

A Spiritual Journey



A Small Group Lenten Resource

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A Spiritual Journey: A Small Group Lenten Resource

This Lenten study guide is intended to assist congregations and their leaders to deepen their walk with Christ. Participants are invited to view their lives as a spiritual journey. We do not travel alone, however. We are joined by companions along the way. As together we begin this journey, we are also assured that Christ is in our midst.

How do we encounter God, made known to us through Jesus Christ, in our day-to-day lives? How can we increase our awareness of God's presence among us? Those are the primary questions we will attempt to address along the way. This resource will attempt to assist us in opening our eyes to even more ways that God is revealed to us.

One effective "eye-opener" for many people is the power of stories. Each of us has our own story to tell. For the purposes of this spiritual journey, we'll be looking more closely at our own stories, specifically seeking out how we perceive God moving with us each step of the way. As we share personal stories of our spiritual journey, as we offer a witness to God's presence among us, the ability for us all to glimpse God moving in our midst is greatly increased. Creating space for the sharing of these sacred stories is one of the purposes of this resource.

Having heard the stories of living witnesses, we may find ourselves open to new ways of hearing the testimonies of those who have gone before us when they speak of their encounters with the living God. As we engage Holy Scripture with the expectation of receiving divine revelation, those stories become alive and we find that they begin to merge with our own stories. We discover that we are surrounded by a great crowd of witnesses as the voices from the Bible join us on our journey. This resource will assist us in exploring a variety of methods for engaging Holy Scripture. Each of the five sessions will include a quiet time for reflecting on the Gospel lesson for the Sundays in Lent, drawn from the lectionary of the Book of Common Prayer. Numerous models for Bible study will be offered in Appendix C.

To assist us in persevering along the way, essential tools for this journey will be recommended: prayer, study, and action. These three tools are time-tested methods for keeping ourselves spiritually healthy, not only for our own sake, but for the sake of those with whom we travel, as well as those we may encounter along the way. Reflections intended to expand our understanding of these tools and how we might utilize them are provided within this resource. The last session will offer participants an opportunity to continue to meet as Spiritual Journey Groups after this Lenten program has concluded. Suggested guidelines for these meetings are found in Appendix F.

Encouraged by the stories we have heard, and equipped with the tools necessary for this journey, our awareness of God's presence among us will increase. It is then that we will be ready to invite others to join us on this journey. It is then that we will be prepared to fulfill the mission of the Church, "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."

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Overview

Session I – Beginning the Journey

- A. Introductions
- B. Outline of the Five-Week Study
- C. Biblical Reflection (Mark 1:9-15)
- D. Sharing Our Spiritual Journeys
 - 1. Guidelines
 - 2. Introduction of Guest Speaker
- E. Small Group Formation and Homework

Session II – First Tool for the Journey: Prayer

- A. Prayer
- B. Biblical Reflection (Mark 8:31-38)
- C. Tool for the Journey: Prayer
- D. Sharing Our Journey (20 minutes in small groups)

Session III – Second Tool for the Journey: Study

- A. Prayer
- B. Biblical Reflection (John 2:13-22)
- C. Tool for the Journey: Study
- D. Sharing Our Journey (20 minutes in small groups)

Session IV – Third Tool for the Journey: Action

- A. Prayer
- B. Biblical Reflection (John 3:14-21)
- C. Tool for the Journey: Action
- D. Sharing Our Journey (20 minutes in small groups)

Session V – Continuing the Journey

- A. Prayer
- B. Biblical Reflection (John 12:20-33)
- C. Taking Our Journey Beyond the Walls of the Church
- D. Continuing the Spiritual Journey Groups (recommended format)

Session One – Beginning the Journey

1. Prayer

*O gracious Light,
pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven,
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!*

*Now as we come to the setting of the sun,
and our eyes behold the vesper light,
we sing your praises O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

*You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,
O Son of God, O Giver of life,
and to be glorified through all the worlds.*
(BCP, p. 139)

Prayers may be offered for ourselves and others.

2. Introductions

When it is your turn, please tell us:

- A. Your name
- B. The place where you find some peace and quiet
- C. The last book you have read
- D. Your favorite recreational activity

3. Format for This Lenten Study

A. Prayer

Each session will begin with a time of prayer, usually drawn from the Book of Common Prayer.

B. Bible Study

We will hear the Gospel lessons appointed for Lent and respond with a time of quiet reflection.

C. Tools for the Journey

Three spiritual practices: prayer, study, and action, will be considered. A reflection on each of the tools, with accompanying questions for discussion, will be offered. Additional resources for further exploration of these spiritual practices are provided in the appendices.

D. Telling Our Stories

We will break into groups of four. Group members will share their spiritual journeys with one another over the next four weeks. Guidelines and suggestions for preparing these spiritual autobiographies can be found in Appendix A.

4. Biblical Reflection (Mark 1:9-15)

- A. The passage is read aloud.
- B. We sit in silence as we reflect on what we have heard.

5. Homework

In Session Two, read the essay “Prayer as a Spiritual Discipline,” and reflect on the questions that follow.

6. Sharing Our Spiritual Journeys

A. Guidelines – Review Appendix A, p. 20

B. Introduction of Guest Speaker

C. Small Group Formation and Homework – Form into groups of four and identify a meeting place for your group. Decide who will be sharing his or her spiritual journey next week.

D. Close with the following prayer:

*Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past;
be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope,
that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread.
Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen.*

(BCP, p. 139)

Session Two – First Tool for the Journey: Prayer

1. Prayer

*O gracious Light,
pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven,
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!*

*Now as we come to the setting of the sun,
and our eyes behold the vesper light,
we sing your praises O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

*You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,
O Son of God, O Giver of life,
and to be glorified through all the worlds.*

Prayers may be offered for ourselves and others.

2. Biblical Reflection (Mark 8:31-38)

- A. The passage is read aloud.
- B. We silently reflect on what we have heard.

3. Tool for the Journey: Prayer

Prayer as Spiritual Discipline

What is the smallest functional unit of human life? The world of commerce and politics says it is the individual. *It's all about me!* Jesus has a different notion. *Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them* (Matthew 18: 19-20).

The essence of human life is community. We know who we are because we are in community with family, friends, neighbors, and work colleagues. The people with whom we live and work are the mirrors that reflect our presence so that we can see ourselves as others experience us. We might even think of random moments when people who don't know one another gather around a particular issue or event. The commonality of purpose and intentionality that is expressed in the gathering might create community, even if for a short span of time.

When we live in isolation, we lose touch. With no mirror to reflect our identity, we see ourselves as we imagine we should be, not necessarily the way we are in the experience of others. But when we interact with the people around us, we have the benefit of their experience as we make our way through life.

We are, by nature, spiritual beings. We are capable of imagining our own death. And we imagine life after death. We are aware of how we live and move. Human consciousness transcends the limits of the body's capacities. And so, as spiritual beings, we engage the world in the context of spiritual reflection. Whether or not we claim a particular discipline to shape that reflection, the process of musing about life's experience is naturally a part of our daily ritual.

It seems that we would easily rejoice in the relational possibilities afforded to life in community. Why wouldn't we long for the kind of life produced in community? Why wouldn't we embrace the continual possibility of life among loving family, friends, and neighbors? Resistance to the embrace of sisters and brothers in community comes because honest human interaction produces accurate self-awareness. Self-awareness demands accountability. The news from a friend that my manner is abusive or insensitive brings with it an expectation for change. Sometimes, hiding from that reality seems easier than dealing with it. Glimpsing ourselves in the mirror held up by the community can feel like a threat to be avoided.

For those whose social framework is the church, the interactive process of communication and reflection that produces self-awareness is called prayer. Prayer is the tool we use to get beyond ourselves, but it also takes into account the notion that God, as Creator, urges us toward a particular quality of life. In quiet moments of solitude, we reflect on life as it is and as we hope it will be. We ask God what we are to do; how we are to be. When we gather in community, we invoke silence, but we also speak into the center of the gathering those concerns that must be shared so that they can be resolved. We bring the everyday world of family, work, neighborhood, and country into the world of worship, asking God to instruct us so that our lives reflect God's will for Creation. We stand in community, not just with the people we love and family and friends, but with anyone who happens to show up. We model community as the gathering of all God's children. And the more inclusive and interactive the gathering, the more clearly we see the work we are given to do as Christ's Body in the world.

Christian spirituality is grounded in human life in the here and now. Especially in the Anglican tradition, we believe that God is redeeming Creation in every moment of time. And so, the task of a follower of Christ is to become a part of that redeeming work. Thus, Christian spirituality is a disciplined, ongoing cycle of prayer, study, worship, work, and leisure that strives to heal whatever is broken in the world.

Specific spiritual disciplines abound. The Gospels, for example, remind us of solitude, silence, fasting, worship, prayer, and simplicity of life as strategies that can be used to exercise spirituality in an ordered way. Most of us probably have a more ordered spiritual life than we imagine. Maybe, for example, particular objects or rooms in one's home spark specific memories of circumstances or people that need to be the subject of spiritual reflection.

Whatever one does to exercise the spiritual dimension of life, for one professing the Christian faith, the essential feature of the exercise is its connection to the mission and ministry of the church. Perhaps it is instructive to think of prayer as a rhythmic alternative to the work we do in the world. We engage in restorative acts of human kindness and work for justice and peace. Then we retreat to reflect prayerfully on what we've done and what remains to do.

All of this, in combination, produces a spirituality that feeds the Christian soul as the Christian's work in the world restores the wholeness of Creation. Amen! Alleluia!

The Rev. Dr. Clayton L. Morris, Program Officer: Liturgical & Spiritual Resources

For additional Prayer resources, please see Appendix B, p. 21.

Questions for Discussion:

- A. When and where do you pray?
- B. What resources do you currently use?
- C. If you have not already done so, would you consider making a commitment to specific times for prayer in your daily/weekly schedule? If you are willing, please write out your commitment in the space below.

4. Homework

In Session Three, read the essay “Study as a Spiritual Discipline,” and reflect on the questions that follow.

5. Sharing Our Spiritual Journeys

- A. Break into our four-member Spiritual Journey Groups.
- B. Listen to the story of the member appointed for this session.
- C. Choose who will share his or her story next week.
- D. Close with the following prayer:

*Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past;
be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope,
that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread.
Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen.*

Session Three – Second Tool for the Journey: Study

1. Prayer

*O gracious Light,
pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven,
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!*

*Now as we come to the setting of the sun,
and our eyes behold the vesper light,
we sing your praises O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

*You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,
O Son of God, O Giver of life,
and to be glorified through all the worlds.*

Prayers may be offered for ourselves and others.

2. Biblical Reflection (John 2:13-22)

- A. The passage is read aloud.
- B. We silently reflect on what we have heard.

3. Tool for the Journey: Study

Study as Spiritual Discipline

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The truth of the Word is found in the story: your story, my story, our story, and of course, the great story. The question is, what do we do with the story once we have heard it? Each story should be treasured, shared, and honored; to do so means to commit to a discipline of reading scripture. It might benefit one to consider the study of scripture in two different ways: from an academic approach, and as a spiritual exercise.

There are commentaries, reflections, and academic papers that can be, and should be, referred to on a regular basis. Viewing the scriptures in this manner gives one the opportunity to discover the historical, contextual, theological, and literary richness of the writing. It allows the reader to explore how the text has influenced the identity of the Episcopal Church as recognized in its doctrine and polity.

When scripture is viewed through spiritual exercises, it is enhanced by images and interpretations that are revealed by and to the individual and the community.

Study as a spiritual exercise means honestly discerning one’s place in the continuing story of a faith community. It means taking a sincere and non-manipulative approach to the text. It means to risk imagining, stepping into the story, journeying alongside those who traveled down dusty roads and over turbulent seas. It means sitting in the streets with the lepers and carrying the

cross. It means celebrating new life and sitting at the banquet tables of the great feasts. It means witnessing the power of healing, birth, death, and resurrection.

As individual transformation occurs, it becomes more and more evident that it is impossible to journey alone. Humanity, by definition, is more than an individual; and when a community is formed, always in the midst of this gathering is the presence of the Spirit. When a community trusts and commits to share the sacred story, our stories, and the present story, there is an abundance of hope that begins to weave together a tapestry of grace and truth.

It is in this human tapestry that the Word is honored; tied together in story the community becomes transformative. Honor comes in actions that heal a broken and wounded world. Honor is in healing and giving, in reconciliation and forgiveness, in compassion and passion.

Ruth-Ann Collins, Associate Program Officer, Adult Formation

For additional Study resources, please see Appendix C, p. 22.

Questions for Discussion:

- A. When and where do you study?
- B. What resources do you currently use?
- C. If you have not already done so, would you consider making a commitment to specific times for study in your daily/weekly schedule? If you are willing, please write out your commitment in the space below.

4. Homework

In Session Four, read the essay “Action as a Spiritual Practice,” and reflect on the questions that follow.

5. Sharing Our Spiritual Journeys

- A. Break into our four-member Spiritual Journey Groups.
- B. Listen to the story of the member appointed for this session.
- C. Choose who will share his or her story next week.
- D. Close with the following prayer:

*Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past;
be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope,
that we may know you as you are revealed in scripture and the breaking of bread.
Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen*

Session Four – Third Tool for the Journey: Action

1. Prayer

*O gracious Light,
pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven,
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!*

*Now as we come to the setting of the sun,
and our eyes behold the vesper light,
we sing your praises O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

*You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,
O Son of God, O Giver of life,
and to be glorified through all the worlds.*

Prayers may be offered for ourselves and others.

2. Biblical Reflection (John 3:14-21)

- A. The passage is read aloud.
- B. We silently reflect on what we have heard.

3. Tool for the Journey: Action

Action as a Spiritual Practice

During my ministry in a congregation that was largely comprised of recent immigrants, I encountered a struggle common to people in congregations throughout the United States, and quite probably throughout the world. At the heart, it is a struggle for identity.

There are an estimated 191 million people migrating throughout the world. With such a significant movement in population, collisions of culture are inevitable, even among the religious faithful. In large sweeping terms, the immigrant has left the familiarity of local custom and language in search elsewhere for a life of dignity. Often such ventures have been made with a hope, if not a promise, of eventual return. The members of the host community, while seeking to extend hospitality, did not deliberately invite change in such magnitude that it would affect established habits, especially if those changes pose a threat to an established perception of stability or at least the perception that stability is within one's grasp. For the immigrant and host alike, there is conflict between that which defines one's identity and that identity which circumstances threaten to change. Our Christian call to action is a call to practice spiritual discipline for the sake of the other over natural desire for the sake of self. Ultimately it is the triumph over self that reveals to us the true identity to which we are called.

To be priest and pastor in such a dynamic context is an invitation into this struggle for identity. As a witness to the Christian narrative of faith, it is an invitation to at once be made aware of the forces of death and resurrection embraced in the baptismal covenant – forces that makes us who we are. By sharing in Christ's death we are called to leave all that is familiar and to pick up our cross and follow into an unknown. As a resurrection people, we profess to share a place at the

heavenly banquet table, one flowing with rich food and fine wine. The immigrants among us have had an experience of carrying the cross and eagerly await a place at this table of feast. At the same time, we who are the host community don't see an open chair to offer and are not ready to give up our seat. All we see is that more people are coming and no one is prepared to leave.

One obvious question to ask is, "Where is Jesus to be found in this struggle for identity, this struggle for a place at the table?" Is Jesus the immigrant asking for a place to sit? Has Jesus already been seated and is He now being asked to move over or to even relinquish his seat?

It would seem easy to project the vulnerability of the outcast onto Jesus – after all, we celebrate his birth in a simple animal stable, as a person for whom there was no room in the inn. Likewise it would seem easy to project the full divinity of God onto Jesus, thus imparting in him extraordinary insight over a natural human propensity to possess, rendering him free from his biological struggle to defeat the elements of scarcity. The temptation to give in to either of these projections fails to grasp at the reality that we are neither completely vulnerable nor are we exempt from human limitations. The immigrant who comes among us brings gifts of culture and human experience to share, gifts we need to receive if we are to be made whole, to be made holy. However, we are not free to act without regard to self-preservation. Such acts have ensured our survival in a world that has often been indifferent to that survival. We seek to expand our identity by welcoming the immigrant while protecting that which we have in our possession. And this struggle seems to leave us at a loss as to how to proceed.

But my thoughts about this struggle don't stop here. God's economy exceeds our human understanding of economy. "*Economy*" is a Greek word for "household," which allows us to rephrase this point. God's household exceeds our human understanding of household.

I am reminded of my place as the third child of six simultaneously with my role as parent of three children. I might ask, who is the "favorite" child among my siblings, or who is my favorite child among our three children? These questions help me think about households and in particular my perception of God's household. Do my parents have favorites? Do I have a favorite? Beyond my egocentric ambitions and insecurities, I am certain that my parents love us all equally, as I love our children equally. Yes, that love may appear differently at times, but it is nevertheless an equal love. This seemingly small insight allows me to reconsider Jesus' experience at the heavenly banquet table. Is it possible that Jesus has the capacity to welcome the immigrant and to retain a seat? Is it possible that we can share a place at the table without losing our place at table?

For several years I was an invited dinner guest of one such immigrant family as they gathered between the Christmas Eve worship services. It was a beautiful experience to be sharing a meal at a table with this gracious, large family. There were not enough seats for everyone to be seated at the same time. Nevertheless, there was an ordering that brought family members to the table to be served, to sit a bit, and to open their seat to another family member who would in turn be served and sit a bit. There was plenty of rich Mexican food, and by a simple act of sharing, there were enough seats for all to find a place at the table. Conversation flowed freely from Spanish to English, allowing all the family members to speak and to be heard. Maybe this image of graciousness at table has something to convey to us. Maybe this image of sharing is a lesson for

us. Maybe we are asking to retain our seat when we should be asking if there is food and drink enough for all who have been invited.

In my roles as child and parent I have given up my seat for our welcomed guests, much as gracious parishioners gave up theirs for me and others in the family. Identity seems to be something we hang onto like a seat at the table. But maybe it's something that we are called to share with each other so that the real purpose of our gathering may take place. By sharing our identity we are fed and others may feed as well. We share one bread and one cup as we gather around the holy table as community. The vessels that contain the elements do not feed us, it is what we receive from those vessels that feeds us.

Is it possible that in God's household our identities are gifts we have been given to share with others who may join us while we are seated? Could the collision of cultures between immigrant and host express an unwillingness to share of the giftedness that has been given us for the sake of our mutual nourishment? Have we confused our identity with the source of that identity? Can we possibly eat everything that has been placed before us, while disregarding those who are standing at the doorway?

These are tough questions to ponder, and they are honest questions for us to ask. Most importantly, whether we acknowledge them or not, we are in dialogue with them every day along with the 191 million people who are migrating among us and those who are sitting beside us. The spiritual practice of action as a discipline invites us to share our seat and to allow others to share their seats with us. Through such disciplined sharing with each other, we are all fed and find rest for a while.

The Rev. Christopher Johnson, Program Officer for Jubilee Ministries, Social Justice, and Poverty Alleviation

For additional Action resources, please see Appendix D, p. 28.

Questions for Discussion:

- A. With what actions do you proclaim the faith that is in you?
- B. What resources do you currently use?
- C. If you have not already done so, would you consider making a commitment to specific times for Christian action in your daily/weekly schedule? If you are willing, please write out your commitment in the space provided.

4. Homework

In Session Five, read the essay “Evangelism in a Post-Modern World,” and reflect on the questions that follow.

5. Sharing Our Spiritual Journeys

- A. Break into our four-member Spiritual Journey Groups.
- B. Listen to the story of the member appointed for this session.
- C. Choose who will share his or her story next week.
- D. Close with the following prayer:

*Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past;
be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope,
that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread.
Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen.*

Session Five – Continuing the Journey

1. Prayer

*O gracious Light,
pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven,
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!*

*Now as we come to the setting of the sun,
and our eyes behold the vesper light,
we sing your praises O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

*You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,
O Son of God, O Giver of life,
and to be glorified through all the worlds.*

Prayers may be offered for ourselves and others.

2. Biblical Reflection (John 12:20-33)

- A. The passage is read aloud.
- B. We sit in silence as we reflect on what we have heard.

3. Taking Our Journey Beyond the Walls of the Church

Evangelism in a Post-Modern World

We begin evangelism by listening. And then we listen some more. It is only when we really hear the stories of others that we will know how to proclaim the good news in ways that can be heard. The truth of the matter is that the way folks “did” evangelism fifty years ago simply does not work in most cases today.

I know those old methods quite well. They were used on me, and I used them on others, many times. And I think that in today’s society, they are a major turn off. Beating people over the head with the Bible and telling them they have to turn or burn is the best way I know to turn most folks away from Christ. I can’t recommend it.

So, what can we do? We meet people where they are in their spiritual life, and avoid the temptation to drag them to where we think they should be. And so, we begin by listening. We listen to the story of another person, and then share our story, always looking for the places where God’s story touches them both.

There are those who will claim that such a deviation from the pattern that previous generations used to do evangelism is a watering down of the message of the Gospel. I disagree. The message of the Gospel, the healing power of God’s redemptive love made know to us through Jesus Christ, remains the same. What has changed is the packaging of that message. And the most prominent new element of that packaging is a big dose of humility.

Those who study such things claim that a person hears the message of the Gospel on an average of twenty-five times before making any decision as to how to respond to the message. One of the biggest problems Christians face is that we all want to be that 25th person! Evangelism is not about getting another notch on our ecclesiastical belts. One plants, another waters, and God gives the growth.

Beyond that, I think we have to face up to the fact that the “turn or burn” message is probably one of the major causes for the fastest growing religious identity found in national polls is “no affiliation.” People started getting turned off by the way the message was proclaimed in the ’60s, when the cultural mores softened, and one would no longer lose their social status if they slept in on Sunday morning instead of getting up and going to church. Consequently, we now have at least three generations who have a limited knowledge of Christianity. They don’t know the Bible stories. They don’t know church jargon. Their impression of Christianity is gleaned from the televangelists, who, for the most part, are still stuck in the 1950s mode of fire and brimstone proclamation.

It is not because our culture has become more decadent that the message of the Gospel struggles to be heard today. It is because of the Church’s poor job of proclaiming that message. A dose of humility is long overdue.

When talking about evangelism, Episcopalians often mention the St. Francis quote, “Preach the Gospel; if you must, use words!” Others point out, that can be seen as a cop out. I tend to agree. Let’s face it: Episcopalians are uncomfortable talking about their faith. Maybe that’s because on some level we are aware that the old methods don’t work today, and we don’t know any new ones. Or maybe it’s because we’re the group that is sometimes described as the ones who imagine hell to be having to eat a five-course meal with a salad fork. It just seems to be rude to talk about religion. Consequently, Francis’ line is a handy excuse to guard our standards of proper etiquette.

The truth of the matter is that our actions are most definitely important. But evangelism is primarily about building a relationship with God, and one another. Every relationship requires good communication. We listen and we respond. Not with judgmental clichés. Not from a position of superiority, believing that we have something the other person needs. Remember, God is already moving in that person’s life. We listen to their story. We tell our story. We speak of the hope that is in us.

And then, we follow up that conversation with loving actions. Without evidence to support our words, no matter how moving our story might be, it can be easily dismissed. Remember that we have three generations that don’t know much about the Gospel. At best, they are apathetic to the message. Some, however, are antagonistic to it, and possibly for good reasons. Bigotry, war, and exploitation of our resources are sometimes justified by those claiming to represent the Christian faith. Our witness through our actions may be the only Gospel some of these folks may ever read.

We’ve got a lot of work to do to rehabilitate our image in the world. We have a long history of unhelpful rhetoric working against us. It seems to me that the first step is to relearn the art of

listening. Informed by what we hear, we can then tell our story, and engage in loving actions. Such actions will be the evidence necessary for some to reconsider the message we have to offer. Such actions will also put things back in perspective. Rather than striving to be that 25th person, we will be able to refocus on God's mission instead of our own, and then move with God, from glory to glory, transforming this world in the name of Christ.

The Rev. Terry L. Martin, Program Officer for Evangelism

For additional Evangelism resources, please see Appendix E, p. 29.

Questions for Discussion:

- A. How do you define “evangelism”?
- B. What might help you share your spiritual journey with others?
- C. If you have not already done so, would you consider making a commitment to specific times and/or places to practice intentional evangelism in your daily/weekly schedule? If you are willing, please write out your commitment in the space below.

4. Sharing Our Spiritual Journeys

- A. Break into our four-member Spiritual Journey Groups.
- B. Listen to the story of the member appointed for this session.
- C. Decide if your group desires to continue to meet.
- D. If so, consider the suggested format found in Appendix F.
- E. Close with the following prayer:

*Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past;
be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope,
that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread.
Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen.*

Appendix A – Telling Our Stories

Each week, one member of your Spiritual Journey Group will be sharing their spiritual autobiography. The week before it is your turn to tell your story, you will need to take some time to prepare your presentation. The following are some guidelines that will be helpful in your preparations.

1. Limit your story to 20 minutes. This may be difficult if your story is complex, but if that is the case, this will be a beneficial exercise, as it will require you to identify the most significant moments of your spiritual journey. You will want to read your presentation aloud before presenting it to the group, not only to make sure it is within the time parameters, but also so that you can “hear” it, and identify those places where some editing may be required for clarity.
2. To begin, make a list of some of the significant moments in your life. Reflect on where God was, or was not, within those moments.

In the study guide *Groundwork: Digging Deep for Change and Action* (2005), Charles Fulton and Susy Miller recommend using a timeline in preparation for telling your faith story. You may find using a timeline helpful. Here are the steps suggested for developing such a timeline:

- A. Draw a timeline from left to right on a sheet of paper, the left being your birth and the right being the present.
 - B. On the timeline, mark and identify, by year, significant events (or turning points) in your life.
 - C. Above the line, describe the context. (What else was going on?)
 - D. Below the line, describe your awareness of God. Was God present or absent in that event?
 - E. Reflect on what you perceived God to be doing: comforting, challenging, teaching, affirming, etc.
 - F. Look at the entire timeline. Do you see any patterns? Are there patterns emerging regarding your experience and your relationship with God?
 - G. Now begin to write out (or outline) your story. Tell how God has been present your life and what the result has been when you have recognized God’s presence.
3. Keep in mind that this story is not intended to be a “confession” or “tell all.” If there are very personal events, or events involving others that they may not wish for you to make public, it may be best to not offer those details.

Appendix B – Prayer

There are many resources available to assist you in your prayer life. What follows is not intended to be an exhaustive list. It is simply a place to begin. If there is a particular resource that you have found helpful, please let us know, and we'll try to include it in future study guides.

Personal Daily Prayer

Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families (BCP, p. 137)

Forward Day by Day

http://www.forwardmovement.org/fdbd_titles.cfm

This is an inspiring daily devotional for Christians that is published by the Forward Movement, an agency of the Episcopal Church.

Contemplative Prayer

<http://www.contemplativeoutreachsd.org>

This is a form of prayer that assists us in becoming still and silent in God's presence. It is the opening of our minds and hearts to God and moving beyond thoughts, words, and emotions and resting in God's presence.

Corporate Prayer

Morning Prayer (BCP, p. 75)

Noonday Prayer (BCP, p. 103)

Evening Prayer (BCP, p. 115)

Compline (BCP, p. 127)

The Holy Eucharist (BCP, p. 355)

Other Resources

Anglican Gradual and Sacramentary

<http://anglicangradual.stsams.org>

The Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission

<http://www.associatedparishes.org>

Church Publishing

<http://www.churchpublishing.org>

Liturgica – liturgical music and books.

<http://www.liturgica.com>

Oremus – daily prayer; liturgy, hymns and prayer resources.

<http://www.oremus.org>

Prayers of the People

<http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>

The Rite Word 2000

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/19625_20002_ENG_HTM.htm

Appendix C – Study

The following are examples of some of the Bible Study formats that are available. Is there one that you like that is not here? Let us know, and we'll try to add it to the list next time.

1. WORDS TO LIFE

Time: 45 minutes

STEP 1. Read the text.

STEP 2. Brainstorm the key words and phrases.

STEP 3. Determine the intended meaning of the key words and phrases by consulting Bible dictionaries and commentaries.

STEP 4. Brainstorm the life questions that are related to each of the key words and phrases.

STEP 5. Discuss how the passage relates to those questions.

STEP 6. Discuss how the passage and the life questions relate to the current life of the community and each individual.

2. WALTER WINK: TRANSFORMING BIBLE STUDY

Time: 1½ to 2 hours

Walter Wink uses this method in his book *Transforming Bible Study* (Abington Press, 1989); it is also the basis of Patricia Van Ness's book *Transforming Bible Study with Children* (Abington Press, 1991). Both books would give additional help to the group leader.

This process requires careful planning and preparation by the group leader. The questions in steps 3 and 4 need to be thought out and formulated beforehand. If imaginative meditation is to be used, it needs to be developed before the meeting. If activities are planned, materials need to be obtained and set up. Someone inexperienced in doing this type of process may wish to seek a mentor to help design and guide the process until the group is used to it. Once it is familiar to everyone, group members can help plan and facilitate the process.

Ground rules for use of this method are as follows:

The text, not the leader, is the focus. The leader poses questions that enable the participants to enter into dialogue with the meaning of the text at all levels.

Everyone is invited to join the conversation. Each member of the group has a different perspective to offer that will increase understanding of the text and its application.

Everyone is equal before the text. Both learned scholars and beginners have their own responses to the text.

STEP 1. Take time for silent centering. Participants quietly explore the anxieties and expectations they have brought with them. They examine how willing they are to let something new happen and whether they can be open to the Spirit and to one another.

STEP 2. Someone reads the passage from Scripture.

STEP 3. The leader asks prepared questions about the context of the text. The questions are designed to help the group identify the critical issues in the text and to understand the text in its own right. For example, they might consider plucking on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5).

a. What is the charge brought against Jesus? What significance do you attach to the fact that it is the disciples, not Jesus, who are accused? Is the issue religious or economic?

b. What is Jesus' defense? Does it meet the Pharisees' objection? How does Matthew change it?

c. Explain the absence (in Matthew and Luke) of verse 27 in Mark. What do you think is the original core of the narrative?

d. What is the basis for action on the Sabbath? What was its purpose? Does Jesus make "man the measure of all things?" Does he make himself the measure? Why doesn't Jesus take up the comparison with David and conclude, "So the Son of David is lord even of the Sabbath"? Does Jesus appeal to his own authority or to a principle inherent in the situation? In the material that Matthew adds, is the appeal made to Jesus' authority or to a principle inherent in the situation?

e. Is Jesus granting his followers license to do what they do? What attitude does Jesus take toward the Sabbath here?

f. Who or what is the "son of man" here? Is it Jesus?

g. What do you learn about Jesus here?

STEP 4. The leader asks questions that help the group members explore the impact the text is making on them. The group explores the linkages between the text and modern life. The leader may invite the group to enter imaginatively into one or more of the Biblical characters and experience them in either their historical setting or in a modern context. The leader may ask the group to explore their emotional responses to the symbols and ideas; for example, the parable of the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1-6; Matthew 12:9-14; Luke 6:6-11).

a. The authorities do not understand Jesus' sense of justice in the scene. Why? At what point does the duty to comply with laws cease to be binding, in view of the need to help others or to oppose injustice? How is this liberating power manifesting itself in us today as we relate to the power structure of society?

b. Now close your eyes and envision that you are:

i) Jesus coming into the synagogue on the Sabbath. You know that your opponents are present. You see a man with a deformed hand sitting in the congregation. Even though he asks nothing from you, you call him over and ask him to stretch out his hand. Then you heal him. Your enemies leave to plot against you.

ii) One of the Pharisees, entering the synagogue right behind this Galilean rabbi, whom you distrust. You, too, see the crippled man. You know Jesus can heal him, but if he does, he will have broken the Sabbath law against work. Jesus reminds you that the importance of life supersedes the law and calls the man to him. The man exposes his crippled hand to Jesus, and Jesus makes it well in front of your eyes. You leave to plot against Jesus.

iii) The crippled man, sitting in the synagogue and waiting for the service to begin. Your withered and useless hand is resting in your lap. Because of your hand, you can't do heavy work. Life is difficult. There is a commotion at the door, and a stranger comes in – followed by a group of Pharisees. They begin talking about healing on the Sabbath, and suddenly the stranger turns to you and calls you over to the group. You go to him. "Stretch out your hand," he says, "and show us your crippled limb." And suddenly your hand is no longer crippled.

c. How did you feel as Jesus? As the Pharisee? As the crippled man? Which did you identify with most? Why?

d. Why does Jesus make the man display his withered hand? Are there times when we have to reveal our wounded lives in order to be healed?

STEP 5. The group explores how the text can be applied. Through music, movement, painting, sculpting, written dialogue, and small group discussion, each person allows the broken aspects of his or her life to be called forth into healing. For example, using the withered hand passage, distribute a piece of clay to each person. Have each person make the withered part within him or herself. Share in the whole group or smaller groups.

Close the group with prayer. The activity (like the one described above) may elicit emotions; a quiet time of prayer during which people are free to offer prayers aloud if they wish is helpful in facilitating the transition from the group experience to leaving.

3. BASE COMMUNITY METHOD

Time: 1½ to 2 hours

Many of the base communities in Latin America have Bible study as an important part of their life together. The two basic elements of the base community method are explication and application. Various authors have described the process, such as: Leonardo Boff, *Church, Charisma and Power* (Crossroad Publishing, 1986); David Lockhead, *The Liberation of the Bible* (The Student Christian Movement of Canada, 1977); Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, ed., *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities* (Orbis, 1981). This method is useful for groups committed to a specific social action issue (e.g., the environment). It is also useful in helping an ongoing group discern a common mission. Ongoing groups might use this method when the group becomes too inwardly focused.

EXPLICATION

STEP 1. Ask a group member to read the passage.

STEP 2. Invite the group to discuss the political, social, and historical context of the text. Group members may want to read what comes before and after the text, look at a study Bible, or consult a commentary.

STEP 3. Invite the group to listen to the text again with the context in mind. Ask a different group member to reread the passage.

STEP 4. Invite members to share comments and reflections on the text.

APPLICATION

STEP 5. Invite the group to identify the similarities and differences between the world of the text and their world.

STEP 6. Invite group members to identify the problems and issues in their common life that are raised by the discussion of the text. These problems should be ones shared by group members – issues in the neighborhood, community, and region – rather than personal issues. Because this method calls a group to a common action (see Step 9), the group needs to identify common issues and concerns.

STEP 7. Ask how the text may be relevant to the group's reality. What does the text say to the group's issues, to the ways they are now responding to those issues and to the role of the Church in response to those issues?

STEP 8. Invite the group to spend some time in prayer, seeking God's guidance.

STEP 9. Invite the group to decide what action they will take in the problem area discussed. Set a time for follow-up so the group can report what has happened as a result of the action taken. If this is an ongoing group, do this report time before starting study of the next passage.

4. IMAGINATIVE BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Time: 1 to 2 hours

The following method is outlined in Thomas Hoyt, Jr.'s article in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Cain Hope Felder (Augsburg Fortress, 1991). It was first recorded by Joseph Johnson, Jr., a Biblical scholar and bishop in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church who received it from his father. Hoyt points out that in black congregations the Scriptures "come to life through images used by the preacher."

- STEP 1. Prepare with devotion and prayer.
- STEP 2. Ask someone to read the passage.
- STEP 3. Ask the group to identify the stories that come before and after the passage to establish the context.
- STEP 4. Identify the problems, issues, circumstances of the participants in the story.
- STEP 5. Ask someone else to read the passage (preferably opposite sex of the first reader).
- STEP 6. Ask the group to identify the human and divine elements in the story.
- STEP 7. Invite the group members to imagine they are the writer or participants in the story. Make sure all the roles are assumed by at least one person in the group. (You can include inanimate objects as well as people – the well, the road, the rock, etc.). Invite the group to role-play the story or read the passage again while the group members imagine what they saw, heard, and felt as the role they assumed. Invite group members to share what they saw, heard, and felt.
- STEP 8. Ask the group to discuss: "What special message does this passage bring to us for our healing and renewal? How is God calling us to respond?"
- STEP 9. Wait for God to speak. End with a time of silence and a closing time of prayer.

5. PERSPECTIVES

Time: 45 minutes

STEP 1. Read the text.

STEP 2. Reflect on the following questions:

- a. What is going on?
- b. Who is involved?
- c. What do those who are involved want?

STEP 3. Share your answers to the questions.

STEP 4. Put the passage in context. Read a Bible commentary to answer the following:

- a. What is the historical situation?
- b. What is the author's intention?
- c. What is the larger context for the passage?
- d. Who was the original audience for the passage?
- e. What are the main ideas of the passage?

STEP 5. Compare the context with the answers to the first series of questions:

- a. How much of what you said is your own concern brought to this passage?
- b. How much are the different perspectives in the group colored by each person's concerns?
- c. What do the passage and the commentary say to you about those concerns?

Appendix D – Action

There are many Action resources available. The following list is simply a sampling. If there is a particular resource that you have found helpful, please let us know, and we'll try to include it in future study guides.

Advocacy Center

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/advocacy.htm>

Bread for the World

<http://www.bread.org/>

Churches for Middle East Peace

<http://www.cmep.org/>

Episcopal Ecological Network

<http://eenonline.org/>

Episcopalians for Global Reconciliation

<http://www.e4gr.org/>

Episcopal Migration Ministries

<http://ecusa.anglican.org/emm.htm>

Episcopal Network for Animal Welfare

<http://www.franciscan-anglican.com/enaw/>

Episcopal Relief and Development

<http://www.er-d.org/>

Jubilee Ministry

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/jubilee.htm>

Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

<http://www.civilrights.org/>

National Episcopal AIDS Coalition

<http://www.neac.org/>

ONE Campaign

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/3654_74932_ENG_HTML.htm

Public Policy Network

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/eppn.htm>

Appendix E – Evangelism

Here are some resources for Evangelism. Once again, this is just the beginning of compiling such a list. If you know of a good evangelism tool, let us know.

Books:

***Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: Living in a Three-Storied Universe*, by Walter Brueggemann**

<http://www.amazon.com/Biblical-Perspectives-Evangelism-Three-Storied-Universe/dp/0687412331>

***Christianity for the Rest of Us*, by Diana Butler Bass**

<http://www.amazon.com/Christianity-Rest-Us-Neighborhood-Transforming/dp/0060859490>

***More Ready Than You Realize*, by Brian McLaren**

<http://www.amazon.com/More-Ready-Than-You-Realize/dp/0310239648>

***Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other and the Spirit of Transformation*, by Stephanie Spellers**

<http://www.amazon.com/Radical-Welcome-Embracing-Spirit-Transformation/dp/0898695201>

***Transforming Evangelism*, by David Gortner**

<http://www.amazon.com/Transforming-Evangelism-Transformations-David-Gortner/dp/0898695856>

***Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism*, by Martha Grace Reese**

<http://www.amazon.com/Unbinding-Gospel-Church-Leaders-Evangelism/dp/0827238088>

***When the Members are the Missionaries*, by Wayne Schwab**

<http://www.amazon.com/When-Members-Are-Missionaries-Extraordinary/dp/0971755205>

Websites:

Evangelism and Congregational Life Center

<http://ecusa.anglican.org/evangelism.htm>

Five Marks of Mission

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm>

Magnetic Church

<http://www.magnetic-church.com>

Via Media

<http://www.everyvoice.net>

Appendix F – Spiritual Journey Groups

When all have gathered, light a candle as the following prayer is said:

O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
(BCP, p. 832)

Each participant responds to these questions:

1. Prayer

- A. Share a moment during the last week when you were aware of God's presence.
- B. What has been your experience of following the spiritual practices you listed during Session Two of the Lenten series?

2. Study

- A. What form of study have you engaged in during the last week?
- B. Are there particular insights derived from that study that has deepened your relationship with God?

3. Action

- A. What action have you engaged in during the last week that has worked toward expanding the kingdom of God?
- B. What is your plan of action for next week?

End your time together with intercessory prayer, which may be concluded with the following prayer:

*Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you,
So guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills,
that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you,
and then use us, we pray, as you will,
and always to your glory and the welfare of your people;
through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*
(BCP, p. 832)

Extinguish the candle, and then go in peace to love and serve the Lord!

Note: I want to express my thanks to the Rev. Donna Ross, former Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Cambria, California, for introducing me to the concept of Spiritual Journey Groups.
–T. Martin

Facilitator’s Guide for *A Spiritual Journey: A Small Group Lenten Resource*

Time

The format for each of the five sessions follows the pattern of “Daily Devotions: In the Early Evening” (p. 139, BCP). If another worship service precedes the session, you may want to omit sections that would be repetitive.

As facilitator, one of your primary challenges will be management of time. These sessions were designed for one hour duration. It is recommended that you not allow them to extend beyond 90 minutes. If a simple Lenten meal precedes this program, it is still recommended that the entire time gathered does not exceed 90 minutes. To accomplish this may require a very careful rationing of time for each of the activities.

Preparations

Through newsletters, bulletins, websites, etc., invite members to “pre-register” for this Lenten Program. Having some idea of how many will be present will be helpful in your preparations. Plan for drop-ins as well, however.

A week before the first session, ask someone to prepare a “Spiritual Journey Talk,” using the guidelines found in Appendix A. This 20-minute spiritual autobiography will be offered during the first session as a model for the group to follow as they prepare their own presentations.

Based on the number that registered, and allowing for potential drop-ins, identify various locations where small groups of four can meet at the conclusion of each session to hear the “Spiritual Journey Talks.” Putting signs up identifying the various spaces (Group 1, Group 2, etc.) will be helpful.

Session One

After the opening prayer, an opportunity is given for the people to offer their own intercessions. When all who desire have offered their personal prayers, the facilitator will need to conclude this prayer time, either with a closing prayer, inviting all to say the Lord’s Prayer, or simply with a closing phrase, such as “We offer all these prayers through Jesus Christ. Amen.”

During the introductions, the facilitator may need to assist in keeping the answers to the listed questions moving from person to person. These introductions are intended to be brief snapshots of each participant. There will be opportunities for full and detailed portraits later on.

To assist the group in becoming more comfortable with the process, a few minutes are taken during this first session to describe the pattern that will be followed each week:

- Prayer
- Biblical Reflection
- Tools for the Journey
- Sharing our Spiritual Journeys

This is followed by a Biblical reflection. Ask for a volunteer to read the passage. You may want to ask someone before the session begins, and give them the Bible with the passage to be read already marked. Invite a time of silence following the reading, with a sentence similar to this: “Let’s sit in silence for a moment as we reflect on what we have just heard.” Allow 2 to 3 minutes of quiet reflection, then move on to the next activity.

Announce the homework for next week’s session: “Read the essay in Session Two on Prayer and reflect on the questions that follow.”

For the introduction to the Spiritual Journey Groups, have participants turn to Appendix A and review the recommendations for writing a spiritual autobiography.

Introduce the guest speaker who will offer his or her spiritual journey as a model for the group.

Have the larger group break up into groups of four.

NOTE: It is important that each group have no more than four persons in it, as there will only be four more sessions of this program. More than four will mean that someone will not have the opportunity to share their story. The exception will be the guest speaker, who will be able to be the fifth member of one of the groups.

It is not necessary to “assign” individuals to a group, although that is an option. If you allow participants to self-select their group of four, it will be important for the facilitator to make sure that everyone is included in a small group. If self-selection results in complete chaos (which sometimes happens!), the facilitator may need to call everyone back together, and have them “count off,” or use some other selection technique.

Once again, it is important that everyone is included, even if that means a group is smaller than four persons. If a group is smaller than four persons, they will have heard all the Spiritual Journey Talks from their group members before the five sessions of this program are concluded. If that is the case, encourage that group to meet in their designated area and use the suggested format found in Appendix F.

Once the groups are formed, they will have two tasks to accomplish:

1. Identify where they will meet at the conclusion of future sessions.
2. Decide who will be sharing their story, using the guidelines in Appendix A, during the next session.

Close with the suggested prayer, or any other prayer that the facilitator selects.

Session Two

Prayers and Biblical reflection as above.

For the “Tools for the Journey” section, if there is sufficient time, give an opportunity for everyone to share their answers. If you have a large group, you may need to announce that time restraints will not allow everyone to speak, so just a few answers will be shared as examples of the variety of possible responses. Make sure to allow time for examples of commitments participants have written out.

Remind the group of the homework for next week.

Before adjourning to their small group spaces, remind the group to select a person to offer their Spiritual Journey next week. Point out the recommended prayer for the small group to say together at the conclusion of their time together.

The session concludes after the small group is done. There is no final gathering of the larger group, as most likely some of the groups will go past the 20-minute guideline. The facilitator will need to remain present until all of the small groups have concluded.

Sessions Three and Four

Follow the guidelines above for Session Two.

Session Five

Prayers, Biblical Reflection, and Tools for the Journey as above.

Before the participants break into their small groups, highlight for them the opportunity offered for each Spiritual Journey Group to continue to meet on a weekly basis to “check in” with one another. The suggested format for such weekly gatherings is found in Appendix F.

Check to make sure that by the end of this session all participants have had an opportunity to share their Spiritual Journey. If somehow someone was missed, arrangements will need to be made for one of the Spiritual Journey Groups to gather to hear that story at another time.

If you have any questions, or need additional support, please contact:

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