



Mennonite
Church
USA

Mennonite
Church
Canada



Begin anew

Believe in God
Belong in Community
Become Mature
Behave like Christ

Christian Discipleship Seminars



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Introduction for the group leader

When Dean M. Kelley (1926–1997) of the National Council of Churches was doing research for his book *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, he discovered that congregations with high standards grew and served others at greater rates than those with minimum requirements. Kelley's findings show that people are challenged by bold visions and clear understandings. Anabaptists have long emphasized discipleship, understanding that to call Jesus Lord means to follow him in life. A healthy church has high expectations for its members. (Mennonite Church USA: A Purposeful Plan, p. 16)

For this reason, the authors of *Begin Anew* believe that preparing for baptism and joyful, meaningful service in the church merits a semester of study. While many congregations seek to make it easy for newcomers to be baptized and become part of the church, we want to make it a bit more challenging. We believe it takes time to learn the basics of the Christian faith, the congregation, and how to live like Christ today.

Begin Anew is a 16-session series of studies that can provide your congregation with rich rewards. As you work through the sessions, you will discover that Christianity is a combination of *believing, belonging, becoming, and behaving*.¹ This course is designed in a holistic way to bring about a clear faith in God as known in Jesus Christ, a solid sense of belonging in a family of loving people, and a disciplined lifestyle. This new lifestyle leads to becoming joyfully involved in a ministry in the church and in God's mission in the world.

These studies are for everyone, no matter their background or what compelled them to come to faith in Jesus. They may be young adults who grew up in the church, dropped out, and are now interested in making a new start. They may be

brand-new to the faith and to your congregation. Or perhaps they simply want to understand the Christian faith from an Anabaptist perspective.

Course structure

Begin Anew offers considerable flexibility. You can work through the four units in any order. For instance, if your group considers itself “spiritual” but not necessarily Christian, you may want to start with Unit 3, “Begin Anew to Become.” This unit explores vital Christian practices such as Scripture reading, prayer, generous giving, and meeting in a small group. If your group has questions about acceptance or friendships, you may want to start with Unit 2, “Begin Anew to Belong.” Some leaders may want to begin with issues of *belief* and end with issues of *behavior*.

Christian faith is a combination of *believing, belonging, becoming, and behaving*. We will explore each of these important aspects of faith as follows:

Unit 1, Believe in God, challenges your group to think about God in a new way. It asks them to consider what it means to follow Jesus in daily life and what changes the Holy Spirit can make. The end of the unit invites individuals to reflect on how they have experienced the grace of God and how they want to respond to God's offer of new life.

Unit 2, Belong in Community, clearly explains who and what is the church. Your group will learn about your church's statements of purpose, faith, and strategy. They will hear the history of the congregation and its vision for the future. The end of the unit gives individuals the opportunity to continue the membership process by filling out and signing the membership covenant.

¹ Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 2005). The author discusses the interaction of these elements that have become familiar in current discussions about faith, church, and mission.

Unit 3, Become Mature, introduces four practices that Christians need to grow and flourish in their new lives of following Jesus. The sessions encourage daily Bible reading, prayer, generosity, and participating in a small group.

Unit 4, Behave like Christ, encourages using gifts, passions, and experiences for meeting the needs of others in the church and the world. It explores issues related to ethics, peacemaking, and outreach from a Christ-centered view. The unit concludes by giving an opportunity to become involved in a ministry in your congregation and in God's mission in the world.

Note that no class can adequately discuss all of the questions posed in these materials. You may need to make a choice at the beginning of each unit and session to address the needs of the entire group. Feel free to begin with the questions that are of most interest to you.

When the group moves into the discussion and reflection time, it is helpful to start in groups of two or three. Then, gather as a whole group to share what you have heard from others. This lets the group hear input from more participants.

Scriptural component and uses

Each of these interactive studies is based on Scripture. We have used various translations² to provide fresh insights and help apply faith to daily life. A separate guide is being developed to help group leaders explain what lies behind the scriptural passages and statements in *Begin Anew*.

As you go through the course, encourage group members to interact with you by circling words and making notes in the margins. After each major section of material, allow time for their questions, comments, and discussion.

There are many ways to use this material. Some congregations have taught all four units in a four-hour block on a Sunday. Other congregations have used the course during a period of 16 weeks as a Sunday school or membership class.

Ideally, your entire congregation should study these materials. Your pastor might want to use the session themes in sermons as members study the material in small groups. Or the manual might be used in other settings as members discuss a sermon and apply it to daily life. Discuss with your pastor or church leaders what format would work best for your congregation.

Credits

These 16 sessions grew out of the congregational work and writing of the following individuals: Palmer Becker of Kitchener, Ontario; Howard Wagler of South Hutchinson, Kansas; and Marion Bontrager of Hesston, Kansas. Further work and testing was done with Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA national staff, Dave Bergen and Terry Shue. We also express gratitude to Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, California, whose work served as the inspiration for these materials.

May God bless you and your congregation as you begin your journey and work through the 16 sessions in *Begin Anew*.

Palmer Becker,
General Editor

²Unless otherwise indicated, the standard Bible translation used is the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). A complete list of the Bible versions used in this material is found in Appendix A, Page 96



Unit 1:

Believe in God



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Introduction to Unit 1

“Does it matter what I believe?” the young woman asked. “If I love Jesus, go to church and live a good life, isn’t that enough? Do I have to believe all these things about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit? ”

You’ve probably asked those questions, too. In an age that emphasizes feeling good about yourself and accepting people of different backgrounds, how important are beliefs about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit? These four sessions will help answer those questions.

Session 1 begins by exploring what we can know about God. It asks if your present view of God is enough and then explores how we can know God through reason, revelation, and incarnation. Our goal is to experience God’s invisible but warm embrace!

Session 2 examines who Jesus is, what he came to do, and how you can become one of his followers. Christianity is more than a spiritual experience, believing in a creed, or having a one-time experience of forgiveness. Christianity is discipleship!

Session 3 emphasizes that discipleship is impossible without the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. This session helps you understand who the Holy Spirit is, what the Holy Spirit does, and how you can be transformed by this presence in your life.

Session 4 helps you write about your own experience of the grace of God. In response, you will be invited to commit to following God in daily life and to opening your life to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

The goal of this unit is for you to have a clearer understanding of God, a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and a story to tell to your friends of how you have been transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Session 1

Believing in God

We live in a world of increasing diversity and religious beliefs. And yet beliefs are the foundations upon which we build our lives. Everyone has them. Unexamined beliefs can lead us in the wrong direction or to pursue damaging or worthless goals.

Beliefs determine feelings, and feelings often determine actions. For example, when people still believed the earth was flat, sailors were afraid to venture too far from the shore lest they fall off the earth. Discovery of gravity and that the earth is round changed the way people acted.

Everyone has some kind of world view. That world view, and the beliefs that make it up, silently determine how we think of the present, the future, and life in general.

A solid foundation of beliefs will help you to be a happier, more secure, and creative person, even while not having answers to all the questions and mysteries of life. We launch into these discussions to explore what the Bible has to say and how that may translate to what you believe about God.

Is your concept of God too small?

“You are great, O LORD God; for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard from our ears.”
2 Samuel 7:22 (NKJV)

Many people find it difficult to embrace God or believe in him because their concept of God is not large enough. J. B. Phillips, in *Your God Is Too Small*, points out that we often continue to have inadequate concepts of God that we held as children.³

If an unbeliever critically challenges us on our belief in God, we might ask, “Can you describe for me your concept of God?” Depending on the response, we might want to say, “I don’t believe in that kind of God either!”

Examining the following negative concepts of God may help you to get rid of old concepts and be open to a better understanding of God. Concepts of God that might be too small for our present world include:

1. An internal enforcer

For many people, God is a restrictive force rather than a nurturing one. God is like an enforcement officer who is “out to get them.” A restrictive conscience is their way of experiencing God. Might this “god” developed during childhood have given you a negative concept of God?

2. Parental holdover

Early concepts of God are almost always built on how we experienced our fathers or mothers. If we were lucky enough to have a good parent, this helps us develop a positive concept of God. If a parent was distant, abusive, or too demanding, however, we tend to have a resistant or fearful attitude toward God.

3. A bearded elder

God is beyond being masculine or feminine. While the Scriptures repeatedly refer to God in terms of father, there also are images of God as mother. We can think of God as a good parent with both male and female qualities.

³J. B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small* (New York: Macmillan, 1965 and 2004). The author describes thirteen unreal gods.

Because those who give us wisdom and guidance during childhood generally appear old to us, it might be natural to think of God as a grand old man. While age can be a positive attribute, it can also lead to thinking of God as old-fashioned or a super Santa Claus.

4. A withdrawn and distant creator

Some people believe that God created the universe but then withdrew from being involved in it. They are known as Deists, who conceive of God as a distant mystery who can never be encountered or embraced in a personal way.

5. A violent, unpredictable force

Still others hold God responsible for storms, earthquakes, and violent acts of nature. Insurance companies sometimes call these “acts of God.” We recognize that this is a difficult and unanswerable question. While God does not rescue you from suffering and distress, God is present in the midst of suffering.

For discussion

What stories from your own experience come to mind when you hear these concepts of God? With which have you struggled? What questions or observations might you have?

How can you know that God exists?

“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord. Isaiah 1:18 (NKJV)

No one has seen God, nor has anyone proved the existence of God with absolute certainty. By faith we make our claim that God exists. But that faith is not without evidence. Humans can know truth through reason and revelation. Through reason, you can use your mind to understand that God must exist. Through revelation, God can communicate to you. Following are three ways you can come to know something about God through reason, and three ways of coming to believe in God through revelation.

1. Knowing God through nature

The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or a word; their voice is silent in the skies. Psalm 19:1-3 (NLT)

From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God! Romans 1:20 (NLT)

2. Knowing God through moral laws

Do what is right and good in the Lord’s sight, so that it may go well with you. Deuteronomy 6:18a (NIV)

You have been given free will to choose how you will live. Experiencing the results and consequences of your actions can tell you that there is a God who has put moral laws in place. If you obey those laws, you may receive benefits; if you violate them, you and society may experience pain and disaster.

3. Knowing God through inner experience

“Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious, for as I was walking along I saw your many altars. And one of them had the inscription on it—‘To an Unknown God.’ You have been worshipping him without knowing who he is, and now I wish to tell you about him.” Acts 17:22a-23 (NLT)

In all cultures, at all times and places, humans have talked to God in prayer and felt near to God. Humans have an inner desire to acknowledge or worship something or someone greater than themselves. Due to an inner mystical desire, you may reason that there is a higher reality than yourself.

4. Knowing God through the supernatural

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.
Acts 2:43

Stories abound of people who have been healed, guided, and empowered in ways that can't be explained through the laws of nature and science. These experiences are supernatural acts that reveal God to us.

5. Knowing God through divine communication

A message came to me from the Lord... Jeremiah 18:1; Ezekiel 12:1 (NIRV)

No prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. 2 Peter 1:21

More than 300 times the writers of Scripture say, "The Word of the Lord came to me..." The Scriptures are our primary source of information about God, although many believers today, including pastors and teachers, tell of receiving supernatural thoughts, insights, and guidance from the Spirit of God.

6. Knowing God through Jesus

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... the Word became flesh and lived among us.
John 1:1, 14a

Jesus is history's unique God-man who bridges the gap between human and divine. The divine word and will of God became flesh; became personified in Jesus Christ. You can come to experience and know God most clearly through a relationship with Jesus.

God also becomes *incarnate*, or personified and revealed, in the character and acts of people who follow Jesus Christ and are filled with the Holy Spirit. You can come to know God as you see his nature and will reflected through people who are like Christ.

For discussion

Reflect on these six ways of coming to know and experience God. Which of them ring true with you? Do you have a story to share about an experience?

What does the Bible tell us about God?

The Bible is the story of how God reached out to people and how they responded. These encounters tell us much about God's nature and intentions.⁴ Following are eight concepts of God portrayed in the Scriptures. Each of the concepts gives meaning or benefit to our lives.⁵

1. God is one.

Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Deuteronomy 6:4 (NIV)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God

and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:4-6

While people in some cultures believe that there are many gods (*polytheism*), the Bible states clearly that there is only one God and that this God is not merely king of the gods. Belief in one God is called *monotheism*. The concept of one God brings unity to our view of the world.

⁴Robert C. Solomon, *The Big Questions* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 47.

⁵For more on the nature and qualities of God, see *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1995).

2. God is relational.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

2 Corinthians 13:14 (NIV)

While our God is one, we experience God in three different ways, as a trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that provides perfect interaction, love, and harmony. Our relational God, who lives in community, wants us to also experience the joys of living in loving community.

3. God is creative.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1 (NIV)

Christians around the world recite the Apostles' Creed, which begins by saying, "We believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." Since God made us in his image, we also have the gift of creativity.

4. God is spirit.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:24

God is not composed of matter and does not have a physical nature. We experience God in spiritual ways and through community. The church is sometimes called "the community of the Spirit."

5. God is love.

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 1 John 4:8

Some would say, "Love is God." We say, "God is loving, and we know that love most clearly in Jesus Christ." God forgives our failures when we ask, and helps us to forgive others. Living in a forgiven and forgiving community is rooted in the concept of a forgiving God of love.

6. God is just.

... his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

Deuteronomy 32:4 (NIV)

God is morally pure. He does not participate in evil. God's kingdom is a kingdom of right relationships with God, with self, with others, and the whole world. What does God require of you? God requires that you "*do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God*" (Micah 6:8).

7. God is personal.

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27

Our ability to think, feel, and act comes from God, who made us in his own image. Our self-worth is a settled issue and rests in the truth of who we are rather than what we do.⁶

8. God is timeless.

From everlasting to everlasting you are God. Psalm 90:2c

God is aware of what has happened, is happening, and what will happen at each point in time. Our relationship with God and his promises to us provide hope that after our natural death we will live together with him and all persons of faith.

For discussion

Considering the above concepts of God, how would you describe God in one sentence? Share your description with others in the class.

⁶Larry Day, *Self-Esteem: By God's Design* (Portland: Mt. Tabor Press, 2004). The author describes the worth in every individual as being inherent in that person's creation.

What kind of parent is your God?

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. 1 John 3:1a,b

Good fathers and mothers take an active, creative interest in their children. They respond to their needs and act in the child's best interest. They want good things for their children. Our God is like that.

One of the finest descriptions of God comes in the story of the waiting father in Luke 15. It shows how our loving God wants to embrace us and welcome us into his family.

There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them.

A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'"

So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

Luke 15:11-24

For discussion/reflection

How has your concept of God been shaped by your experience of your father or mother? For example, was your parent nurturing, just, and loving or absent, critical, and demanding? How might this have affected your relationship to God?

Session 2

Believing in Jesus

Christianity is not merely a philosophy or set of rules. Christianity is built around Jesus Christ, a divine-human person. Jesus is the center of our faith! Christians are those whose personal relationship with God through Jesus is central and who are committed to follow him in daily life.

Who is Jesus?

1. Jesus came from God to live among us.

From the Gospels you can learn more about Jesus than secular historians know about Julius Caesar. Luke, a physician, began his report to Theophilus with these words:

Many people have written accounts about the events that took place among us. They used as their source material the reports circulating among us from the early disciples and other eyewitnesses of what God has done in fulfillment of his promises. Having carefully investigated all of these accounts from the beginning, I have decided to write a careful summary for you, to reassure you of the truth of all you were taught. Luke 1:1b-4 (NLT)

The apostle Peter had this to say about Jesus:

Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside of the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. Acts 2:22b-24

2. Historians documented the reality of Jesus.

From sources outside the Bible, you can learn that:

- Christ's birth was unusual (Mishna).
- He had disciples who worshipped him as God and were called Christians (Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius).
- He was executed by Pilate (Tacitus), in thick darkness (Thales), during the Passover (Mishna).
- Officials wondered why the Jews had killed their wise king (Marabben Sayā).
- They reported that he rose from the tomb (Josephus, Eliezer, and Tacitus).⁷

3. Jesus lived in total obedience to God.

Jesus followed the commands of his father in total faithfulness. Jesus said of himself:

"... My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work." John 4:34

"... I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me." John 5:30c

⁷Michael Green, *World on the Run* (Westmont, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983)

Early Christians in a hymn said:

Who [Jesus], though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:6-11

4. Jesus is our master teacher, our savior from sin, and our Lord.

Followers of Jesus look to him as their master teacher, the one who gives power to overcome sin, who gives guidance and meaning to life both now and in the life to come.

5. Jesus is alive.

After his suffering, [Jesus] presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and

speaking about the kingdom of God. Acts 1:3

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples. After he ascended into heaven, he returned through the Holy Spirit and became available in all of us. You, along with followers of Jesus, can experience the presence and guidance of Jesus today. We worship and follow a living Jesus!

6. Early Christians accepted Jesus as their Lord.

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” John 20:28

You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

Acts 10:36 (NIV)

To early Christians, the phrase “Jesus is my Lord” was another way of saying, “Jesus is my king and ultimate authority.” In the Roman Empire, Caesar was to be worshiped as Lord and ultimate authority, but early Christians, at the risk of their lives, declared Jesus as their Lord. To accept Jesus means that he will be your Lord and ultimate authority. As a Christian, you will be under new management—by Jesus, the Lord of heaven and earth, who functions in a servant style.

For discussion

Who does the world around you say Jesus is? How would you answer a friend who asked the question “Who is Jesus?”

What does Jesus reveal about God?

He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being. Hebrews 1:3a

Jesus was God’s special gift to the world. Through Jesus we find our greatest help in understanding God and God’s will. Through Jesus we come to a personal relationship with God.

1. Jesus reveals the word and wisdom of God.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... the Word became flesh and lived among us ... John 1:1, 14a

The Greeks believed that knowledge and

wisdom floated in the universe. The Hebrew people believed the word and wisdom of God had mysteriously brought the world into being. The Apostle John helped both Greeks and Jews to understand that the impersonal but powerful wisdom/word present in the universe had come to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

2. Jesus reveals the nature of God.

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”
John 14:9b

“... I always do those things that are pleasing to him.” John 8:29b (NLT)

If you want to know God’s nature or God’s will, take a good look at Jesus! Our thoughts and actions should correspond to the nature of Jesus.

3. Jesus reveals the purposes of God.

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near.” Mark 1:15a

“But strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:33

From the beginning of time, God’s purpose has been to lead his people and to help them live in fellowship with each other. Through Jesus Christ, who introduced the Kingdom of God, we can allow God’s purposes to reign in our minds, hearts, and relationships.

For discussion⁸

Describe and discuss how the apostle John helped both Greeks and Jews to a personal understanding of God through Jesus Christ. How does what you learned here about Jesus help make a bridge to people in the world around you?

What did Jesus come to do?

A leader is one who has followers. Jesus has influenced more people and has had more followers than anyone who has ever lived. What did he come to do?

1. Jesus came to bring good news.

... Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”
Mark 1:14-15

Jesus brought the good news that God’s reign was to begin in a new way on earth. The prophets, especially Isaiah, had looked forward to the time when God would reign.

Isaiah foretold that God’s reign would be filled with light and the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 60:1-2, 19; John 1:5), deliverance and salvation (Isaiah 43:1-4; Luke 4:18-19), peace (Isaiah 60:17-19; Luke 2:14), healing (Isaiah 35:5-6; Mark 1:32-34), joy (Isaiah 35:10; Luke 2:10), repentance and return to God (Isaiah 51:11; Matthew 4:17), and most of all, righteousness and justice (Isaiah 42:1-7; Luke 10:25-37). All of these prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the community or kingdom that he came to inaugurate.

2. Jesus came as a servant king.

Jesus was vastly different from the kings and rulers of this world, but he was a king. Jesus was crucified not as a blasphemer, but as a king.

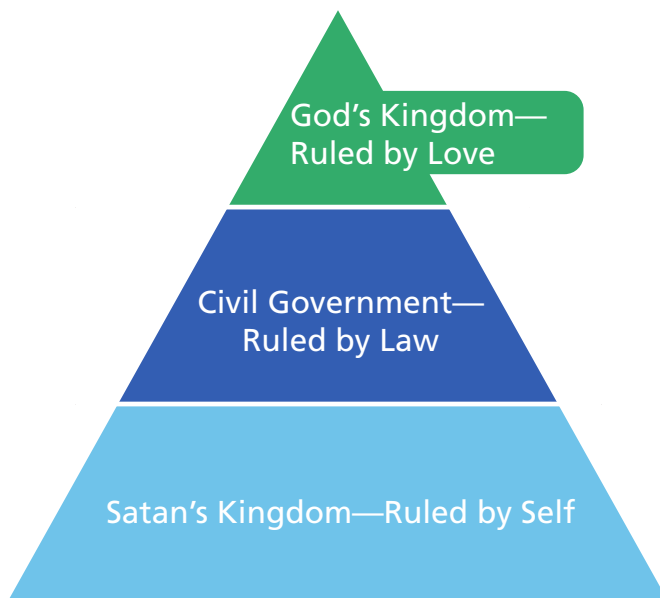
⁸ For more on the nature and work of the Holy Spirit, see *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1995).

“Whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:27-28

“... let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made [Jesus] both Lord and Messiah ...” Acts 2:36

When questioned by Pilate, Jesus said:

“... My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews ...” John 18:36



3. There are three types of kingdom in today's world.

The kingdoms might be diagrammed like this:

- **Satan's kingdom.** Satan controls the lives and actions of much of the world. These people believe that freedom (doing what I please) is the best way to live. This, however, causes chaos in their lives, families, communities, and world.

... Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 2 Corinthians 11:14

- **Civil government.** God ordained authority to control the evils in a sinful world. The purpose of earthly governments is to preserve life and create order. Law is the ruling force of earthly governments.

... the authorities that exist have been established by God. ... They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Romans 13:1c, 4c (TNIV)

- **God's kingdom.** God's kingdom is wherever God is king; wherever God is allowed to reign. God's kingdom might be in your inner self, in your family, or in a committed group of people. The ruling force in God's kingdom is love, which fulfills the law.

“Strive first for the kingdom God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:33

4. In today's world, people relate to Jesus in three ways.

- **Non-Christians** have not accepted Jesus into their lives. Jesus is outside their lives and is not Lord of their affairs. These people often place self, someone else, or something else on the throne or in the control center of their lives.
- **Non-Active Christians** may have accepted Jesus as their savior, but they are not accepting him as their Lord. They often seek their own kingdom or are serving someone else's. Self is still in control of their affairs.
- **Active Christians** have accepted Jesus as Lord of their lives and are seeking to follow him in daily life. He is on the throne of their lives and in control of their affairs.

What keeps you from a relationship with God?

1. Some people simply want to be happy.

Sometimes there is a way that seems to be right, but in the end it is the way to death. Proverbs 16:25

- You might look for happiness by acquiring possessions.
- You might look for happiness by experiencing pleasure.
- You might look for happiness by gaining power.

2. Some people think they already have a personal relationship with God.

You might be thinking:

- “I grew up in a Christian home, so I must be a Christian.”
- “I have been active in the church.”
- “It really doesn’t matter what you believe, just be sincere.”
- “All will be well if I give up my bad habits, be good, and work hard.”

3. Some people want freedom to live as they please.

You may believe that freedom or “doing what I please” is the most joyful way to live. But when you follow that way of thinking, you come into conflict with God, with your real self, others, and the whole world.

Neglecting or rebelling against the guidance and purposes of God is what destroys marriages, families, and relationships of all kinds. Your barrier to the abundant life that God wants you to have may simply be that you are not acknowledging Jesus as your Lord.

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one

wise, she took of its fruit and ate and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Genesis 3:6

Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Matthew 7:21

You shall have no other gods before me. Exodus 20:3

4. Some people neglect or refuse to acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

This is the basic sin for which you probably need forgiveness. You need to be saved from the results of this sin, which cuts you off from:

- **God**
There is a problem. Your sins have cut you off from God. Isaiah 59:2a (NLT)
- **Others**
All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23
- **Your real self**
“How do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul...?” Mark 8:36 (NLT)
- **All creation**
We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now. Romans 8:22

For discussion

When have you seen spiritual death, in others or in yourself? In what ways does cutting yourself off from God and others lead to emotional, relational, or spiritual death?

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23

What brings you closer to God?

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

Your salvation from the consequences of going your own way is in establishing a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. You can enter into that relationship by:

1. Admitting that Jesus has not been your Lord.

You shall have no other gods before me.
Exodus 20:3

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 1 John 1:8

2. Asking God to forgive you for rejecting him and doing wrong.

But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. 1 John 1:9 (NLT)

3. Accepting the free gift of salvation God offers to all.

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9

You will receive forgiveness and enter into a saving relationship with God when you earnestly pray a prayer that might go something like this:

Lord Jesus, I admit that I have offended you by neglecting or even rebelling against you. I truly repent and am coming to ask, “Will you forgive me?” I am giving myself to you and inviting you to take control of my life. Fill me with your living Spirit so that I can fulfill the purposes you have for me. In the name of Jesus I pray this. Amen.

For discussion

What questions or comments do you have about accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Are you ready to do that? See page 28.

From what does God save you?

To be saved means that to be rescued from something or someone that has been destroying or will destroy you. You should be able to specifically name what you are being saved from.

When you receive God’s forgiveness for separating yourself from him and when you pledge your loyalty to Jesus as your Lord, you begin a process of transformation. Sometimes this process takes time as you little by little surrender as much as you can to as much of Jesus as you understand.

1. When you accept Jesus as Lord, he will begin to deliver you from:

- Broken relationships with God, family, friends, and others.
- Lack of purpose or direction in life.

- Being self-serving rather than other-serving.
- Loneliness, bitterness, and low self-esteem.
- Obeying orders that cause offence, destruction, or death.
- Deceit, dishonesty, and unfair competition.
- Harmful habits such as drinking, drugs, and other crutches.
- A tendency to brag, criticize, and put others down.

2. You will be saved from hell and eternal death.

“Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my

Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ... Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' Matthew 25:34, 41

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:10

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." John 3:16

3. You will be transformed.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." Matthew 7:21

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2

Christianity is more than having a spiritual experience such as speaking in tongues, being healed, or having a special experience of worship. It is more than agreeing to a creed. It is more than having a one-time forgiveness experience. Christianity is discipleship.

Christians are people who follow Jesus in everyday life. Even the Christian position on peace and nonviolence is not merely based on a few verses of Scripture. It is rooted in our relationship to Jesus, who transforms us. Transformed people do not kill and destroy even when ordered to do so by military or other authorities.

For discussion

What did you think earlier about salvation? How has this study changed some of your understanding? Do you think of salvation/deliverance more as something here and now, or in the future, after death? What difference does it make?

Session 3

Believing in the Holy Spirit

Is believing in the Holy Spirit important?
If so, why?

God becomes personal to us through the Holy Spirit. Current culture stresses the experiential, and it is primarily through the Holy Spirit's work that we feel God's presence and transforming power.

In this session we will explore the Holy Spirit as a person, explain how to receive the Spirit, and how we are transformed by it.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. Romans 8:26-27

Who is the Holy Spirit?

1. The Holy Spirit is a person.

The Holy Spirit is not an "it" or impersonal force like the wind. According to Scripture, the Holy Spirit has a mind, emotions, and a will. This makes it possible for us to relate to it. We note that:

- The Holy Spirit speaks.
"Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches." Revelation 2:7a
- The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness.
Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Romans 8:26a
- The Holy Spirit prays for us.
For we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. Romans 8:26b
- The Holy Spirit teaches, guides, and commands us.
"The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." John 14:26

- The Holy Spirit calls people to the work of God.

...the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Acts 13:2b

- The Holy Spirit comforts believers.
Meanwhile the church . . . living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, increased in numbers. Acts 9:31

2. The Holy Spirit has the attributes and nature of God.

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are each equally and eternally the one true God. This concept of trinity is difficult to comprehend, and yet it is fundamental to understanding the nature of God. It tells us that God is relational.

- The Holy Spirit is eternal.
The earth was empty . . . and the Spirit of God was hovering over its surface. Genesis 1:2 (NLT)

- The Holy Spirit knows all things—is omniscient.
... for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 1 Corinthians 2:10b
- The Holy Spirit is all-powerful—omnipotent.
“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you ... for nothing will be impossible with God.” Luke 1:35a, 37
- The Holy Spirit is present everywhere—omnipresent.
Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. Psalm 139:7-8

3. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus.

Jesus was filled with the Spirit of God. This was a sign, or testimony, to his divinity. In the Gospel of Luke the Holy Spirit’s present was seen:

- At the announcement to Mary of Christ’s coming.
- At the baptism of Jesus
- As he was tempted.
- As he performed miracles.
- At his crucifixion.
- After his resurrection.
- At his ascension.

Spirit of God, Holy Spirit, and the Spirit of Jesus are interchangeable terms. To get an adequate understanding of the Holy Spirit, we need to take a good look at Jesus.

For discussion⁹

How is knowing of the life of Jesus helpful for us to understand the Holy Spirit?

How can you receive the Holy Spirit?

Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38

To receive the Holy Spirit into your life:

1. You must earnestly desire to receive the Holy Spirit.

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” Luke 11:13

Receiving Jesus as your Lord and Savior and receiving the Holy Spirit have much in common. In fact, they may be the same experience or process.

2. You can receive the Holy Spirit by:

- Admitting that you have not been totally open to the Spirit.
- Asking forgiveness for every known sin.
- Surrendering as much as you can to as much of the Spirit as you can understand.

All these [disciples] were constantly devoting themselves to prayer. ... And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Acts 1:14a; 2:2,4

⁹For more on the nature and work of the Holy Spirit, see *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1995).

3. As you surrender more, you will receive the Holy Spirit more fully.

You may receive the Holy Spirit when you first ask for forgiveness and surrender yourself to Jesus. You may also receive the Holy Spirit at later times when you make further or more complete confessions of sin and surrender more fully.

When Paul came to Ephesus, he asked some believers if they had received the Holy Spirit when they became believers. They had not; they had only received forgiveness (Acts

19:1-4). Paul baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus and laid his hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 19:5-6)

When Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them ... Acts 19:6

For discussion

When have you been aware of the Holy Spirit working in your life? How have you personally invited the Spirit into your life? How could you lead a friend to receiving the Holy Spirit?

How might you be transformed by the Holy Spirit?

Speaking in tongues or performing miracles is not the greatest evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit. The greatest evidence is the transformation of your thoughts, feelings, and actions.

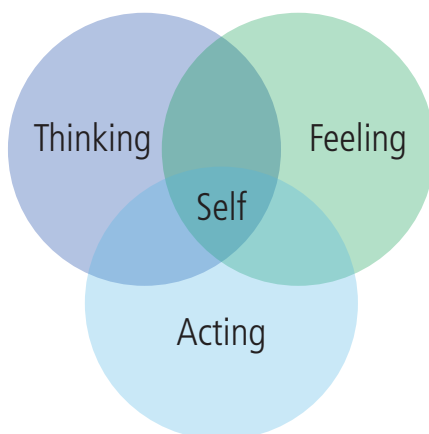
Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2 (NIV)

Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17

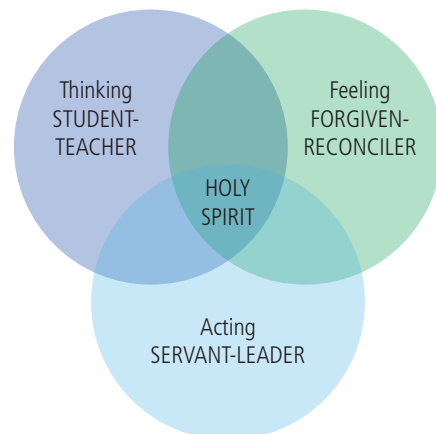
By creating us in his image, God gave each of us the capacity to think, to feel, to act, and to receive his Spirit. Unfortunately, too often we cut ourselves off from the Spirit of God and selfishly determine the way we think, feel, and act. Without Jesus as Lord and the presence of the Holy Spirit, we tend to use our thinking, feeling, and acting to build our own kingdoms or the kingdoms of someone else.

If the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit become central in your life instead of self or some other dominating force, your thoughts, feelings and actions will be transformed. This might be shown as follows:

Natural Person



Transformed Person



4. As a transformed person, you will think differently.

Be transformed by the renewing of your minds.
Romans 12:2b

When you accept Jesus as your Lord, your mind will be changed. You will want to learn more about God's will and to do it. You will want to be a student of Jesus. As you learn, you will be transformed and teach according to the nature and spirit of Jesus. You will begin teaching what Jesus has taught you, as a student-teacher of Jesus.

5. As a transformed person, you will feel differently.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Philippians 2:5 (NIV)

Experiencing God's forgiving love and being embraced in God's family will touch your emotions. You will likely become more other-centered and more compassionate and sensitive to the needs of people. In response to your own forgiveness, you will become more forgiving and concerned for the reconciliation of others. As a transformed person, you will become a forgiven-reconciler for Jesus.

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

6. As a transformed person, you will act differently.

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:25b-28

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

If you have accepted Jesus as your Lord, you are under new management. As you surrender yourself to this management, you will have a new value system and a new awareness of right and wrong. Delivered from a life controlled by self and other powers, and directed by Jesus, your servant leader, you will become a servant who puts others first. According to the gifts God gives you, you will receive power to witness and serve. As a transformed person, you will become a transformed servant-leader who gives your energies to further the Kingdom of God.

For discussion

What comments or questions do you have about becoming a transformed student-teacher, forgiven-reconciler, and servant-leader?

Session 4

Believing in the grace of God

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

Grace means “unmerited favor.” It is by the grace God gives that you have been saved and invited to live in God’s family. It is not of your own doing.

This session will help you to understand grace and to share the story of how you have received the grace of God.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. 1 Peter 3:15b (NIV)

What are examples of God’s grace?

A basic truth is that God takes the initiative to bring you into his family. This invitation may come to you through other people who have reached out to you. Ultimately, it comes through Jesus Christ.

Following are four ways in which we understand the grace of God.

1. **Through Jesus we come to know and experience that God is a loving and merciful God.** We overcome our fear of God and are brought close.

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” John 15:13

2. **Jesus gives us an example of how a true human is able to live.** He helps us to overcome our lost-ness and gives us a purpose for life.

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:21

3. **Through Jesus, we have been forgiven for our neglect and rejection of God.** We are set free from the wages of our sin.

He [Jesus] personally carried away our sins in his own body on the cross so we can be dead to sin and live for what is right ... 1 Peter 2:24 (NLT)

4. **Through Jesus we are given victory over death and the evil powers that have controlled us.** Through his ongoing presence and power we can overcome evil pressures and look forward to eternal life with God.

Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:57

Here is a list of specific situations from which people have been delivered by the grace of God. Could one of these be your story?

- **Guilt or shame.** You received forgiveness for sins or failures stemming from “doing your own thing.”

- **Abandonment.** You received acceptance and the love of God after feeling alone, overlooked, not needed, and uncared for.
- **Fear.** You received faith that there would be life and a relationship with God after death. Doom was lifted.
- **Powerlessness.** You received power from God to overcome a habit or addiction that was destroying you.
- **Feeling tainted.** You received a new sense of self-worth before God after something that happened to you that made you feel dirty, evil, or perverted.
- **Rejection.** You received affirmation in the Kingdom of God after being made to feel like your ideas or contributions were not valid.
- **Hopelessness.** You received unexplained healing from depression, illness, or grief when you had lost courage or reason for living.
- **Confusion.** You received guidance from the example of Jesus when you were lost and confused.

Sharing your story

Your experience of receiving the grace of God is unique. As a believer, you are encouraged to share your story with your friends, family, and congregation. We share our stories because:

1. Stories are effective.

We learn and are encouraged by sharing our stories with each other.

Many of the Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony ...
John 4:39

2. It's natural to want to tell others about something good.

We cannot stop telling about the wonderful things we have seen and heard.
Acts 4:20 (NLT)

3. We are commissioned to share our personal stories

Let the whole world know what he has done.
Psalm 105:1b (NLT)

Each day proclaim the good news that he saves. ... Tell everyone about the amazing things he does. Psalms 96:2b-3 (NLT)

How to organize your story

The following parts make an effective faith story. Choose one question from each part and write a four-part story that tells how you have experienced the grace of God.

1. Tell what life was like before you experienced God's love, forgiveness, acceptance or guidance.

- What were your childhood and teenage years like?

- Did you grow up in a Christian home?
- What were your attitudes? What were your relationships?
- What was most important to you?

- What or who had become lord in your life? Was it sports/fitness, success at work, marriage, sex, making money, drugs, alcohol, having fun, entertainment, popularity, or hobbies?

2. Tell what caused you to realize your need for Christ?

- What led to your decision to follow Jesus? How did God get your attention?
- What needs, hurts, or problems made you dissatisfied with your life?
- What or who motivated you to take action?

3. Tell how you received the grace of God.

- Where did it happen?
- Over what period of time did it happen?
- What did you say in your prayer? Be specific.

4. Tell what difference Christ has made in your life.

- From what hurt, habit, or hang-up were you delivered?
- How have your thinking, feelings, and actions changed?
- What benefits have you experienced or felt?
- What problems has it caused?

How to refine your story

1. Choose one experience from your life to which others can relate.

You likely have more than one story to tell. Different situations will call for different stories! Choose the story from your life that best matches the situation of your listener.

You might choose to tell how God has helped you to overcome a major crisis such as: abuse, an accident, addiction, abortion, bankruptcy, broken dreams, an eating disorder, grief, depression, disease, discrimination, divorce, an empty nest, financial problem, infertility, incest, jail, rape, or surgery. Your story will tell the good news of how you experienced God's grace!

2. Write, rewrite, and practice your story.

Ask God to give you first the right spirit and then the right words. Read your story aloud and edit it to make it conversational. Let a friend read it and make suggestions. Practice it until it feels and sounds natural. Here are some pointers:

- Be enthusiastic about what has happened.
- Be honest about your continuing struggles. Your life is not perfect.

- Share casually and informally, in a matter-of-fact tone.
- Use “I,” “me,” and “my,” not “you” or “them.”
- Use humor—it reduces tension and relaxes people.
- Smile.

3. Keep your story short and to the point.

As you write, avoid excessive, unnecessary details. Try to keep your story to less than three minutes long. Be brief. The more specific you are, the more dynamic it will be.

- Spend the most time on the difference following Christ has made.
- Give concrete examples of the changes in your life.
- Give credit to the Holy Spirit for transforming your life.

For discussion

What questions or comments do you have about sharing your personal story? What is your story? Share it with your group!

Are you ready to commit to following Jesus?

... look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. ... I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.

Revelation 3:8b, 20

For discussion

What questions or comments do you have about what it means to become a Christian? To open your life more fully to the Holy Spirit?

You are invited to make a personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

My personal commitment to Jesus Christ

You are invited into a personal relationship with God:

1. **A God of love made you and me in his image as a good part of creation.** God wants us to live at peace with our Maker, our world, and one another.
2. **Sin destroys harmony in creation when we try to run our own lives apart from God.** Suffering, greed, violence, and broken relationships result.
3. **Jesus died on the cross because he confronted the powers of sin that fracture our world.** Jesus healed the sick, forgave enemies, and lived in the joy of the kingdom of God.
4. **You can have a new beginning by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.** God forgives when we confess our sin, and the Spirit of God enables us to follow Jesus in all of life.

Prayer:

God, I have sinned by turning away from you and trying to run my own life. Separated from your love, I am shaped by the powers of greed, lust and violence that bring chaos to the world.

Forgive my sin and let me start anew. Thank you for your son Jesus, who defeated Satan and brought the kingdom of God to reality. Give me power to live like Jesus—loving the enemy, sharing possessions, serving others, caring for creation, and speaking the good news of your salvation.

I commit myself to the church as the body of Christ. I give allegiance to Jesus and his way of forgiveness above every other loyalty. Amen.

Adapted from "Four Spiritual Truths of a Peacemaking God: A Way for Anabaptists to Share Their Faith," by J. Nelson Kraybill, The Mennonite, November 4, 2003, pages 9–11

Signature_____

Date_____



Unit 2:

Belong in Community



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Introduction to Unit 2

In Unit 1 we recognized that Jesus is the center of our faith. In this unit we will go on to see that community is the center of our life. It is in our gathering together and interacting with each other in community where we most fully experience the love of God, the guidance of Jesus, and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

These four sessions explore what it means to become a member of God's community, the church. We will see that the church is like a family. All of us were designed to be part of God's family, and that's exactly what we intend to be, family to one another! As the apostle Paul says:

You are members of God's very own family ... and you belong in God's household with every other Christian. Ephesians 2:19 (NLT)

The material in this unit is based in part on the congregational life and experiences of the writing team. Your congregation will need to adapt and sometimes rewrite the material in these sessions to reflect your context, vision, and guidelines.

This unit includes four sessions:

Session 1 will help you to see the church as a community of people, a family, a body, an upside-down kingdom, and the hope of the world.

Session 2 examines a congregation's statements of purpose, faith, and strategy.

Session 3 shares visions related to the Anabaptist heritage, engagement with God's mission in the world, and commitment and training.

Session 4 deals with practical matters related to meaningful membership, including baptism and the Lord's Supper.

While there is no obligation to do so, at the end of these sessions you will be given an opportunity to apply for membership in a church family. We want you to have a strong sense of belonging to a caring family of believers.

Session 1

Belonging in community

As human beings, relational in nature, we have a strong social need to belong. Relationships give meaning to our lives. We are excited about our church. In it we experience a strong sense of belonging and have many meaningful

relationships with God and with each other! Let's explore the church as a community of people, a family, a body, an upside-down kingdom and, the hope of the world.

What is the church?

1. A community of people

The church is not a building, business, organization, or weekly performance. It gathers in buildings and needs to organize, but essentially the church is a Christ-centered community of people who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:10

Membership in the church is not restricted to any one group, class, or nationality. The church is made up of young and old, rich and poor, newcomers and long-term members. If you love Jesus, you are a candidate for this new Christ-centered community of people.

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

2. A family

... live together in peace. Be understanding. Love one another like members of the same family. Be kind and tender ...

1 Peter 3:8 (NIRV)

In the church we seek to love each other like brothers and sisters. As in a family, we are free to give and receive counsel. Those who are older or who have been believers longer are seen as

spiritual fathers and mothers. We want to be as committed to each other as we are to Christ.

"Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Matthew 12:50

Don't reprimand a senior member of your church, appeal to him as a father. Treat the young men as brothers and the older women as mothers. Treat the younger women as sisters.

1 Timothy 5:1-2 (Phillips)

3. A body

Together you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of that body.

1 Corinthians 12:27 (NCV)

When he was on earth, Jesus was limited to being at one place at a time. After he returned to heaven, his followers were filled with God's spirit and became his new body. Jesus could now be wherever two or three were gathered in his name. Those spirit-empowered people continued to do what Jesus had been doing: teaching, healing, working for justice, and showing forgiveness. Today there are over 200 million churches worldwide who individually and together are the body of Christ, continuing the work of Jesus. Your congregation is a part of that body.

4. An upside-down kingdom

The church is different from the kingdoms of this world. Its values and patterns are often opposite to those of the world. They are the values of Jesus.

For example, the kingdoms of this world have political boundaries and human leaders who often lord it over others. In the church, which represents God's kingdom, Jesus is Lord. He leads from a heart of service. As citizens of this kingdom, we function as servants to Jesus and to each other.

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:25b-28

As Christians, we are first citizens of Christ's kingdom and then citizens of an earthly nation. We are part of a kingdom of peace. We help our community and nation most as we serve Christ and humanity as part of this upside-down kingdom.

"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders." John 18:36 (TNIV)

5. God's primary answer to the world's problems

"On this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven." Matthew 16:18b-19 (GNT)

The church is a channel for conveying God's love and justice to the world. The church as the body of Christ is the best resource for helping troubled people to find new life and make a new beginning. The most helpful thing you can do for someone who is ill, confused, guilty, or in poverty, is to invite him or her to join

the family of God by accepting Jesus as Lord. As members share knowledge, resources, and mercy with a person, they can bring about justice and a new life for that person.

All the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. Acts 2:44-45 (NLT)

[We have] the hope of life forever, which God promised to us before time began ...
Titus 1:2 (NCV)

In your community and world you might find many people who are lonely, empty, or filled with guilt, shame, fear, and despair. What does your church have that the world needs? The church can offer:

- **Fellowship** in place of loneliness.
- **Forgiveness** in place of guilt or shame.
- **Meaning** to life in place of emptiness.
- **Peace and security** in place of fear and despair.

For discussion

In what ways have you experienced the church as a community? A family? A body? An upside-down kingdom? As a reason for hope? Invite one or two class members to share how they have experienced their church community congregation. Respond with questions or comments.

Session 2

Belonging with purpose and unity

This session begins with one congregation's story and continues with their statements of purpose, faith, and strategy. Note that these materials are *examples* of how a congregation might

understand itself and organize its work. (Your congregation will need to modify them to fit your situation.)

One congregation's story

The mother church was growing rapidly. In 1991, members dreamed of planting a church in an area of the city and subsequently purchased some property. At the same time, several members of a neighboring congregation were dreaming of a new kind of church. A core of 35 people began meeting. They asked each other, "Might we start a new church? If so, what kind of church do we want to be?"

After six months, the group chose a pastor and nine elders. Each of the elders led a small group; the groups were like family to people who were looking for a new level of fellowship. In these groups, prospective members shared their faith stories with each other and their hopes for the church. On October 15, 1995, 65 people committed themselves to membership and a new church family was born.

By 2000, when the congregation had grown to 240 people, they built the present sanctuary and sent their first missionary to Cambodia. Several others spent time in service with Mennonite Central Committee. In 2010, the congregation launched a ministry with immigrants that has now grown to be a vibrant church on its own.

A diverse group of people

Regardless of background, previous faith, or economic status, people are welcome in this congregation. They seek to be "a church for all peoples." To maintain harmony within their diversity, the group has drawn up three clear statements for members to support and affirm. If anyone has difficulty with these three statements, they will probably be happier in another church.

The three statements are:

- Our Purpose—Why we exist
- Our Faith—What we believe
- Our Strategy—How we do ministry

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters ... that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.

1 Corinthians 1:10

Statement of purpose

... even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. Ephesians 1:4 (NLT)

1. We recognize that all churches are motivated by something.¹⁰

Even though they may be unspoken or unknown, all aspects of a congregation are influenced by its basic underlying principles.

- **Some churches are motivated by tradition.**

A favorite phrase in a tradition-driven church is, “We’ve always done it this way.”

- **Some churches are motivated by personality.**

The most important question in this church might be, “What does the leader want?”

- **Some churches are motivated by finances.**

Here the question on everybody’s mind is, “How much will it cost?”

- **Some churches are motivated by programs.**

Members focus their energy on maintaining the current programs or introducing new ones. The church often gets preoccupied with filling positions.

- **Some churches are motivated by buildings.**

Winston Churchill said, “We shape our buildings and then they shape us.”

- **Some churches are motivated by seekers.**

A church may allow the needs of unbelievers to become the driving force while overlooking the needs of the total church body.

2. In contrast to these forces, our church seeks to be motivated by purpose.

Our purpose statement guides us in deciding what we will and what we will not do. Rather than asking God to help us fulfill *our* purposes, our challenge is to fulfill the calling or vocation that *God* has for our congregation.

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

1 Peter 2:21

In a nutshell, our purpose is to continue what Jesus began. [Your congregation may express its purpose in a different way such as “Making more and better disciples” or “To give glory to God.”]

Fully stated, our purpose statement is:

Our church exists to continue what Jesus began through worship, ministry, mission, fellowship, and discipleship.

This one-sentence statement can be divided into five sub-purposes.

3. Our five sub-purposes are based on the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

The Great Commandment says: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart ... soul ... and mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*” Matthew 22:37-40

1. “Love God with all your heart.” This is **worship**. We exist to worship.

2. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This is **ministry**. We exist to minister.

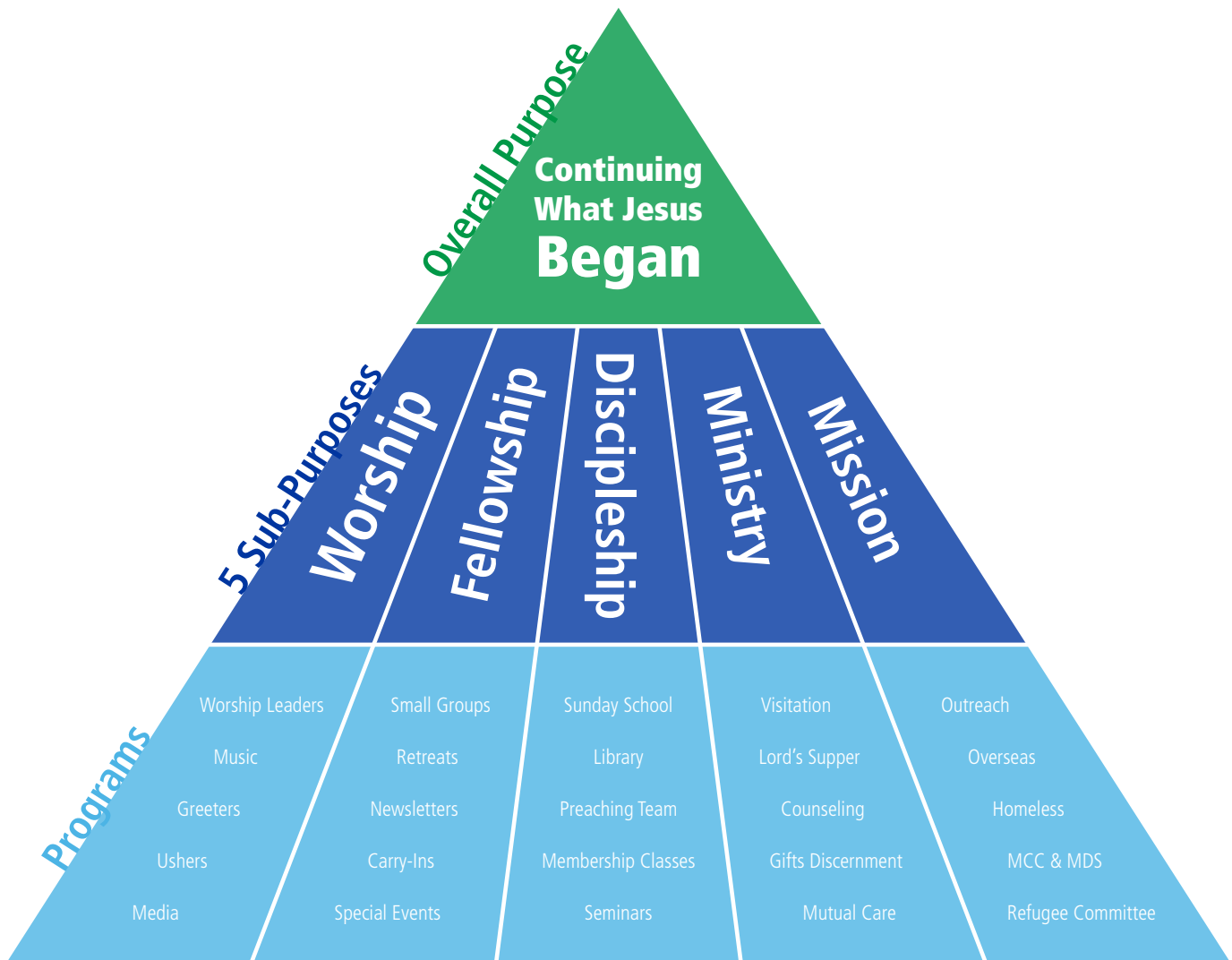
The Great Commission says: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. ...*” Matthew 28:19-20

¹⁰For a more complete treatment of purpose, see Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church, Part Two* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

3. “Make disciples.” This is **mission**. We exist to evangelize and serve.
4. “Baptize.” Through water baptism believers are incorporated into **fellowship**. We exist for fellowship.
5. “Teach them all things.” This is **discipleship**. We are called to disciple and nurture each other so that we all grow into Christ-likeness.

4. We diagram our purpose in the shape of a triangle.

Our sub-purposes and activities flow from our main purpose, continuing what Jesus began. This gives overall focus to our work. [You can replace the words in this diagram to reflect the purposes and activities of your congregation.]



For discussion

What is the purpose of your congregation?
 What is stated in your constitution? What
 changes or additions would you like to make?

¹¹Summary statement, *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1995), 93–98.

Statement of faith

There is one Body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all ...
Ephesians 4:4-6

Faith in a Mennonite Perspective as its own statement of faith.¹¹ It is in four sections, including Common Themes of Faith, The Church and its Practices, Discipleship, and the Reign of God.

Our congregation has adopted *The Confession of*

Common Themes of Faith

1. God

We believe that God exists and is pleased with all who draw near by faith. We worship the one holy and loving God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit eternally. God has created all things visible and invisible, has brought salvation and new life to humanity through Jesus Christ, and continues to sustain the church and all things until the end of the age.

2. Jesus Christ

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Word of God become flesh. He is the Savior of the world, who has delivered us from the dominion of sin and reconciled us to God by his death on a cross. He was declared to be Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. He is the head of the church, the exalted Lord, the Lamb who was slain, coming again to reign with God in glory.

3. Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the eternal Spirit of God, who dwelled in Jesus Christ, who empowers the church, who is the source of our life in Christ, and who is poured out on those who believe as the guarantee of redemption.

4. Scripture

We believe that all Scripture is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit for instruction in salvation and training in righteousness. We accept the Scriptures as the Word of God and as the fully reliable and trustworthy standard for Christian faith and life. Led by the Holy Spirit in the church, we interpret Scripture in harmony with Jesus Christ.

5. Creation

We believe that God has created the heavens

and the earth and all that is in them, and that God preserves and renews what has been made. All creation has its source outside itself and belongs to the Creator. The world has been created good because God is good and provides all that is needed for life.

6. Calling

We believe that God has created human beings in the divine image. God formed them from the dust of the earth and gave them a special dignity among all the works of creation. Human beings have been made for relationship with God, to live in peace with each other, and to take care of the rest of creation.

7. Sin

We confess that, beginning with Adam and Eve, humanity has disobeyed God, given way to the tempter, and chosen to sin. All have fallen short of the Creator's intent, marred the image of God in which they were created, disrupted order in the world, and limited their love for others. Because of sin, humanity has been given over to the enslaving powers of evil and death.

8. Salvation

We believe that, through Jesus Christ, God offers salvation from sin and a new way of life. We receive God's salvation when we repent and accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. In Christ, we are reconciled with God and brought into the reconciling community. We place our faith in God that, by the same power that raised Christ from the dead, we may be saved from sin to follow Christ and to know the fullness of salvation.

The Church and Its Practices

9. Church

We believe that the church is the assembly of those who have accepted God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the new community of disciples sent into the world to proclaim the reign of God and to provide a foretaste of the church's glorious hope. It is the new society established and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

10. Mission

We believe that the mission of the church is to proclaim and to be a sign of the kingdom of God. Christ has commissioned the church to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all things he has commanded.

11. Baptism

We believe that the baptism of believers with water is a sign of their cleansing from sin. Baptism is also a pledge before the church of their covenant with God to walk in the way of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit, water, and blood, believers are baptized into Christ and his body.

12. Lord's Supper

We believe that the Lord's Supper is a sign by which the church thankfully remembers the new covenant, which Jesus established by his death. In this communion meal, the church renews its covenant with God and with each other and participates in the life and death of Jesus Christ, until he comes.

13. Foot Washing

We believe that in washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus calls us to serve one another in love as he did. Thus we acknowledge our frequent need of cleansing, renew our willingness to let go of pride and worldly power, and offer our lives in humble service and sacrificial love.

14. Discipline

We practice discipline in the church as a sign of God's offer of transforming grace. Discipline is intended to liberate erring brothers and sisters from sin, and to restore them to a right relationship with God and to fellowship in the church. The practice of discipline gives integrity to the church's witness in the world.

15. Ministry

We believe that ministry is a continuation of the work of Christ, who gives gifts through the Holy Spirit to all believers and empowers them for service in the church and in the world. We also believe that God calls particular persons in the church to specific leadership ministries and offices. All who minister are accountable to God and to the community of faith.

16. Church Order

We believe that the church of Jesus Christ is one body with many members, ordered in such a way that, through the one Spirit, believers may be built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Discipleship

17. Discipleship

We believe that Jesus Christ calls us to discipleship, to take up our cross and follow him. Through the gift of God's saving grace, we are empowered to be disciples of Jesus, filled with his Spirit, following his teachings and his path through suffering to new life. As we are faithful to his way, we become conformed to Christ and separated from the evil in the world.

18. Spirituality

We believe that to be a disciple of Jesus is to know life in the Spirit. As the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ takes shape in us, we grow in the image of Christ and in our relationship with God. The Holy Spirit is active in individual and in communal worship, leading us deeper into the experience of God.

19. Family

We believe that God intends human life to begin in families and to be blessed through families. Even more, God desires all people to become part of the church, God's family. As single and married members of the church family give and receive nurture and healing, families can grow toward the wholeness that God intends. We are called to chastity and to loving faithfulness in marriage.

20. Oaths

We commit ourselves to tell the truth, to give a simple yes or no, and to avoid the swearing of oaths.

21. Stewardship

We believe that everything belongs to God, who calls the church to live in faithful stewardship of all that God has entrusted to us, and to participate now in the rest and justice which God has promised.

22. Peace

We believe that peace is the will of God. God created the world in peace, and God's peace is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ, who is our peace and the peace of the whole world. Led by the Holy Spirit, we follow Christ in the way of peace, doing justice, bringing reconciliation, and practicing nonresistance, even in the face of violence and warfare.

23. Government

We believe that the church is God's holy nation, called to give full allegiance to Christ its head and to witness to every nation, government, and society about God's saving love.

The Reign of God

24. Reign of God

We place our hope in the reign of God and its fulfillment in the day when Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. He will gather his church, which is already living under the reign of God. We await God's final victory, the end of this present age of struggle, the resurrection of the dead, and a new heaven and a new earth. There the people of God will reign with Christ in justice, righteousness, and peace forever and ever.

For discussion

Which of these statements do you affirm? With which might you disagree or have difficulty? On which would you like to have more clarity?

Statement of strategy

Our Statement of strategy describes how we understand and offer ministry. [You will need to edit or discuss the following statement in relation to your own congregation's strategy.]

Ministry is the key “product” our congregation has to offer. It includes anything that serves or builds up another person or cause. Caregiving, teaching, preaching, visiting, and working for peace and justice are examples of ministry. If you become part of our congregation, you can expect to minister and be ministered to in five ways.

1. Our pastors equip and inspire us for ministry.

It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up.

Ephesians 4:11-12 (NIV)

While our pastors are involved in offering ministry, their first responsibility is to serve as *ad-ministers*. (Administration is an integral part of pastoral ministry.) This means that they are administrators who minister through helping others to minister. They equip us and provide overall direction to our various ministries by example and guidance. While our pastors are involved in ministry and give direction to it, our members are the primary *doers* of ministry.

2. Elders give overall direction to our congregation.

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

1 Timothy 5:17 (NIV)

Our elders seek to listen carefully both to the Holy Spirit and to the desires of our church members. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they consider these desires and then corporately make decisions that will best fulfill our purposes and serve the congregation well. These decisions may not always be according to majority opinion.

3. Lay leaders develop and guide the specific ministries of our congregation.

... If anyone wants to be a leader in the church, he wants to do a good work for God and people.

1 Timothy 3:1 (NIRV)

Each lay leader [these might be deacons, facilitators, coordinators, overseers, or chairs], together with the Gifts Discernment Team, chooses workers for his or her area of ministry. The persons in actual ministry are given freedom to make as many decisions as possible in their area of work.

4. Small groups are the key pastoral structure of our church.

They broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

Acts 2:46b-47a

Each member of our congregation is encouraged to be part of a small group. The leader of the group often functions as a lay pastor to the group even while members minister to each other. Small groups are encouraged to affirm the same five sub-purposes as the congregation and to help their members experience and practice those purposes. To do this, they are encouraged to have a balance of fellowship, study, sharing, prayer, and involvement in God's mission in the world. In small groups we personally experience:

- A sense of belonging
- Mercy and compassion
- Spiritual growth
- Opportunity for service
- Fun and fellowship
- Discernment of gifts
- Encouragement and support
- Giving and receiving counsel
- Confession and forgiveness
- Ministries of reconciliation

- 5. Members of the congregation are encouraged to each have a ministry** in the church and in God's mission in the world. These are according to the gifts of the members and the calling of God.

God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out when you have faith that God is speaking through you. If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching. If your gift is to encourage others, do it! If you have money, share it generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. Romans 12:6-8 (NLT)

For discussion

How do you respond to our congregation's various expressions of ministry that include: pastors, elders, lay leaders, small groups, and involved members?

What changes or additions would you suggest as you consider the ministry of your congregation?

Session 3

Belonging with a common vision

To have vision means to have a mental picture or idea of what might be. Vision enables people to see into the future and to be motivated toward it. Leaders recruit according to vision. Members tend to volunteer, serve, and give according to vision.

This session describes four different visions that are helping us to see and to become the church that God wants us to be.

Vision 1 is a summary of The Anabaptist Vision. This vision for the church emerged in about 1525 and has continued to provide core values for our existence.

Vision 2 describes our denomination and its vision for mission. We join together in various ways to alleviate suffering, share the Gospel and equip each other for engagement in God's mission in the world.

Vision 3 describes our vision for reaching the people of our community and inviting them, step by step, to make deeper levels of commitment.

Vision 4 outlines the training program in which you are currently involved.

The Anabaptist vision

In the 16th century, various students of the Scriptures became uncomfortable with the misuse of power by leaders of the traditional state church. These state church leaders offered forgiveness in exchange for financial payment and emphasized doing works to earn salvation. Some of the students, including Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin, protested these practices and thereby became known as *Protestants*. They were courageous leaders who ushered in the Great Reformation. Originally, they had a vision for a voluntary rather than a state church. They accepted the Scriptures as the sole basis for faith and practice, and affirmed the church as a community of believers.

Unfortunately, due to the Peasants' Revolt and other factors, these reformers were not able to follow through on their vision. They retained the state church and continued the sanctuary as the structure of the church, infant baptism as the introductory rite into the church, the government's use of the sword as the tool for discipline, and the private interpretation of the Bible as the primary way of knowing God's will.

Several students of Zwingli, including Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock, and Felix Manz, were not satisfied with merely reforming the church back to the patterns of Constantine and Augustine. These more radical reformers wanted to restore the church to its original New Testament pattern and form. They practiced adult baptism upon confession of faith, rather than infant baptism, and formed congregations separate from the state church. They were nicknamed Again-Baptizers (*Anabaptists*).

Jesus was at the center of the Anabaptists' faith. They accepted him as their Lord and Savior and interpreted the Scriptures from an ethical, Christ-centered point of view. Becoming a Christian called for more than having a spiritual experience, reciting a creed, or having a one-time experience of forgiveness. They believed in repentance, the filling of the Holy Spirit, and a commitment to follow Jesus in daily life as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount. "Christianity is discipleship!" they said.

Christ-centered community was at the center of their life. While forgiveness from God was necessary for salvation, forgiveness from each other was needed for community. The Anabaptists' ideal was to have true fellowship with God in their celebrations of communion and to be as committed to each other as they were to Jesus Christ in their everyday lives.

Reconciliation was at the center of their work. Early Anabaptists were active in reconciling people to God through evangelism, and to each other through peacemaking. They understood salvation as being transformed. It was because believers were transformed in their thinking, attitudes, and actions that they refused to engage in violence and war.

The Anabaptist movement grew rapidly in Switzerland, South Germany, and the Netherlands. Menno Simons, a former Catholic priest, emerged as an effective teacher and bridge-builder for the many small churches that sprang up. The members of these churches became known as *Mennists* and later as *Mennonites*.

For more than a hundred years Anabaptists were severely persecuted. They were branded as heretics because they did not baptize their children, a crime punishable by death. Their views on the church were a threat to both Protestant and Catholic leaders. As a result, more than 4,000 Anabaptist leaders became martyrs for their faith by being burned at the stake, drowned, or executed in other ways.

Professor Rufus M. Jones, at the turn of the 20th century, summarized the results of the Anabaptist vision in this way:

Judged by the reception it met at the hands of those in power, both in Church and State, equally in Roman Catholic and in Protestant countries, the Anabaptist movement was one of the most tragic in the history of Christianity; but, judged by the principles, which were put into play by the men who bore this reproachful nickname, it must be pronounced one of the most momentous and significant undertakings in man's eventful religious struggle after the truth. It gathered up the gains of earlier movements, it is the spiritual soil out of which all nonconformist sects have sprung, and it is the first plain announcement in modern history of a program for a new type of Christian society which the modern world has been slowly realizing, an absolutely free and independent religious society, and a State in which every person counts as a person, and has his share in shaping both Church and State.¹²

For discussion

What is your response to the statement by Rufus M. Jones? How do you understand the Anabaptist movement of today? How do you see this vision expressed in the life of our congregation?

Our vision for mission

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you ...”
Matthew 28:19-20

Our congregation is part of the South Central Mennonite Conference of Mennonite Church

USA. Through this group of 30 congregations we:

- Employ a conference minister who assists with congregational relations and pastoral placement.
- Publish a bimonthly magazine that shares news and views.

¹² Rufus M. Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1909), 369.

- Sponsor youth retreats, Bible quiz events, and other activities.
- Plant new congregations.
- Have a special ministry with and to people living in and coming from Mexico.

Our congregation also belongs to Mennonite Church USA, a denomination of about 95,000 members meeting in 873 congregations, belonging to 21 area conferences in 44 states. We benefit from our denomination in many ways.

The denomination:

- Facilitates the publishing of educational materials, books, and DVDs.
- Encourages and helps coordinate our elementary, secondary, and graduate schools.
- Offers mutual aid and stewardship ministries, including mutual funds and planned charitable giving.
- Trains and equips pastors and congregational leaders for ministry, leads anti-racism workshops, and facilitates interchurch relations.
- Networks with health care providers with a common faith perspective.
- Sponsors mission workers in 55 countries who are involved in church planting, peace and justice work, and support ministries.

Through our denomination we become members of Mennonite World Conference. Mennonite Christians number about 1.7 million worldwide. These Christians come together every six years from various backgrounds and conferences to fellowship and plan together.

To help alleviate suffering, we are also members of or relate to Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Disaster Service, Mennonite Foundation, and Mennonite Economic Development Associates.

Through the medical, agricultural, educational, financial, and advocacy work of these organizations, we seek to alleviate suffering throughout the world and share the good news that Jesus is the way to peace and reconciliation. Examples of suffering that we seek to alleviate include:

- Poverty—nearly two billion people live on less than two dollars a day.
- Illiteracy—many communities lack a viable school, especially for girls.
- Disease—20,000 children die every day of preventable diseases.
- Spiritual emptiness—countless people who have money, fame, and power are still experiencing inner emptiness and lack of purpose.
- Corrupt leadership—self-centered, dictatorial leaders are causing hardship in every area of society.
- War—more than 100 million people have died of war and violence in the past century

For discussion

Where do you see God at work in your community and world? How are others in your congregation joining God's activity? What is God inviting you to be a part of? What is your vision for mission? How are your congregation and denomination helping to realize that vision? What other missional activities would you like to see?

Our vision for commitment¹³

Our vision is to invite people from the community and the church to make commitments toward a closer relationship with God and each other, for the purpose of ministry and mission. We explain this vision for ministry and mission with five circles of commitment:

- The Community
- Attenders
- Members
- Maturing
- Lay Ministers

1. From community to regular attenders.

The outer circle represents unaffiliated people who live in the community. We reach out to them through friendship, publicity, and personal invitation. We take special note of those who occasionally come to worship or to some other activity. Our goal is to invite non-believers from the community to make a commitment to Christ and become regular attenders. As soon as possible, we invite them to take Unit 1 of these studies, “Believe in God,” where they will have an opportunity to reflect on the grace of God and commit, or recommit, themselves to Jesus Christ.

2. From attenders to members.

The next circle represents people who have begun to attend regularly. They come for worship and may participate in other ministries of

the church. We invite these regular worshipers to take Unit 2, “Belong in Community,” to be baptized, and to make a commitment to become members of the congregation.

3. From members to maturing members.

We want members of the congregation to become spiritually mature. Therefore we invite them to enroll in Unit 3, “Become Mature,” where they will be invited to commit to the practices of daily Bible reading, prayer, generous giving, and being part of a small group with a mission.

4. From maturing to ministry.

We hope that every mature member will have a ministry in the church and become part of God’s mission in the world. Maturing members are invited to take Unit 4, “Behave Like Christ.” This unit helps maturing members discern their gifts and options for ministry and mission. These lay ministers form the core of our congregation.

For discussion

How do these four points relate to your understanding of how every maturing Christian is called to become involved in ministry? In which of these circles would you currently place yourself?

¹³ For a more complete treatment of “Circles of Commitment,” see Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 131–136.

Our vision for training

While most churches limit themselves to a brief baptism or membership preparation class, our congregation has adopted these *Begin Anew* sessions to help Christians gain a clearer understanding of faith, meaningful church membership, and involvement in ministry and mission. Each of the four units concludes by inviting participants to sign a covenant related to that area of growth and involvement. The units are as follows:

Unit 1: Believe in God helps us to affirm our belief in God, to enter into a relationship with the living Jesus, to be transformed by the Holy Spirit, and to celebrate and tell of the ways we have experienced the grace of God.

Unit 2: Belong in Community is this unit, which helps participants understand the privilege of being part of God's family. It describes the nature of that family and invites participants to commit themselves to membership.

Unit 3: Become Mature helps members mature spiritually by introducing them to the practices of daily Bible reading, prayer, generous giving, and participation in a small group.

Unit 4: Behave like Christ helps maturing members to explore how spiritual gifts, passion, personality and experiences can be mobilized to faithfully fulfill God's purposes. It helps them to make a commitment to a meaningful ministry in the church and to participate in God's mission in the world.

For discussion

Share one or two things you are learning in these *Begin Anew* studies. What have you appreciated most? What topics would you like to learn more about?

Session 4

Belonging through meaningful membership

This session deals with practical matters related to being a member of our congregation. We want your membership to be meaningful, so we will begin by exploring two practices related to membership: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism

... Jesus himself was baptized. As he was praying, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you." Luke 3:21-22 (NLT)

Just as Jesus began his ministry by being baptized, we invite attendees to begin their life and ministry in the church with water baptism. For Christians, baptism is the introductory rite into God's family, the church.

Who should be baptized?

Most Christian churches practice infant baptism, while Anabaptists (of which Mennonites are a part), including our congregation, practice adult or believer's baptism. This means that belief in Jesus is followed by being baptized upon your confession of faith. We believe that:

1. Every follower of Jesus Christ should be baptized.

"Everyone who acknowledges me before others I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven." Matthew 10:32-33

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Matthew 28:19

The purpose of baptism is to publicly celebrate your relationship with Jesus and confirm your personal commitment to him. Baptism doesn't make you a Christian; it just shows that you are one. It lets everyone know that you have made a commitment and that you want to be part of Christ's body.

2. Those who want to celebrate their adoption into God's family should be baptized.

For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:13

Baptism not only celebrates your relationship with Christ but celebrates your adoption into God's family. We are baptized "into Christ's body." Joining Christ's body, the church, is a joyful event. We cannot be a part of Christ without also being part of Christ's body.

3. Those who have been baptized before coming to personal faith in Jesus Christ should be baptized.

Some churches practice infant baptism as a sign of overcoming original sin. In this ceremony the parents promise to raise their children in the faith, and the church welcomes the child into the community of faith. They pray that the children will later confirm their faith when they reach the age of accountability.

Instead of practicing infant baptism, our congregation practices parent-child dedication.

In this ceremony, parents—together with the church—promise to raise their children in the faith and pray that when the children reach the age of accountability and are old enough to make their own decision, they will choose to be baptized upon confession of their faith. Adult baptism lets them share the story of how they have experienced the grace of God and celebrate their personal relationship with Christ and his body.

If you have been baptized as an infant and have publicly confirmed your faith in Jesus Christ as an adult, we leave adult baptism to your discretion. If you choose adult baptism,

we will share with the congregation your past history, including where and when you publicly confirmed your faith.

If you and your spouse or children have individually made decisions to follow Christ, you may be baptized together in the same service as were the Philippian jailer and the members of his family.

At the same hour of the night he [the Philippian jailer] took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. Acts 16:33

When should you be baptized?

1. You should be baptized soon after becoming a believer.

... many of [the people] who heard him believed and were baptized. Acts 18:8 (NIV)

As soon as receiving Christ into your life is a settled issue, you are invited to prepare for baptism by taking the first two units of *Begin Anew* or other preparatory classes. Baptism is your public identification with Christ. It communicates that you are a believer and that you want to be part of Christ's body. It is your formal initiation into the Christian faith and the church.

2. Don't delay baptism until you think you are "good enough."

Those who believed ... were baptized and added to the church ... Acts 2:41 (NLT)

Salvation is by grace; it is an undeserved gift from God. You will never be "good enough" or "know enough" to earn your salvation. Once you have received forgiveness for going your own way and have a basic understanding of what it means to follow Jesus as Lord, there is no reason to delay your baptism. If you are new to the Christian faith, you may want to take extra time to study the congregation's statements of faith and vision found in this unit.

How should you be baptized?

Sometimes new believers are baptized by pouring and sometimes by immersion. One form of baptism is not superior to another. What is important is that baptism is a symbol of what God has done in your life. Those whose commitment to Christ has happened over a period of time, and who want to publicly declare Jesus as their Lord, may prefer the symbol of pouring. Those who have had a more radical conversion experience and want to symbolize their movement from death to new life often prefer the symbol of immersion.

Procedures and symbols for baptism

At the beginning of the baptism service, the pastor will say a few words to the congregation about the meaning of baptism. You will then be introduced to the congregation as a believer and recommended for baptism. The pastor will ask a series of questions about your commitment to Christ, or you may share a personal testimony in which you answer the questions. The usual questions are:

- Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, trusting in his death and resurrection for the forgiveness of your sins?
- Do you solemnly consecrate yourself to Christ and his service and do you seek the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit to turn from the ways of sin, foster communion with God through prayer and the study of Scripture, and as far as you know how, lead an upright Christian life according to God's revealed will and to the honor of God's name?
- Are you willing to give and receive counsel from the members of this congregation and live in fellowship with them?
- Do you desire to be baptized upon your confession of faith in Christ, and to be received into the church of Jesus Christ, which is dedicated to God's mission in the world?

1. Baptism by pouring

- You will be invited to share your faith story with the congregation.
- You will be asked to kneel as a symbol of having accepted Jesus as your Lord and your willingness to humbly serve him.
- Your pastor, elder, or mentor will publicly pray that you will remain faithful to your affirmation of faith.
- The pastor will pour water on your head as a symbol that your sins have been forgiven or washed away.
- While pouring the water, the pastor will declare that you are being baptized in the name or nature of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- The pastor will then place his/her hands on your head to symbolize that you are set apart and blessed for the ministry of the church.

- The pastor and perhaps an elder will offer you the "right hand of fellowship," inviting you to rise and walk with the congregation in newness of life.
- You will be given a certificate of baptism.
- You will be formally welcomed as a member of the church, Christ's body.
- Members of the congregation will have an opportunity to welcome you at the end of the service.

2. Baptism by immersion

- You will be invited to share your faith story with the congregation.
- You will be led into the water by an elder or mentor.
- The pastor may ask you to affirm your faith in Jesus and to renounce the evil powers of this world.
- Your pastor, elder, or mentor will pray that you will remain faithful.
- You will be briefly immersed under the water as a symbol of dying to your old way of life and being resurrected to new life.
- You will be formally welcomed as a member of the church, Christ's body.
- You will be given a certificate of baptism.
- Members of the congregation will have an opportunity to welcome you at the end of the service.

Note: If you have a special handicap or need, this should be discussed with your pastor so that special arrangements can be made.

The last three steps in baptism may happen after additional faith instruction, such as Unit 2 of *Begin Anew*, or at a special evening service, when baptism has taken place during the regular morning worship service.

For discussion

What lingering questions do you have about baptism? Are you drawn to a particular form of baptism? Why?

The Lord's Supper

... the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of

me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 1 Corinthians 11:23b-25

What is the Lord's Supper?

1. The Lord's Supper (often called **communion**) is a light fellowship meal.

Eating together in biblical culture was a sign you were at peace with each other. Eating the Lord's Supper together as a congregation symbolizes that you are at peace with God and with each other. You are declaring that you have a forgiven relationship with God and with each other in the congregation. You are a forgiven community. The service will remind you that this forgiveness was made possible by Christ's death and resurrection.

2. The Lord's Supper is a simple act that symbolizes what Christ has done.

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."
Matthew 18:20

The Lord's Supper is a simple object lesson that demonstrates what God has done for us. The broken bread is a symbol of Christ's body, which was broken for us. The small cup of grape juice or wine symbolizes the life-blood of Jesus that brought joy and freedom to the first believers and also to us.

We understand the Lord's Supper as a sign, or symbol, of what the grace of God has

accomplished and is accomplishing in the lives of believers. It is a symbol of the real presence of Christ at work in the church, rather than a sacrament, or means, by which believers receive the saving grace of God.

3. How often should we observe the Lord's Supper?

While some Christians observe the Lord's Supper every time they meet together, we observe it at special occasions such as:

- First Advent (first Sunday of the church year)
- Pentecost
- New Year's Eve
- First Sunday of the calendar year
- Recommitment Sunday
- Maundy Thursday or Good Friday
- World Communion Sunday

Each time we observe the Lord's Supper, it reminds us of the covenant that we have made with Christ and each other. The experience of eating together in harmony is a foretaste of the perfect communion we will have with God and each other in heaven. You will note that we celebrate the Lord's Supper in a variety of forms.

Who should participate?

1. Those who are committed to following Jesus in daily life

While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples ... Mark 14:22 (GNT)

Jesus observed the Lord's Supper with his disciples, not the crowds. Communion assumes that those participating have a personal relationship with Christ and each other.

2. Those who have prepared themselves through self-examination

"If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."

Matthew 5:23-24 (NIV)

Each time we observe the Lord's Supper in our congregation, we have a time of prayer and self-examination. We ask ourselves, "Is there anything in my life that needs to be confessed and forgiven?" Also, "Is there anything between me and another member that needs to be dealt with?"

3. Believing but unbaptized children who want to participate

"... Let the little children come to me and do not stop them ..." Matthew 19:14a

Observance of the Lord's Supper is generally reserved for baptized believers who have a forgiven relationship with God and each other. We bless the children by giving them a grape and telling them that God loves them.

If unbaptized but believing children desire to participate, parents and the church may want to discuss the meaning of the Lord's Supper with the children and decide on what is appropriate. This may be a time for the children to quietly but publicly confirm that they have a relationship with Christ or to express their desire to begin such a relationship.

For discussion

What lingering questions do you have about the Lord's Supper? How do you understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper?

Membership

Why do we have membership?

In our congregation we believe formal membership is important. The difference between "adherents" and "members" is summed up in the word: commitment. We ask you to commit to membership for three reasons:

1. A biblical reason: The church is the body of Christ.

Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it. 1 Corinthians 12:27

The church, when filled with the spirit of God, is the body of Christ on earth, continuing what he began doing in his ministry. We find that we cannot be part of Christ without also being part of his body or family.

2. A personal reason: Membership aids spiritual growth.

Membership in a local congregation makes fellowship and "belonging" more specific. There are over 30 commands in the Bible that cannot be fulfilled without being part of a body of believers. Making a commitment helps us give and receive counsel to each other and actively express our faith.

3. A practical reason: Membership defines who to count on.

Love one another. Care for one another. Greet one another. Encourage one another. Pray for one another. Counsel one another. Share with one another. Help one another.

Just as every team has a roster and every school has an enrollment, so the church needs to know who to count on. Membership identifies our family. The declaration of faith and loyalty through membership encourages a person to become trustworthy.

For discussion

What difference does formal membership make? How is it important to the church? To the believer?

For general discussion

Do you have remaining questions or comments relating to the following?

- Being baptized upon confession of faith

- Affirming and supporting the congregation's statements of purpose, faith, and ministry
- Supporting the church with your attendance, gifts, and resources
- Being willing to give and receive counsel
- Sharing in the witness and mission of this congregation

Are you ready to commit to membership?

"Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. ... I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me." Revelation 3:8, 20

My commitment to _____ Church

I affirm that:

I have accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

I have publicly announced my faith through baptism.

I agree with the congregation's statements of purpose, faith and ministry.

I promise that:

I will support this congregation with my regular attendance, gifts and resources.

I will be willing to give and to receive counsel in this family.

I will share in the witness and mission of this congregation.

Signature_____

Date_____

God,

You have said that if I have received Jesus as my Lord and Savior and believed in his name, you have given me the right to become a member of your family.

I thank you for that invitation and am now accepting it.

In the name of Jesus, I pray this.

Amen.



Unit 3:

Become Mature



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Introduction to Unit 3¹⁵

Many people consider themselves to be spiritual even though they may not be Christian. The four sessions in Unit 3 will introduce you to Christian resources and concepts that will help you explore what it takes to become spiritually mature in the Christian faith.

To become spiritually mature is to become more like Jesus. How can you grow to become more like Christ? We will find that this doesn't happen automatically. It is a process that takes discipline. The apostle Paul advised Timothy to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Timothy 6:7). He said his purpose for ministry in Colossae was:

That you may become mature Christians and may fulfill God's will for you.
Colossians 4:12b (Phillips)

This third unit of *Begin Anew* explores four basic practices you need to experience steady growth towards becoming spiritually mature. There are other disciplines that you may want to explore at a later time.

Session 1 explores why, when, and where you should read your Bible, and how much of it at a time. You will examine different ways in which Scripture is interpreted and creative ways for studying it.

Session 2 focuses on the importance of developing a prayer routine and what you might do

during your time of prayer. You will examine ways of praying that others have found to be creative and useful.

Session 3 examines the benefits and importance of being generous with your financial resources. It also provides some cautions about the "prosperity Gospel."

Session 4 explores the value of meeting regularly in a small group.

Spiritual disciplines are regular practices or routines that will help you discontinue destructive behaviors and nurture new life in Christ. Engaging regularly in spiritual disciplines allows you to receive guidance and experience spiritual growth and joy in the Christian life.

As you develop these practices, they will become natural ways for you to relate to God and to those closest to you. The practices themselves will not transform you. Only God can do that! Well-chosen practices put you in a place where God can transform your thoughts, feelings, and actions. They help you to become an obedient, faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

At the end of each session, you will be given an opportunity to discuss one of the practices and, if you wish, to commit yourself to it.

¹⁵ The general structure and content of this unit has been adapted from C.L.A.S.S. (Christian Life and Service Seminars) materials by Rick Warren, Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, Calif.

Session 1

Becoming spiritually mature through Bible reading

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Bible reading is a primary way of allowing yourself to be taught by God. This session will pose six important questions.

Why read the Bible?

1. Reading the Bible is a way to fellowship with God.

“If anyone ... opens the door, I will come in and fellowship with him and he with me.”
Revelation 3:20 (TLB)

2. Reading the Bible increases your devotion to God.

[Hezekiah] was successful, because everything he did ... he did in a spirit of complete devotion to his God. 2 Chronicles 31:21 (GNT)

3. Through Bible reading, you receive direction from God.

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct your paths. Proverbs 3:6 (NKJV)

4. By reading the Bible, your mind will be transformed.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God ... Romans 12:2

5. Reading the Bible helps you become more effective in service.

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. 2 Timothy 3:16

When is the best time to read?

The best time to read the Bible is when you are at your best.

Reasons for an early morning quiet time:

- It seems logical to begin the day with it.
- It demonstrates that meeting with God is your first priority.
- You are likely to be more rested. Your mind is less cluttered.
- It's often the time of least distractions.

Reasons for an end-of-the-day quiet time:

- Some people are more alert in the evening.
- It seems logical to close the day in fellowship with God.
- It is often a time of few distractions.
- It is calming to go to sleep with an encouragement or inspiring thought from God.

Where might you read?

On his way home [the Ethiopian eunuch] was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. Acts 8:28 (NIV)

1. You can read wherever you have the opportunity:

- While waiting in the car or a waiting room
- Around the dining table with your family
- In a sanctuary during worship
- In a small group study

2. The best place to have fellowship with God and receive guidance is where you have the fewest distractions.

- This might be a special room or a special chair.
- Gather the resources that you need, such as a Bible, journal, and hymnbook.
- Light a candle or do what it takes for you to become quiet and focused.

For discussion

How would you answer the question, “Why is it important for me to read the Bible?”

How much should you read?

Happy is the one who reads this book, and happy are those who listen ... and obey what is written in this book Revelation 1:3 (GNT)

1. Read until God speaks to you.

- Read until something stops you and says, “This is for you!” It may be only a verse or a paragraph.
- Underline God’s special word for you. Make a note of it in the margin or in your journal.

2. Read to get the big picture.

- Read a whole chapter or section.
- Read through the Bible one book at a time.
- Read the Bible with one word or theme in mind.

3. Read the Scripture passage suggested in a devotional book, reading guide, or the common lectionary.

4. Repeatedly read key passages like the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount is our Lord’s specific instruction on how spiritually mature, spirit-filled persons can meet the practical challenges of life. Reading it carefully and often will help you develop a Christ-centered point of view. On the following page is a one-month reading guide for the Sermon on the Mount.

For discussion

What pattern of reading Scripture do you find to be most helpful?

One-month Sermon on the Mount reading guide

Day	5:1-16	Characteristics of a spiritually mature person
1	1-2	Introduction
2	3 and 8	You know you are spiritually poor. You are honest and sincere.
3	4 and 9	You feel badly when you do wrong. You work for peace.
4	5 and 10	You are meek and obedient even while suffering persecution.
5	6 and 11	You desire to do what God requires even if you are mistreated.
6	7 and 12	You show mercy to others. Your reward may be delayed.
7	13-16	You are to be as useful in the world as are light and salt.
	5:17-48	Spiritually mature actions toward others
8	17-20	Your minimum standards
9	21-26	Your attitudes and actions toward accusing people
10	27-32	Your commitment to family
11	33-37	Your relationships with business people
12	38-42	Your response to public officials
13	43-48	Your actions toward enemies
	6:1-34	A spiritually mature relationship with God
14	1-4	In giving for the needy
15	5-14	In prayer
16	15-18	In fasting
17	19-24	In relationship to property and wealth
18	25-32	In regard to food and clothes
19	33-34	In regard to priorities and trust
	7:1-12	Practical suggestions for spiritually mature believers
20	1-5	When relating to someone with a problem
21	6	When deciding how to use your time
22	7-11	When seeking to be filled with the Spirit
23	12	When dealing with general situations
	7:13-29	Dangers that will come
24	13-14	Temptations to take the easy road
25	15-20	Failure to identify false teachers
26	21-23	Being deceived about a relationship with the Lord
27	24-27	Failure to practice these teachings
28	28-29	Concluding observations

How should you interpret the Scriptures?

1. Recognize that all Scripture is inspired.

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. 2 Timothy 3:16

No prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. 2 Peter 1:21

All Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, came to us through revelation by the Holy Spirit. But not all Scripture is equal in usefulness or authority. While Scripture is your final source of information about God and God's will, Jesus is to be your final authority.

2. There are four common ways of interpreting the Scriptures.

Differing approaches to the interpretation of Scripture lead sincere Christians in very different directions in understanding God and God's will. The four approaches are as follows.

a. The “flat Bible” approach assumes that all Scriptures are equally authoritative. The teachings of Moses are considered equal to the teachings of Jesus. With this approach, it often seems as if God has two wills. Those who use this approach tend to consult Moses and the Old Testament to understand God's will on social issues such as capital punishment and engagement in war. They consult the New Testament, and especially the writings of the apostle Paul, to understand God's will on personal issues like living a godly life. Because the flat Bible approach fails to see Jesus as the ultimate authority, it does not give adequate and consistent guidance for our everyday lives.

b. The dispensational approach grew up in the mid-1800s. It assumes that God has a different will and standards of ethics for different dispensations or eras of time. The dispensations include the times of Adam, Noah, Abraham, the Law, the church age, and the future kingdom age. Many who

follow this approach say that the Sermon on the Mount is for a future era of time when Jesus will reign on earth; therefore the teachings of Jesus are not for us today. Because the dispensational approach places more emphasis on prophecy than on justice and does not give adequate authority to Jesus, the ultimate word, it fails to provide adequate guidance for us today.

c. The Christological approach recognizes that the New Testament is based on a new covenant between God and humans. It teaches that the Old Testament looks forward to the coming of Christ, and that Christ is the center of Scripture. Unfortunately, it is a theological approach that limits its understanding of Christ and the New Covenant to what Christ did on the cross. Because the Christological approach doesn't give adequate attention to the teaching, life, and ministry of Jesus, it is not the fullest revelation of God and God's will for us today.

d. The ethical, Christ-centered approach assumes that God and God's will are most clearly and fully revealed in Jesus Christ. While God revealed himself to Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets, God revealed himself most fully by coming to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was completely obedient and faithful to God and is today the living Word of God. The Christ-centered approach says that while the written Scriptures are the ultimate source of information about God and God's will, Jesus (his life, teaching, death, and resurrection) is the ultimate authority on how to understand or interpret any passage. Because Jesus is the fullest revelation of God and God's will, all Scripture must be read and interpreted in the spirit and nature of Jesus.

3. Jesus is the final authority.

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these

last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. Hebrews 1:1-3b

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Matthew 28:18

"You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you ..." Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43

Since Jesus is the ultimate authority, all Scripture must be interpreted according to his spirit and nature. If Jesus is your final authority, you

will receive consistent guidance from the Scriptures. When reading a difficult passage in the Old Testament, it can help you to ask, "How would Jesus teach and act in this situation?"

Never allow a Scripture to contradict the spirit, nature, and teaching of Jesus. If two scriptures seem to disagree, let Jesus be the referee! Our congregation recommends this ethical, Christ-centered approach to the Scriptures.

For discussion

What experience have you had with these different approaches to reading scripture? Using an ethical, Christ-centered approach, how might you interpret Psalm 3:7?

How should you study the Scriptures?

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15

When you study a passage of Scripture to teach others or to receive deeper understandings, consider using the following three-step **inductive study method**. Although some of this study can be done alone, we believe that we need the body of believers and the Holy Spirit to discern and interpret Scripture accurately. Personal study of Scripture needs to be balanced with studying the Bible as a group of believers together.

1. Observe: What does it say?

- Read the passage or story with fresh eyes. Set aside your assumptions.
- In what form is it written? Is it poetry? Narrative? Parable?
- Read the passage or story a second time with pencil in hand, underlining words and phrases that might have had special or different meanings in Bible times. (The difference between *reading* the Bible and *studying* it is that when you study, you use a pencil.)

- Write down five, 10, or even 20 observations! What does it say about who, what, where, and how?

2. Interpret: What did it mean to the first readers?

- Explore how the first readers understood the passage in their situation.
- In a Bible dictionary, look up the words that you have underlined seeking to understanding the customs and culture of that time in history.
- In a brief statement, describe what you believe the text meant to the first readers in their situation.

3. Apply: What does it mean for you?

Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. James 1:22

- Apply the principles, truths and examples to your daily life. Write a brief statement describing what you believe the passage is encouraging you to believe and do. This is the ultimate significance of Bible study!
- Describe an action that you will take to apply the truth.

- Make a commitment to do, in the spirit of Jesus, what it says.
- Begin to obey what you have learned. We cannot expect to receive further insights until we have acted on those that we have already received.

The **Application Bridge** illustrates that the first step to applying a Scripture is to understand

how the first readers understood the passage **then**, in their time and culture. Use a Bible dictionary to explore the original meaning of words and customs.

We then cross over the bridge to apply them for our current—**now**—situation. Personalize the passage by putting your name and situation into it. Try to state specifically what the passage is asking you to think, feel, or do.

The Application Bridge

THEN

Observe

Analyze their situation

Explore customs

NOW

Discern timeless principles

Analyze your situation

Personalize and apply

For discussion

Study Matthew 5:23-24 together as a group, using the above three steps and the Application Bridge. Share your thoughts with each other.

Are you ready to commit to daily Bible reading?

“Whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:19b (NIV)

My commitment to daily Bible reading

I commit myself to reading the Bible daily.

I will begin with _____. (book or reading guide)

I will seek to read regularly at _____ in _____.
(time) (place)

Signature_____

Date_____

God,

I look forward to receiving guidance from you through Bible reading. Thank you in advance for the inspiration and guidance that I will receive.

Help me to be faithful to my commitment. I pray this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Session 2

Becoming spiritually mature through prayer

Be joyful in hope, patient in trouble, and persistent in prayer. Romans 12:12 (ISV)

Without prayer there is no religion of any kind.

Prayer assumes that there are spiritual realities and ways of communicating with God. Prayer is talking with God.

Why pray?

1. Prayer is a primary way to have fellowship with God.

If we say that we have fellowship with him [God] while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true. 1 John 1:6

2. We receive guidance from God through prayer.

... If you want to know what God wants you to do, ask him, and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking. James 1:5 (NLT)

3. Prayer is for the way we surrender ourselves to God and God's will.

Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him and he will help you. Psalm 37:5 (NLT)

4. Prayer helps us express our thoughts and feelings.

Express your thoughts and feelings to God as honestly as you can. Don't try to impress God. Don't ever lie to God—God already knows your thoughts and feelings!

Examine me, O God, and know my mind; test me, and discover my thoughts. Find out if there is any evil in me ... Psalm 139:23-24 (GNT)

5. Prayer is a way to intercede for needy persons.

I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. 1 Timothy 2:1-2

When is a good time to pray?

1. Pray after reading the Scriptures.

So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading ... all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Nehemiah 8:8, 9

Let God speak to you through Scripture and then in prayer respond to his guidance.

2. Pray after journaling.

Journaling is a pattern of writing thoughts and feelings for self-reflection. Often, Scriptures are reflections that writers had after an encounter with God. Many people today find journaling

to be an excellent preparation for prayer.

To journal, take out a clean sheet of paper each day and on the top write "Yesterday." Reflect on your experiences of yesterday. What did you do, think, or feel? What decisions did you make? Did you experience the presence, guidance, or power of the Holy Spirit? If so, where and how? Pray in response to your thoughts and feelings.

3. Pray when you need forgiveness.

If we confess our sins to him, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

Honest confession in prayer leads to forgiveness. Admit what you have thought, said, or done that was not in keeping with God's will; then ask for forgiveness.

4. Pray when you are grateful.

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High.
Psalm 92:1

Before a meal, express words of gratitude for what God has provided. When you have experienced the presence or power of God, give thanks.

5. Pray in times of special need.

Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7

Sharing our special needs with God helps us to receive guidance. Jesus is constantly interceding for us and wants the best for us. We also want the best for others, so we are encouraged to intercede for them.

Where can you pray?

1. Pray in a private place.

Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Luke 5:16 (NIV)

During morning devotions or before going to work or school, find a quiet place to pray. In the evening before going to sleep, you might kneel at your bed to pray. On a day off or during the weekend, you might spend time in a prayer room or place where you feel close to God.

2. Pray in public, but not in order to be seen.

"When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners

and in the synagogues where everyone can see them ... " Matthew 6:5 (NLT)

During worship, think deeply about the words in a liturgy or hymn. Seek to make the pastor's prayer your own. When asked to pray in public, try to express honestly the concerns of those in the group.

3. Pray wherever people are in special need.

Peter and John went down to Samaria where they prayed that the new believers would receive the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:15 (CEB)

In what ways can you pray?

Many have found that the acronym A.C.T.S. provides the guidance and balance needed for their daily or even their public prayers. A.C.T.S. stands for: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Sincere desire.

Each day, take out a clean piece of paper, draw lines to divide it into four sections, and label the sections A, C, T, and S. Write a word or sentence for each letter expressing to God your adoration, confession, thanksgiving and sincere desire. Here is further explanation:

- **Adoration**

"... To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" Revelation 5:13b

Adoration expresses your respect and praise to God for who God is. Following are fifteen descriptions of God. Each day, according to your situation and need, choose one of the qualities of God on the following page and write a word or sentence that expresses your praise and respect for how you have experienced God.

- | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| – Provider | – Shepherd | – Healer |
| – Forgiver | – Power | – Giver of Shalom |
| – Teacher | – Deliverer/Savior | – Lord/Director |
| – Guide | – Advocate | – Victor over evil powers |
| – Revealer of Truth | – Encourager | – Presence in time of trouble |

- **Confession**

Examine me, O God, and know my mind; test me, and discover my thoughts. Find out if there is any evil in me ... Psalms 139:23-24 (GNT)

Write a word or sentence in which you confess any sin, thought, or anxiety that comes to mind. This is your time to be honest!

- **Thanksgiving**

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? 1 Thessalonians 3:9

Write a word or sentence expressing your gratitude for:

- People who have blessed your life.
- What God has done in your life or ministry.
- Creation and the resources that are available to you.

- Your salvation, adoption, eternal hope, and spiritual gifts.

- Family, friends, and special relationships.

- Your physical well-being, opportunities to work, and so on.

- **Sincere desire**

“Ask and it will be given to you; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you.” Matthew 7:7

... Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Romans 8:34 (NIV)

Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire. Write a word, sentence, or paragraph that shares with God your sincere physical, social, material and/or spiritual needs for that day. Include concerns for others. Then evaluate your sincere desires, seeking to bring your will into line with God’s will.

What are other ways to pray?

We believe that Jesus is our mediator with God. He hears our prayers and intercedes for us to God (asks on our behalf). To aid you in intercessory prayer, you might explore the following steps.

1. Make a prayer list.

Make a list of people for whom you want to intercede regularly. You want God to bless these people with guidance, health, or some other gift. Include your “enemies!”

Consider praying for a different group of people each day of the week. For example:

- Monday: Family members
- Tuesday: Co-workers
- Wednesday: Friends and neighbors
- Thursday: EGRs (Extra Grace Required people)

- Friday: Public leaders
- Saturday: Missionaries
- Sunday: Your pastor(s), leaders, and teachers

2. Pray an inclusive or “ripple” prayer.

I urge ... that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. 1 Timothy 2:1-2

There may be times when you want to pray more intensely or for a longer period of time. You might think of your prayer as the ripples that form when a stone is dropped into a calm pool of water. Beginning in the middle, start praying for yourself until you can say, “Yes, Lord, this is the way it is between us.” Then move on to pray for your family, your neighbors, and so on. This might be diagrammed as follows:

- Self
- Family
- Friends and neighbors
- The city
- The nation(s)

3. Keep a record of your requests and answers.

You might use the following pattern:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Request</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Answer</u>
-------------	----------------	-------------	---------------

For discussion

What questions or comments do you have about seeking God’s guidance and assistance via a daily time of prayer? Which of the models suggested resonates with your prayer needs?

Are you ready to commit to a regular time of prayer?

My commitment to a daily time of prayer

I commit myself to a daily time of prayer.

It will usually be in _____ at _____.
(location) (time)

I will use the following outline as a guide:

___ A.C.T.S

___ Ripple

___ Other

Signature_____

Date_____

God,

*I look forward to having fellowship with you
and to receiving guidance from you.*

*Thank you for making this fellowship and
guidance possible through prayer.*

I pray this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Session 3

Becoming spiritually mature through generous giving

The key to becoming a generous person is to first give yourself to God so that God can use you for the kingdom.

“Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:33

They first gave themselves to the Lord.
2 Corinthians 8:5b

Jesus came to proclaim and inaugurate the kingdom of God. We are challenged to give first priority to proclaiming and forwarding that kingdom. Generous giving is a way of disciplining ourselves to give priority to God’s kingdom. Giving a percentage of your income is called **tithing**, and is one way to plan your giving.

What does the Bible say about tithing?

1. In the Old Testament, God commanded it.

One tenth of all the produce of the land, whether grain or fruit, belongs to the Lord.
Leviticus 27:30 (GNT)

2. In the New Testament, Jesus commended it.

“... You should tithe, yes, but you should not leave undone the more important things.”
Matthew 23:23c (NLT)

3. Tithing serves as a guide for how to spend your income.

Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.
Deuteronomy 16:17 (TNIV)

4. Giving generously expresses your gratitude and loyalty to God.

But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth ...
Deuteronomy 8:18a (NIV)

Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, “How are we robbing you?” In your tithes and offerings! ... Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, ... see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. Malachi 3:8,10

5. Generous giving expresses God’s love for the disadvantaged.

I want you to be leaders also in the spirit of cheerful giving ... This is one way to prove that your love is real, that it goes beyond mere words. 2 Corinthians 8:7b, 8b (TLB)

Why should you give?

1. Giving reflects the character of God.

God is a giver!
God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. John 3:16a

2. Giving draws you close to God and God’s work.

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21

3. Giving proportionately helps you to plan.

Honor the Lord by giving him the first part of your income, and he will fill your barns ... Proverbs 3:9a (TLB)

Invariably, when givers plan what percent they want to give for God, they also plan the rest of their spending. They learn the difference between wants and needs, and discern what to give to God, what to spend, and what to save.

4. Giving in times of difficulty will strengthen your trust in God.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. Proverbs 3:5

Command those who are rich in this present world ... to be generous and willing to share. In this way ... they may take hold of the life that is truly life. 1 Timothy 6:17-19 (NIV)

5. Giving generously is a way to work for justice and to meet the needs of the disadvantaged.

... give happily to those in need, always being ready to share with others ... 1 Timothy 6:18 (TLB)

6. Giving is an investment for eternity.

By doing this, you will be storing up real treasure for yourselves in heaven—it is the only safe investment for eternity!
1 Timothy 6:19a (TLB)

When should you give?

1. Give regularly.

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income ... 1 Corinthians 16:2a (NIV)

Consider giving a gift each week or at the beginning of each month. Writing weekly or monthly checks in advance will help you to be consistent in giving even when you need to be absent from weekly worship. Arranging for an automatic bank transfer is another way to help you to give regularly.

2. Consider giving when you have received special income.

Honor the Lord with your wealth and the firstfruits from all your crops. Proverbs 3:9 (NCV)

Consider firstfruits giving. This means giving the first raise or paycheck, or the first part of every paycheck, to God.

Where should you give?

1. Give your basic gift where you worship.

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my temple. Malachi 3:10a (NLT)

2. Give as generously as you can where it is needed.

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was

sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Matthew 25:35-36

3. Give through reliable organizations.

Your congregation is connected to a wider network of trusted church ministries that help support and resource your local congregation and address the needs of the world. Your pastor can assist you in making these giving choices.

How much should you give?

1. Give as much as possible.

... they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry ... 2 Corinthians 8:3-4

Instead of seeing how little you can give, give as much as possible for the lasting work of Christ and the church.

2. Consider giving a graduated tithe.

Each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income. 1 Corinthians 16:2 (TNIV)

A graduated tithe is a percentage of your profits according to your income. A struggling person might give 3 percent, while a wealthy person might give 30 percent or more. You might seek to increase your generosity by giving an additional 1 percent of your income each successive year.

Some givers begin by tithing 10 percent of their basic salary or an amount equal to what a person would receive on welfare. They then give an extra 10 percent for each thousand or ten thousand above that amount until they are generously giving away all their added income.

3. To give an offering means giving an "abundant portion."

"... Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" Matthew 25:21 (NIV)

Just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. 2 Corinthians 8:7 (NIV)

An "offering" refers to anything you give in addition to your regular plan.

4. A budget is a spending plan.

"... for which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?" Luke 14:28

And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Timothy 5:8

A budget helps you spend your income as a good steward. It will help you to live within your income. It may also help you meet the real needs of your family and the deepest needs of others.

With what attitude should you give?

1. Give willingly.

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion. 2 Corinthians 9:7a

2. Give joyfully.

For God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7b

3. Give expectantly.

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and whoever sows generously will reap generously. 2 Corinthians 9:6 (NIV)

Will generous giving cause you to prosper?

1. The Old Testament suggests that if you are faithful and obedient, God will bless and prosper you. If you are unfaithful and disobedient, you will be cursed.

All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God. ... However if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you. Deuteronomy 28:2, 15 (NIV)

2. The New Testament observes that even if you are faithful and obedient, you may not prosper.

It is not necessarily true that a righteous person will prosper and an unrighteous person will not. In fact, you may need to suffer for the cause of righteousness. We have the

promise, however, that those who are faithful will receive an eternal reward.

Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. James 1:12

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:10 (NIV)

For discussion

What questions or comments do you have about financial generosity? What is your current approach to giving? What goals are you prepared to set to make giving a part of your spiritual growth?

Are you ready to commit to generous giving?

My commitment to give generously

I commit myself to give priority to God's kingdom in my financial life.

I pledge to cheerfully give:

____% of my income to God through my congregation

____% of my income to God through other charities

____% total

Signature_____

Date_____

God,

You have been very generous with me. Help me to give priority to your kingdom by giving cheerfully and generously.

I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Session 4

Becoming spiritually mature through small groups

“Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage each other” Hebrews 10:25 (GNT)

It is in a small group where we are most able to support each other and enjoy the fellowship that

God promises. It is also where we can hold each other accountable to live and love according to the commands of Christ. This session provides some guidelines for you and your congregation.

How might the church be structured?

1. God has always worked through both large and small groups.

Moses chose able men from all Israel and appointed them as heads over the people as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Exodus 18:25

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak Matthew 5:1-2

In the wilderness Moses ministered to a very large congregation of people, but Jethro encouraged him to form small groups. Jesus ministered to crowds of 5,000 or more, but probably spent more time with his small group of twelve than with all the rest of the people he met combined.

It is often in small groups that the church the most specific and helpful. After extensive research, Pastor Takashi Yamada, a scholar from Japan, came to believe that “the uniqueness of the early church and the Anabaptists

was that they met in small groups where they confronted each other and made each other strong enough to confront the world.”

A large group is:

- A formal gathering
- Of 12 or more persons
- Who focus on the leader or an agenda
- For the purpose of worship, teaching, and mission.

A small group is:

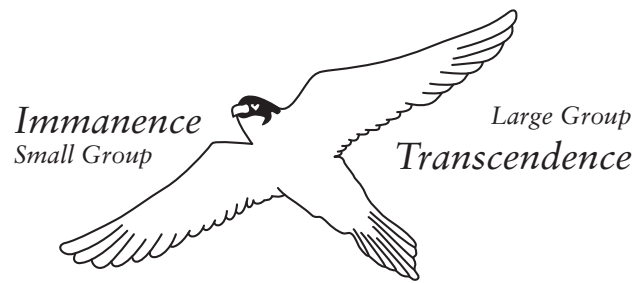
- An intentional face-to-face gathering
- Of three to 12 people
- On a regular time schedule
- For the purpose of spiritual growth and support.

2. A healthy church is like a two-winged bird.

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. ... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:41-47

Large, celebrative worship services that include singing, preaching and prayers tend to emphasize the *transcendence* (greatness and mystery) of God. Small groups in homes that include sharing, caring, and prayers tend to emphasize the *immanence* (nearness) of God. The two wings are of equal importance.

The small group might be considered the basic unit of the church. Everything needed to “be church” can happen in a small group. A congregation is a network of small groups. A denomination is composed of congregations that network together.



3. Small groups are the key pastoral structure of our congregation.

In our congregation we aim to have a shepherd for every sheep. For that reason, our congregation encourages each attendee to participate in both the congregation and in a small group.

We believe that if a person wants to experience good pastoral care and growth, he or she needs to get into a group! Our small groups coordinator helps people find a place in a group that is compatible with their needs and interests.

Ninety percent of people's problems are best dealt with by fellow strugglers, not psychiatrists, doctors, or clergy.—Paul Tournier

Why meet in small groups?

1. Small groups provide a sense of belonging.

... let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Galatians 6:10 (NIV)

2. Small groups help us to experience God's presence and guidance.

"... wherever two or three come together in my name, I am there, right among you!" Matthew 18:20b (Phillips)

3. Small groups provide a time for fun and fellowship.

They ... met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. Acts 2:46-47a (NLT)

4. Small groups enhance spiritual growth.

Take time and trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit. 1 Timothy 4:7b (Phillips)

5. Small groups provide encouragement in times of difficulty.

Let us think of one another and how we can encourage each other to love and do good deeds. Hebrews 10:24 (Phillips)

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2

6. Small groups help us to provide more and better ministry and mission.

God has given gifts to each of you from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Manage them well so that God's generosity can flow through you. 1 Peter 4:10 (NLT)

7. Small groups help us to be accountable to each other.

Encourage one another daily ... so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.
Hebrews 3:13 (TNIV)

8. Small group members give each other guidance for daily living.

Without counsel, plans go wrong, but with many advisors they succeed. Proverbs 15:22

What will your group be like?

1. Membership in a small group is voluntary.

Groups form around common agendas or according to geographical location, topic of interest, type of mission, or special need.

2. Friendships are formed in small groups.

You may come from different backgrounds

and age groups but if you share honestly with each other and the spirit of Jesus is present, you will become friends. You will likely look to a small group more for fellowship than for intimacy of relationships. You may find one or two individuals in the group with whom you can share more intimately.

Where and when will your group meet?

... They continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. Acts 2:46 (NIV)

Small group members decide where and when to meet. Groups may meet in homes, offices, restaurants, or wherever is convenient. They may meet at any time of the day or week.

What might your group do?

Groups help to meet the needs of their members. Therefore, each group must decide on its purpose and activities.

Experience shows that balance is important for a healthy life and a healthy group. We encourage your group find a balance among the four Ws of a group meeting:

1. Welcome

Your group is like a family to which you belong. Unconditional acceptance of each other is basic to group experience. Therefore, each member needs to receive a warm welcome. Usually that warm welcome includes refreshments.

The group meeting might begin somewhat informally with a simple sharing question that includes both fact and feeling, such as: "What did you do today?" "Where did you go on your last vacation?" or "What is the best thing

that has happened since we last met?" Members should be able to answer in one or two sentences. Do not judge the answers. Keep the welcome time warm, but short.

2. Worship

Many groups enjoy a bit of worship. You might sing a chorus, a contemporary song, or a stanza of a hymn. A short opening prayer may be appropriate to bring you more specifically into the presence of God.

3. Word (Study)

Your group may want to choose a passage of Scripture, a magazine article, or a need in the community for dialogue. There is a difference between teaching and dialogue. While the teacher of a class will prepare a set of teaching notes, the leader of a small group should prepare three or four discovery questions for dialogue. Group members should be encouraged

to experience discovery and engage in dialogue with each other about those discoveries. At the conclusion of dialogue, the leader might summarize what has been discovered or learned.

4. World (Sharing and Prayer)

Before leaving, you will receive ministry. This may happen as you are invited to share what is going on in your world and others pray for you. Your leader might go around the circle asking each member, “How can we pray for you and/or your ministry?”

Variety in prayer is good. Group members might pause in silence to pray for each person. Your leader might ask each of you to pray for the person to your right. The leader might close the meeting by praying for all persons present.

Your meeting also might close with a discussion of next steps in your personal mission involvement or your joint group project.

How might you begin a new group?

1. Choose a partner.

Team up with a person who has some of the same concerns you have. This person will likely serve as an apprentice and should have the potential to lead the group in your absence, or even to begin a new group.

2. Decide together on the purpose, place, and time for your first group meeting.

3. Create a list of three to nine persons you will invite to an exploratory meeting.

4. At your first meeting, enjoy a time of fellowship and then ask: “If we would choose to meet regularly,

- What would be our purpose?
- Where, when, and how often would we meet?

- Who would be our leader?

- What would we do about child care? Refreshments? Attendance?

For discussion

What previous small group experience have you had? What was the best part of that experience? What challenges did you encounter?

Are you ready to commit to meeting in a small group?

My commitment to meet in a small group

Because I want to have close fellowship with other believers and to be held accountable, I **commit myself to:**

- ☐ Meet regularly with a small group of believers. (I would like to meet ____ weekly, ____ monthly.)
- ☐ Remember the members of my group in prayer.
- ☐ Be available when a member has a special need.
- ☐ Make myself accountable to the group or a member of it.

Signature_____

Date_____

God,

I acknowledge that you desire to have fellowship with me and desire that I have fellowship with other believers.

Therefore, I commit myself to meeting together for the purpose of deeper fellowship and effective service. I trust that you will help me to join a group or to form a new group in which I can be a faithful participant.

In the name of Jesus, I pray.

Amen.



Unit 4:

Behave like Christ



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To what ministry in the church do you feel called?	
My commitment to a ministry in the church	
To what part of God's mission in the world do you feel called?	
My commitment to God's mission in the world	

Introduction to Unit 4

Christianity is more than having a spiritual experience, reciting a creed, or making a request for forgiveness. Christianity is discipleship. It is following Jesus in daily life. Being a Christian is to behave like Christ.

These sessions have emphasized that Christianity is a combination of believing, belonging, becoming, and behaving. In this unit, we will consider just how Jesus behaved. How did he relate to the needs of people? How did he react to the violence and ethical concerns of his day? How did he behave relating to what God had sent him to do? These final four sessions will help you answer those questions and model your life after Jesus.¹⁶

Session 1 will examine behavior that grows out of a relationship to Jesus. We will expand that to explore what we believe about responding to needs and the kinds of needs calling for ministry.

Session 2 will help you become more self-aware in regard to your abilities, interests, and spiritual gifts. This will include a spiritual gifts discernment exercise.

Session 3 will reflect on your spiritual, educational, work, and ministry experiences, both painful and joyful. You will consider how these experiences might be used as Jesus would use them.

Session 4 helps to bring together everything you have been learning. You will be given the opportunity to identify and sign up for a ministry in the church and in God's mission in the world.

The apostle Paul had this to say:

... The most important thing is that I complete my mission; the work that the Lord Jesus gave me—to tell people the Good News about God's grace. Acts 20:24 (NCV)

Jesus concluded his ministry by saying to God:

I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. John 17:4

May these sessions help you to conclude these studies and enter into ministry in a similar way.

¹⁶ For more help in finding and fulfilling your unique purpose for life, see Erik Rees, S.H.A.P.E. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

Session 1

Behaving like Christ in response to need

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around

himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. John 13:3-5

What are our natural human tendencies?

As human beings, we tend to become preoccupied with our own needs and image:

Position

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." Mark 10:35a, 37

Power

... "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called

benefactors. But not so with you." Luke 22:25

Prestige

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me also this power to that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Acts 8:18-19

How did Jesus behave in ministry?

Jesus was a different kind of person. He did not lord it over others and yet was the most influential person who has ever lived. In regard to his person, Jesus was characterized by:

Spirit empowerment

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Luke 4:18-19

Obedience

"I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek

to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me." John 5:30

Servanthood

"For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Mark 10:45

Nonviolence

"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" Luke 23:34

How can you behave like Christ in ministry?

1. Have the spirit of Christ.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

2. Be obedient to the commands of Christ.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” John 14:15.

... “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation” Mark 16:15

... what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8b

3. Be a servant who lives for others.

“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.” Luke 22:25–26

What do we believe about ministry?

1. Each Christian will receive a call to ministry.

If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching. If your gift is to encourage others, do it! If you have money, share it generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. Romans 12:7-8 (NLT)

Every believer is created, called, gifted, and authorized to minister. This call has both an **inner urge** and an **outer confirmation**.

The prophets and teachers fasted and prayed. They placed their hands on Barnabas and Saul. Then they sent them off. Acts 13:3 (NIRV)

A call to ministry often begins in a rather mysterious way with an inner attraction to or excitement about an endeavor. When you see a challenge, you might think, “That is for me!” or “I would like to do that.” This inner call needs to be confirmed by the church or by those who will receive your service. They may say something like, “Yes, you can do that,” or “Yes, we need that.”

2. Ministry is the Christian’s primary vocation.

“For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to

be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:28 (NLT)

Every believer has a ministry in the church and a part in God’s mission in the world. This requires setting priorities. You may need to eliminate some things from your life to make room for that which is most important.

Your ministry will help to fulfill one or more of the basic purposes of the church.

You are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NIRV)

Your ministry might be providing food (fellowship) caregiving (ministry), music (worship), teaching or peacemaking (discipleship), or evangelism or service (mission).

3. Every member deserves help in discovering his or her place in ministry.

Barnabas took [Paul], brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. Acts 9:27

After you have discerned your gift or passion, someone will meet with you to give you

feedback, encouragement, and guidance.

Our pastors are both ministers and administrators. They will help you to discover and be involved in a meaningful ministry and mission.

4. Involving gifted individuals results in a diversity of styles in ministry.

Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. 1 Corinthians 12:4 (NLT)

We anticipate lots of diversity. We can have unity without uniformity.

5. Volunteers need to be committed.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward” Colossians 3:23, 24 (TNIV)

Although we allow people to change ministries gracefully without guilt or shame, we encourage you to commit yourself to a ministry and mission for one, two or three years. In your ministry we expect excellence, not perfection.

“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” Matthew 25:23 (NIV)

Excellence is doing your best. We encourage creativity and innovation, which assumes that people will make mistakes. We view mistakes as “experiments that didn’t work.”

For discussion

Can you identify an inner urge that is calling you to be involved in a particular ministry of your congregation? In what ways has there been an external call for this ministry?

What needs might you be called to meet?

Jesus ministered to people according to their need. You will also be called according to the needs of people. Following are five types of need. It will be normal for you to be more attracted to one kind of need over others. What needs might God be guiding you to meet? Circle the type to which you are drawn.

1. Physical needs

“If, as my representatives, you give even a cup of cold water to a little child, you will surely be rewarded.” Matthew 10:42 (TLB)

Jesus healed the sick, the lame, and the blind. He fed the hungry. God uses nurses, doctors, and manual laborers to meet the needs of people today. God also uses our prayers. Might your call be to work with people stricken by physical poverty, handicap, or catastrophe?

2. Spiritual needs

“One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4b

Jesus knew people needed more than physical bread to really live. God still uses pastors, teachers, and counselors to help those who have adequate food and material things but are feel empty spiritually. Might your calling be to help people who are spiritually hungry find fellowship and meaning in life? God uses any type of ministry or mission that is Spirit-filled to meet spiritual need.

3. Emotional needs

We urge you, our friends, to warn the idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 (GNT)

Jesus wept with Mary and Martha in the loss of their brother. He encouraged the disciples when they were disheartened. Some people in your congregation, community, and world are discouraged, depressed, or experiencing grief. They have lost hope that things will get better. Some act out their emotional pain in violent and abusive ways. Others withdraw or become addicted to alcohol or drugs. Do you

feel called to bring either inner or outer peace to a person or group that is in emotional need?

4. Intellectual needs

... how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? Romans 10:14b (NLT)

Jesus told people, “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” All of us need knowledge. We need information and training in regard to our work, society, and the problems in our world. The world needs teachers to help children and those who are illiterate to read and write. Some need trainers to help them learn business, computer, or agricultural skills so that they provide for their families. Billions need to know Christ and his will for their lives. Are you being called to serve like Christ as a teacher, missionary, or researcher?

5. Relational needs

... “You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people

beneath them. But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must become your slave. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:25-28 (NLT)

Everyone needs relationships that are warm and uplifting. Unfortunately, many in our churches, communities, and world are living under dictatorial and self-serving leaders. Relationships with God and each other are broken, and people are living in conflict with each other. Are you called to help reconcile people to God and/or to help reconcile individuals and groups to each other?

For discussion

Which of these five needs draws you most strongly? Have you done this type of ministry in your life? What was happening to your spirit as you engaged in this work? Transfer your choice to page 90.

What does your church have to offer?

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10 (TNIV)

If your congregation were a factory and you a factory worker, what would you be producing? We believe **ministry** would be your product! Our calling both as individuals and as a church is to provide ministry in the name of Jesus for people in the church, community, and world! If we minister like Jesus did, we will see God at work reducing the suffering and increasing the joy in people’s lives.

Our work is to do the **caring**, while God’s work is to do the **curing**.¹⁷ If we think it is our responsibility to do the actual healing, forgiving, and reconciling that is needed in people’s lives, we

will overburden and frustrate ourselves. We will be seeking to do something that only God can do. Our ministries will be much more joyful and relaxed when we do the caring and let God do the curing!

In a world that is filled with need, what do followers of Christ and the church have to offer? When we behave like Christ, we will offer:

- **Fellowship** in place of loneliness
- **Forgiveness** in place of guilt or shame
- **Meaning to life** in place of emptiness
- **Peace and hope** in place of fear and despair

¹⁷ Kenneth C. Haugk, *Christian Caregiving a Way of Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1984), chap. 2.

Session 2

Behaving like Christ in knowing yourself

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. There are different abilities to perform service, but the

same God gives abilities to all for their particular service. The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person, for the good of all.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (GNT)

What are your natural abilities and interests?

1. Natural abilities are strengths received at birth.

- You received them through your biological parents.
- You will naturally excel in the area of your abilities.
- Performing tasks using these strengths does not tire you out.
- You will likely meet the needs of your target people-group through your natural abilities.
- Results based on natural abilities may glorify self if not dedicated to God.
- When a natural ability is dedicated to God and filled with God's Spirit, it becomes a gift God can use.

2. Your interests draw you to another person or challenge.¹⁸

People are the most satisfied, useful, and successful when they are engaged in work that interests them. Which of the following seven areas of interest describes you most clearly and might cause you to consider a particular? Circle it.

___ **Artistic:** You are imaginative, innovative, and interested in creative endeavors. Might your ministry/mission be in the area of music, drama, or the arts?

___ **Business:** You like to complete specific tasks, enjoy organizing people, or processing data and situations. Might your ministry/mission be in leading a ministry in technology or in helping someone begin a new business?

___ **Intellectual:** You enjoy dealing with ideas and concepts more than dealing with the arts, people, or things. Might your ministry/mission be related to teaching, problem solving, or research?

___ **Manual:** You are drawn to concrete physical and mechanical work, often related to nature, tools, and machinery. Might your ministry/mission be in the area of technology, facilities, transportation, the kitchen, or the yard?

___ **Persuasive:** You are interested in influencing and persuading people to think or act in new ways. Might your ministry/mission be in promoting a ministry, teaching students, or in some form of evangelism or peacemaking?

___ **Social:** You enjoy relating to people. Might your ministry/mission be in showing God's love through welcoming, visiting, counseling, coaching, or training?

___ **Values:** You are challenged by the opportunity to preserve, interpret, and teach values and what is true. Might your ministry/mission be in teaching, preaching, writing, or defending the work of Christ?

¹⁸ Palmer Becker, *You and Your Options* (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press, 1983), 3–8

For discussion

What seems to be your strongest area of interest? Transfer it to page 90.

What does the Bible teach about spiritual gifts?

A spiritual gift can be either a natural ability that has been dedicated to God and filled with his Spirit or a God-given special ability. Following are seven truths about spiritual gifts.

1. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. No one receives all the gifts.

... Each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.
1 Corinthians 7:7b (TNIV)

2. You can't earn or buy a spiritual gift.

... May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money. Acts 8:20 (NIV)

3. Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit for the benefit of others.

Each one, as a good manager of God's different gifts, must use for the good of others, the spiritual gift he has received from God.
1 Peter 4:10 (GNT)

4. The church is to operate on the basis of spiritual gifts rather than elected office.

He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.
Ephesians 4:11 (NLT)

5. We discover our gifts through ministry.

God has given each of you some special abilities; be sure to use them to help each other....
1 Peter 4:10 (TLB)

6. We are to develop the gifts God gives us.

Put these things into practice; devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress.
1 Timothy 4:15

7. Correct use of spiritual gifts can produce fruit of the Spirit.

... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... Galatians 5:22-23

What are your spiritual gifts?¹⁹

The following gift descriptions are gathered from Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and from current experience. As you reflect on your experiences in ministry, what has God blessed? Mark each gift either **Yes**, I'm pretty sure I have this gift, **Maybe**, I may have this gift, or **No**, I don't think I have this gift. Give the Holy Spirit as much room as possible to suggest your possible gift!

Administration ____ Yes ____ Maybe ____ No

The ability to organize people, tasks, or events.
The ability to plan procedures and to set goals.
A desire to manage or coordinate a variety of responsibilities.

Apostleship ____ Yes ____ Maybe ____ No

The ability to start and oversee new ministries or churches. The ability to be culturally sensitive and to adapt to different surroundings. A desire to minister to unreached people.

Craftsmanship ____ Yes ____ Maybe ____ No

The ability to design or construct items used for ministry. The ability to work with wood, cloth, paints, metal, glass, or other raw materials. A joy in serving with skilled hands.

¹⁹Rick Warren, *Class 301: Discovering My Ministry* (Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, Calif.: 2003), 35–36.

Creative Communication

_____ Yes ___ Maybe ___ No

The ability to communicate God's truth through drama, writing, graphics, music, or dance. A desire to use artistic skills to communicate God's love and message.

Discernment _____ Yes ___ Maybe ___ No

The ability to distinguish between truth and error, good and evil, right and wrong, pure and impure motives. The ability to recognize inconsistencies in teaching or interpretation. A desire to discern the spirits.

Encouragement _____ Yes ___ Maybe ___ No

The ability to strengthen, comfort, reassure, or urge to action those who are ill, discouraged or wavering in their faith. A desire to emphasize God's promises and to place confidence in the future.

Evangelism _____ Yes ___ Maybe ___ No

The ability to invite unbelievers to place their faith in God and to commit themselves to following Jesus in everyday life. A desire to build relationships and to talk to non-believers.

Faith _____ Yes ___ Maybe ___ No

The ability to have confidence in God's ability and therefore the ability to ask for what aligns with God's will. An attitude of trust in God that allows you to go forward when others will not.

Giving _____ Yes ___ Maybe ___ No

The ability to manage finances and to choose a lifestyle characterized by generosity. Cheerful desire to contribute money and resources liberally to the work of the Lord.

Healing _____ Yes ___ Maybe ___ No

The ability to touch, pray, or offer medical services that bring healing to those who are ill. A keen desire to restore people to wholeness through God's healing power.

Helps _____ Yes ___ Maybe ___ No

The ability to serve unnoticed wherever needed. The ability to support the gifts and ministries of others. A desire to accomplish practical and necessary tasks that will free others for ministry.

Hospitality _____ Yes ___ Maybe ___ No

The ability to meet new people and to provide a safe and comfortable environment. A joy in caring for people by providing fellowship, food, and shelter.

Intercession _____ Yes ___ Maybe ___ No

The ability to consistently pray for others. A practice of praying in response to the leading of the Spirit, convinced that God moves in direct response to prayer.

Interpretation _____ Yes ___ Maybe ___ No

The ability to make known to the body of Christ the message of one who is speaking in tongues. The ability to interpret and communicate a timely message from God.

Knowledge _____ Yes ___ Maybe ___ No

The ability to search the Scriptures for insight, understanding, and truth that will help to guide the church. Having the necessary information to help the church make a decision or proceed with its work.

Leadership _____ Yes ___ Maybe ___ No

The ability to envision, establish goals, and provide direction for God's people or ministry. An ability to motivate and a desire to inspire people for the purposes of God.

Mercy _____ Yes ___ Maybe ___ No

The ability to express love, grace, and dignity to those who may be lonely, forgotten, or facing hardships and crises. A desire to cheerfully and practically help those who are suffering or are in need.

Miracles _____ *Yes* ____ *Maybe* ____ *No*

The ability to speak God's truth and see it confirmed by an accompanying miracle. A desire to authenticate the ministry or message of God through supernatural interventions that glorify him.

Prophecy (Preaching)

_____ *Yes* ____ *Maybe* ____ *No*

The ability to make God's word and will known through public proclamation. The ability to clearly describe the promises and judgments of God. A desire to help people repent and to live a life that reflects the kingdom of God.

Reconciling (Peacemaking)

_____ *Yes* ____ *Maybe* ____ *No*

The ability to help people in conflict listen to each other, and to help them relate in new and just ways.

Shepherding (Pastoring)

_____ *Yes* ____ *Maybe* ____ *No*

The ability to nurture, care for, and protect care receivers. The ability to guide and equip followers to spiritual maturity and ministry. A desire to model how to be a follower of Christ.

Teaching _____ *Yes* ____ *Maybe* ____ *No*

The ability to clearly explain and apply the word of God to the lives of students. A desire to communicate biblical truth so that it will inspire greater knowledge and faithful discipleship.

Tongues _____ *Yes* ____ *Maybe* ____ *No*

The ability to speak, worship, or pray in a language unknown to you. The ability to worship with unknown words too deep for the mind to comprehend. A desire to experience intimacy with God.

Wisdom _____ *Yes* ____ *Maybe* ____ *No*

The ability to apply knowledge effectively to a specific situation. The ability to provide divinely given solutions in the midst of confusion. A desire to provide direction and next steps for God's workers.

List and rank the gifts you have marked yes and maybe:

Yes

Maybe

For discussion

Share with the group what you think might be your spiritual gift(s). Test your perceptions with the observations of other group members. Help those who have difficulty identifying their gift(s) in their discernment. Transfer your possible spiritual gift(s) to page 90.

Session 3

Behaving like Christ by offering yourself

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ that you are serving. Colossians 3:23-24 (TNIV)

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. Philippians 1:12 (NIV)

One of the most overlooked factors in determining the ministry or mission God has for us is our past experiences. In this exercise, you will be asked to name and reflect on experiences you have had that can help you to minister in the church and God's reconciling mission in the world.

What spiritual experiences have you had?

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. James 4:8a

What has been your most memorable spiritual experience? When did God or God's guidance seem especially close or real to you? When and in what setting you were baptized? Complete the following sentence:

I had a special spiritual experience when...

How might your most important spiritual experience be used in ministry and mission? Transfer it to page 90.

What painful experiences have you had?

[God] helps us in all our troubles so we are able to help others who have all kinds of troubles using the same help that we ourselves have received from God. 2 Corinthians 1:4 (GNT)

Our greatest strengths for ministry often come out of a weakness or time of pain. What painful experiences have you had that might be used in ministry or mission? These might include such things as an illness, accident, failure, death

of a loved one, an abortion, abuse, bankruptcy, divorce, a handicap, or addiction. Complete the following sentence:

One of my most painful experiences in life was when ...

How might this painful experience be used in ministry and mission? Transfer it to page 90.

What educational experiences have you had?

Always remember what you have learned. Your education is your life—guard it well. Proverbs 4:13 (GNT)

Knowledge and skills help us to be effective in ministry and mission. What schools, classes or workshops have you attended that were especially helpful? What skills or qualifications did you acquire? Complete the following sentence:

I have graduated from _____ and gained skills in ...

How might this degree or skill be used in ministry and mission? Transfer it to page 90.

What work experiences have you had?

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Jeremiah 29:11

A work environment often provides an excellent setting for ministry or mission. Complete the following sentences:

I have had vocational experience as a ...

In my work environment I have opportunity to ...

How might your work experience or work environment be used in ministry or mission? Transfer your thought to page 90.

What ministry experiences have you had?

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, people will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. 2 Corinthians 9:13 (TNIV)

Which of your ministries has God blessed (music, visitation, caregiving, teaching or serving, etc.)? Complete the following sentences:

I have ministered to the following age groups:

The ministry that I have enjoyed the most is ...

In the community, I have been involved in ...

Beyond my community, I have been involved in ...

The ministry that has been most blessed is ...

For discussion

What do your previous experiences in ministry and mission say about what you might be called to in the present? Transfer your thoughts to page 90. Be prepared, with your small group, to brainstorm a possible ministry in the church and in God's mission in the world that is right for you.

Session 4

Behaving like Christ in ministry and mission

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Romans 12:11-13 (NIV)

In this final session, you will build on what you have learned about ministry and about yourself. You will be invited to commit yourself to a ministry in your congregation and, if possible, to an aspect of God's mission in the world.

What have you learned about yourself?

1. To what type of human need are you most clearly drawn? See page 82.

- ☐ Physical need
- ☐ Spiritual need
- ☐ Emotional need
- ☐ Intellectual need
- ☐ Relational need

2. For what do you seem to have a natural ability?
See page 84.

3. Which of the seven interest areas of life attracts you? See page 85.

- ☐ Artistic
- ☐ Business
- ☐ Intellectual
- ☐ Manual and Technology
- ☐ Persuasive
- ☐ Social
- ☐ Values

4. What is/are your strongest spiritual gift(s)?
See pages 85-87.

5. What experience you have had might be useful in your ministry or mission? See pages 88-89.

A spiritual experience is ...

A painful experience is ...

An educational/training experience is ...

A work experience is ...

A ministry experience is ...

To what ministry in the church do you feel called?

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:7

As you consider your interests, abilities, spiritual gifts and experiences, and as you look at the needs in your congregation, what ministry might God be calling you to do? What do you feel an inner urge to do? What are people inviting you or encouraging you to do? If you knew that you could not fail, what would you like to do?

If you need further help in choosing a ministry, the list of opportunities and roles below may prompt an idea. If you had the time and opportunity, which of the following ministries might you choose? Check all that apply and then choose the one to which you feel most drawn.

Write your thoughts below. Be courageous!

Roles for ministry

1. Worship

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worship planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Guitarist/instrumentalist | <input type="checkbox"/> Soloist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worship leader | <input type="checkbox"/> Choir director | <input type="checkbox"/> Design bulletins |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pianist/organist | <input type="checkbox"/> Worship band member | <input type="checkbox"/> Floral/decor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greeter/usher | <input type="checkbox"/> Worship team singer | <input type="checkbox"/> Preacher |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sound board | <input type="checkbox"/> Children's story | <input type="checkbox"/> Drama/skit director |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | | |

2. Fellowship

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Youth pastor | <input type="checkbox"/> Small group leader | <input type="checkbox"/> Retreat staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small group hostess | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp counselor | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation director |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greeter/usher | <input type="checkbox"/> Church receptionist | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp cook |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nursery attendant | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth group sponsor | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food/potluck coordinator | | |

3. Nurture/discipleship

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sunday school teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> Book sales |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter editor | <input type="checkbox"/> Librarian | <input type="checkbox"/> VBS ministry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church historian | <input type="checkbox"/> Archivist | <input type="checkbox"/> Study leader |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trend analyst | <input type="checkbox"/> Special seminars | <input type="checkbox"/> Junior superintendent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Youth teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> Christian education director | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

4. Ministry

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children's ministry | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth leader | <input type="checkbox"/> Addict counsel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hospice volunteer | <input type="checkbox"/> Benevolent fund committee | <input type="checkbox"/> Food bank |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day care assistant | <input type="checkbox"/> Christmas program | <input type="checkbox"/> Home visitor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day care worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage counselor | <input type="checkbox"/> Retirement center |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camp physician | <input type="checkbox"/> Media minister | |

5. Mission/evangelism/peacemaking

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pastor of outreach | <input type="checkbox"/> Peace committee | <input type="checkbox"/> Camp speaker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faith story coordinator | <input type="checkbox"/> Missionary | <input type="checkbox"/> Translator |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church planter | <input type="checkbox"/> Missionary business manager | <input type="checkbox"/> Special issues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evangelist | <input type="checkbox"/> Prison visitation | <input type="checkbox"/> News correspondent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outreach committee | <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural mission | <input type="checkbox"/> Material aid worker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disaster service representative | | |

6. Support ministries

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church administrator | <input type="checkbox"/> Treasurer | <input type="checkbox"/> Finance committee |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church secretary | <input type="checkbox"/> Project manager | <input type="checkbox"/> Photographer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Secretary of the board | <input type="checkbox"/> Internet technician | <input type="checkbox"/> Church stats |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Board member | <input type="checkbox"/> Congregational chair | <input type="checkbox"/> Program analyst |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Custodian | <input type="checkbox"/> Gardener | <input type="checkbox"/> Groundskeeper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation coordinator | | |

Are you ready to commit to a ministry in the church?

My commitment to a ministry in the church

I commit myself to _____.
(your ministry)

I will begin _____ and initially serve until _____.
(date) (date)

I will be accountable to _____.
(leader of the ministry)

Signature_____

Date_____

God,

*I thank you for the gifts that you have given me
and the opportunity to use them for your glory.
I surrender myself to be used by you.*

Help me to do the work with joy and enthusiasm.

I pray this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

To what part of God's mission in the world do you feel called?

"... the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! ..."

Luke 10:2-3 (NIV)

As you consider your interests, abilities, spiritual gift(s), and experiences, and as you think of the needs in your community and beyond, to what part of God's mission you are you being called? What do you feel an inner urge to do? What are

people inviting or encouraging you to do? Write down your thoughts. Test them with your small group. Be courageous!

If you need further help in choosing a mission, the lists of concerns and options below may be of help. If you had the time and opportunity, which special concern, peacemaking option, or form of evangelism would you choose? Check all that spark an inner urge.

To what special concern are you drawn?

- Abuse
- Assisting the poor
- Athletics
- At-risk children
- Blindness
- Business and the economy
- Caring for the sick
- Community issues
- Compulsive behavior recovery
- Deafness
- Disabilities and/or support
- Divorce recovery
- Drug and alcohol recovery
- Other
- Financial management
- Health and/or fitness
- Homelessness
- Illness and/or injury
- International and global affairs
- Law and/or justice system
- Marriage
- Media and/or entertainment
- Parenting and family
- Peace and/or politics
- Planting churches
- Race
- Other

How might you work for peace?

- Victim-offender reconciliation ministry
- Christian Peacemaker Teams
- Alternatives to military service
- Short-term service ministry
- Campaign for a justice issue
- Social or community counselor
- Other

How might you bring people to Christ?

- Personal witness
- Fellowship evangelism
- Media witness
- Celebrate addictions recovery
- Evangelistic services
- Overseas mission work
- Church planting
- Other

Are you ready to commit to God's mission in the world?

My commitment to God's mission in the world

I commit myself to _____.

I will begin _____ and initially serve until _____.
(date) (date)

I will be accountable to _____.
(leader of the mission)

Signature _____

Date _____

God,

*I thank you for the gifts you have given me and
the opportunity to use them for your glory.*

I surrender myself to be used by you.

*Help me to do this mission work with joy and
enthusiasm.*

I pray this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Appendix: Bible Translations

CEB	Common English Bible
GNT	Good News Translation
ISV	International Standard Version
KJV	King James Version
NCV	New Century Version
NIV	New International Version
NIRV	New International Reader's Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Phillips	J.B. Phillips New Testament
TLB	The Living Bible



**Mennonite
Church
USA**

Mennonite Church USA

3145 Benham Ave., Suite 1
Elkhart, IN 46517

718 N. Main St.
Newton, KS 67114-1703

1251 Virginia Ave.
Harrisonburg, VA 22802-2434

Toll-free: 1-866-866-2872
Llamada gratis, operadora
en español: 1-877-665-6662

www.MennoniteUSA.org

20141002

**Mennonite
Church
Canada**

Mennonite Church Canada

600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4

Toll free: 1-866-888-6785

www.MennoniteChurch.ca