



*Discovering*  
The Good and Beautiful  
COMMUNITY

L E A D E R   G U I D E

*by Matthew Johnson*

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THE APPRENTICE SERIES SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDES & SUPPORTING MATERIALS.

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For more information contact Aprentis, 2100 W. University Ave., Wichita, KS 67213 or log on to the web site <http://www.aprentis.org>.

# INSTRUCTIONS

This document is the third installment of the Apprentice study. It begins with Session 25 which covers chapter 1 of *The Good and Beautiful Community*. One of the challenges of this study is helping a group of folks practice BEING a good and beautiful community instead of just talking about it. To help with this, there are a few sessions that have suggestions for additional activities your group can do outside the normal meeting time. This occurs in Sessions 26, 27 and 28 (Chapters 2, 3 and 4 respectively). As the leader of these sessions you will need to decide in advance which activities are feasible and would be helpful to your group. You will need to make the necessary arrangements for each activity. These suggestions are optional, but they do put flesh and blood on the ideas discussed in the book which can lead to deeper transformation.

## HOW TO USE THIS LEADER GUIDE

This Guide combines the Small Group Guide Appendix in the book with additional questions and activities for leading the group through each session. Some questions and suggested activities from the Small Group Guide have been omitted or expanded to enhance the experience when the group has a leader—like you!

You will need only one copy of this Leader Guide to use in class. Occasionally you will have to make copies of handouts for the class. They immediately follow the session or are part of the supporting materials listed on the home page and in the Table of Contents. To help make each Guide more useful and readable, headings are printed in CAPS/SMALL CAPS, instructions are in a regular font, and any part that should be read to the group is in *italics*.

The Study begins with Session 0—Getting Acquainted—which gives the group a chance to become familiar with one another and the idea of community. During this session the weekly format of each gathering, which differs a little from the first two studies, and the expectations for each participant are introduced. One component, “Chapter Challenge,” is not in Session 0. The next session—00 Introduction—is very important because it lays out key ideas for the rest of the book. If the group does not have a working grasp of these central ideas, it may lose sight of the true vision of the Apprentice Series.

If your group is new but the participants have worked through *The Good and Beautiful God* and *The Good and Beautiful Life* in other groups, then you can begin with Session 0 and skip Session 00. Have the group read the “Introduction” and the first chapter of *The Good and Beautiful Community* as preparation for Session 1. If your group has been together AND has worked through the first two books in the Apprentice Series, you may choose to skip Sessions 0 and 00, beginning with Session 1. However, it would be helpful for the group to discuss their ideas and experiences of community during their first session together.

# STUDY SCHEDULE

Week	Session	Chapter	Length of Session
1	Session 0	Getting Acquainted (option for new groups)	90 minutes
2	Session 00	Introduction (option for new groups)	90 minutes
3	Session 25	Chapter 1: <i>The Good and Beautiful Community</i>	90 minutes
4	Session 26	Chapter 2: <i>The Good and Beautiful Community</i>	90 minutes
5	Session 27	Chapter 3: <i>The Good and Beautiful Community</i>	90 minutes
6	Session 28	Chapter 4: <i>The Good and Beautiful Community</i>	90 minutes
7	Session 29	Chapter 5: <i>The Good and Beautiful Community</i>	90 minutes
8	Session 30	Chapter 6: <i>The Good and Beautiful Community</i>	90 minutes
9	Session 31	Chapter 7: <i>The Good and Beautiful Community</i>	90 minutes
10	Session 32	Chapter 8: <i>The Good and Beautiful Community</i>	90 minutes
11	Session 33	Chapter 9: <i>The Good and Beautiful Community</i>	90 minutes
12	Session 34	Developing a Group Rule and Celebrating the Completion of the Study	90 minutes

PLEASE NOTE: Please be aware of conflicts such as holidays. See “Becoming a Group Spiritual Director” for a schedule that includes suggested dates.

# GETTING ACQUAINTED

## SUPPLIES

- ✎ Nametags and markers
- ✎ Blank paper and pens for the Exploring Community activity

## WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Begin by going around the room and having everyone briefly share their name, a little information about themselves, and if they have participated in any other book studies from The Apprentice Series.

Once everyone has shared, go around the room a second time asking everyone to briefly share their faith journey as well as what they hope to get from this study. Mentally note what folks are seeking and allow these Spirit-led desires to shape your opening prayer.

## OPENING PRAYER

After everyone has shared, take a moment to offer a prayer inviting God to lead the group over the course of the next several weeks into deeper truth and love. Or read this prayer aloud:

*God of new beginnings, you have brought us together to share this time. We give you thanks for each person here, and for their willingness to accept your invitation to be part of a good and beautiful community. We invite your Spirit to be at work throughout our study, setting us free from false narratives that would hold us back from you and your love. We entrust ourselves to you, knowing that as we draw closer to you, we will find ourselves drawn closer to one another and forming a unique and loving community. We ask these things in the name of your son, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

## EXPLAINING THE FORMAT

It is important for participants to understand in advance the process the class will use to study and apply the teachings of the book. The power of The Apprentice Series to lead us toward transformation comes through the Holy Spirit's work in three components of change:

1. replacing false narratives with the narratives of Jesus,
2. engaging in soul-training exercises that awaken us to God's kingdom and invite God to change our spirits, minds and bodies,
3. gathering with a community of Christians who are also seeking God's kingdom.

These components of transformation are discussed in greater depth in the "Introduction" of the book.

With these components in mind, each chapter of *The Good and Beautiful Community* will explore false narratives that prevent the formation of a healthy community. To help the reader take hold of the true narrative that Jesus embodies, there will be a soul-training exercise which should be practiced during the week. Once a week, this group can come together to discuss the ideas of the chapter as well as explore the blessings and challenges of the soul-training exercise.

The group time will be divided up this way:

1. **OPENING TO GOD.** Each session will begin with 5 minutes of silence to allow the group to become fully present to God and one another. To lead into this time of silence, ask for a volunteer each week to bring something to share that connects with the chapter such as a Scripture passage, poem, quote or song. At the conclusion of the silence there will be a suggested prayer. You may use the suggested prayer or offer a prayer of your own or simply ring a meditation chime, or say "Amen."
2. **SOUL-TRAINING.** Following the time of silence, the group will reflect on the soul-training exercise for the week. It is important for the members of the class to understand that these practices are not always easy. They require time, energy and commitment. However, these requirements are more than worth it if we grow in our awareness

of God's kingdom in our midst and if the Spirit, working deep within us, leads us to love and life. For each person there will be the occasional exercise that is a unique struggle. These experiences should be shared with the group because often the greatest insights come out of our struggles. Encourage participants to be open and honest with their experiences of the soul-training exercises.

3. ENGAGING THE CHAPTER. Each session will also include a time to discuss the key ideas of the chapter. When discussing the chapter, honesty is foundational. Participants should feel free to disagree with the author and even with one another as long as the disagreement is presented respectfully. It is through such discussion that transformation can really happen. Participants should also embrace any emotions that surface through the reading and discussion. Emotions often give us insight into deeper issues we are experiencing. When we ignore emotions, we short circuit the insights we might gain by naming them. Finally, discussion should remain on topic unless an individual or couple is working through a particular issue not related to the topic that has surfaced because of the material.
4. ENGAGING THE WORD. We are a people of the Word, and it is important each week that we reconnect with the Bible passages that help form and shape our understanding of the good and beautiful community.
5. EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION. While discussion is vital to our journey together as a group, it is also important that we have experiences that move us deeper. Each session will include an activity that creates space for this deeper encounter with God and one another. Each member of the group will need to enter this time with an open mind and an open heart. People are sometimes uncomfortable when they are asked to do something beyond talking, but if we only discuss an idea we do not engage it on deeper physical, emotional and spiritual levels. Certainly, not every exercise is going to have a profound impact on every participant, but group members should keep in mind that even if the exercise is not speaking to them, it could be helping someone else greatly. If this time is held with reverence, those who are being touched will have the space they need.
6. GO IN PEACE. A concluding quote or thought will be offered to send the group from their time together.
7. FOR THE COMING WEEK. Because each chapter presents a different topic and soul-training exercise, it is important to look ahead and be prepared. This brief section will alert the group to practices that need extra time in planning.

## WRITING A PLAN FOR LIFE

At the conclusion of *The Good and Beautiful Community*, the reader is invited to create a plan for life. This plan is a composite of the soul-training exercises and other spiritual practices that help us be mindful of God's presence. Throughout this study there will be opportunities for the group to reflect on the soul-training exercises from previous chapters. Occasionally the group will need to be reminded to return to previous practices so they can decide which ones they want to write into their plan and which ones they will want to leave out. Detailed instructions for writing the plan for life are contained in the final section of *The Good and Beautiful Community*.

## EXPLORING COMMUNITY

As a conclusion to the class, spend about 20 minutes discussing everyone's understanding of community. Begin by giving everyone a copy of the definition listed below, or one from another dictionary. Have a volunteer read the definitions aloud and then discuss the four questions.

The *Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary* defines community this way:

- 1: a unified body of individuals: as
  - a: state, commonwealth
  - b: the people with common interests living in a particular area; broadly : the area itself <the problems of a large community
  - c: an interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common location

- d: a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society  
    <a community of retired persons
- e: a group linked by a common policy

After reading through the list of definitions, discuss these questions:

1. Which definition best matches your first thought when you think of the word community? What about that particular definition matches your thoughts?
2. What would you add to this list of definitions?
3. How does the Church fit into these definitions? How might the Church challenge these definitions?
4. On a piece of paper, have each participant write an answer to this question: What is it about the idea of community that you are attracted to? Invite everyone to share as they are comfortable.

Keep these thoughts and questions in mind as you work through *The Good and Beautiful Community*.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Gracious God, you have given us many tools to help us grow in our discipleship, and for these we are thankful. But more wonderful than any tool are the relationships we have with the people who make this spiritual journey with us. Thank you, God, for the community you have given us. May we always be open to your Spirit's work in our midst as we grow into life as your children. Amen.*

### FOR THE COMING WEEK

The group needs to read the “Introduction” to *The Good and Beautiful Community*. There is no specific soul-training exercise to do during the week, however it would be beneficial for each person to observe 5 minutes of silence each day to help them connect with God’s loving presence. For groups who have worked through *The Good and Beautiful God* and *The Good and Beautiful Life*, skip Session 00 and have the group read the “Introduction” and the first chapter as preparation for Session 1.

Recruit a volunteer who will bring a brief Scripture passage, prayer, poem or song that will be read as a lead-in to the 5 minutes of silence at the beginning of the next session.

# INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION CHALLENGE

There are two main challenges with the “Introduction.” First is the number of foundational ideas that the “Introduction” contains. For individuals who have read *The Good and Beautiful God* and *The Good and Beautiful Life* these ideas are a review, but for someone who has not read these books, the ideas of transformation and grace will need to be clearly understood to keep the rest of this study healthy.

The second challenge comes from understanding the author’s desire to wed contemplation and action. Depending upon your background you may come from a tradition or be part of a congregation that emphasizes personal piety more than social action or vice versa. Be aware of this tendency and try to keep the two connected in a healthy relationship. It is through contemplation that we discover our identity, and it is through action that we express that identity. My experience in working with individuals and groups has been that folks with a background in active social justice sometimes struggle to embrace the immense value of contemplation. On the other hand, groups with a history of practicing piety may feel condemned if there is emphasis on action without a connection to contemplation. As the leader, watch carefully for these tendencies and be proactive in responding as issues arise.

## SUPPLIES

- ☞ Nametags and markers (giving people a second chance to learn names)
- ☞ White board or tablet for recording answers during Engaging the Introduction

## OPENING TO GOD [5 minutes]

Have the volunteer from last week offer their reading as a lead-in to 5 minutes of silence. At the end of the 5 minutes you may offer the following prayer, or a prayer of your own.

*God of all creation, you have created us for wholeness, and through your Son, Jesus Christ, we are witness to what the fullness of human life can be. Even more, through the gift of your Holy Spirit even the most basic practices of sleep, study and listening become tools that lead us toward transformation. Thank you, loving God, for these generous gifts. Open our hearts and our minds now as we seek your Spirit’s guiding. Amen.*

## SOUL-TRAINING [15 minutes]

If your group is not experienced in observing 5 minutes of silence, it will be beneficial to reflect on their experience of having quiet time with God each day. Use these questions to facilitate that discussion:

1. Were you able to have 5 minutes of silence with God each day? If so, describe what was helpful and what was difficult about that time.
2. What did you learn about yourself by having 5 minutes with God every day?
3. How did the time impact your relationship with and understanding of God?

## ENGAGING THE INTRODUCTION [30 minutes]

The “Introduction” to *The Good and Beautiful Community* gives foundational ideas for the entire Apprentice Series. As a large group discuss the following questions to help better understand these ideas.

1. The author explains that this series is built on a model of transformation that has four components: narratives, spiritual practices, community and the power of the Holy Spirit. How would you describe these four components in your own words? (Leader, it would be helpful to write key words from people on a whiteboard or large tablet of paper.)



2. This book looks at the second part of the Great Commandment: loving our neighbor as ourselves. Our ability to love our neighbors flows out of God's love poured into us. When have you felt especially loved by God? If you are comfortable, describe your experience with a small group of two or three people within your group.
3. With this book, the author is striving to achieve a difficult balance. He writes, "So the aim here is to create a happy marriage between contemplation and action, piety and mercy, personal devotion and social service" (p. 13). How balanced is your own life in terms of personal devotion and social service? What is needed to achieve balance between these two?
4. Dallas Willard is quoted as saying, "The true social activist is the person who lives as an apprentice of Jesus in his or her ordinary relationships" (p. 14). Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your answer.
5. Based on the author's "Introduction," how would you describe the purpose of this book to a friend who was thinking about reading it?

### ENGAGING THE WORD [25 minutes]

Have a volunteer read aloud Ephesians 2:8-10, then discuss the questions below.

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. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

1. How does this passage address the relationship between faith and good works?
2. Have there been times in your life when you believed you had to earn your salvation through works? If so, describe what that experience was like.
3. What feelings stir within you when you realize that you were "created in Christ Jesus for good works"?

### CLOSING PRAYER [5 minutes]

*God of grace, you have reconciled us to yourself, and we cannot boast in ourselves for this, but instead we can give you thanks and praise. What is more, you have created us for good works, so that our light may so shine before others that they will give you praise. Fill our hearts with the knowledge of your unwavering love for us, and strengthen our hands and feet that we might go into the world to reveal your love to others. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

### FOR THE COMING WEEK

The group needs to read Chapter 1, "The Peculiar Community," and prepare to discuss it during the next class. In addition the group will need to set aside sufficient time for the soul-training exercises described following the chapter on page 38. The exercise is called 2 x 4 because we are invited to spend 2 hours with God and to engage in 4 acts of Christian peculiarity. As a group look through the explanation of these soul-training exercises and make certain everyone is clear on what they need to do. Because there are multiple facets to this discipline, it will be helpful to have the entire week to complete them.

Finally, recruit a volunteer who will bring a Scripture, prayer, poem or song for the next class as a lead-in to the opening silence.

# CHAPTER 1, SESSION 25: THE PECULIAR COMMUNITY

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

With this chapter it may be tempting for members of the group to slip into legalism and guilt. Whenever we are confronted with the lives of other Christians, it is tempting to judge and condemn ourselves rather than see it as an invitation from the Holy Spirit to grow and learn. If guilt begins to surface, keep the group mindful of the story of William Penn and the carrying of his sword.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that the Church has largely failed to produce people who are “different,” and that includes most of us, so we need to be honest about the issues we have adjusted to in our world and allow the Spirit of Christ to challenge us to live differently.

## SUPPLIES

- ☞ Altar (any type of table with a cloth on it)
- ☞ Candle (preferably a pillar type)
- ☞ Lighter
- ☞ Pens and paper for the group

## OPENING TO GOD [5 minutes]

Have the person who volunteered last week offer their reading as a lead-in to 5 minutes of silence.

These 5 minutes of silence allow the members of the group to release the tension and busyness of their day and become fully present to the moment. At the conclusion of the silence you may offer a brief prayer, ring a meditation chime, or simply say “Amen.”

## SOUL-TRAINING [10-20 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. Use the questions below to discuss your experience of spending two hours with God and performing four acts of peculiarity.

### TWO HOURS WITH GOD

1. As you are comfortable, share with your group how you spent your two hours with God (for example: a single two hour block, one hour of worship plus one hour at a park, or eight 15 minute blocks).
2. Did you utilize the author’s eight suggested steps for quiet time? What steps were most helpful? If you left any steps out, why did you omit them?
3. What challenges did you encounter in spending two hours with God?
4. How did the time with God affect you?

### FOUR ACTS OF PECULIARITY

1. What effect did your four acts of peculiarity have on you?
2. What challenges did you experience in fulfilling this soul-training exercise?
3. How were your acts of peculiarity an expression of God’s peculiarity?
4. Did your “maladjusted” actions ever give you a sense of being a citizen of the kingdom of God? If so, how?

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30-40 minutes]

If you divided into sub-groups for your discussion of the soul-training exercise, you may regroup for your discussion of the chapter. If time is limited, read through the following questions and note which ones you especially want to discuss, and then begin with those questions.

1. What is your earliest recollection of church? How did it shape your understanding of God and sharing life with others?
2. Can you recall a time you encountered a good and beautiful community? If so, describe your experience and what the group was like?
3. Read aloud the Athenagoras quote on pages 28-29. What is most striking to you about his description of the Christians? What would he write about Christians in your community?
4. The author gives us this description of God's peculiar people:  
 For example, if I (by the power of the Spirit) begin telling the truth in my life, I will become an oddity. If I can learn to slow down, live without being ruled by anger and actually pray for people who try to cut me down, I will be considered weird (p. 27).  
 Then Cornel West gives us this description of how we are to be maladjusted to the ways of the world: "There have always been Christians who are well-adjusted to greed, well-adjusted to fear, well-adjusted to bigotry" (p. 34). The author adds, "all Christians *ought* to be maladjusted to things like injustice, greed, materialism and racism."  
  - ☞ Do you agree that Christians should be "peculiar" and "maladjusted"? Why or why not?
  - ☞ How do you feel about being peculiar because of your faith?
  - ☞ On page 31 the author writes, "The God that Jesus reveals is peculiar." What is your reaction to this statement?
5. Reread the first four paragraphs of "Trust the Leading of the Spirit, not Laws and Rules" on pages 35-36.  
  - ☞ What wisdom do you draw from George Fox's response to William Penn regarding wearing his sword?
  - ☞ Is there any area of your life you wish someone would tell you what to do? How can you apply Fox's principle?

### ENGAGING THE WORD [10-20 minutes]

Have a volunteer read aloud Romans 12:1-2. Then discuss the following questions.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship. Do not conform 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.

1. As a group, create a list of words and phrases from this passage that point to the peculiarity of Christians. Explain why you have chosen those words.
2. What does the phrase "be transformed by the renewing of your minds" mean? How do we do that?
3. Why would the renewing of our minds lead us to not be "conformed to this world"?

### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION

On pages 32-34 the author describes various people throughout history and even today who are peculiar. This segment of the session will give participants a chance to name the individuals in their life who have been maladjusted inspirations for them. It will also give everyone an opportunity to listen for the Spirit's leading in ways they can become more maladjusted to this world.

To help set a reflective tone for this segment, you may want to move to a different room, particularly if the room where you regularly meet does not have a warm and worshipful feel to it. Whether you move to another room or not, you will need to redirect everyone's attention to the altar area.

Begin with a few moments of silence to give everyone a chance to relax and open themselves to the Spirit's presence. Light the candle as a reminder that Christ is present as our light and life. Then offer this prayer or a prayer of your own:

*Gracious, loving and peculiar God, throughout history you have raised up people who were maladjusted to the patterns of this world, and for those people we give you thanks.*

*We give you thanks for Abraham who set out for an unknown land and had faith in your promise to him.*

*We give you thanks for Moses who led your people to freedom.*

*We give you thanks for the prophets who confronted your chosen people.  
 We give you thanks for Mary who surrendered herself to your will.  
 We give you thanks for John the Baptist who lived in the wilderness so he would recognize your coming into the world.  
 We give you thanks for Paul who saw the boundaries between people dissolved by Christ.  
 We give you thanks for all those throughout history who, by the gift of your Holy Spirit, were able to see greed, injustice and oppression in the world around them and had the courage to stand against such forces.  
 We are indeed surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.  
 Lead us on, o Lord, to be your people filled with Christ's presence in our hearts, planted securely in your wondrous Kingdom.  
 Reveal to us greed, injustice and oppression in our own times and give us the courage to stand with you in opposing such forces in our own individual lives and in the larger social structures of our world.  
 This we pray in the name of your Son, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

After the prayer, invite the group to spend a few moments in silent reflection. Have each person write down in a journal, in their book, or on a blank sheet of paper someone who has inspired them by being maladjusted to this world. (They don't have to have known this individual personally.) Each person can also list the characteristics they find inspiring from that person's life. Two examples would be:

*Francis of Assisi—characteristics: left a life of wealth and comfort to serve the poorest in his world.*

OR

*My cousin Rich, who lived a life free from material possessions and loved strangers unconditionally.*

Give the group about 5 minutes. After the 5 minutes, ask everyone to discuss with a partner who they wrote about and what they wrote. Give partners about 5 minutes to share.

Next, return to silence, but this time have each individual reflect on any sign of peculiarity in their own life and have them write about that. What changes have they made in their life as they have become more like the God Jesus reveals?

After the silence, invite everyone to turn to their partner again and discuss what they noticed. It is possible folks will feel awkward talking about themselves. Encourage everyone simply to be honest and to remember that they are celebrating God's work in their lives, not their own accomplishments.

Finally, spend time in silence with individuals asking the Spirit to reveal any aspect of their life where they have become conformed to the patterns of this world. They might want to journal these thoughts.

When the 5 minutes of silence has ended, invite people to turn to their partner and reflect on what they felt the Spirit revealing, if anything. The partners can pray and encourage one another throughout the week, perhaps exchanging e-mails or phone calls. Remind the group that they should not feel condemned by these revelations but should see them as invitations to a deeper understanding of who God is and how God is revealed in their life.

### GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Have a volunteer read aloud the following Scripture passage:

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us (1 John 4:7-12).*

### FOR THE COMING WEEK

The next chapter explores the source of hope for the Christian community. The soul-training exercise is sharing your faith. The author gives very constructive steps to make this happen, however you will need to begin early in the week in order to see the impact of these steps prior to your next gathering.

Finally, recruit a volunteer to bring a Scripture, prayer, poem or song for the next class as a lead-in to the opening silence.

# CHAPTER 2, SESSION 26: THE HOPEFUL COMMUNITY

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Within this chapter there are two ideas that the group needs to grasp. The first idea is that we are a people who have hope because we know the outcome of all things will be good. We have this hope because we believe God's will is going to prevail. The second idea is that we must be a people who witness to this hope and share it with others. Understanding how these two ideas are related may stretch your group based on their own understanding of witnessing. Certainly, most Christians would acknowledge that we are called to be people of hope. Likewise, most Christians recognize our call to be a witness to the world. However, witnessing is not always seen as related to hope. In fact, many times witnessing has more to do with avoidance of eternal damnation than hope in a good future. As you are able encourage the group to articulate in their own words how hope and witnessing are related, so they can connect these ideas to one another and live them in a healthy way.

## SUPPLIES

If you do option 2 for “Experiencing Transformation”:

- ☞ A large flower box filled with soil with enough space for every participant to plant approximately 5 seeds
- ☞ A package of seeds (any variety you prefer) with enough seeds for each participant to have 5 or 6

## OPENING TO GOD [5 minutes]

Have the person who volunteered last week offer their reading as a lead-in to 5 minutes of silence.

These 5 minutes of silence allow the members of the group to release the tension and busyness of their day and become fully present to the moment. At the conclusion of the silence someone in the group may offer a brief prayer, ring a meditation chime, or simply say “Amen.”

## SOUL-TRAINING [10 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. Use the questions below to discuss your experience of sharing your faith.

1. Have you been practicing any of the seven steps prior to reading this chapter? How does it encourage you to know that you are already playing a significant role in reaching others?
2. Which of the seven activities was most helpful to you? Why?
3. What difficulties did you discover as you worked through these steps? What might these difficulties teach you?
4. How will you apply these steps beyond this study?
5. What did you learn about God, yourself or others through this soul-training exercise?

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30-40 minutes]

If you divided into sub-groups for your discussion of the soul-training exercise, you may regroup for your discussion of the chapter. If time is limited, read through the following questions and note which ones you especially want to discuss, and then begin with those questions.

1. What have been your experiences with witnessing, evangelism or faith sharing?
2. Of the six excuses for not witnessing (p. 45), which one are you most inclined to use for not sharing your faith story? Why?
3. John Zizioulas writes that the Christian community “has its roots in the future and its branches in the present” (p. 48). How does this quote and the author's interpretation of it make you feel about the future? How do your feelings about the future impact your actions in the present?

4. Review “The Four-Part Story of Hope” section (pp. 48-51). What new or challenging ideas did you find in this section? As you place yourself in this meta-narrative, how do you feel?
5. As Christ’s story becomes our story, we receive a new identity that forms the foundation for our behavior, but this is not how we normally think. The author explains,
 

We almost always do the reverse: we define identity on the basis of behavior; we tell people what they must do (imperative) to find out who they are (indicative). Paul does the opposite: he tells them who they are and then tells them how they should then live. The more we grow into the story, the more the story grows into us (p. 52).

How has your identity in Christ led to changes in behavior?
6. The author points out that our lives are a witness:
 

When we tell the truth when it is hard, when we sit in the waiting room with a hurting and scared friend when we have pressing things to do, when we strive to stay in harmony with people who disagree with us, when we find a way to spend less so we can give more, when we offer a blessing to someone who curses at us, the essence of Jesus, who lives in and through us, is emerging (p. 55).

Spend a few minutes in silent reflection. Think over the last week and consider when the essence of Jesus was emerging in your life or in someone you know. If you are comfortable, share your insights with the group.
7. The author invites us to be prepared to give the reason for the hope we have, gently, respectfully, and when the person is ready to hear it. How does this approach affect your willingness to share your faith?

### ENGAGING THE WORD [10-20 minutes]

Have a volunteer read the following Scripture aloud. Then discuss the questions.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints—the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you (Col 1:3-6, NIV).

1. In your own life, when has hope produced faith and love?
2. If hope is confidence in a good future, how would you describe your level of hope?
3. What truths about God and God’s kingdom increase your hopefulness in a good future?

### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION—TWO OPTIONS

For this session’s experience you have two options. The first option is to make plans to travel to a soup kitchen and practice the seven steps of sharing your faith. The second option is a prayer experience that can be done during the class time.

#### OPTION 1: SOUP KITCHEN

This is not your normal soup kitchen experience. Normally, when we think of acts of service and soup kitchens we think of going to one, putting on our hair nets and serving the meal. Instead, the vision of this experience is to go to a soup kitchen and eat the meal with those who are being served; sitting with those who are in need. During this time you will have an opportunity to practice many of the seven steps of faith sharing such as watching for those who are hurting or hopeless, listening to someone’s story, offering them hope and perhaps even inviting them to be part of your faith community.

If you decide to go to a soup kitchen, there are several details that will need to be organized, but with the help of the group these can be done without much trouble. Work through the list of considerations with your group, allowing them to take ownership of the experience. Below this list of considerations you will find the seven steps for witnessing. Because of the setting for this experience, a few of the steps have been modified slightly.

Considerations:

1. Is there a soup kitchen within a reasonable distance of your residence? If so, where is it located? Who is the contact person for this soup kitchen?
2. When is the meal served? When can the group attend the meal?
3. The purpose of this exercise is to build relationships, so you won't be going to the soup kitchen to help serve the meal. Someone in the group will need to contact the person responsible for the soup kitchen and explain the practice and its goal: to build a relationship with someone and possibly share some hope with them. If the coordinator of the kitchen is not comfortable with this, you may have to modify your plan.
4. Group considerations:
  - a. If your group is large (or if the soup kitchen is small), you may want to split your group in half and have each group go at a different time.
  - b. Have each person in your group partner with someone else, so they can sit together to help with the conversation (this is especially helpful for introverts).
  - c. You can carpool to the soup kitchen, but it may be best to enter the soup kitchen in pairs rather than as one large group. If you enter as a large group, it is hard to divide without being conspicuous.
  - d. Be prepared in advance to explain what you are doing. There is no reason to lie about your presence at the soup kitchen, however the way you explain your presence could be either very inviting or very insulting. So be prepared to say, "I'm from (blank) church, and we just wanted to come here and get acquainted." If you are prepared, you can avoid saying something like, "Yes, I'm here from (blank) church, and we're here as part of an experiment to witness to hopeless, poor people."
  - e. Also, be prepared with questions that are appropriate for the setting. Questions such as "Where do you work?" or "Where do you live?" could lead to awkward moments if the person is unemployed or homeless. Instead, think of questions that invite the person to tell their story. Questions like, "Have you always lived here?" could invite the person to share where they have lived. Or you could ask, "Do you have any family?" With these types of questions be prepared with follow-up questions that invite them to say more.
  - f. Finally, consider your attire before you go. If possible, wear old, comfortable clothes. Clothing that looks expensive or professional might make you feel "out of place" and could create an "us" and "them" image.
  - g. Please keep in mind that some of the people with whom you are speaking may already be Christians. They may be as much a blessing to you as you are to them.

On the day you are going to the soup kitchen, gather about thirty minutes before hand and spend time preparing your hearts and minds for this experience. This time of preparation will walk you through the seven steps of sharing your faith.

1. **PRAY**—Begin with a time of prayer together. Ask God to help each group of partners to connect with someone during the meal. Pray that your eyes and ears will be open to see those that God is bringing to you. Pray that, as conversations unfold, everyone will be able to follow one of the steps of witnessing, even the beautiful, simple gift of listening. Finally, pray that God will give everyone in your group patience, realizing that they may not connect with anyone during the meal.
2. **WATCH**—When you arrive at the soup kitchen you may be entering very unfamiliar territory. You may feel very self-conscious and out-of-place. Don't fight these feelings, simply welcome them and return your attention to your true purpose: building relationships with those in need. As time allows, whether it is standing in line or hanging up your coat, ask God for eyes of compassion. Look around the room and notice the body language of each person. Who is the Spirit drawing your attention to?
3. **REACH OUT**—Depending on the seating arrangement, you may have limited options on where to sit. Don't worry about this, God will lead you. Once you sit down you can begin with casual conversation,

getting to know the people around you. As you are getting acquainted you will need to be aware of what types of questions you will ask. Again, questions such as, “Where do you work?” or “Where do you live?” may lead to awkward moments if the person is unemployed or homeless. Instead, you can ask questions such as, “Where did you grow up?” and “Do you have any family?” If the conversation doesn’t open up, don’t push it, just enjoy your meal and pray for those at your table as well as the rest of your group.

If the conversation does open up, trust your intuitions and common sense in knowing what to ask. If it seems natural, reach out by asking nonthreatening yet searching questions, such as “How are you feeling about life right now? What is working? What is missing?” Throughout the conversation keep listening for clues to their heart.

4. **LISTEN**—Jim Smith says it best: “Listen well. This is so seldom done in our harried and hurried culture that it almost seems like a lost skill. Simply by listening you are demonstrating love. Listen for clues to the condition of the person’s heart. What is he or she longing for? Struggling with? The best thing to ask yourself privately is, ‘Where do I think God is working in this person’s life?’ It may be healing from a divorce, the joy of a new job or the grief of losing a loved one. Whatever it is, try to discover what the person cares about” (p. 60).
5. **CONNECT**—In the course of one conversation during one meal, it is unlikely you will have an opportunity to connect, but then again, anything is possible. Smith suggests, “Ask yourself, How does the gospel apply to [this person’s] situation?” (p. 61). Another way to understand this step is to call it the “learning” step. You may learn some beautiful and powerful truths from the people at your table if you ask a simple question such as, “What keeps you going?”
6. **SHARE**—At some point you might be asked to tell your story or share your thoughts. If that happens, do not be afraid. Trust the leading of the Spirit, and simply be honest. “Remember Peter’s advice. ‘Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence’ (1 Peter 3:15-16)” (p. 61).
7. **INVITE**—Because of the brevity of this experience, it is unlikely that the conversation will lead to a point of invitation. Nevertheless, it is possible and would be a wonderful gift to share. It is a wonderful expression of acceptance to invite someone to be part of your faith community. However, don’t extend the invitation unless you truly intend to follow through and make it possible. The person may need assistance with transportation or any number of things, and as the inviter you might need to provide them. If those provisions are not realistic, don’t extend the invitation.

If you find that a relationship has formed in this brief time, the best way to invite the person into your life and faith journey might be simply to come back to this same soup kitchen and visit again. In my experience of leading individuals through this type of experience, I have found that deep and genuine relationships begin to blossom after several months and all parties involved are transformed by the relationships.

Following the meal your group should gather somewhere to reflect on their experience. Remember that it is not a competition; some pairs will have powerful experiences and others may not. The goal is to share our hope with someone who is struggling and perhaps develop a friendship along the way. If the group enters the experience with an experimental attitude, they will be more comfortable learning from each other and perhaps trying it again with a better understanding of what might happen.

Finally, there may be one or two people in the group who are uniquely gifted for this type of ministry. If you see someone really coming alive through this experience, encourage them to incorporate this practice into their personal rule. If possible, support and challenge them to make time for this spiritual practice.

#### OPTION 2: THE HIDDEN VICTORY OF CHRIST

In a different room than the one you meet in, set a flower box filled with soil on a table. The flower box should be large enough for everyone in the group to plant a few seeds. Divide a package of seeds into two small glasses or bowls. Place chairs in a circle around the soil if possible. You will need one chair for each participant.



At the completion of the “Engaging the Word” discussion, have the group move to the room where you have set up the seeds and soil. Invite everyone to have a seat, then read the following:

*In Colossians 3:1 the Apostle Paul writes, “Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”*

*To help us understand the finished work of the risen Christ, Walter Brueggemann writes:*

*The victory of God in our time over this deathly idolatry is hidden from us, as God’s decisive victory is always hidden from us. We do not know exactly when and where the victory has been wrought. It is hidden in the weakness of neighbor love, in the foolishness of mercy, in the vulnerability of compassion, in the staggering alternatives of forgiveness and generosity which permit new life to emerge in situations of despair and brutality (p. 51).*

*Jim Smith continues by writing, “Jesus defeated the things that oppress us, which is the reason for our hope. It is not flashed by neon signs but is still all around us. We see it when a neighbor serves another and when people forgive or extend hospitality or generosity. When we do this we are participating in the victory of Jesus” (p. 51).*

*To help us experience the ascension of Christ I would like for you all to take a piece of paper and a pencil or pen and make a list of times this last week when you saw people “participating in the victory of Jesus” by serving others, forgiving, extending hospitality, practicing generosity, etc.*

Give the group between 5 and 10 minutes to create their list. Then say:

*Now that you have created a list that helps us see the places where Christ’s victory is being revealed, I would like us to have a visual reminder of that victory and how it is sometimes hidden from our sight. On the table I have set a flower box filled with soil. I ask each of you to come forward, two at a time, to plant seeds in the soil. Please plant one seed for each item on the list. Are there any questions?*

After answering questions, have participants begin planting. Once everyone has finished planting their seeds, smooth the soil and say something like this:

*Just as the seeds you planted are now hidden from our sight, so there are times when the victory of Christ is hidden from our eyes either because we are not looking for it or because it is not yet revealed. We’ll share a few moments of silence to reflect again on your list, the hidden seeds and power of knowing that Christ’s victory is accomplished.*

After a few minutes of silence, offer a short prayer of your own or this one:

*God of victory, we give you thanks that you have overcome all that would oppress us. We give you thanks that the work of Christ is finished even though we can’t always see where that victory has been wrought. By your Spirit open our eyes and tune our hearts to where your victory has been revealed so that we may be people of hope in a world of despair. Amen.*

Following the prayer, the group may want to reflect on this exercise and the quotes used in it by discussing these questions:

1. As you wrote your list of people participating in the victory of Jesus, how did the list make you feel?
2. How can our awareness of the hidden victory of Christ make us a peculiar people?
3. How can we be more aware of the victory that Christ offers in our own world?

### GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Have a volunteer read the following quote from the book to send you forth.

Roots in the future, roots in the resurrection, roots in the eternal victory of Jesus, roots that are firmly planted in eternal life, roots that nourish the trunk and the branches, and ultimately produce the fruit that draws others into the story. N.T. Wright concludes, “to be truly effective in this kind of mission, one must be genuinely and cheerfully rooted in God’s renewal.” Genuinely and cheerfully rooted. As I often say to fellow apprentices, “If you have been saved by grace, then please notify your face!” We have a real reason to cheer. The more we know the story, the more we rejoice (p. 48).

### FOR THE COMING WEEK

The next chapter explores the role of self-sacrifice within the Christian community. The soul-training exercise involves self-sacrifice in various areas of our lives.

Finally, recruit a volunteer who will bring a Scripture, prayer, poem or song for the next class as a lead-in to the opening silence.

# CHAPTER 3, SESSION 27: THE SERVING COMMUNITY

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

The largest challenge of this chapter is the radical shift many churches need to make from being *self-preserving* to being *self-sacrificing*. This is a tall order to fill and may be overwhelming for the members of your group. Nevertheless, it can be done and it must be done, and even a small group that is seeking to be a more self-sacrificing congregation will make a difference.

A secondary issue with this chapter surfaces as people consider their own practices of self-sacrifice. There are indeed some people who serve too much and do not properly care for themselves or their families. Be mindful of individuals in your group that may struggle with this balance. The words of this chapter could lead them in an unhealthy direction of guilt and condemnation. Ultimately our acts of service should flow from a heart of love, not a place of guilt or obligation. Whenever we become driven by a fear of making God or our neighbors happy, we need to evaluate our narratives.

## SUPPLIES

- ☞ Altar
- ☞ A Christ candle that will be lit at the beginning of the “Experiencing Transformation” exercise
- ☞ Unlit candles set on the altar
- ☞ Journals with pens
- ☞ Index cards
- ☞ Photocopies of the prayer used during the “Experiencing Transformation” exercise (see page 20)

## OPENING TO GOD [5 minutes]

Have the person who volunteered last week offer their reading as a lead-in to 5 minutes of silence. At the conclusion of the silence someone in the group may offer a brief prayer, ring a meditation chime, or simply say “Amen.”

## SOUL-TRAINING [10-20 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. This chapter’s soul-training exercise invites us to live unselfishly in multiple settings. Divide into groups of three or four to work through the following questions.

1. Select two of the following areas and describe what you learned about unselfish living:
  - ☞ family
  - ☞ work
  - ☞ church
  - ☞ daily life
2. What was the most difficult aspect of living unselfishly?
3. What did you learn about others as you lived unselfishly?
4. Did you grow in your ability to treasure others through this practice?

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30-40 minutes]

If you divided into sub-groups for your discussion of the soul-training exercise, you may regroup for your discussion of the chapter. If time is limited, read through the following questions and note which ones you especially want to discuss, and then begin with those questions.

1. The author opens the chapter with the story of a committee meeting. How have you seen narratives of self-centeredness and self-sacrifice at work inside or outside the church? What has been the fruit of those meetings?
2. In exploring the false and true narratives, the author contrasts a self-focused church with an others-focused church (pp. 67-70). Consider your own faith community. With your group, list the ways your community is self-focused and others-focused. What do these lists tell you?
3. The author writes, “The value of a church is not in its longevity but in its love. The success of a church is not in its size but in its service to the people and the community” (p. 72-73). Do churches struggle to focus on love instead of longevity, and service over size? What factors contribute to this struggle?
4. What was your reaction to the author’s idea of “treasuring our treasure”? Why?
5. How do you feel about Dallas Willard’s comment: “The most important task we have, especially for those in church leadership, is to pray for the success of our neighboring churches” (p. 76)?
6. Can you think of a time you gave yourself the “space of grace” (p. 77)? If so, how did the space affect the situation?

### ENGAGING THE WORD [10-20 minutes]

Have a volunteer read aloud Philippians 2:3-11, then discuss the following questions.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

who, 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.

1. What does this passage tell us about the narratives of Jesus?
2. How would you describe the metanarrative of this text (the bigger story)?
3. As a group, create a list of tangible ways you can follow the example of Christ who humbled himself for the sake of others. Individually consider which items you could do this week.

### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION

The goal for this week’s “Experiencing Transformation” is two-fold. The first goal is to celebrate the ways your faith community is already “others-centered.” The second goal is to work together as a group to either support a current

“others-centered” practice within your congregation or to come up with a way that you as a group can treasure the unique treasures of your community. First, pass out to each person a copy of the prayer that you have photocopied.

Then begin by sharing this quote from the author:

*Communities become others-centered when they are steeped in the narrative of the kingdom of God. They know that their community is an outpost of the kingdom of God, a place where grace is spoken and lived for as long as is needed. The value of a church is not in its longevity but in its love. The success of a church is not in its size but in its service to the people and the community. We are a people founded by a person who never established a church or built a building or led a finance campaign to build impressive buildings. Our leader just came and served and then died for the good of others. I suppose that would be a pretty good mission statement for a church, but one I am not likely to see: “We exist to serve others and then die, just like our Founder” (pp. 72-73).*

In a worshipful space, with an altar in the middle with one lit candle on the table and several unlit candles spread around it, invite the group to identify ways your congregation is “others-centered.” We often overlook these gifts. With each practice that is named such as housing the community food bank, sponsoring after-school tutoring, providing daycare for single parents, light a candle. After each candle is lit offer the following prayer:

Leader: *We are an outpost of your kingdom, O God.*

All: **Help us to speak and live your grace to the treasures in our midst.**

After several practices have been named, invite the group to prayerfully consider if there are any “treasures” in your community that the congregation has failed to treasure. Are there college students in need like the people the author describes? Is there an overlooked homeless population? Are there single parents who could use some help? Are there minorities that need a hand up? As these groups are identified, light another candle for each one. Again offer this prayer:

Leader: *We are an outpost of your kingdom, O God.*

All: **Help us to speak and live your grace to the treasures in our midst.**

Once 3 or 4 “treasures” have been identified, move to a time of silence. In the silence invite everyone to individually write a conversation with God on a sheet of paper, asking God how the group could treasure these treasures in the next week or two. Give the group about 10 minutes for this time of discernment.

If anyone has an idea that comes from their conversation with God, have them write it down on an index card. Gather the index cards together and read the suggestions aloud to the group, allowing the group to decide if there was one they should pursue. As you are able, be open to the Spirit’s leading in what steps to take.

Develop a plan and schedule a time so the group will be able to follow through on whatever is decided.

### GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Have a volunteer read aloud this quote:

*Communities become others-centered when they are steeped in the narrative of the kingdom of God. They know that their community is an outpost of the kingdom of God, a place where grace is spoken and lived for as long as is needed (p. 72).*

May our communities become such places.

### FOR THE COMING WEEK

The next chapter considers what unites the Christian community. The soul-training exercise is expressing love toward those you disagree with. There are practical suggestions for this soul-training, but you will need the full week to be able to implement them.

Finally, recruit a volunteer who will bring a Scripture, prayer, poem or song for the next class as a lead-in to the opening silence.

Leader: *We are an outpost of your kingdom, O God.*

All: **Help us to speak and live your grace to the treasures in our midst.**

Leader: *We are an outpost of your kingdom, O God.*

All: **Help us to speak and live your grace to the treasures in our midst.**

Leader: *We are an outpost of your kingdom, O God.*

All: **Help us to speak and live your grace to the treasures in our midst.**

Leader: *We are an outpost of your kingdom, O God.*

All: **Help us to speak and live your grace to the treasures in our midst.**

Leader: *We are an outpost of your kingdom, O God.*

All: **Help us to speak and live your grace to the treasures in our midst.**

Leader: *We are an outpost of your kingdom, O God.*

All: **Help us to speak and live your grace to the treasures in our midst.**

# CHAPTER 4, SESSION 28: THE CHRIST-CENTERED COMMUNITY

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

This chapter could be the most challenging for your group. It has the potential to stir tension on many different levels. The first level of uneasiness could arise from the idea that there is something more important than the specific way our denomination expresses its faith, and that is Christ. While this idea is difficult to disagree with, the truth is that many Christians want to believe their denomination is better than other denominations, not just different. Therefore, some individuals in your group may be very uncomfortable embracing different practices as being legitimate.

A second level of discomfort could arise for those who are the opposite of those in the first group. There are many people who don't see why there is a big deal made about the differences between groups of Christians. These folks would embrace a vision of a happy family, but they may do so at the risk of surrendering the true identity of the denomination they are part of. As the leader, you can challenge these folks to embrace the unique qualities of their own congregation, and yet be respectful and open to the unique characteristics of other faith communities.

A final level of challenge for this chapter comes in knowing what is essential for Christians to agree upon and what is nonessential. You may wish to have copies of the various Creeds available so your group can review them and decide if those statements sufficiently cover the essential beliefs of a Christian. Even within your group there could be particular issues that individuals feel very strongly about and refuse to compromise on. As always, there is no easy way to work through these conversations, however, as the leader you have the responsibility to remind everyone in the group to be respectful of the different viewpoints represented within the group. And while such conversations may feel stressful, remind the group that too often various groups of Christians isolate themselves and never learn the benefit of such dialogue.

## SUPPLIES

No special supplies are needed other than copies of the Creeds if you decide to review them.

## OPENING TO GOD [5 minutes]

Have the person who volunteered last week offer their reading as a lead-in to 5 minutes of silence.

These 5 minutes of silence allow the members of the group to become fully present to the moment. At the conclusion of the silence someone in the group may offer a brief prayer, ring a meditation chime, or simply say "Amen."

## TREASURING YOUR TREASURES FOLLOW-UP

At the conclusion of the previous session the group was invited to explore ways your congregation or group could treasure a hidden treasure in your community. If you developed a plan for doing so, utilize the following questions to process that experience:

1. Was the experience of reaching out what you expected it to be like? How was it different than you expected?
2. What internal reactions did you have as you attempted to treasure this group or these individuals?
3. What might God be teaching your congregation or group through this experience?

## SOUL-TRAINING [10-20 minutes]

This chapter's soul-training exercise invited us to love those we disagree with. If you are a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four to work through the following questions.

1. What tangible steps were you able to take to express love toward those you disagree with?
2. How did the interaction change your perspective?
3. When interacting with those who are different than you, which of John Wesley's five practices seems most difficult? Why do you think this is so?
4. What did this soul-training exercise teach you about God?

### ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30-40 minutes]

If you divided into sub-groups for your discussion of the soul-training exercise, you may regroup for your discussion of the chapter. If time is limited, read through the following questions and note which ones you especially want to discuss, and then begin with those questions.

1. The author opens this chapter with a story of being rejected by an audience because of his theological terminology. Discuss a time you have experienced rejection by other Christians because of your beliefs. How did that rejection make you feel?
2. The true narrative of this chapter is: "If you do not look, act, worship or believe as I do, but your heart beats in love for Jesus, then regardless of our differences, we can and must have fellowship with one another" (p. 89). What relationships in your life have illustrated this true narrative?
3. On page 93 the author recounts an experience of serving communion and realizing that many different types of hands were becoming one in the body of Christ. What did you take from this story?
4. Drawing from the wisdom of John Wesley, the author writes, "We can, and will, differ in how we think, which style of worship we prefer, which method of baptism we affirm, but these are not essential. The only thing that matters is that our hearts beat in love for Jesus. If we have that, we are united" (p. 96). What practical effect do you think this approach would have on the Church today?
5. Discuss any positive experiences you have had worshipping with people of a different background than your own. How does this affect your openness to future opportunities for such worship?
6. Have a volunteer read aloud the vision written by Richard Foster on page 101-2, then discuss the following questions.
  - ☞ What does this passage say about God's vision for the church?
  - ☞ What does this passage stir within you? How would you like to respond?

### ENGAGING THE WORD [10-20 minutes]

Read the following to the group to help prepare them for the Scripture encounter during this session:

*In describing the stunning nature of the unified body of Christ in the early church the author writes:*

*What might this have felt like to the members of the church in Colossae? Imagine you are Jewish, taught from birth that you are chosen by God and that the Gentiles are defiled, and then having to join hands with a Greek for prayer. Or imagine you are a slaveholder, a member of the elite class, reaching out to receive a piece of communion bread from a slave. Imagine you are a first-century man raised with the notion that women are inferior, and then looking across the room at a woman who, by her graciousness, has paid for the home you are meeting in. The cross-centered community discovered a kind of equality unknown in the first century (p. 92).*

*To help us relate the power of the experiences of the early Christians with our own lives, we will be using a Scripture reading practice that is very similar to lectio divina, but it is called Breaking Open the Word. This practice has been developed by the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and is modeled after small Christian communities in Central America.*

*The Scripture will be read three times. Before each reading a question will be shared for us to consider as we listen to the Scripture. After a few minutes of silence our insights to the questions will be discussed. Unlike lectio divina, this practice invites a higher level of*

conversation between readings, so feel free to add your own insights to the sharing of others or to ask others to say more based on what they share.

Here are the three questions:

☞ Question 1: *What word or phrase particularly speaks to you?*

☞ Question 2: *What in today's world does this passage of Scripture address?*

☞ Question 3: *To what does this passage call me? To what does it call the groups to which I belong?*

I will read the correlating question before each Scripture reading. After the discussion of the third question, there will be a brief time of silence.

The Scripture we will be using today is Colossians 3:11 from the New Revised Standard Version. Are there any questions?

Once all questions have been answered, invite the group into a few minutes of silence. Then read the following:

For the first reading the question is: What word or phrase particularly speaks to you? Here is our passage:

*There is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!*

Give the group a few minutes of silence to consider and reflect on the word or phrase that spoke to them. Then say:

*Now that you've had a few minutes to chew on this passage, what word or phrase spoke to you? Feel free to contribute even if your word or phrase has been spoken.*

Once everyone has had a chance to say their word or phrase, invite the group back into a time of silence. After a moment of silence read the following:

For the second time through the passage the question is: What in today's world does this passage of Scripture address? Here is our passage:

*There is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!*

Give the group 3 to 5 minutes of silence to consider their answer to the question, then invite everyone to share. Again, encourage the group to add their thoughts and insights to the ideas of others, and let people know that their questions can be just as valuable as their answers even though there may not be immediate answers.

Once everyone has had an opportunity to contribute their thoughts, invite the group back into a time of silence. After a moment of silence read the following:

For our final reading the question for reflection is: To what does this passage call me? To what does it call the groups to which I belong? Here is our passage:

*There is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!*

Again, give the group 3 to 5 minutes of silence to consider their own answers to these questions, then invite everyone to discuss their thoughts. Once everyone has had a chance to contribute, invite the group back into a moment of silence and end that time with either a prayer for courage to be responsive to God's invitation or simply say "Amen."

### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [20 minutes]

The time of "Experiencing Transformation" may or may not serve as a continuation of the practice of Breaking Open the Word. Either way, it is an invitation to participate in worship and conversation with a group that is different than your own. Begin by reading the following:

*It is tempting to discuss the ideas of this chapter and then never take any practical steps to live out our unity in Christ. If you are willing, as a group, we are going to spend a few minutes developing a plan to interact with a group of Christians who are different than we are. First, let's hear some of the experiences you have had in worshipping with different communities. What have been some of the different styles of worship you have participated in?*

*Has there ever been a time when you attended a church and you were the racial minority? Describe that experience.*

*Is there a congregation in your area that is racially or culturally different than your own group that no one in the group has*



*worshipped with?*

*Is everyone willing to attend worship with this congregation and perhaps learn a little about their history, their beliefs, their practices and how you are united in Christ?*

As the leader you can either recruit someone to work out the details for this trip or work them out yourself. Set a date when the entire group will attend worship at the identified church. It would be beneficial to coordinate with the leadership of the congregation you visit and to spend time talking with a few members of the congregation before and after worship to learn more of their history and understanding of God. Be clear with these leaders about your desire to see the unity of the church revealed without removing differences.

### GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Have a volunteer read aloud the following quote from the book to conclude your time together:

*How can we agree with people who refuse to agree with us? How can we be “united in mind and thought” when clearly we do not agree on every point? Should we simply let go of our ideas, opinions or doctrines? We will never agree on all things, but we can and must agree on one thing: Jesus is Lord (p. 94).*

Amen!

### FOR THE COMING WEEK

The next chapter explores reconciliation and forgiveness within the Christian community. The soul-training exercise gives three options for practicing forgiveness. As a group look at the “Three Exercises” listed on pages 122-24. Say:

*Is there anyone who would like to practice option 1, “Allowing others to forgive for you”? If so, is there a volunteer in the group who would be willing to take on the burden of unforgiveness and begin holding the situation in prayer? When the group comes together next week you will be able to share your experiences with this practice. The other options can be practiced individually.*

Finally, recruit a volunteer who will bring a Scripture, prayer, poem or song for the next class as a lead-in to the opening silence.

# CHAPTER 5, SESSION 29: THE RECONCILING COMMUNITY

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

The challenge of forgiving others has haunted many Christians. In the context of a group discussion it is often difficult to discuss the ways we have been hurt and the people we need to forgive. Hopefully at this stage in the class, members feel comfortable being open and honest with one another, however, this may not be the case for a number of reasons. As the leader, be aware of your responsibility to create a safe and inviting space for participants to open up. Also, be prepared to direct people to additional help if they need it. For example, there may be an individual in your group who needs to receive counseling in order to work through their experiences. Your encouragement and resources could help them get the support they need.

Also, please note, to help with the flow of this session the time of reflecting on the soul-training exercise has been combined with “Experiencing Transformation.” It would be helpful to the group to explain this change at the beginning of class.

## SUPPLIES

- ☞ A simple wooden cross that can have nails driven into it
- ☞ Nails and hammers
- ☞ A solid table for the cross
- ☞ A CD player and song for the “Experiencing Transformation” component

## OPENING TO GOD [5 minutes]

Have the person who volunteered last week offer their reading as a lead-in to 5 minutes of silence.

These 5 minutes of silence allow the members of the group to become fully present to the moment. At the conclusion of the silence someone in the group may offer a brief prayer, ring a meditation chime, or simply say “Amen.”

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30-40 minutes]

Please note, if time is limited, read through the following questions and identify which ones you especially want to discuss, and then begin with those questions.

1. The author begins the chapter with the story of Stan. How did this story make you feel? What role did narratives, community and soul-training play in his transformation and healing?
2. The false narrative stated in the chapter is: “Only when we forgive will we be forgiven and healed” (p. 110), but the true narrative is: “Only when we know we have been forgiven will we find healing and begin learning to forgive” (p. 111). As a group, reflect on the parts of these narratives that you agree and disagree with.
3. Who do you most identify with in Jesus’ story of forgiveness in Matthew 18:23-35? Why?
4. Clarifying that forgiveness is not something we generate from our own willpower, the author explains “Jesus . . . is both the *pattern* and the *power* of forgiveness and reconciliation” (p. 117). When have you experienced the power of Jesus which allows you to forgive someone? Discuss this experience with your group.
5. The author recounts his experience of confession with Richard Foster (pp. 117-18). As a group name your own experiences with confession. When have you experienced deepened trust through the confession of sins and the affirmation of God’s forgiveness?
6. Review the two sections titled “Keeping Boundaries of Forgiveness” (pp. 118-19) and “The Forgiveness Ambush” (pp. 120-21). How are these sections helpful? What difficult questions about forgiveness still remain for you?

## ENGAGING THE WORD [10-20 minutes]

Have a volunteer read aloud the following Scripture passage and quote from the book:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us (2 Cor 5:18-19).

In response to this passage the author writes:

This is a clear explanation of the finality of the cross. God—in Christ—is not counting our sins against us. God stopped counting and apparently never took it back up. God is no longer dealing with us on the basis of our sins but on our faith. Jesus died for all of the sins of all of the people for all time—and that means you. Do you know that? Do you have that peace that passes understanding? Do you have the joy of knowing that God has nothing against you (p. 112)?

1. Discuss as a group times you have experienced the finality of the cross and the joy that message brings.
2. How has your knowledge of God's forgiveness empowered you to be a minister of reconciliation to others?

## EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION WITH SOUL-TRAINING [30 minutes]

For this session it was a natural fit to combine the reflection for the soul-training exercise with a time of "Experiencing Transformation." The group will begin with the normal questions that go with the soul-training exercises. After this discussion, you may want to move to a different room that is more worshipful. In this second room, you will need a simple wooden cross with hammers and nails. Near the end of the exercise, participants will be able to nail their reflections to the cross. Take time prior to class to test the process and see if everything works as planned. While the group is nailing their creations to the cross, you may want music playing in the background. A song that deals with reconciliation would be great or an instrumental piece.

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. The soul-training exercises involve various steps toward and ways to experience forgiveness. Each of these three questions correlates to the three soul-training exercises; in groups of three or four answer the questions that apply.

1. If you allowed others to forgive for you, discuss the ways this practice affected you. If you were bearing the burden of unforgiveness for someone, describe your experience of daily prayer and what happened within you.
2. The author gives two steps toward forgiving someone who has hurt you: "identity" and "perspective" (p. 123). If you focused on either of these steps, explore with your group how they helped and what challenges you encountered.
3. The third practice was seeing something new in the Lord's Supper. If this was your practice, reflect on what you noticed for the first time in the Lord's Supper and how it relates to forgiveness and reconciliation.

To help us experience transformation, we will combine the ideas from 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 with the soul-training exercise of forgiving. It is important to remember that we cannot force ourselves to forgive someone, so if any member of the group is not ready to express forgiveness toward someone, that is completely acceptable because we trust the Holy Spirit to lead us to whatever place we need to be.

Begin with a moment of silence to allow the group to re-center in God's loving presence.

After the silence, give everyone a blank sheet of paper. Invite them to write down or draw something that expresses a time they felt completely forgiven and fully reconciled to God. It might be a time they were in nature and felt totally at peace. It may have occurred during a retreat or mission trip. It may be a relationship with a family member or friend.

Give the group about 10 minutes to reflect and create. If possible, provide colored pencils, markers or crayons to help folks express themselves.

After 10 minutes, call the group back together and ask them to share what they created or wrote about if they are comfortable. As folks share, ask questions that help them express the deep feelings that were associated with that experience of forgiveness.

Now invite the group back into silence. This time they will have 10 to 15 minutes to reflect on a person they need to forgive. Again, give them blank paper to either describe the way they have been wounded by this person or draw something depicting their pain.

When the 15 minutes have passed, invite everyone to share what they have created. The point of the sharing is not to force forgiveness out of the group members, so discourage the group from trying to “fix” any situation. The main point of this activity is to help us name the areas of woundedness in our lives. The group will be most helpful to those who share by simply listening closely.

After everyone has had an opportunity to explain their creation and the area of pain they have experienced, explain that they will have a time for quiet reflection while music plays. If they feel led by the Spirit to invite God into the situation to bring healing, freedom and perhaps even forgiveness, they can symbolically accept that invitation by folding their artwork or journal entry and nailing it to the cross. Ask for questions. Once the questions have been answered begin the music and enter the quiet.

Once everyone has participated who wants to, offer a prayer of your own or the following:

*God of forgiveness and reconciliation, we give you thanks that before we even realized we were separated from you, you were already reaching out to us. We give you thanks that through the teachings, life, death and resurrection of your son we can see your desire to heal us from our transgressions, deliver us from evil and bring us fully into the reality of your kingdom. With our identity rooted in the good news of your love, may we be free to go into the world and live as your ministers of reconciliation, letting everyone know that you desire to be in relationship with them. We ask this in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

When dealing with the ways people have suffered, certain shared hurts may need to be dealt with by trained professionals. Pay attention to anything that should be referred to a counselor and take personal responsibility to help that group member find help.

### GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude your time by having everyone find a partner and pray with and for them to know God’s forgiveness and reconciliation in a deeper way

### FOR THE COMING WEEK

The next chapter explores encouragement and accountability within the Christian community. The soul-training exercise is meeting with an accountability friend. You will need to work out the details for this meeting early in the week.

Finally, recruit a volunteer who will bring a Scripture, prayer, poem or song for the next class as a lead-in to the opening silence.

# CHAPTER 6, SESSION 30: THE ENCOURAGING COMMUNITY

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

There is no doubt that Christians need other Christians who will remind them of their identity as ones in whom Christ dwells. We also need constant reminding that we are residents of the kingdom of God. The difficulty arises because so many Christians have experienced condemnation and judgment rather than admonition and encouragement. While the author does an excellent job of delineating these differences, our wounds from being judged can reach very deep, and our own patterns of condemning others can be hard to break.

If your group struggles with such wounds or habits, spend additional time exploring the difference between judgment and admonishment. It may be helpful to notice the role love plays when we admonish someone and contrast that with the self-promotion that often drives condemnation. Challenge the group to consider how we can improve in our ability to admonish one another without being judgmental or hypocritical.

## SUPPLIES

- ☞ Two index cards per person
- ☞ Pens or pencils
- ☞ A simple altar space for the “Experiencing Transformation” exercise

## OPENING TO GOD [5 minutes]

Have the person who volunteered last week offer their reading as a lead-in to 5 minutes of silence.

At the conclusion of the silence someone in the group may offer a brief prayer, ring a meditation chime, or simply say “Amen.”

## SOUL-TRAINING [10-20 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. Use the questions below to discuss your experience of meeting with an accountability friend.

1. Were you able to find an accountability friend?
2. How did the time of conversation with this person affect you?
3. Have you had any experiences with an accountability friend (or group) in the past? How would you compare that experience with this week’s experience?
4. What resistance do you feel toward having an accountability friend?

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30-40 minutes]

If you divided into sub-groups for your discussion of the soul-training exercise, you may regroup for your discussion of the chapter. If time is limited, read through the following questions and note which ones you especially want to discuss, and then begin with those questions.

1. The author opens the chapter with the story of the Clay Pot Church and their pastor Tom Smith. From that opening section what inspired or challenged you?
2. In discussing the false narrative, the author explores how churches lower their expectations and eradicate commitment at the risk of decreasing genuine transformation (pp. 128-29). Describe the level of commitment expected of you in various churches you’ve attended. How did the level of commitment affect you? Have you ever seen a higher level of commitment lead to genuine transformation? If so, discuss what you saw.

3. As the author explains the true narrative he writes, “I want a community that reminds me constantly of who I am and will watch over me with love—which means both comfort and warning—so that I might live a life worthy of my calling” (pp. 130-31). Do you desire such a community for yourself? What attracts you to this idea, and what reluctance do you feel toward this type of community?
4. On a Sunday morning when the author did not want to go to church, he was reminded of his identity. He writes, “I know who I am: loved, forgiven, cleansed, made alive and destined for eternal joy. As we sing, the community reminds me who I am” (p. 132). Discuss times you have been reminded of your identity by your community of faith.
5. Has there been a person or group in your life who has spurred you on to love and good deeds? If so, please describe what happened.
6. The author tells us, “To admonish is to warn, to watch out for and to offer guidance to another” (p. 136). Why do you think we are reluctant to admonish one another? How can these concerns be addressed?
7. Do you agree with Dallas Willard’s theory that if we gave good training to the ten percent of the people in church who are ready and willing to grow, they would grow and their transformation would lead to a change in others? Why or why not?

### ENGAGING THE WORD [10-20 minutes]

Have a volunteer read aloud 1 Thessalonians 5:14.

And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them (NSRV).

Notice that there are specific gifts that are offered to people with specific needs, for example, idleness receives admonishment or warning, and encouragement is given to the faint-hearted or timid.

1. Has there ever been a time when someone in your faith community encouraged you? Explain.
2. Have you ever seen someone offer the wrong gift to a person? For example, offering warning to the weak or help to the idle.
3. How do we discern what a person needs as we stand and walk beside them?
4. Give specific examples of situations in which you could practice patience this week.

### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [20 minutes]

Within the chapter there is the beautiful idea that the faith-community has a three-fold responsibility: (1) help Christians recognize what we are capable of as God’s children, (2) challenge us to reach toward those capabilities and (3) remind us again and again that we are indwelt by Christ and we are residents of God’s kingdom. This experience aims to bring these three components into focus.

The first step, “what we are capable of being” gives participants an opportunity to reflect on the lives of other Christians and to be reminded of how other Christians have expressed their identity as a child of God. This step will take the most time and may be intimidating for group members. Emphasize with the group that what they write is for their eyes only. The second step, “holding us to a higher vision” is a time for personal confession to God. The point of this segment is not to stir guilt or frustration with ourselves, but instead to help us realize that as God’s children we are capable of doing wonderful things. The final step, “receiving the peace of Christ” is a simple time of assurance that we are indeed those who are indwelt by Christ.

You will need two index cards per person as well as pens or pencils to write with. You will also need to create a simple altar space for this experience.

### WHAT WE ARE CAPABLE OF BEING

Begin the exercise by giving everyone an index card and a pen. Invite the participants to spend 5 minutes in silence thinking about the lives of real people who have inspired and challenged them. These might be people they have known personally or people they have read about. Have participants write the name of the person on the index card along with a few points of how the person's story has inspired them and what they would like to change about their own life in order to emulate the life of that person.

Some possible famous Christians to consider would be:

- ☞ Mother Teresa
- ☞ Martin Luther King Jr.
- ☞ Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- ☞ Dorothy Day

### HOLDING US TO A HIGHER VISION

Give each participant a second index card. Have the group reflect on the points from their first index card and write down areas in their own life where they have not lived as a beloved child of God or a resident of God's kingdom. As these areas become clear, each person can write a brief prayer of confession on their card, acknowledging the areas where they have fallen short. The prayers can be specific or general, long or short. It could also be helpful for each person to consider how God might be calling them to live differently in light of the gospel.

As their prayers are completed, have each person spend a few moments in silence reflecting on their prayer, and then have them place their prayer on the altar as a way of inviting God's transforming forgiveness into their lives.

### RECEIVING THE PEACE OF CHRIST: WHO WE ARE

It is customary to receive words of pardon and forgiveness after we offer a prayer of confession. Few words of assurance are more powerful than the words spoken by our friends and neighbors. So, now that the group has laid their confessions before God, they need to be reminded who they are. Read the following words of assurance and instructions to the group:

*Friends in Christ, we do not confess our sins in order to earn God's forgiveness, because that forgiveness has already been poured out upon us through Jesus Christ. Instead, we have named our struggles and shortcomings, because we long to live lives that are fully grounded in God's kingdom. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. In light of this good news, I invite you to go from person to person and encourage each other with these powerful words:*

*[name], you are one in whom Christ dwells and delights.*

### GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude your time by having a volunteer from the group read the following quote:

I want a community who will challenge me to become who I already am: one in whom Christ dwells and delights, a light to the world, salt to the earth, the aroma of Christ to a dying world. I want a community who reminds me constantly of who I am and will watch over me with love—which means both comfort and warning—so that I might live a life worthy of my calling (pp. 130-31).

### FOR THE COMING WEEK

The next chapter focuses on generosity. The soul-training exercise is applying frugality to your time, treasures and talents, which creates margin to then be more generous.

Finally, recruit a volunteer who will bring a Scripture, prayer, poem or song for the next class as a lead-in to the opening silence.

# CHAPTER 7, SESSION 31: THE GENEROUS COMMUNITY

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Whenever the issue of generosity and financial resources are discussed it is always possible that people will feel condemned. The thrust of this chapter is that those who have resources are invited into a kingdom dance of identifying needs and meeting those needs with our resources. If we do not engage in this dance we should not feel condemned, we just aren't experiencing the fullness of kingdom life. And while we are not meant to feel condemned, we also must realize there could be an invitation from the Spirit to live more simply and give more generously. One challenge you may face as a leader is helping your group to hear such an invitation.

## SUPPLIES

- ☞ Tickets for dividing the group
- ☞ Candy bars to represent the food distribution (you will need twice as many candy bars as there are people in your group, so if you have 10 people in your group you will need 20 candy bars; if there are 5 people in your group you will need 10 candy bars—purchase full size candy bars, not the small ones)
- ☞ Extra full-size candy bars as prizes
- ☞ Bite-size candy bars as prizes
- ☞ Dictionaries
- ☞ Pens
- ☞ Paper

## OPENING TO GOD [5 minutes]

Have the person who volunteered last week offer their reading as a lead-in to 5 minutes of silence.

At the conclusion of the silence someone in the group may offer a brief prayer, ring a meditation chime, or simply say "Amen."

## SOUL-TRAINING [10-20 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. Use the questions below to discuss your experience of applying frugality to your time, talents and treasures so you could then be generous with those items.

1. What challenges did you experience in being frugal in these three areas?
2. Did you notice an increase in your margin? If so, how?
3. What new ways were you able to be generous as a result of your frugality and increased margin?
4. Does your faith community tend to emphasize stewardship of time, talents or treasures more? How does this emphasis affect your own practices?

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [25-45 minutes]

If you divided into sub-groups for your discussion of the soul-training exercise, you may regroup for your discussion of the chapter. If time is limited, read through the following questions and note which ones you especially want to discuss, and then begin with those questions.

1. The author begins this chapter by telling the story of his mixed feelings about taking a homeless man to dinner. Discuss your experiences of helping those in need and the feelings these situations produced.



2. There are three false narratives that prevent generosity: “God helps those who help themselves” (p. 149). “If I give it away I have less” (p. 150). And “What I have is mine to use for my own pleasure” (p. 150). Which of these three false narratives is strongest in your life? How did you come to believe these narratives?
3. In explaining the third true narrative that everything is God’s and I am a steward of those resources, the author writes, “We are stewards of God’s gifts; everything belongs to God. That changes everything. . . . This fundamental shift affects all of our daily decisions” (p. 153). Spend a few minutes silently reflecting on the daily decisions you make that might be different if you believed everything belongs to God and you are a steward of God’s gifts. In a journal or in the margin of your book, write down these changes. If you are willing, share your notes with two or three others in your group as a way to hold each other accountable.
4. The author recounts several individuals who share their gifts with him, and through submission he receives those gifts. Name one or two people who are a profound blessing to you. How might you express your gratitude to these people?
5. The three ways to become a generous community are (1) learning the joy of giving, (2) practicing margin and (3) learning ways to give. Which of these is most lacking in your faith community? How could you increase your knowledge or skill in this area?
6. What is your reaction to the idea that we cannot give from beyond the grave but can give only now? If you agree with this statement, what changes might you make to your daily life?

#### ENGAGING THE WORD [10-20 minutes]

Have a volunteer read aloud 2 Corinthians 8:13-14.

I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance (NRSV).

1. When has someone else’s abundance and generosity supplied your need?
2. When has sharing your abundance helped someone else in their need and led to fair balance?

#### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION WITH SOUL-TRAINING [35 minutes]

This session’s experience is a simulation in global distribution. Based on the size of your group you will have to adjust the quantities of your supplies to match the percentages given in the exercise. The exercise will divide your group in two with approximately 20% of the participants in a group representing the “rich” of the world and approximately 80% of your group representing the poor. Once your group is divided, they will be given candy bars that represent the distribution of food around the world. The “rich group” will receive approximately 86% of the candy bars and the “poor group” will receive 14% of the candy bars as a representation of the distribution of food in the world. The exercise concludes with a different look at resources as again the two groups are given a task, but the resources to complete the task are not equally distributed.

Here’s an example, if you have 10 people in your group, 2 would be randomly chosen to represent the rich of the world and 8 participants would represent the under-resourced of the world. You would have a total of 20 candy bars and the 2 people in the rich group would get 86% of those, which is 17. The 8 people who are in the poor group will get 3 candy bars.

The goal of this exercise is to give participants a visual grasp of the disparity of resources in our world and how that impacts life. It is *not* a goal of the experience for anyone to feel guilty or condemned. A person might feel deeply grieved by the experience, and they may desire to make changes in their life based on the experience, and these responses are fine, but if you sense that anyone feels overwhelmed with guilt, take additional time to move them to a positive place of action.

Some participants may find the exercise too contrived. If anyone feels this way, their feelings should be honored. Give them space to express their own thoughts on the matter. However, keep the overall focus of discussion on the true narratives from the chapter; otherwise the conversation could degenerate into fruitless diatribes.

Distribute the tickets (see supply list with instructions) randomly to the group without them knowing their significance. Once everyone has received their ticket, divide the group into the “rich” and the “poor.” For added emphasis you could move to a different room where there are only enough chairs for those who are rich, while those who are poor must either stand or sit on the floor. Once the groups are divided, read the following:

*Today’s exercise helps us explore the second true narrative that was discussed in the chapter: if we share, we all have enough (p. 151). This kingdom truth is even expressed in the world at large, where 1.2 billion people—one fifth of the world’s population—live on less than one dollar a day. 3 billion people—almost half of the world’s population—struggle to survive on less than two dollars a day. 815 million of these people suffer from chronic hunger. Every 3 seconds, a child dies from hunger or other preventable causes. That’s 29,000 children every day!*

*You may think hunger is about too many people and too little food, but surprisingly this is not true. This rich and bountiful planet produces enough to feed every woman, man, and child on earth. Instead, it is about those who have sharing with those who lack so that there will be enough.*

*Here is how things break down: 20% of the world’s population (facing the “rich” group)—that’s you—consumes 86% of the world’s goods, represented by these candy bars. So even though there are only (insert number of “rich” group) of you, you get (insert number of candy bars that would be 86%, give them the candy bars that represent 86% of the world’s resources). The rest of you (facing the “poor” group) get only 14%. (Give this group the amount of candy bars that is appropriate, and encourage both groups to start eating.)*

*The roots of hunger lie in inequalities in access to education, resources and power. The results are illiteracy, poverty, war and the inability of families to grow or buy food. This activity is a metaphor for how food and other resources are inequitably distributed in the world. As such, we can only touch upon the issues. We cannot recreate the many and complex ways in which poverty manifests itself. We will not have time to go into all the problems associated with lack of access to healthcare, education and employment opportunities, and the realities of the day-to-day struggle for survival.*

*The point of this activity is not to make us feel guilty. Whether we are born in the “rich” group or the “poor” group is beyond our control. The point of this exercise is to help us visualize the abundance and perhaps take a step further into kingdom generosity.*

*To help express a different disparity besides food, I am going to give you a task to perform within your group. I will give you the only supplies you will get to complete this task. Distribute paper, pens and dictionaries—once again, give 86% of the pens and paper to the rich plus one dictionary for each person in the “rich” group. Then give 14% of the paper and pens to the “poor” group along with 1 dictionary for every 10 (or less) people in that group.*

*I will give you two words. Each person must have their own, individual piece of paper with those two words, and the dictionary definitions of those two words written on it. Shared efforts or your own definitions are not good enough. The two words are ABUNDANCE and SCARCITY. You may begin. After a few minutes ask all who have completed the task to hold their definitions up. Presumably, all the “rich” will have completed the task while only a few of the “poor.” Praise the “rich” and give them more candy as a prize for accomplishing the task. For the poor who do complete the task, give them a “bite” size candy bar. For those who did not complete the task, tell them they must give whatever they do have to a person who completed the task, whether it is a piece of candy bar, a piece of paper, a pen or a dictionary.*

*Then say: This concludes our exercise, but we are going to spend a few minutes in silence so you can process what just happened. Consider questions such as these:*

- ☞ How did you feel during the exercise?*
- ☞ What new thoughts did you have about the issue of global poverty?*

- ☞ What questions did the exercise raise for you?
- ☞ We will end the silence with a time of prayer. I will pray and then everyone will say aloud “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” We will end the prayer time by saying aloud, “Amen.”

After the silence offer this prayer:

*Generous and loving God, we pray:  
That no youngster will be denied an education,  
That no worker will be cheated of justice,  
That no child will die from a curable disease.  
Together we pray,*

**All: Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

*That no financial system will ever again burden the poorest,  
That no trade will deny a fair wage,  
That no debt will ever again trap nations in poverty.  
We pray,*

**All: Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

*Guide us, o Lord,  
To do justice,  
To love kindness,  
To walk humbly with you.*

**Amen.**

## DEBRIEFING

1. How did you feel during the exercise?
2. This activity aims to make us examine how we value people. Based on your experience, how can we value people in ways other than their productivity?
3. What practical steps could you take to address the unequal distribution of resources in the world?
4. What systems and institutions are in place in our world that keep resources from being distributed in a just way?
5. What sacrifices might the “rich” have to make in order to balance the resources of our world?

## GO IN PEACE [15-20 minutes]

Have a volunteer read aloud this quote from the book:

*A gospel of abundance is found only in the kingdom of God, where somehow we have what we need when we need it. The kingdom of God is not like an ATM where we can get an endless supply of resources to spend however we like. It is a dispenser of resources offered to those who understand the ways of the kingdom. Where there is a need and a person who can meet that need, the supply will never run out (p. 154).*

Let us go out, seeking the kingdom!

## FOR THE COMING WEEK

The next chapter looks at the role worship plays in the Christian community. The soul-training exercise gives us five steps to prepare for worship.

Finally, recruit a volunteer who will bring a Scripture, prayer, poem or song for the next class as a lead-in to the opening silence.

# CHAPTER 8, SESSION 32: THE WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

One of the most hotly discussed topics in many churches in recent years has revolved around worship. As the group enters this conversation, you will need to be aware of any history that has caused pain or division in your congregation. Also, be aware that someone in your group may have been hurt in another church in a situation related to worship. This chapter is meant to look deeper than just the form worship takes such as traditional or contemporary, so don't linger on discussions revolving around these forms. Instead, concentrate on the role of corporate worship in the life of a follower of Christ.

## SUPPLIES

- ☞ Photocopies of the Handout "Order of Worship" if you plan to use this suggestion
- ☞ Any supplies needed for your worship experience

## OPENING TO GOD [5 minutes]

Have the person who volunteered last week offer their reading as a lead-in to 5 minutes of silence.

At the conclusion of the silence someone in the group may offer a brief prayer, ring a meditation chime, or simply say "Amen."

## SOUL-TRAINING [10-20 minutes]

This chapter's soul-training exercise moved us through five steps that prepared us for worship, helped us focus during worship and applied what God was calling us to do following worship. If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. Use the questions below to explore these five steps.

1. Were you able to prepare for worship by creating margin, arriving early and entering with holy expectancy? If so, what impact did these steps have on your worship experience?
2. What one aspect of worship did you focus on this week? What did you notice or learn from this intentional focus?
3. What one thing did you feel God was inviting you to do? Have you had an opportunity to respond? If so, what has been the result?

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30-40 minutes]

If you divided into sub-groups for your discussion of the soul-training exercise, you may regroup for your discussion of the chapter. If time is limited, read through the following questions and note which ones you especially want to discuss, and then begin with those questions.

1. The author gives us two false and two true narratives (pp. 170-73). Which of the false narratives is most at work in your life? How can you tell? Do you agree with the true narratives? Why?
2. In summarizing the quote from C. S. Lewis, the author writes, "We need each other, despite our differences. And worship is not about the quality of the performance but the heart of those who worship" (p. 174). How have differences within your worshipping community been a blessing to you? How would you describe the heart of your worshipping community?
3. In his letter to his son, Jacob, the author explains the value and importance of several elements of worship. What did you find most helpful from this section (pp. 177-84)? Why?

4. If you are comfortable, discuss your struggles with worship—the hurt, disappointment, disillusionment or burnout that has made worship difficult for you. Conclude this time with prayer for one another and for anyone struggling to find a worship home.
5. In our current culture it is easy to become a worship consumer. What are the indications that you are more focused on critiquing worship than you are on critiquing your own heart?
6. Read the quote from *Jayber Crow* on pages 184-85. What emotions does this story stir within you? How does it change your perspective of worship, your faith community and your place in that community?

### ENGAGING THE WORD [10-20 minutes]

Have a volunteer read aloud Psalm 95:1-3:

O come, let us sing to the LORD;  
 let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!  
 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
 let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!  
 For the LORD is a great God,  
 and a great King above all gods (NRSV).

1. When you read this psalm of David, does it encourage or discourage you regarding your own worship experience? Why?
2. Why do we feel our worship experience needs to match the psalmist's?
3. Have you ever felt the type of joy in worship David is describing? Recount your experience.
4. David's narrative in the psalm is that God is a rock, Lord and King above all gods. What connection is there between David's view of the good and beautiful God and his response in worship?

### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION WITH SOUL-TRAINING [30 minutes]

To help us grasp the beauty and significance of worship, the author writes a letter to his son, Jacob. Drawing on the primary points of that letter, the group will share in a time of worship. As the leader, you may create your own worship experience based on your tradition and the resources you have available or you can photocopy the suggested Order of Worship located at the end of this session, which can be modified as you see best. The only component that is not included in the Order of Worship is singing, which will depend completely upon the group's resources. If there is a musician in your group, you may want to sing a few hymns or choruses together. If you do not have a musician in your group, you could either listen to a recorded worship song or read the lyrics to a hymn or song.

The suggested Order of Worship includes communion/Eucharist/the Lord's Supper. If you are part of a community that receives communion, Eucharist or the Lord's Supper, you can share it in whatever form is most familiar to your group. In many denominations it can only be consecrated by a clergy member. If you are a member of such a denomination and are not ordained, you will need to work out those details with your pastor. The "Great Thanksgiving" in the Order of Worship is one suggestion for preparing to receive communion.

Following the time of worship you can end with the "Go in Peace" quote and discussion of what is needed to prepare for next week's class.

### GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Have a volunteer read the following quote aloud as a benediction for your time together:

Christianity is not a religion but the formation of a people through the gospel—the good news that God in Christ has reconciled the world. Religion is the human search for God; Christianity is God's search for humans. We do not worship so much as we respond. "Through Christ in the Spirit we respond to the Father's love. This is the ground-pattern of Christian worship" (p. 173).

## FOR THE COMING WEEK

The final section of the book gives guidance for creating a soul-shaping plan. The next session will give the group a chance to reflect on their soul-shaping plan and possibly create a soul-shaping plan for the entire group.

Finally, recruit a volunteer who will bring a Scripture, prayer, poem or song for the next class as a lead-in to the opening silence.

## SUGGESTED ORDER OF WORSHIP FOR SESSION 10

### GREETING

Leader: *At the beginning of our time of worship, we are going to take a few moments to move around and greet everyone in our group with this word of grace and peace: I am thankful that you are here.*

### CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Leader: *Now let us sit down and observe a moment of silence before joining in a prayer of confession.*

Silence

Leader: *Lord, we confess our day-to-day failure to be truly human.*

Response: **Lord, we confess to you.**

Leader: *Lord, we confess that we often fail to love with all we have and are, often because we do not fully understand what loving means, often because we are afraid of risking ourselves.*

Response: **Lord, we confess to you.**

Leader: *Lord, we cut ourselves off from each other and we erect barriers of division.*

Response: **Lord, we confess to you.**

Leader: *Lord, we confess that by silence and ill-considered word*

Response: **We have built up walls of prejudice.**

Leader: *Lord, we confess that by selfishness and lack of sympathy*

Response: **We have stifled generosity and left little time for others.**

A moment of silence can be observed for personal reflection.

Leader: *Holy Spirit, speak to us. Help us listen to your word of forgiveness, for we are very deaf. Come, fill this moment and free us from sin.*

All: **Amen.**

United Methodist Hymnal #893\*

### CREED AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Leader: *Let us read aloud together The Apostle's Creed.*

#### THE APOSTLES' CREED

All: **I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**  
**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,**  
**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,**  
**born of the Virgin Mary,**  
**suffered under Pontius Pilate,**  
**was crucified, died, and was buried;**  
**he descended to the dead.**  
**On the third day, he rose again;**  
**he ascended into heaven,**  
**is seated at the right hand of the Father,**  
**and will come again to judge the living and the dead.**  
**I believe in the Holy Spirit,**  
**the holy universal church,**

\* This contemporary litany of confession comes from the Cathedral Church of Saint George in Cape Town, South Africa, which was Archbishop Desmond Tutu's cathedral.

**the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

The Apostles' Creed, Ecumenical Version UMH #882

Leader: *Now let us read aloud together The Lord's Prayer.*

### THE LORD'S PRAYER

All: **Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and forever. Amen.**

### SCRIPTURE AND SILENCE

Leader: *The following Scripture reading has been formatted so it can be read aloud by everyone. Let us read the passage four times with a few minutes of silence between each reading.*

Leader: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?  
Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword?*

All: **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.  
For I am convinced that neither  
death, nor life,  
nor angels, nor rulers,  
nor things present, nor things to come,  
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,  
nor anything else in all creation,  
will be able to separate us from the love of God  
in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Thanks be to God! Amen.**

Romans 8:35, 37-39 (NRSV)

### OFFERING GIFTS

Leader: *In our culture we sometimes limit the idea of offerings to money when actually any gift or resource that God has given us can be shared as an offering to God and others. To put a twist on the idea of offering gifts, let us share the insights and feelings that came from the Scripture meditation as a gift to offer our group.*

### COMMUNION, EUCHARIST, OR THE LORD'S SUPPER

#### INVITATION TO THE LORD'S TABLE

Leader: *Come to the Lord's Table,  
all you who love him.*



*Come to the Lord's Table,  
confess your sin.  
Come to the Lord's Table,  
be at peace.*

## THANKSGIVING AND COMMUNION

Leader: *The Lord be with you.*

Response: **And also with you.**

Leader: *Lift up your hearts.*

Response: **We lift them to you, Lord.**

Leader: *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*

Response: **It is right to praise you, Lord.**

Leader: *It is right, and a good and joyful thing,  
Always and everywhere to give thanks to you,  
Holy Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
From the rising of the sun to its setting  
your name is praised among all peoples.  
Therefore we praise you,  
joining our voices with your people on earth  
and all the company of heaven  
who for ever sing this hymn to the glory of your name:*

All: **Holy, holy, holy, Lord,  
God of power and might  
Heaven and earth are full...  
Full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest!  
Hosanna in the highest!  
Blessed is the One who comes  
In the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest!  
Hosanna in the highest!**

Leader: *You are holy, Almighty One!  
Blessed are you, Jesus Christ!  
In the power of the Spirit you created all things, blessed them, and called them good.  
You called to yourself a people to make your mercy and truth known in all the world.  
We betrayed your calling;*

Response: **You were faithful.**

Leader: *We wandered from the way;*

Response: **You called us to return, and led us home.**

Leader: *And still we turned from your ways, abused your creatures,  
and made ourselves slaves to sin and death.  
At the right time you came and dwelt among us,  
as one of us,*

*bringing good news to the poor,  
 healing the sick, raising the dead,  
 sharing table with the unrighteous,  
 and teaching the way that leads to life.  
 By your incarnation, life, suffering, execution and resurrection  
 You gave birth to your church, delivered us from slavery  
 and made a new covenant with us by water and the Spirit.  
 On the night of your betrayal, Lord Jesus,  
 you took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to your disciples and said,  
 "This is my body which is given for you.  
 Do this in remembrance of me."  
 You did the same with the cup after the supper, saying,  
 "This cup that is poured out is the new covenant in my blood."  
 Blessed Trinity, in remembrance of all you have done to save us,  
 we offer ourselves to you in praise and thanksgiving  
 as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us,  
 as we proclaim the mystery of our faith:*

- Response: **Christ has come among us. Christ has died.  
 Christ has risen. Christ abides with us.  
 Christ will come again.**
- Leader: *Pour out your Spirit on us*
- Response: **Pour out your Spirit on us**
- Leader: *Pour out your Spirit on these gifts*
- Response: **Pour out your Spirit on these gifts**
- Leader: *Make these gifts the body and blood of Christ*
- Response: **Make us, through them, Christ's body alive in the world.**
- Leader: *Abba, Father!*
- Response: **Let your kingdom come!**
- Leader: *Glory to you!*
- Response: **Glory to you!**
- Leader: *Come, Lord Jesus!*
- Response: **Be our daily bread.**
- Leader: *Glory to you!*
- Response: **Glory to you!**
- Leader: *Holy Spirit!*
- Response: **Send us to the world.**
- Leader: *Glory to you!*
- Response: **Glory to you!**

Leader: *Holy, Blessed Trinity!*

Response: **One God forever!**

Leader: *Glory to you!*

Response: **Glory to you!**

**BREAKING THE BREAD AND PRESENTING THE CUP**

**GIVING THE BREAD AND CUP**

**GIVING THANKS**

Leader: *Let us read aloud together.*

All: **Lord, you now have set your servants free  
to go in peace as you have promised.  
For these eyes of ours have seen the Savior  
whom you have prepared for all the world to see!  
Blessing and honor and glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.**

**SENDING FORTH**

Leader: *You have seen the Savior. Go now in peace.  
And the blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
One in Three and Three in One,  
Go with you.*

All: **Amen.**

# CHAPTER 9, SESSION 33: WRITING A SOUL-TRAINING PLAN

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Two possible responses to the idea of writing a rule for life can surface during the discussion of this chapter. First, many participants will dive head-long into the practice and create a rule that is humanly impossible. If you have anyone in your group who takes this approach, encourage their enthusiasm, but also remind them of the need for balance and feasibility. Our life rules are not helpful if they can't be followed. It is also helpful to remember that God is present in every aspect of our life, therefore it is not necessary to implement too many spiritual practices but instead to focus on the spiritual practices that help us see the kingdom of God in everyday life. It would also be worthwhile to explore what is motivating their need for so many disciplines. Such rules sometimes reflect false narratives of needing to earn God's approval or prove themselves as righteous.

Second, participants may be resistant to the idea of creating a rule. This attitude should be honored and explored. It is possible that the person who feels this way has already established a "rule" for their life without calling it such and has now moved into a place of sensitive, on-going discernment of God's Spirit. On the other hand, it could be an issue of pride and a reluctance to develop a plan for spiritual formation. If this is the case, invite these persons to share how their journey has evolved to this point and to explore other ways to approach life in God's kingdom.

Also, please note that during the next session the group will work together to create a group rule and to decide if they would like to continue meeting and how often those gatherings might occur. For a list of on-going options for the group, visit The Apprentice Series website at [www.ApprenticeofJesus.org](http://www.ApprenticeofJesus.org). Click on the "Small Groups" tab then click on "Leader's Guide." On the Leader's Guide page check out the documents titled "What Next?: Life After The Apprentice Series" and "A Fellowship of Apprentices: Leading Meaningful Follow-up Sessions." These documents will give you ideas and suggestions for the future of your group.

Finally, in planning ahead, please note the next session is a celebration for the conclusion of the class. As such, you may want to invite everyone to bring items to share such as refreshments, snacks and music.

## SUPPLIES

- ☞ Index cards
- ☞ Pens
- ☞ Meditative music to play during the "Experiencing Transformation" exercise
- ☞ One empty glass candle votive for each participant
- ☞ Trash inside each candle votive which could include scrap paper, dirt, tape, ashes, used matches, and so on—be creative
- ☞ One candle for each participant that will eventually be placed inside the candle holder

## OPENING TO GOD [5 minutes]

Have the person who volunteered last week offer their reading as a lead-in to 5 minutes of silence.

At the conclusion of the silence someone in the group may offer a brief prayer, ring a meditation chime, or simply say "Amen."

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER AND THE SOUL-TRAINING EXERCISE [30-40 minutes]

Utilize the following questions to explore the process of creating your individual rule and learn from others in the group.

1. Discuss your process for picking the soul-training exercises that form the basis for your plan. What was easy and what was difficult about creating that list?

2. The second step in creating a soul-training strategy is adding practices that are not part of The Apprentice Series. What other practices did you add to the list? Did any of your additions surprise you?
3. When you first looked at your list of spiritual disciplines, was there any imbalance? Did you have to cut back on anything to make it more practical?
4. As you followed your rule this week, how did it affect your relationship with God?
5. Prior to writing your rule, how would you describe your daily and weekly interactions with God? What was nourishing and what was difficult about your spiritual journey? How does your rule fit into these strengths and weaknesses?

During the next session the group will have an opportunity to create a group rule and decide any future plans for the group.

### ENGAGING THE WORD AND EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [25-35 minutes]

Have a volunteer read Matthew 12: 43-45 (TNIV) aloud:

“When an evil spirit comes out of anyone, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”

With these strong words, Jesus reproaches the scribes and Pharisees who have asked for a sign from him. However, his teaching can also speak to our experiences of changing our behavior temporarily but failing to replace those behaviors with something that is life giving. Using the language of The Apprentice Series, it would be like throwing out our false narratives but never embracing Jesus’ narratives.

1. You have probably never felt possessed by an evil spirit, however, discuss times you have eliminated an unhealthy habit only to find it return with more vengeance shortly after. How did that experience impact your attitude about changing yourself?
2. When have you added spiritual practices to your life that drove the evil out of your heart and then filled your heart with love and life, making it difficult for the evil to return?

After discussing the two questions above, read the following to the class:

*Throughout this study the author has encouraged us to set aside false narratives that keep us distant from God, hide our true identity and strain our relationships with others. As you have journeyed together you have engaged in soul-training exercises that not only sweep and clean your heart but also fill it with the narratives of Christ. On the altar there are glass candle holders that are filled with trash. I invite you into a time of silence to consider two or three false narratives you have especially felt invited to remove during this study. Write them on the index card, then tear up the index card and put it into the candle holder with the other trash. Carry the candle holder over to the trash can and throw out the trash. Then spend a few minutes identifying the true narratives that you need to embrace to fill the space the old narratives have left behind. Once you have these narratives in mind, come forward to receive a candle, place it in the glass container and light it as a symbol of your openness to receive the Spirit of God into your heart. At the conclusion of class you are invited to take the candle home with you.*

Ask, *Are there any questions?* Once everyone is clear on the exercise, play some reflective music and invite the class to begin.

## GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Before the session comes to an end, have a volunteer read aloud this quote from the book to remind everyone of the true purpose of a rule:

What does a strategy do for people? It is a balanced and wholesome pattern that helps define how we want to live. It is a constant reminder of how we would like to live. It can help us to go beyond merely good intentions and into action (p. 191).

*As you live your rule this week, may it guide you in becoming human and incarnating the values of the kingdom of God.*

## FOR THE COMING WEEK

For the coming week, there is no chapter to read. The group should focus on practicing their rule, making adjustments as necessary. During the next session the group will work together to create a group rule and decide if they would like to continue meeting and how often those gatherings might occur.

Finally, recruit a volunteer who will bring a Scripture, prayer, poem or song for the next class as a lead-in to the opening silence.

# SESSION 34

## DEVELOPING A GROUP RULE AND CELEBRATING THE COMPLETION OF THE STUDY

### SUPPLIES

- ☞ Party supplies
- ☞ Fun music
- ☞ Slips of paper and pens for people to write down suggestions for the group rule

### WELCOME

This gathering is a celebration of finishing the book. To set the tone for this accomplishment, you may want to have refreshments.

### OPENING TO GOD [5 minutes]

Have the person who volunteered last week offer their reading as a lead-in to 5 minutes of silence.

At the conclusion of the silence someone in the group may offer a brief prayer, ring a meditation chime, or simply say “Amen.”

### SOUL-TRAINING [10-20 minutes]

Spend this time reflecting on your experience with your personal rule.

1. How has your rule been helpful to you?
2. What has been difficult about observing your rule? What adjustments might you need to make to your rule?
3. What are you learning from both the successes and struggles of your rule?

### ENGAGING THE WORD [15 minutes]

To help set the stage for the creation of a group rule, have a volunteer read aloud the following Scripture and then discuss the questions listed below.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb 10:23-25, TNIV).

1. Recall that in Colossians 1:3-5a Paul points out that hope leads to faith and love. Now in this passage we are challenged to hold “unswervingly to the hope we profess.” If you are comfortable, discuss why you sometimes lose your grip on the hope we profess as Christians.
2. How has this group spurred you on toward love and good deeds during the past few months?

### ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30-40 minutes]

As a group decide if you will follow the author’s suggestion and create a group rule. It may be helpful to clarify that the group will not necessarily be gathered together to observe each of the spiritual practices that make up the group soul-training strategy. Here are some steps to follow and points to consider if you decide to create such a rule.

1. On slips of paper each person writes down one discipline they would like to see in the group rule. There are various criteria that might lead a person to choose a particular discipline. For example, it might be a discipline that was especially meaningful to her or him. Or it might be a discipline the individual wants to do but lacks the personal discipline to follow through, therefore it would be helpful to have others doing the discipline as well to add that

accountability. Or it might simply be a discipline that the group naturally gravitated toward.

2. Compile a list of disciplines from the slips of paper.
3. Decide how often each discipline will be observed. Allow for grace in this matter. One person might have a schedule that allows for two hours of silence each day, but someone else might struggle to have 5 minutes. Design the rule to support the person who struggles with any discipline. Those who are able to do more of any discipline can certainly do so on their own.
4. Once the list is complete, check for balance and moderation. Is anything clearly missing? Is there a good balance between disciplines that relate to God, self and neighbor? Make any necessary adjustments.
5. Each member of the group should write down the rule and schedule.

Other considerations:

- ☞ Decide when to meet again to encourage and support one another. (It may be two to four weeks.)
- ☞ Make sure you have other ways to be in contact with one another between your gatherings whether through e-mail, a blog or social networking. Use this communication to not only discuss the disciplines but also share prayer requests and insights of how God is working in your life.

## FUTURE GATHERINGS

Use this suggested outline when the group gathers to reflect on the rule and how God is at work in their lives.

### Opening to God

Begin with 5 minutes of silence followed by an opening prayer, ringing a meditation chime, or simply saying “Amen.”

### Questions for Groups

1. *Which false narratives have you struggled with since we last met?*
2. *What true narratives have become stronger or clearer since the last meeting?*
3. *How are you doing with your rule?*
4. *What is God teaching you through the practices in your rule?*
5. *How can we support you?*

### Review

Review the group rule and remove disciplines that do not seem connected with your journey as a group (remember individuals can still observe these practices). Are there any disciplines that should be added? Formalize this new rule and use it until you meet again.

### Go in Peace

Conclude your time by reading a Scripture passage, helpful quote or reciting The Lord’s Prayer.

## CONCLUDING CELEBRATION [30 minutes]

Whether your group will be meeting again or not, it is a good idea to end your time with a celebration. Encourage everyone to bring snacks to share and perhaps have some fun music playing. After everyone has grabbed something to eat, regroup and spend a few minutes letting everyone reflect on their experience with this study. Possible questions to get the group started could include these:

- ☞ What was the most rewarding aspect of this study?
- ☞ What ideas from the book were the most helpful to you?
- ☞ How were the members of your group a blessing to you?
- ☞ What will you take from this class and group as you move forward?



## GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Have a volunteer read aloud this quote from the book:

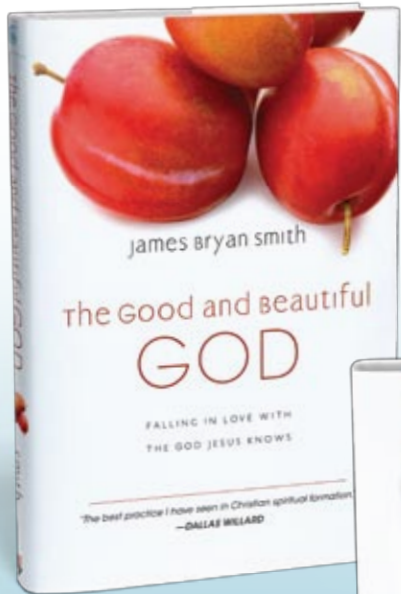
The real issue comes down to this: Will we do it? Will we stay the course? Will we keep working on deepening our love for God, taking care of ourselves and loving our neighbor? I pray that you have gained some ideas and practices that will help you as you continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (p. 202).

Then have another volunteer read aloud this passage of Scripture from Ephesians 3:14-19 (TNIV), and say after its reading: *Although our time together is ending, may this prayer continue to resonate in our hearts for one another!*

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

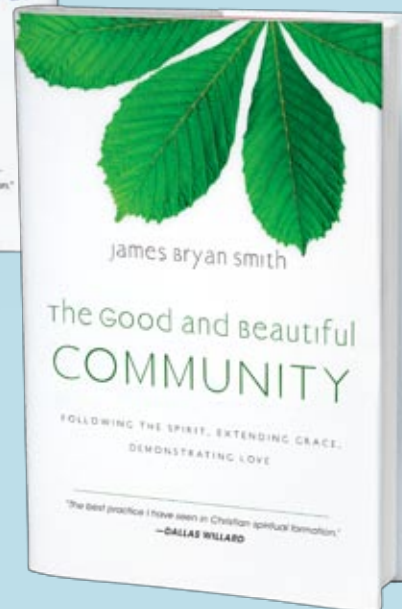
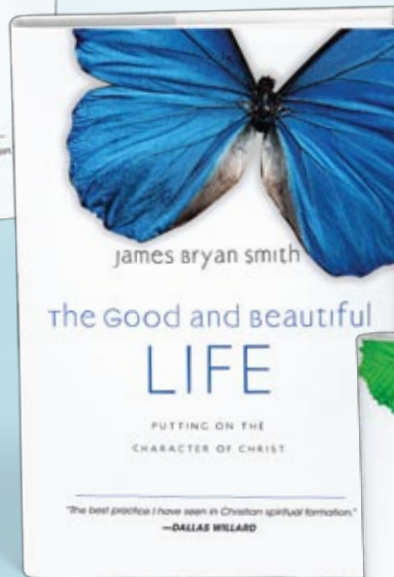
Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

# THE LIFE OF AN APPRENTICE



*"The Apprentice Series is the best practice I have seen in Christian spiritual formation."*

DALLAS WILLARD  
AUTHOR OF *THE DIVINE CONSPIRACY*



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