

# CONNECTIONS: REIMAGINING EVANGELISM

A VIDEO & STUDY GUIDE RESOURCE CREATED BY EVANGELISM CONNECTIONS



**DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES**  
The United Methodist Church

**EVANGELISM  
CONNECTIONS**  
*Engaging Evangelism Ecumenically*

[www.EvangelismConnections.org](http://www.EvangelismConnections.org)

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Cover art: “The Way of Life” sculpture located in the West Tower of Ely Cathedral, the principal church of the Diocese of Ely in Cambridgeshire, England. Jonathan Clarke’s massive cast-aluminium sculpture reminds us that life is far from straightforward. Like the journey of faith, its path is irregular and unpredictable. Yet, despite its many twists and turns, we are reminded that Christ travels with us.

# Preface

The World Council of Churches recently produced an ecumenical document, entitled “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes.” In that document, it is noted, “Evangelism is the outflow of hearts that are filled with the love of God” (page 29). This study guide on “Evangelism in the 21st Century” recognizes and explores that concept very well.

In the past, evangelism has sometimes been conducted in ways that were harmful, negative, and aggressive. This study guide seeks ways of healing this negative history of evangelism. Instead of antagonistic approaches, this study guide suggests hopeful and new ways of doing evangelism—with deep humility—that respects others.

The guide also encourages us to share our faith and our lives. Today we live in a postmodern society where people do not often share their life stories or their faith stories with other people. What is unique about this guide is it that offers encouragement for faith sharing in helpful and positive ways. This guide has the potential to create and enable joy.

When engaging evangelism in the past, we have used toolkits for training. This is not a toolkit for a select few; rather, it offers encouragements, questions, and ideas for people in churches about evangelism in today’s time. I would commend it for your exploration.

**Rev. Dr. Jooseop Keum**

*Director of the Commission on World Mission on Evangelism; The World Council of Churches*  
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# Introduction to This Study Guide

Welcome to this study guide! This guide was created to encourage communities of faith to explore evangelism in the 21st century in North American contexts.

“Evangelism” can be a scary word. For some people, the term conjures up negative images of people forcing their faith onto resistant people. This study guide is written in the recognition that this kind of evangelism is not usually welcome in our communities of faith today. The study guide also recognizes, however, that evangelism is much more than that. Evangelization is part of our Christian call, and it means something different to many Christians today than it did yesterday.

The study guide will invite participants to ask and explore questions, stretch their understandings of evangelism, confront their fears and skepticism, and consider what might be an authentic expression of evangelism for them.

We wish you well as you explore evangelism in the 21st century.

# What is Evangelism?

Evangelism is the good news of God’s healing and saving love in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, evangelism has become a problematic term for some in the 21st century. Scare tactics, coercion, and “bad news that has an escape clause” has become synonymous with evangelism in some people’s minds. In reading the gospels (the word gospel means “good news”), though, we do not see any of these approaches used by Jesus. Evangelism is good news. It is also not a program about membership recruitment or meeting budgetary obligations. Evangelism is indeed good news.

What was the good news that Jesus shared? The first proclamation of the good news is found in Luke’s Gospel, where Jesus recites a lesson from Isaiah 61:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me.  
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,  
to proclaim release to the prisoners  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to liberate the oppressed,  
and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.*

LUKE 4:18-19

The announcement of the kingdom of God is a key point of the good news. Many churches and traditions emphasize conversion—“in order to get into heaven after one dies”—as the point of Christian faith. By contrast, Jesus Christ’s foundational message in Matthew 4:17 is: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, paraphrases this verse as: “Change your life. God’s kingdom is here.”<sup>1</sup> His emphasis is on conversion that leads to radical change in behavior, thought, and action. These changes indicate that a person chooses to live daily as a new citizen in God’s reign (kingdom).

There is a marked difference between the two approaches. Salvation with heaven as the only goal has a distant, future orientation. To emphasize a single, future benefit can leave new Christians wondering what should be happening to and through them in the present. By contrast, salvation that invites us to be participants in God’s kingdom and reign has an active, present orientation. The focus is on how to live in this new reality, right now.

The practices and understanding of evangelism vary widely. Some churches understand evangelism as sharing a set of beliefs and accepting tenets of the faith rationally—a “head” style of ministry. Some congregations view evangelism as growing in one’s personal relationship with Jesus—a “heart” style. Still other congregations believe evangelism is loving our neighbors in tangible ways—a “hands” style. Rarely do congregations employ and integrate all three, yet this integration is the style and model that Jesus employed in his ministry. We invite people into a lifetime of growing in love of God and neighbor, so that they may join in God’s world-transforming kingdom work. This work of transformation happens only when people know who they are, who God is, and how to live in loving relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> From *The Message* Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson

# Evangelism Connections

This study guide has been produced by Evangelism Connections. Evangelism Connections is an ecumenical group of North American Christians who strive to frame evangelism, hospitality, and church vitality in a 21st-century context and to provide shared resources toward that end. We invite you to participate, comment, and share your own thoughts and ideas on sharing Jesus' message in a postmodern world.

Our advisory group is a partnership of evangelism staff persons from the following denominations:

- African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
- American Baptist Churches
- Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- Church of the Brethren
- Episcopal Church
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
- Moravian Church Northern Province
- Presbyterian Church in Canada
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- Reformed Church in America
- United Church of Christ (U.S.A.)
- The United Church of Canada
- United Methodist Church

## History of Evangelism Connections

The member communions of Evangelism Connections originally gathered as a unit of the National Council of Churches. The evangelism unit of the National Council of Churches (NCC) produced a statement on evangelism that was approved by the National Council Board officially on November 12, 1994, that has guided the group's work since. "The world needs a common witness to Christ. Therefore, ecumenism and evangelism must be inseparable. Standing and witnessing together as one evangelizing Church is to trust God to transform in ways not yet known. We acknowledge this future and reaffirm our readiness to respond to God's call to united witness and action." (From a policy statement adopted by the General Board, National Council of Churches in Christ, November 12, 1994)

In 1996, the members of this NCC group decided to become more focused on equipping local churches to do effective evangelism in their particular contexts, and Evangelism Connections was born.

The early years of Evangelism Connections focused on producing national evangelism conferences featuring well-known leaders and inspiring speakers on evangelism in both workshop and general session context at various venues throughout the United States. When this approach became cost prohibitive, Evangelism Connections decided to widen its effectiveness by making denominational evangelism resources available free of charge to anyone and everyone on the internet through a website:

**[www.evangelismconnections.org](http://www.evangelismconnections.org)**.

This has proven to be effective in combining both evangelism and ecumenicity to provide congregational and personal availability to quality evangelism resources. For example, the group has created an Evangelectionary that features resources with an emphasis on the texts of the Common Lectionary that have a missional component.

More about Evangelism Connections can be explored on its website:

**<http://www.evangelismconnections.org>**

# How to Use This Study Guide

This study guide uses a video resource in each session. The videos are available on YouTube at [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZBIYrsvunUodpQzqkL8vNhR-tisSIbm](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZBIYrsvunUodpQzqkL8vNhR-tisSIbm). Currently, these videos are available only online. To show them in your sessions, therefore, you will need access to the Internet in the place in which you will gather.

Each session also includes a Scripture reading, so having access to a Bible will be necessary.

This study guide is divided into seven sessions. Each session uses the following format:

- **Opening:** a gathering time that will include prayer, exploring a quotation, integrating learnings from the previous session, and offering opportunities to build community within the group
- **Approaching the theme:** a chance to start exploring the theme for the session and using questions to help people begin to engage
- **Scripture reading:** related to the theme for each day is a Scripture reading and accompanying questions; the Scripture will also be revisited later in the session
- **Introducing and watching the video clip:** the video clips for each session are between 2–6 minutes long
- **Discussion questions:** based on the video and the Scripture, these discussion questions allow for further exploration of the theme
- **Responding to the theme:** an opportunity to further integrate learnings from the session and consider application to broader contexts
- **Closing:** a space for final reflection questions and to close with prayer.

This study guide is a starting point, so leaders are welcome to change or adapt questions for your own context. Leaders are also invited to be particularly sensitive to people who may not be able to be at every session. As such, the “opening” section of each session includes two options: one invites the integration of learnings for those who were there for the previous session; the other facilitates opening the theme and is not reliant on learnings from having been there previously.



# Session 1: Fears

## Opening

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

Begin the session with prayer.

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

Share with the group that evangelism has been described as:

*“Something you do to someone that you don’t want done to you.”*

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

## Approaching the Theme

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

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

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

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

## Scripture Reading

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

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

Advise the group that they will return to the Scripture later in the session, and invite the group to keep the story of Moses in mind as they watch this video clip.

## Introducing & Watching the Video Clip

Share with the group that in the video people will speak about their own fears about sharing the good news. People will also talk about negative experiences with evangelism, including encountering people who have judgmental views on evangelism. The importance of sharing stories is also described. Invite the group to listen to other key themes that emerge for them.

View the video clip here: <https://youtu.be/-MPRbhtF50I>

## Discussion Questions

Invite the group to consider the following discussion questions:

- What did people name in the video as fears for engaging with evangelism?
- One person noted that some people are afraid that people will ask them about a biblical passage, or about why there is suffering when there is an all-loving God, and then they will not know how to respond. What would you say if someone asked you those questions?
- What fears do you have or what inhibits you from sharing about your faith?
- What other themes or portions of the conversation resonated for you from the video?

## Responding to the Theme

Invite the group to consider the story of Moses once again.

- Having heard and discussed the video clip about fears, ask if there anything else that they might want to share about the biblical passage?

Remind the group that Moses was concerned about self-judgment, and he worried that he was not good enough to do what God asked him to do. Invite the group to reflect silently about times when they might also have been judgmental about themselves, or when they have felt inadequate, and particularly as it relates to evangelism. Affirm with the group that we are all called by God to do good work and that God continues to work in all of our lives.

Note that this video clip addressed fears and also named the importance of telling stories about life and about Jesus. It was noted that it can be helpful for people to practice telling and sharing stories, so that it can become more natural, and that there is a difference between telling our own stories and telling others what to believe.

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

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

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

## **Closing**

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

Close the session with prayer.

# Session 2: Excitement

## Opening

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

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

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

UNKNOWN

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

## Approaching the Theme

### **Option 1:**

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

### **Option 2:**

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

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

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

## Scripture Reading

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

- How did the disciples respond to Jesus’ question about who people say that he is?
- Why do you think Jesus asked the disciples this particular question?
- Do you think that it is significant that Peter declared that Jesus is “of God”? Why or why not?

## Introducing & Watching the Video Clip

Share with the group that in the video clip, people will also ask the question about who is Jesus for them. In the conversation, people explore their comfort level with sharing their excitement about Jesus. Some reflect that we should not infringe on other people's beliefs or culture; however, we still do not talk about faith as easily as we talk about sports and other things we are excited about.

View the video clip here: [https://youtu.be/4um\\_8w570\\_U](https://youtu.be/4um_8w570_U)

## Discussion Questions

Invite the group to consider the following discussion questions:

- How do we get that excitement about Jesus?
- Do you agree that it is easier to talk about excitement for sports teams than to talk excitedly about faith? Why or why not?
- Why do you think that people are hesitant to share about their sense of hope through faith?
- What other themes or portions of the conversation resonated for you from the video?

## Responding to the Theme

Invite the group to return to the Scripture reading about Jesus asking Peter and the disciples who they say Jesus is.

- After the group has viewed and discussed the video clip, ask if there is anything else they want to share about the biblical passage.

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

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

Remind the group that this video clip explored questions about how to express excitement about Jesus and that the Scripture explored questions about who people said Jesus was. Let the group know that they will have some time to explore more about who Jesus is for them. There are a few options for how people can explore this question.

## Who is Jesus?

The Mainline Evangelism Project, which analyzed 1200 interviews of church leaders, was triggered by a conversation that author Martha Grace Reese had with eight pastors of growing churches. She writes about her experience in one of her books (Reese, Martha Grace. *Unbinding the Gospel*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008, p. 14.). During her time with these pastors, she had posed the question, “What difference does it make in your own life that you are a Christian?” She did not expect the response she received: silence. None of the eight pastors—who were deemed successful by virtue of their growing congregations—could verbalize what difference Jesus made in their lives.

In a recent study of a cross-section of United Methodist congregations, the same trend emerged. Church leaders could share what was great about their church, but struggled to make the connection to Jesus.

### **Option 1:**

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

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

### **Option 2:**

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

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

## Closing

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

Close the session with prayer.

# Session 3: Community

## Opening

Begin the session with prayer.

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

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

ANONYMOUS

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

## Approaching the Theme

### **Option 1:**

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

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

### **Option 2:**

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

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

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

## Scripture Reading

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

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

## Introducing & Watching the Video Clip

Share with the group that this video clip emphasizes the importance of relationship. In the conversation, people share that everything starts with relationship, and sharing one's faith is not part of a broader agenda. The video also explores how the word "evangelism" doesn't have to be a scary one, and what it might mean to do evangelism in the 21st century. The importance of a community being grounded in faith practices first is also named.

View the video clip here: <https://youtu.be/4Ip0oRKffb8>

## Discussion Questions

Invite the group to consider the following discussion questions:

- Is evangelism an activity the church should be engaged in? Why or why not?
- How was relationship and/or community described in the video? Why do you think that people emphasized the importance of having relationships without an agenda or without making "them join us"?
- What faith practices does your community of faith have in place to relate to others?
- What other themes or portions of the video conversation resonated for you?

## Responding to the Theme

Invite the group to return to Esther's story. She was called by God to speak in that time and place. God's voice, however, was not the only voice in that story. Some voices were actually encouraging the destruction of the people. Despite the many voices, Esther still heard what God was calling her to do.

- Have you heard God's voice? If so, in what way?
- Describe what hearing God's voice and listening for God's call means for you.
- How might we listen for and hear God's voice in the midst of other voices?
- In what ways do you think that Esther lived out her call in the context of community?

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

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

### ***Option 1:***

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

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

Invite participants to respond to these questions as a way of writing and telling their own faith story.

Explore with the group if they would be willing to share their testimonies during an upcoming Sunday worship time!



**Option 2:**

The video clip also noted that we are able to speak and act after being grounded in faith practices. In the United Methodist congregational study (referenced in session 3), there was a direct link between congregations creating space for people to practice telling their story and be in real, authentic community and individuals' comfort with evangelism. Only one of the churches involved in the study practiced regular testimony and accountability, and that church was also the only congregation where leaders expressed their comfort in being vulnerable and who had no hesitation about inviting their friends and coworkers to worship.

- How is your congregation creating a culture of authenticity and vulnerability?
- Where can you practice and share your story with others?
- Are you comfortable inviting friends, coworkers, or neighbors to your church? Do you have any hesitation? If so, what and why?

**Closing**

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

Close the session with prayer.

# Session 4: Changes

## Opening

Begin the session with prayer.

Share with the group the following quotes:

*“If we don’t change, we don’t grow. If we don’t grow, we aren’t really living.”*

GAIL SHEEHY

*“The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance.”*

NATHANIEL BANDY

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

## Approaching the Theme

### **Option 1:**

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

### **Option 2:**

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

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

## Scripture Reading

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

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

## Introducing & Watching the Video Clip

Share with the group that this video clip emphasizes the ways that society changes more rapidly than churches.

View the video clip here: <https://youtu.be/ijlDhP8Gs1U>

## Discussion Questions

Invite the group to consider the following discussion questions:

- Do you agree that the church tends to evolve much slower than society and current culture? If so, why?
- Does your church still operate with the “if we build it, they will come” mentality?
- Are there ministries or mindsets in your ministry context that need to die in order to bring about new life?
- What other themes or portions of the video conversation resonated with you?

## Responding to the Theme

Invite the group to return to Saul’s story. Saul was a religious leader, firm in his convictions and beliefs. Jesus challenged him to not only quit what he was doing, but to instead take a leadership role with those he was persecuting. In the meantime, Ananias is called to take Saul under his wing and to embrace a person who had initially sought to do him harm. We often think of this story as the conversion of Saul, but there are actually two call and conversion stories.

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

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

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

## Closing

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

Close the session with prayer.

# Session 5: Words

## Opening

Begin the session with prayer.

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

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

SAINT FRANCIS

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

## Approaching the Theme

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

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

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

## Scripture Reading

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

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

## Introducing & Watching the Video Clip

Share with the group that this video clip emphasizes the importance of connecting one’s individual story, the community’s story and the gospel story, and how there is often a disconnect between the good things we do and our faith.

View the video clip here: <https://youtu.be/tnwwBkH0whE>

## Discussion Questions

Invite the group to consider the following discussion questions:

- How would you describe what “mission,” “discipleship,” and “evangelism” mean in plain language?
- Do you naturally connect mission, discipleship, and evangelism?
- In the video clip, one person referred to the paradigm shift in the entry points to faith. Worship used to be the primary entry point, but now it is often fellowship or mission. Where did you enter faith or the church?
- What other themes or portions of the video conversation resonated for you?

## Responding to the Theme

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

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

Ask the group to consider:

- A recent study showed that many congregations struggle to differentiate between doing good because it’s the “nice” thing to do or out of civic duty and serving out of love and in response to God’s love. What is your motivation for serving?
- Are you intentional in building relationships while serving, or do you usually only think about meeting a physical need?
- How might outreach be different if people’s needs and longings were viewed holistically: physical, social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual?
- Does your church often default to addressing physical needs and assume that people of a certain educational or social-economic level do not need to hear the gospel message or experience Christian community?

## Closing

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

Close the session with prayer.

# Session 6: Go

## Opening

Begin the session with prayer.

Share with the group the following quote from Mother Teresa:

*“If you want a love message to be heard, it has got to be sent out.  
To keep a lamp burning, we have to keep putting oil in it.”*

MOTHER TERESA

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

## Approaching the Theme

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

- Do I understand myself to be sent in love? From where? To whom?
- Do we understand ourselves to be sent people?
- Where are places in your community that could use a love message?

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

## Scripture Reading

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

- These are Jesus’ final words to his disciples in Matthew and serve not only as a charge, but a promise. We have been entrusted to continue Jesus’ work. What aspects of the Great Commission are the most challenging for you?
- The Greek word for “go” does not necessarily refer to physical travel, but places a sense of urgency on Jesus’ words. Do we operate out of a sense of urgency or complacency when we read this text?
- The text reminds us that Jesus has given us the authority to serve on his behalf and that we are never alone. In other words, Jesus is already there and working in every situation, and we are invited to join him in kingdom work. Does this acknowledgement help this work seem less daunting?

## Introducing & Watching the Video Clip

Share with the group that this video clip emphasizes the ways we are to live out our discipleship in our everyday lives.

View the video clip here: <https://youtu.be/LacYgG6XfUg>

## Discussion Questions

Invite the group to consider the following discussion questions:

- Some critics suggest that in recent decades, churches have focused more on making good members than on making disciples of Jesus Christ. Do you see a difference between membership and discipleship?
- Do we understand church membership as the goal of Christian faith or a vessel through which we can find community and grow in our love and knowledge of God in order to transform the world?
- From the original Greek, the word “go” can also be translated “as you go.” How do you understand the Great Commission? Is it to live out in your everyday life?
- What other themes of the video conversation resonated for you?

## Responding to the Theme

Invite the group to return back to the Great Commission text.

- In a time when congregations and denominations are losing members, how do we not operate out of fear, but instead use the opportunity to go and see what new things God is doing beyond our walls?
- A major aspect of evangelism is paying attention: paying attention to God and paying attention to others. What are some ways that you practice paying attention to God in order to know what God is up to in your neighborhood?
- How are mission opportunities selected in your congregation? Are they based on assumed needs and member interests or are they a response to expressed needs by people in your community?

### *Option 1*

If you are holding this study in your congregation, consider taking some time to examine current mission and outreach opportunities in your church. As you reflect on your setting, ask if your congregation is using its gifts and strengths to connect and offer hope to the community. Do your efforts speak to the demographics of those beyond your walls? Consider obtaining some demographic information about your community and talking to community and civic leaders about the hopes and dreams of people in your area.

### *Option 2*

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

## Closing

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

Close the session with prayer.

# Session 7: Disciples

## Opening

Begin the session with prayer.

## Approaching the Theme

Invite people to reflect on a question below.

- What do you think about when you think about the 12 disciples?
- What qualities and attitudes come to mind?
- What might being a disciple mean to them today, in today's context?

Share with the group that when Jesus sent out the disciples, he sent them without purse, bag, or sandals, and they did not lack anything (Luke 22:35). Ask the group, if you were asked to go out and be a disciple now, what would you want to take with you? Give the group time to brainstorm ideas.

## Scripture Reading

Read Romans 12:1-18 (which is about being living sacrifices and the marks of a true Christian). Invite the group to share initial reactions to the Scripture.

- We are reminded that God has equipped each of us uniquely. Do you know which gifts you have to contribute to the body?
- Paul challenges the Roman church to live differently from others in their community. Are there aspects of the passage that you find especially challenging?

## Introducing & Watching the Video Clip

View the video clip here: <https://youtu.be/5nzXs1qqO8s>

## Discussion Questions

Invite the group to consider the following discussion questions:

- When you reflect on what kind of church you want to be, what would you name?
- What kind of Christian do you want to be?
- The video names that it is important for Christians to be different; how would you describe that kind of difference? How might Christians be different?
- The importance of a life of discipleship is also lifted up in this video clip. What does being a disciple of Jesus mean to you?



## Responding to the Theme

At the beginning of the first session we brainstormed the words, phrases, and emotions evoked by the word “evangelism.” As we conclude this study, let’s revisit that exercise and see how our responses compare seven sessions later.

Ask the group participants to reflect and respond to a question, “What do you think about when you encounter the word ‘evangelism’?” Invite participants to brainstorm key words or phrases. What emotions and images does the word evoke? Record the comments on flip chart paper.

## Closing

Evangelism has become a problematic term for some in the 21st century. Unfortunately, at times, scare tactics, coercion, and bad news that has an escape clause has become common practice and synonymous with evangelism. In reading the gospels (which means “good news”), though, we do not see any of these approaches used by Jesus. Evangelism is good news. It’s the good news of God’s healing and saving love in Jesus Christ, not about introducing a program, membership recruitment, or increasing budgets.

What was the good news that Jesus shared? The first evidence of the good news is found in Luke’s Gospel where Jesus recites a lesson from Isaiah 61:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives/ and recovery of sight to the blind, to let  
the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.*

LUKE 4:18-19, NRSV

The year of the Lord’s favor, also called Jubilee, represented a forgiveness of past burdens and a fresh start. This passage underscores care and concern for the poor and marginalized people in society. The good news promised relief and release. Evangelism is a lifestyle in which a follower of Jesus both shares faith and serves others in need.

Invite the group to reflect on key learnings from the sessions.

- Has this study transformed your previous understanding of evangelism in any way?
- How will you embody the gospel and share your story in your everyday life?
- How now will you live?

Thank the group for their participation and close the session and the study with prayer.