



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Study Guide by Kathryn Hatfield Bauchelle

Dear Sunday school classes, book clubs, and other groups: We are glad that you have picked up *The Gospel Next Door* by Marty Troyer! An intriguing journey is ahead of you. On the coming pages are some suggested questions to help guide your discussion and focus your conversation.

Note to leaders: *The Gospel Next Door* tells stories of Houston; we're hoping that you'll localize everything you read. Find ways to apply the stories, ideas, and thoughts to *your* city, town, church, or neighborhood—wherever you and your group belong. For that reason, the word *community* has been used frequently in the questions below, so that you can apply the discussion topics to the community that fits you best.

In preparing these questions, we have assumed that they will be used in small group discussion, most likely discussing one chapter per session, and that the facilitation will be shared among a number of different leaders. We've tried to include a variety of questions, and you will probably find that there are more for each chapter than you can complete in the time that you have. But that's okay! We're hoping that you as the

facilitator will review the questions ahead of time and choose those that will be of most interest or applicability to your particular group. And of course you're free to add your own!

Suggested wording for newsletter, bulletin, or other communication about your discussion group:

As Christians, we pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. But what does that even mean? Would we recognize God's kingdom if it moved in next door?

Learn to see God's work in your neighborhood, city, and the world—and learn how to join it. With stories from his own city of Houston, Texas, author Marty Troyer introduces a theology of place that empowers us to truly see the work of God where we live, work, and play. *The Gospel Next Door* unpacks the gospel through the lenses of following Jesus, making peace, and overcoming injustice. Those seeking to connect more deeply with the world that God so loved will find compelling stories and practical ideas for healing brokenness and imagining new life.

Join us for this book study that begins on [DATE] at [PLACE]. Books are available from [SOURCE].

Introduction

FOLLOWING JESUS INTO A NEIGHBORHOOD NEAR YOU

Warm up:

- What does the phrase “the gospel next door” mean to you?
- Give a word or phrase to describe your reaction to the idea of “following Jesus right where you are.” Why do you think you feel this way? What do you hope to learn from the book?

Discuss the chapter:

- Does the author's contrast between his invitation to Jesus, and Jesus' invitation to him (p. 9), resonate with you? Do you think there's really a difference here? Why or why not?
- What do you think a faith “left at church” looks like? What about a faith that comes home with you?
- Why do you think an atheist might be attracted to the gospel? Why might a Christian be threatened?
- How do you understand the phrase “missional community” (p. 11)? Do you think you belong to one? If not, what would have to change for the community you're in to become missional?
- “This invitation always comes with a location: a setting that roots our life of faith in a neighborhood or workplace or family. Jesus leads us to an address on a map where the gospel is already bringing life into the soil and streets and souls it touches” (p. 13). Troyer focuses on his hometown of Houston throughout this book. Discuss your home community—church, neighborhood, city, other—and define among yourselves what you think Jesus might have in mind for *your* locality. What needs healing? Where do you see God at work?

- Go around the group and ask everyone to name one thing they're passionate about in the community. How might the gospel "be applied uniquely to your setting"?
- Do you agree that "the church needs a new way of making disciples" (p. 16)? What would be an outdated definition? What could replace it?

See our world with gospel eyes:

Bring in a news story or current events article from the past week or two. Explain how you are seeing with gospel eyes as you engage with it. If time permits, open this for discussion.

Make it matter:

What will you do with what you've learned today? What action will you take? Give each person the opportunity to commit to a specific action or behavior change as a result of today's discussion.

Pray:

God, we know that in loving the world, you love every country, city, town, and neighborhood. We know you love each and every one with your whole heart, none more, or any less, than any other.

Open our eyes to what's around us every day. Help us to see the gospel next door. Give us eyes to see where you're already working and to see where we can make you known. Open our minds and hearts as we study this book, and show us where and how you want us to join you in making all things new. Amen.

Take it further:

Go to www.thegospelnextdoor.com to meet some of the people in the book, find more resources, and to join the conversation.

PART I: THE GOSPEL AS LENS

Chapter 1:

HOW JESUS' GOSPEL CLARIFIES PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING

Warm up:

- What was the most striking thing you read in this chapter?
- Where did you feel most emotion? (Inspired, challenged, outraged, despairing, etc.)

Discuss the chapter:

- Troyer opens this chapter with a list of things he loves about Houston, Texas (p. 23). What do you love about your community? Nothing is too small or too large, too trivial or too profound, to mention here!

If you have the resources and space, write this list somewhere where it can be displayed throughout the days or weeks of this study.

- Consider the example given in this chapter of Egypt as both a haven and a place of oppression (p. 25). What is the darker side of your community? How might others in your community experience it differently to you?
- Discuss Troyer's question on p. 29: "Has too much information ever slowed down your desire to put faith into action? It certainly can happen, with committees spinning their wheels, churches waiting for more information, and small groups getting all their ducks in a row before moving forward." Talk about some examples from your community. What gets lost when this happens?
- This chapter contains a list of those who saw reality through a gospel lens and thus took a gospel-focused course of action: Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, James Loney, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (pp. 31–32). Who might you add to this list? Why?
- On p. 35, Troyer defines *gospel* as "the good news about our good God's good acts in our good world" (p. 35). What other definitions of gospel have you heard? How would *you* define it?
- Have someone read aloud the final sentences of this chapter: "When we see the world through the eyes of God and not our own, practicing our faith comes into greater focus. Embracing the gospel as good news for all life helps us respond to the physical and spiritual hunger around us" (p. 36). Ask everyone to silently consider where they may need to see the world through the eyes of God instead of their own. After a few minutes, encourage people to share some of their thoughts.

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Bring in a news story or current events article from the past week or two. Explain how you are seeing with gospel eyes as you engage with it. If time permits, open this for discussion.

Make it matter:

What will you do with what you've learned today? What action will you take? Give each person the opportunity to commit to a specific action or behavior change as a result of today's discussion.

Pray:

God, your passion for human flourishing is so limitless that every schoolroom, street, and relationship we've ever had or will have is in your care. Everywhere, everything, every time, everyone. And we thank you! Give us *your* eyes to see our world. Bring our faith into greater focus. Give us the courage to embrace the gospel as good news for ALL life, and to act boldly to triage the crucial needs we see around us. Amen.

Take it further:

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Chapter 2:

BORROWING THE EYES OF GOD

Warm up:

- What was the most striking thing you read in this chapter?
- Where did you feel most emotion? (Inspired, challenged, outraged, despairing, etc.)

Discuss the chapter:

- Share your responses to the story of the Baldwins (pp. 37–39). Could you have responded in this way? What might have held you back?
- “Vision—seeing clearly, perceiving, understanding, grasping, comprehending, hearing, and obeying the actions of God—is a core theme throughout John’s gospel” (p. 41). Read aloud some or all of the John passages given in the footnote to this sentence, at the bottom of p. 41 (if possible, use a variety of Bible translations). How would you summarize the themes of these verses? Do any in particular stand out to your group?
- “Like a movie trailer put out weeks before a movie is released, the church is a glimpse for the watching world of all that God intends for human flourishing. We live today as if the kingdom were already here. We live it, embrace it, imagine it, and defend it. We ask ourselves what people and communities will look like when they’re fully functioning as God designed, and we live that way today. We call out the lies of the world that are counter to the kingdom of God and boldly spread the news that a new world is coming and is already here” (p. 43). Where’s one place your community does this well? Where’s another where you have room to improve? Discuss and agree on one thing your (church) community could do (or you could do) to make your wider community curious about the good news.
- How is your (church) community a glimpse of things to come?
- “The very essence of Jesus’ teachings is love. Love as reconciliation, love as forgiveness, love as restoring community and shalom, love as peace breaking down walls that divide” (p. 44). Can you think of some examples of this in action in your community, and in the wider world? What are some situations you see around you that could use more love?
- Troyer talks of the leaders who persecuted Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath as “faithful and committed” (pp. 45–46). Have you ever been faithful and committed to something that you later realized was not correct? How did you change? Are there things in your (church) community that could fall into this category now?
- Consider the description of the early Houston Mennonite Church: “We were a place for spiritual nourishment, attracting people who wanted the religious goods we offered. Absent from our DNA was a sense of purpose tying our own spiritual health to the health of our community. We didn’t understand our community’s needs, or our role in it, or how essential the word *Houston* is to our name. The common good simply wasn’t on our radar screen; attracting members was” (p. 47). Has this been true of your church community in the past? How did you move past it? Is it still true in some ways now? How could you change? How important is your location to your church identity?

- Read aloud the Isaiah passage quoted on pp. 48–49 (Isaiah 58:6-7). There’s a lot of challenge in this if God means it literally. Hear your group’s responses and discuss.
- Ask someone to read aloud the modernized Apostles’ Creed on p. 51. Hear responses from people. What would the world described be like to live in? How far would you be willing to go to see it come about? Use this “Houstonized” version of the Apostles’ Creed as inspiration for creating a local version of your own.
- Answer this chapter’s final questions (p. 52): “What are the things you sense God is doing in your neck of the woods? How might localizing your theology strengthen your involvement in God’s mission? How does your location shape the way you live your faith?”

See our world with gospel eyes:

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Make it matter:

What will you do with what you’ve learned today? What action will you take? Give each person the opportunity to commit to a specific action or behavior change as a result of today’s discussion.

Pray:

God, we want to be a glimpse for the watching world of all that you intend for human flourishing. We want to live today as if the kingdom were already here. We want to live it, embrace it, imagine it, and defend it. We want to ask ourselves what people and communities will look like when they’re fully functioning as you designed, and we want to live that way today. Help us to call out the lies of the world that are counter to your kingdom and to boldly spread the news that a new world is coming—and is already here. Amen.

Take it further:

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Chapter 3:

TELL THEM ABOUT THE DREAM!

Warm up:

- What was the most striking thing you read in this chapter?
- Where did you feel most emotion? (Inspired, challenged, outraged, despairing, etc.)

Discuss the chapter:

- Robert Hodge dreams of one day being able to paint teacups, some day when there’s no longer a need for “art that raises social consciousness” (p. 53). What are your teacups?

- What dreams do you have for your community? Ask members of your group to dream out loud in “What if?” sentences. If you like, add them to your list from chapter 1: all the things you love about your community.
- This chapter tells some stories of very literal captives and very literal liberation. What other types of captivity can bind a community? What sorts of captivity do you see around you? What would it take to free these people to a life of grace?
- Troyer suggests that we “take the time to listen well to the stories of how your community was formed and how it has transformed over the years. Tours through a neighborhood with seasoned leaders in faith, business, nonprofit, education, and civic arenas who are able to recount changes over time can prove invaluable. Speak to grandmothers and pastors in minority, immigrant, and poor communities to hear the strengths and brokenness they experience. Simply walking your neighborhood will help you learn about real neighbors God may be calling you to love” (p. 58). You probably can’t do this in the moment, but you can plan for it. Who would you speak to? Where would you go on a tour? Brainstorm a master list—and don’t forget to appoint a note-taker so you can come back to it later and put your plan into action.
- Choose from the suggestions on pp. 58–59. Include some of these in today’s discussion and include others in your plan, above.

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Make it matter:

What will you do with what you’ve learned today? What action will you take? Give each person the opportunity to commit to a specific action or behavior change as a result of today’s discussion.

Pray:

God, we believe you have more to give than all we could ever ask for or imagine. Help us to dream! But never our own hopes and opinions about the way things should be. Root our dreams in God’s gospel of Jesus’ restoration of all things. Help us to ask ourselves: “What if?” What if heaven really came to our community? What if black artists could paint teacups, spiritual and physical slavery were a thing of the past, and all children had access to amazing education? Move beyond our minds and transform our hearts. Open our eyes to see what you’re already doing. Give us a divine love of our community. And call us again today to join your amazing work right where we already are. Amen.

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PART II: THE GOSPEL GIFT OF JESUS

Chapter 4:

LOOK LIKE JESUS

Warm up:

- What was the most striking thing you read in this chapter?
- Where did you feel most emotion? (Inspired, challenged, outraged, despairing, etc.)

Discuss the chapter:

- Consider Linda's story (pp. 63–65). Think of times when we might be tempted to offer an incomplete solution to someone's problems. Do we ever focus on one part of someone's needs and ignore the whole? How can we do better than this?
- "For Christians, what is our image of full personhood?" (p. 66). Discuss this in pairs and then share your thoughts with the larger group.
- "Equipped with the gospel, we too can be trained to see people through godly rather than human eyes" (p. 69). How can we move in this direction? Discuss this in terms of "more" and "less." For example, "If I'm seeing someone with godly eyes, I'll see more [fill in the blank] and less [fill in the blank]."
- Are there areas in your own life where you need to (or long to, or want to) hear the gospel? Perhaps you've never even thought of the gospel in connection to your work, your marriage, your homeowner association, etc. Where do you yearn to hear the gospel applied?
- Troyer describes tours on the "justice bus," combating wage theft and touring neighborhoods to learn more about human trafficking (pp. 72–73). What could you do in your community to learn more about where you could join the fight against injustice? Are there groups you could join or activities you could support?
- "With the eyes of our hearts enlightened, compassion can become our default as well, our primary way of seeing people right off the bat" (p. 73). Our society as a whole seems to have lost some of its ability to feel and show compassion. Can you think of examples? What do you think has caused this? What are some ways we can be part of the solution and not part of the problem?
- Some people still get a "default compassionate" response from society at large. Who are they? Who are those who do *not* get that default response? How about you? Are there groups or people for whom you have a negative default response?
- "I need God to see me as good, and I'll do what's needed to prove I am. I wonder what emotions this stirs up in you" (p. 77). What emotions does this stir up in you? What types of "anxieties or hidden fears" could block people from loving others? Make a list and discuss as many as you choose to.

See our world with gospel eyes:

Bring in a news story or current events article from the past week or two. Explain how you are seeing with gospel eyes as you engage with it. If time permits, open this for discussion.

Make it matter:

What will you do with what you've learned today? What action will you take? Give each person the opportunity to commit to a specific action or behavior change as a result of today's discussion.

Pray:

God, we know you are restoring all things—souls, streets, and entire cities—and we want to respond with a YES to your invitation to be transformed with them. As part of that transformation, give us your eyes to see. Your eyes of compassion, of love, of justice, of mercy; the eyes of Christ. Help us not to shy away when what is revealed is *where we* need to change. We know you promise us abundant life; set us free to live for others. Amen.

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Chapter 5:

EVANGELIZING PEACE

Warm up:

- What was the most striking thing you read in this chapter?
- Where did you feel most emotion? (Inspired, challenged, outraged, despairing, etc.)

Discuss the chapter:

- Bring in a picture of the Pietà found in the Santos and Esther Nieto Park in Houston. Begin your session in quiet contemplation of this picture. After a time of silence, share your responses.
- “We live in a culture that too often values destroying life and not helping it to flourish” (p. 80). Where are you guilty of this? What stories of past or present violence are part of your community memory? Where in your community or neighborhood could you find something or someone who you could help to flourish?
- Discuss responses to the questions on p. 80: “Is this mural how the neighborhood perceives the church? Are we like Mary in this mural—offering too little too late, irrelevant in the face of violence, tending the wounds of our sons but incapable of preventing them? Is it possible we’ve resigned ourselves to the role of post-chaos chaplain and missed opportunities to stop violence before it erupts?” What is your reputation in the community?
- “In a time as complex and dangerous as our own, Jesus lived as if the long-awaited kingdom were actually already here” (p. 84). Review some of the ways Jesus did that. How can we live the same way today? What obstacles do we put in our own way, and what excuses do we make, to avoid doing this?

- Consider David Atwood’s story and his relationships with death row inmates (pp. 85–87). Some would find this hard to understand. Listen to honest responses from your group and consider how to see this through a Jesus lens.
- What does “loving enemies” mean to you?
- “Their stories become powerful when we know who they have chosen to love and where those people live” (p. 88). Can you think of other examples where this is true? Are there people in your own community who are remarkable in a similar way?
- “They genuinely believed violence created the common good” (p. 89). Where is this true of society today? What might later generations say, with hindsight, of some of our present-day choices?
- Do you agree with the definitions of *peacemakers* and *peacekeepers* on p. 95? Which category does your community currently fit into? Do you like it that way?
- “Youth ministry isn’t about saving kids but about helping them find their place in God’s story” (p. 96). Does your community have a youth ministry? Would it be helpful to review it in light of this statement? What might change?

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Make it matter:

What will you do with what you’ve learned today? What action will you take? Give each person the opportunity to commit to a specific action or behavior change as a result of today’s discussion.

Pray:

God, we want to be like Jesus, who lived as if the long-awaited kingdom were actually already here and as though the skills of war were already useless. We want to be like Jesus, who refused to have any enemies and who lived as if your kingdom and will were truly present on earth as they are in heaven.

We know that violence will not bring our communities redemption, and that yours is the way of peace. Help us to be peacemakers, not merely peacekeepers, and to find your love for everyone we meet. Amen.

Take it further:

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Chapter 6:

FORM A NEW DISCIPLE-MAKING CULTURE

Warm up:

- What was the most striking thing you read in this chapter?

- Where did you feel most emotion? (Inspired, challenged, outraged, despairing, etc.)

Discuss the chapter:

- The *Houston Chronicle* remarked on “how distinct it was to have a pastor in Houston talking about peace and Jesus in the same sentence” (p. 97). Some people find this distinct; for others it is the norm. Where does your community fall?
- Do you agree with author Kathleen Norris, quoted on p. 99, that “we may want to believe that we are still concerned. . . . But the ceaseless bombardment of image and verbiage makes us impervious to caring.” If you agree, what solutions do you see? If you don’t agree, how would you re-state this thought?
- How would you differentiate “disciple-making” from “church-going”? Is this a valid distinction? Do you agree that it’s “woefully inadequate for equipping us to put our faith into action” (p. 100)?
- “But becoming a disciple of Jesus is about *formation* far more than *information*” (p. 100). How do we turn information into action? What might need to change—even radically—in how you approach disciple-making within your community? What has formed *your* faith?
- How does Christianity’s “path to becoming fully human, fully alive” differ from culture’s path?
- Answer Troyer’s question on p. 103: “Are we infected with a Western lifestyle without even knowing it?”
- What are some elements of the American Dream that could be getting in the way of God’s dream in your community?
- The literal meaning of *Gelassenheit*, mentioned on p. 104, is “calmness”, or “coolness”; another meaning could be “serenity.” How could adopting this posture help us move closer to God?
- On p. 105 is a list of people whose lives have been enlarged and changed by “living into Jesus’ story.” Who would you add to this list? Think locally as well as more broadly!
- What type of ministry *with* (not *to*) your neighbors could your community do? Are there things you or other groups are already doing that you could expand upon?
- Has anyone in your group been part of Faithwalking or a similar process? If so what did they learn?

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Make it matter:

What will you do with what you’ve learned today? What action will you take? Give each person the opportunity to commit to a specific action or behavior change as a result of today’s discussion.

Pray:

God, our Great Physician, you are present and passionate about the people we know and the neighborhoods we live in. Transform us to love like you love and to live like you live. We accept the gifts of your love and grace; may they be spiritually empowering for us. We pray our church would make true disciples, for all

the churches in our neighborhood and in our denomination. Teach us how to love, to act for justice, to see the world as it actually is and can be. Show us that you specially gifted us to be your partners. Help us to be as Jesus would be, if he were us. We love you, Jesus. Open our eyes to see and our mouths to witness to Jesus in our city, in our schools, and in areas of poverty and racism and war and peace. We pledge our allegiance to you and you alone. Amen.

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PART III: THE GOSPEL GIFT OF PEACE

Chapter 7:

SHALOM AND THE COMMON GOOD

Warm up:

- What was the most striking thing you read in this chapter?
- Where did you feel most emotion? (Inspired, challenged, outraged, despairing, etc.)

Discuss the chapter:

- Does anyone know of a local story like those that introduce this chapter (Jesse Jones and the banks; Reverend Lawson and racial integration)? If so, tell it now.
- Create a word cloud of all the different meanings and nuances of the word *shalom*. Display it where you can see it for the duration of the book study, if possible.
- Does your church, your town, your community have integrity *and* workability? Where could you find ways to improve? Where have you already taken steps in this area? Is there anyone for whom it doesn't work? Why are they left out?
- Where does your immediate community live as if its "own welfare is inexplicably intertwined with the health" of the wider community? What's one thing you could do immediately to draw closer to this state? Can you plan for, and commit to, doing this?
- "To understand God you need to understand peace, and the same is true of understanding the gospel, Jesus, God's kingdom, salvation, evangelism, atonement, and grace" (p. 118). Choose one or more of the topics listed in the footnote at the bottom of p. 118. Read the associated Bible verses aloud and discuss how an understanding of peace helps illuminate that topic.
- Research and bring in some statistics that reflect the values of your community, as Troyer does for Houston and Texas on pp. 121–22. Is anyone surprised by your local stats? Where could you be a means for change?

- On p. 122, Troyer includes a quote from Rick Santorum: “There is income inequality in America. There always has been and hopefully, and I do say that, there always will be. . . . Why? Because people rise to different levels of success based on what they contribute to society and to the marketplace, and that’s as it should be.” Discuss your reactions and responses to this. How would you respond to Santorum, if given the chance? How does “borrowing the eyes of God” offer a different interpretation?
- How would Twila (story on pp. 123–24) feel if she came to your church? Would she feel empowered and valued or like her work didn’t matter? How does your church treat volunteers and view “church work”?
- Imagine that your current discussion group is an ecclesia for your community. What would you plan, right now? What would you change, right now? How could you bring changes to your community by viewing it through a gospel lens?
- Answer any or all of the questions posed at the very end of this chapter: “What would your city or neighborhood look and feel like if it were filled with shalom? How is your city both part of and block to God’s intentions for all its people? Is it possible the health of your city is tied to your vocation and willingness to volunteer your time?” (p. 128).

See our world with gospel eyes:

Bring in a news story or current events article from the past week or two. Explain how you are seeing with gospel eyes as you engage with it. If time permits, open this for discussion.

Make it matter:

What will you do with what you’ve learned today? What action will you take? Give each person the opportunity to commit to a specific action or behavior change as a result of today’s discussion.

Pray:

God, in the word *shalom*, we catch a glimpse of the world as you intended it to be: a world filled with goodness. We pray for true shalom for our community. Show us how to have both workability and integrity. Shine a light on the places where these things are lacking, and help us to celebrate where they are already to be found. Above all, make us agents of change. Help us to understand what shalom can look like for *everyone*, and to seek the peace of our community. Amen.

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Chapter 8:

THREE TRILLION DOLLARS OF POTHOLES

Warm up:

- What was the most striking thing you read in this chapter?

- Where did you feel most emotion? (Inspired, challenged, outraged, despairing, etc.)

Discuss the chapter:

- “Things as basic to our lifestyle as out-of-season tomatoes, cheap, fashionable clothing, and corn subsidies all signal that we are living in a global community the likes of which no generation before ours could imagine. When the cell phone I use every day transitioned from luxury item to essential gadget, women and children in the Democratic Republic of Congo were forced to mine dangerous conflict minerals like tin and tungsten. And the list goes on” (pp. 131 –32). What other examples of the global community can you think of? Which of the examples benefit you and your community? Which examples do it harm? Which examples harm others?
- How has your church, your community, your faith made your world feel small?
- Bring in a picture of Earthrise, as referenced on p. 132. Look at it together. What thoughts does it inspire? Share them with your group.
- The bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima are referenced on p. 135 as a claimed “act of peace.” Have you ever seen these actions in any other way? What alternatives were there?
- How does it feel to consider the United States as “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today”? Is this how it is presented to society at large? Why do you think so many support war and violence as a means of bringing peace?
- What’s your response to the quote from King on p. 137: “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death”? How do you think about or define “spiritual death”?
- Where are we encouraged by our society to put “profits above people or corporations above compassion” (p. 144)? Brainstorm together and make a list. Ask everyone present to choose one (or more!) of the instances listed for attention and behavior change over the coming weeks.
- To paraphrase a line on p. 145: “We are all only responsible for ourselves.” What are some actions that you could start to do today, that would show care of neighbors half a world away? Where could you sacrifice something you have grown accustomed to—convenience, an artificially cheap price—to enable someone else to flourish? Commit to a new action focused on another’s flourishing, and write these commitments somewhere to return to, or find another way to hold each other accountable.
- On p. 146, the idea of “true cost” is explored. Discuss this further with your group. If possible, bring in photos of sweatshop workers, who make many of our clothes, or child laborers, who harvest cacao to make our chocolate. How might our buying practices shift if we had to encounter these oppressed people at point-of-sale, or worse, be the one to do harm to them instead of allowing others to do it on our behalf and out of our sight? How can we put into action our unwillingness to allow their misery to subsidize our cheap goods, and instead move to an acceptance of “true cost” as the norm?

See our world with gospel eyes:

Bring in a news story or current events article from the past week or two. Explain how you are seeing with gospel eyes as you engage with it. If time permits, open this for discussion.

Make it matter:

What will you do with what you've learned today? What action will you take? Give each person the opportunity to commit to a specific action or behavior change as a result of today's discussion.

Pray:

God, we know that everything is interrelated. War, local economies, spiritual health, poverty, creation, chocolate. We know that for better or for worse, we are citizens of this one world—our world, the created world, the only world we've got. Events on a global scale affect our neighbors next door, and choices we make ripple to the four corners of our globe. Make us worthy of this knowledge. Let us not be paralyzed by it, daunted by the magnitude and complexity of this web of relationships. Instead, let us respond with love. Give us clarity of vision to recognize our neighbors—even those we will never meet—and to love them as we love ourselves. Give us willingness to live in a way that reflects your love for people and planet. Amen.

Take it further:

Go to www.thegospelnextdoor.com to meet some of the people in the book, find more resources, and to join the conversation.

Chapter 9:

READ THE BIBLE WITH BLACK LIVES MATTER

Warm up:

- What was the most striking thing you read in this chapter?
- Where did you feel most emotion? (Inspired, challenged, outraged, despairing, etc.)

Discuss the chapter:

- Reflect on the story that opens this chapter. Imagine the scene from the viewpoint of various protagonists, especially the murdered young men: “What if you weren't struggling to live faithfully but were merely struggling to live in a culture that hated you? What if you were part of a community that was terrorized through lynching mobs and bodies hung on trees?” (p. 151). Spend some time in silence, considering how common this type of story was in the United States at a certain point in history.
- Does your community have any history of racial violence? Can you tell some of those stories?
- “Perspective matters” (p. 151). Discuss examples of this in your community, or in current events today.
- Who are some of the “poor and pushed out” (p. 152) in your community? How can you listen to their voices?
- The idea that “New Testament authors found it nearly impossible to interpret positively a story of someone with great means” (p. 154) can make us feel uncomfortable. After all, most of us qualify as extremely wealthy on a global scale. Go to www.globalrichlist.com for an illustration of this fact. Discuss your responses and reactions.

- Troyer states that he has “been racialized to think about everything, from missions to theology, through a white-default lens” (p. 159). Have you thought about race in this way before? What examples can you think of, from your own life or community, where this can be seen to be true?
- How would you describe your community or church’s racial makeup? How does this affect the way you see the world and how you act?
- On pp. 160–61, Troyer makes a number of practical suggestions for broadening our perspective. Plan how you might do any or all of them: Listen to the marginal voices you already know. Read the Bible from below, where Jesus lived. Write an autobiography of race. Map out where in your own community the marginalized live.
- Return to the earlier question in this section, where you identified the “poor and pushed out” in your community. Now answer the questions on p. 161: “As a faith community, think about what it would look like for these communities to be restored to wholeness. What would have to change for these communities to function as designed? What is the gospel message for these people? What blocks might your community be putting up to them experiencing it?”

See our world with gospel eyes:

Bring in a news story or current events article from the past week or two. Explain how you are seeing with gospel eyes as you engage with it. If time permits, open this for discussion.

Make it matter:

What will you do with what you’ve learned today? What action will you take? Give each person the opportunity to commit to a specific action or behavior change as a result of today’s discussion.

Pray:

God of the margins, we praise you for who you are and not who we want you to be. You are the God of exodus and resurrection. You are the God of the orphans, widows, and strangers—of migrants and those who are sick, poor, and imprisoned. We thank you for your intimate care of the poor and pushed out, and of your promise that we will meet you in them. We name those we know who are struggling and need your care.

[*Time of silent or oral prayers.*]

Jesus, when we say your name, remind us of your roots on the margins. Give us the courage to look at the world through your eyes, and not from the perspective of power or privilege. The executed-now-risen God of the margins is with us. Amen.

Take it further:

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PART IV: THE GOSPEL GIFT OF RESTORING JUSTICE

Chapter 10:

HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM

Warm up:

- What was the most striking thing you read in this chapter?
- Where did you feel most emotion? (Inspired, challenged, outraged, despairing, etc.)

Discuss the chapter:

- Consider the story about the Habitat for Humanity building project that opens this chapter. What made the difference?
- On p. 168, there's a possibly surprising definition of injustice: "The Bible's word for this—for broken relationships and broken community—is *injustice*. In Greek, this is the exact same word as *unrighteousness*." Share your responses and reactions to this definition. What are some implications for the church?
- "So what does justice look like in the Fifth Ward and in neighborhoods like yours? Who are the recipients of God's gift of justice? Is it directed at the thieves who stole from Habitat, or as a gift to the grandmother? Is it about punishment or about healing the roots of poverty?" (p. 170). What do you think justice looks like in neighborhoods and communities like yours?
- *Justice* has been equated with "just deserts" and "due punishment" for a long time. Do you have this meaning lodged in your head? How do you feel about learning a new way of seeing it?
- "But one doesn't heal cancer with a Band-Aid. Neither can you restore the wholeness of communities by addressing symptoms (theft, for example) rather than root causes" (p. 172). What are some root causes of injustice in your community? How might wholeness be restored? What can *you* do?
- Privilege can be hard to understand, and can be easy to deny. A popular explanation is a good introduction, though it has also rightfully been called over-simplistic so it is only a starting point. You can find it here: <http://twentytwowords.com/what-will-you-do-with-your-privilege/> Read this out loud, and discuss.
- "Thirty million low-wage workers in the United States lose, on average, \$50 billion in stolen wages annually" (p. 175). Were you surprised by this statistic? What can be done about it? Why do you think this isn't talked about more, in the media, by those in power?
- "Too many [Christian business leaders] are unaware of the actual power they have for change, and too many keep ethics and faith separate" (p. 178). Do you think one can legitimately keep ethics and faith separate? Why, or why not?
- Think about the challenge on p. 179: "Who do you see when you step outside your front door? Is there anyone there you've been blind to? Is there anything in God's Word you've been blind to?" If you have the opportunity to prepare this ahead of time, ask members of your discussion group to bring in photos

of the view from their front door. You might also like to bring a photo of what's outside your church door—or if you're meeting in the church, go and look out! Consider the quote above in a very literal way.

- Finish your discussion with the final two questions from this chapter: “What do you see God already doing in your community? How are you being called to join?” (p. 179). Make a list of people and organizations that are forces for good in your community. What help do they need that you could supply?

See our world with gospel eyes:

Bring in a news story or current events article from the past week or two. Explain how you are seeing with gospel eyes as you engage with it. If time permits, open this for discussion.

Make it matter:

What will you do with what you've learned today? What action will you take? Give each person the opportunity to commit to a specific action or behavior change as a result of today's discussion.

Pray:

God, the breadth and depth, height and length of your love for the world is so all-encompassing that it passionately addresses both those who are *lost* and that which is *broken*. Oh God, help us to be able to do the same! Help us to lose our desire for punitive justice and instead to respond with active restoration. Let us see justice and righteousness as inextricably linked and to work for the flourishing of all humanity. God, help us see what you're already doing in our community! Let us join you in bringing your kingdom. Amen.

Take it further:

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Chapter 11:

CONGRATULATIONS, YOU'VE BEEN CALLED!

Warm up:

- What was the most striking thing you read in this chapter?
- Where did you feel most emotion? (Inspired, challenged, outraged, despairing, etc.)

Discuss the chapter:

- Linda White's story is very thought-provoking. Could you respond as she did, in her eventual pursuit of restorative justice? Why or why not?
- On a spectrum, with punitive justice at one end and restorative justice at the other, where do you stand? Which do you think is more effective? Draw a line on a sheet of paper or whiteboard and invite people to mark where they fall, or vote with your feet and stand in a line in the room, with one end

representing one extreme and the other end the opposite. Discuss these responses and why people chose as they did.

- “Instead of returning hate for hate, Jesus teaches returning good for evil. He is often caught bringing folks who have broken relationships back into full standing with their people” (p. 184). “Return good for evil” has been repeated so often that we sometimes don’t even stop to think about the full weight of the words. What does this look like in your world? Think of someone who has done harm to your family, or your neighborhood, or your community. What does “good for evil” look like for them?
- “Jesus is not interested in the blame game; he wants both victims and offenders restored to full community” (p. 185). Some people would say this the above represents *injustice*, not justice. How do you respond to this?
- What’s the difference between *believing in* Jesus and believing him? Why might Christians be “so unlike Christ,” as Gandhi stated (p. 186)?
- “What might justice look like in your community or congregation? How would your office or residence be transformed if practices of restorative justice were introduced?” (p. 188).
- “[Doing justice is] the natural lifestyle of those who have experienced freedom from inner chains and have given themselves to breaking the outer chains that oppress” (p. 192). What would need to change—for you and for your community—to make doing justice the natural order? Does such a thought make you feel elated, or apprehensive, or something else?
- What might God be calling you to in this regard?

See our world with gospel eyes:

Bring in a news story or current events article from the past week or two. Explain how you are seeing with gospel eyes as you engage with it. If time permits, open this for discussion.

Make it matter:

What will you do with what you’ve learned today? What action will you take? Give each person the opportunity to commit to a specific action or behavior change as a result of today’s discussion.

Pray:

God, some of us have grown up believing in the idea of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” Replace this for us, God, with a desire to make things *right*. Help us find ways to learn new skills, and learn to expend our best energies loving our neighbors and actively working for common-good justice where we live, work, and play. God, we know you have the power to liberate us from what binds our souls and holds our world captive. Oppression and shame, unjust burdens and spiritual blocks, hawkish lies and hiding of our true selves: none of these are any match for you. Unbind us. Set us free to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly—wherever you may lead us. Amen.

Take it further:

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Chapter 12:

WORSHIP THE GOD OF MISSION

Warm up:

- What was the most striking thing you read in this chapter?
- Where did you feel most emotion? (Inspired, challenged, outraged, despairing, etc.)

Discuss the chapter:

- Read Isaiah 58:6–8 in as many different Bible translations as you can find. What would this look like if it literally took place in your community? Can it be true that we're asked to live this way? How is it different to the way you're living now?
- “Weeks of worshipping the God who cares about the hungry, homeless, and naked oriented them to do the same” (p. 194). Have you thought of worship and justice as so directly linked before? How do you respond to the two concepts being put together in this way?
- Consider the Herringtons' story. How would you have responded if a friend came to you and said they were taking in some homeless people? What do you think of Betty's view of the situation (p. 195)?
- “The God of justice isn't waiting for you to change the world. God is waiting for you to worship God” (p. 196). What do you think of this? What will happen when we truly worship God? What's holding us back from this? Are there habits we need to break or does our distrust or anxiety run deeper than this?
- “If God loves the world, would the people you work alongside say the same about you? Might they say, ‘I'm not a person of faith, but man, does she ever love people?’” (p. 197). Answer this honestly. How could you show more love to those around you? Think broadly: from home, to workplace, to church, to cyberspace. Where do you hang out? Where could your love be more evident? Will you commit to working on this?
- “And before you can even ask what that means, Jesus has broken a bread loaf and poured wine to share. The acts of breaking and pouring become symbolic performances of the self-sacrificial love we're called to give to the world. His radical hospitality toward betrayers and deserters is just one real-time example of what this means in daily life” (p. 198). If you celebrate communion (or the Eucharist, or Mass), do you see it in this way? What do you think of the metaphor of “breaking and pouring” as the pattern for our lives?
- “How is your worship shaping you for mission?” (p. 199). Is something missing for you from either activity? If so, what needs to change?
- “When we think about worship and mission together we may easily slip into thinking that our worship services are themselves to be attractive to outsiders. Services that attract people by their quality are likely not missional worship” (p. 199). Has your church moved toward or away from the idea that “services are attractive to outsiders”? What elements could you introduce or remove to change the focus of your worship?

- Read aloud the confession of faith on pp. 201–2, in turns or in unison. Spend some time in silence when you have finished reading.

See our world with gospel eyes:

Bring in a news story or current events article from the past week or two. Explain how you are seeing with gospel eyes as you engage with it. If time permits, open this for discussion.

Make it matter:

What now? Use the section below to plan further actions as a result of your study.

Pray:

God we thank you that you love the world—this world—with its streets, buildings, businesses, and beautifully different cultures. We love who and how you are, and commit our time, talents, and treasure to join what you are doing. We pray for our church’s worship—and for our neighbor churches as well—that it would shake us out of normal and shape us to live in the world as you are in the world. Help us to always love you. Transform us to love what you love. Empower us to love who you love how you love them. God you are “able to accomplish abundantly more than all we can ask or imagine.” We thank you that the transformation of the world doesn’t depend on us. We do, however, ask that you would start with us. Change us, God; change our city and community; change our church; and change our world. May your kingdom come to earth just like it is in heaven. Amen.

[End by together saying the “I believe” liturgy on pp. 201–2.]

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