesses in Jerusalem—to the people closest to us. We are called to bear witness in Judea—to the people who look, think, and act like us. We are also called to be witnesses in Samaria—to people we do not like. (Remember: Jews hated Samaritans! Samaritans were considered "half-breeds" who lacked the proper understanding of worship.) We are also called to be witnesses to the world.

TRY:

Make a list of people in your family who do not know the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Make a list of people in your neighborhood, work, and community who do not know the fullness of life in Jesus.

Make a list of people you do not like or who are very different from you. Maybe it's not that you don't like them, but that they make you feel uncomfortable. How would you share faith with them?

Make a list of people you have a heart for in other parts of the world.

TALK:

In groups of three, work through the following questions:

- » How is God leading us to bear witness in our community?
 - What if it really does start with your families?
 - Who are the people like us?
 - Who are the people not like us?
- » Who is our Jerusalem?
- » Who is our Judea?
- » Who is our Samaria?
- » On our community visits, what did it feel like to share faith with others?
- » Is there one outreach to which we are called?
- » Where do we see the church serving in ways that connect outreach with faith-sharing?



	Medium	Large
House Coffee	3.55	4.05
Coffee of the Day	3.55	4.05
Decaf Coffee	3.55	4.05
Caffe Au Lait	3.55	4.05
ESPRESSO	3.55	4.05
Latte	3.55	4.05
Cappuccino	3.55	4.05

COFFEE BEVERAGES		Medium	Large	NON-COFFEE BEVERAGES		Small	Medium	Large
House Coffee		1.65	1.75	Hot Chocolate		2.20	2.45	2.70
Coffee of the Day		1.65	1.75	Tea		1.40	1.75	2.10
Decaf Coffee		1.45	1.65	Chai Tea Latte		3.70	3.25	3.80
Caffe Au Lait		2.00	2.35	Hot Apple Cider		3.50	2.75	3.00
ESPRESSO				COLD BEVERAGES				
Latte				Iced Coffee		Small	Medium	Large
Cappuccino				Hot Tea		1.75	1.95	2.15
				Hot Latte		1.75	2.05	2.35
				Hot Mocha		3.00	3.40	3.75
				Hot Tea		2.15	3.70	4.00
				Hot Mocha		2.70	3.20	3.70
				Hot Caramel		3.20	3.70	4.20
				Hot Fudge		3.20	3.70	4.20
				Hot Chocolate		1.80	1.90	2.00

OUR BRUNCH MENU
THE HONEY
THE SPINACH
THE CRISP PUFFY
BAGEL D

TAKE:

Pray about your sphere of influence (coffee shop, club, PTA) and discuss with your conversation partner why and how you can spend more time in this arena of your life. What would you need to give up in the church community to spend more time with people outside the church?

Gathering Six:

Connecting and Going Deeper with People in Our Spheres of Influence

THINK:

The purpose of this gathering is to go deeper into and become more intentional in our relationships with people around us. Don Everts and Doug Schaupp, the authors of *I Once Was Lost*, help the reader understand the context of sharing faith with unchurched friends and family. They lift up five thresholds through which people must move to become seekers and then pilgrims along the journey of faith.

Friends move from distrust to trust. Everts and Schaupp help their readers engage evangelism in a new cultural context. In our postmodern world, people are interested in Jesus, but not in the church. Many people are very suspicious of institutions like the church. Therefore, people need to experience Jesus through Christians who are loving and authentic. The best thing that can happen to a person who does not know God's love is to be in a relationship with a Christian who is both loving and accepting. God came into the world in the flesh and blood of Jesus to reveal God's unconditional love for humanity. People must trust us before they will hear one word we have to offer about real and lasting life.

Friends move from complacent to curious. Even though there is a longing in the human heart for something more,

When we are open and transparent about our lives, the door is open for our friends to see that things can change in their lives.

people don't always get the connections between their lives and the ways in which God is working to heal relationships and creation. As we are on the journey with another person, we are called to be aware of the life events and experiences that open people to spiritual things. For an example, many movies have spiritual themes and can become ways through which we talk about our brokenness and God's reconciling love.

Friends move from being closed to change to being open to change. When we are open and transparent about our lives, the door is open for our friends to see that things can change in their lives. How have you been open to change? It is helpful to others when we are able to share about times in our lives when we had to let go of something that was hurting us. Maybe we had to let go of control or an unforgiving spirit. Sometimes people have the belief that things are just the way they are, and that nothing can change!

Friends move from meandering to seeking. When we are engaging these sorts of conversations, it is important to be able to invite our friends into a group that is studying Scripture and investigating spiritual themes. This group can be the context for a seeker to have a safe place to explore the faith and to experience the faith of growing Christ followers.

Friends move from the threshold to kingdom life and work. Through prayer and nudging from the Holy Spirit, there comes the time when you talk with your friends about joining God in God's mission of real and lasting life. In other words, there is an invitation into kingdom life.

TALK:

As you look at Acts 1:1-8 again, remember that we are called to bear witness to what we have seen and heard and experienced in Jesus. We are not called to condemn and judge others; we are called to bear witness to the saving power of God in Christ.

In groups of three, talk about where you need to hang out more to build relationships with people outside the church. Is it the PTA, a track club, a neighborhood association, a sports league, a coffee shop or a place with people you meet through a shared hobby? Not only does the church need to connect with mission in the community, but growing disciples of Jesus are called to reach out to people in their lives.

Look at circles of influence:

- » Family and friends
- » Neighbors
- » Social contacts (clubs, work, coffee shops)
- » Countries or international communities
- » People groups in your community

In groups of three, share about where you are in the thresholds with your friends:

- » Are you just beginning to build trust?
- » Are you becoming more aware of the spiritual connections in your lives and culture?
- » Are you becoming more vulnerable with your friends in sharing how you have experienced your life changing in positive ways?
- » Are you looking for groups for your friends to explore the faith more deeply?
 - Is it time to start such a group in your church?
- » Are you at the point in your relationship with a friend when you need to ask that person if he or she would like to join God's mission of real and lasting life? Does that person want to enter into a relationship with God?

TRY

Make a list of the people who make up your Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and locate them in the five thresholds.

Record the names of people in your life with whom you need to spend more time, so that your relationship is one of trust and honesty. List those who are moving to become more curious and open to change. Also list those you need to invite to a group in which people are investigating God. Then list those you are being led to invite into a relationship with Jesus. Pray about these people.

TAKE:

Plan to bless three different people in your life.

Examples of blessings:

- » Spend time with a relative, sharing coffee or a meal.
- » Mow your neighbor's yard.
- » Pay for the person behind you in a drive-through line.

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Suggested Resources

Books

Christianity for the Rest of Us by Diana Butler Bass
Evangelism for the Rest of Us by Mike Bechtle
Church 3.0 by Neil Cole
The Master Plan of Evangelism by Robert E. Coleman
The Tangible Kingdom by Hugh Halter and Matt Smay
ReJesus, by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch
The Celtic Way of Evangelism by George G. Hunter III
Just Walk Across the Room by Bill Hybels
Becoming a Contagious Christian by Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg
An Evangelism Primer by Ben Campbell Johnson
GodSpeech by Ben Campbell Johnson
The God Who Speaks by Ben Campbell Johnson
Got Style? by Jeffrey A. Johnson and Patricia G. Duckworth
We Are Here Now by Patrick Keifert
They Like Jesus but Not the Church by Dan Kimball
Evangelism Is . . . by Clinton M. Marsh
The Disciple Making Church by Glenn McDonald
Holy Conversation by Richard Peace
Out of the Salt Shaker and into the World by Rebecca Manley Pippert
Reinventing Evangelism by Donald C. Posterski
Unbinding the Gospel by Martha Grace Reese and Brian L. McLaren
Reimagining Evangelism by Rick Richardson
Introducing the Missional Church by Alan Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren
Irresistible Evangelism by Steve Sjogren, Dave Ping, and Doug Pollock
The Unexpected Adventure by Lee Strobel and Mark Mittelberg
Evangelism After Christendom by Bryan P. Stone
Dirty Word by Jim Walker

Videos and DVDs

The Big Story, part 1 and part 2, James Choung (www.youtube.com)
Dust—NOOMA Series 008, Rob Bell (<http://store.flannel.org>)
Bullhorn—NOOMA Series 009, Rob Bell (<http://store.flannel.org>)
Jesus vs. Christians—Highway Video (www.highwayvideo.com)
Live at Woodcrest, Brennan Manning (www.youtube.com)
NOOMA and Highway Video are excellent sources of helpful material.

Web sites

www.allelon.org
www.evangelismcoach.org
www.GraceNet.info



pcusa.org/evangelism

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