



**The Thrive Project:**  
a season of education



## Fall: a season of education

The first season in the Thrive Project is the season of education. For each season there is a purpose and every purpose deserves some metrics:

*Fall/Education proposed purpose statement:* to broaden and deepen congregational awareness and articulation of the biblical foundations of congregational revitalization so that all leaders and the majority of members can name and describe the biblical vision of a healthy congregation as expressed by the Six Great Ends of the Church.

*Fall/Education proposed metrics statement:* By the conclusion of the Season of Education, 100% of our staff and officers, 80% of our committee/team members, and 50% of all church participants will be able (1) to name and (2) to describe the Six Great Ends of the Church.

Can you imagine the dynamic energy that would flow throughout your church if all staff, all officers, the vast majority of your other lay leaders, and at least half your congregation operated from the same playbook? It would lead to holy lunacy! Huzzah! Huzzah!

So what is the playbook? Here are the Six Great Ends of the Church:

1. The proclamation of the Gospel for the salvation of humankind
2. The shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God
3. The maintenance of divine worship
4. The preservation of the truth
5. The promotion of social righteousness
6. The exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

What would it take for your congregation to be able to affirm and articulate these core biblical values of congregational life? During the Season of Education, there are a variety of options for inviting congregational affirmation and articulation. Options are based on the tried and true principles of *deep immersion and broad*

*dissemination* (like the kids' song: "Deep and Wide"). For instance, consider the following ideas:



- (1) *Choose a theme* that promotes the Six Great Ends as a means to becoming a healthier congregation.

- Examples include, "The Big Six," "The Ends Are Just the Beginning," "Make the Church Great Again," "Six Signs of Health" (with an accompanying medical image), or a theme of your own imagination. Be creative...be provocative...be evocative...have fun together to create anticipation!

- (2) *Sermon Series:* a seven-week series (one per week with an introductory sermon).

- Alternative sermon series: dig into each of the six Great Ends for 2–3 weeks for a 13–19-week series.
- "Extend the Sermon" notes: Include in-bulletin and online notes that create a six-day follow-up study.

- (3) *Congregation-wide study focus:*

- Sunday morning studies: theme classes at child, youth, and adult levels
  - Six-week small group initiative that use existing groups and/or create time-limited groups. Each of these groups can use the essays and Bible studies included in this handbook.
  - All-church retreat
  - Wednesday night program: use the existing program and/or experiment for six weeks
- (4) *Faith-sharing focus*: Invite congregants to share their perspectives and/or experiences on one of the Great Ends as an expression of a healthy congregation.
- Devotional book: Write brief essays and publish the book online or as a printed handout.
  - Record a video response or personal sharing in the midst of the worship service each week: one theme per week.

(5) “*Lord, Deepen Our Hope*” *prayer concerts*: in which the church hosts a dedicated time of prayer for each of the Great Ends. The Prayer Concert can be conducted amidst:

- All small groups and committees throughout the 7, 13, or 19 weeks of education
- As a Sunday morning gathering
- By organizing “prayer triads” or “prayer quads” of people willing to pray the theme for each week
- As part of each week’s worship service—it could be *both* a joy *and* a concern!

As noted above, these ideas are only suggestions. Your ideas matter, for they form the kernel of a covenant that God will plant. That seed, with the Holy Spirit’s help, will cause growth. Your living into the covenant you make, with God and one another, will be the harvest.



## The Power of Immersion

By Brad Munroe, Presbytery Pastor

I grew up on the beach in San Clemente, California. I swam and played water polo from junior high through college (along with a little club polo during my first call) and lifeguarded during the summers.

I have a love-hate relationship with water. Too many mornings were spent in the pre-dawn light, standing on a pool deck, watching the mist rise from the water—a cloud of unknowing that promised to shock my body's system. Standing on the deck in just a suit was cold, but was it worse than actually plunging into the icy depths? Okay, perhaps a minimally heated pool in Southern California, even in winter, hardly constitutes “icy depths,” but at 5:59 a.m. the difference seemed subtle.

At 6:00, on the dot, my coach's baritone would ring like an overcaffeinated alarm clock, “Let's go! Do it!” We would dive in, immersing ourselves for the next 150 minutes into a world that hardly seemed plausible mere seconds before. Sure, there were teammates who had already taken the plunge; these were the early adopters. The rest of the team, us early majority folks, waited until the last second, until we heard the coach bark his orders.

What fascinates me as I recollect these tortured moments of my youth and young adulthood is how common the experience was of hating getting into the water but loving being in the water. There is something about being immersed in water, (and I don't mean in a sacramental sense, but actual water for recreation's sake), that bespeaks an otherworldly existence: simultaneously fresh, invigorating, challenging, exhausting, and liberating. Once in the pool, we loved the water.

It strikes me that many of us fear immersion even as we discover it to be life-giving. The morning routines of an aquatics team are played out, throughout the nation, in the lives of our churches. We hate something until we don't. We are reticent until we aren't. We are uncertain until the moment comes and, together, we dive in, only

to discover that which we feared is both true (It's *COLD!*) and life-giving (Time to *PLAY!*).

The Thrive Project is a form of congregational immersion for the sake of renewal. Thrive is a Season of Discernment for a congregation that requires:

- **broad participation** – not just pastor and elders, but a wide swath of the congregation,
- **depth participation** – not just showing up to meetings, but the honest work of perseverant prayer and dynamic dialogue with God's Spirit and one another, and
- **invested participation** – not just wanting to “tinker with how we do things” but seeking the mind, heart, and will of Christ.



No half-steps will carry us where we want to go on this journey. No half-measures will suffice to lead us to the place of being a

church clear about our mission in Christ, focused on using our spiritual gifts in service of our neighborhood, cultivating disciples that—individually and corporately—are growing together and learning how to be salt and light in our world.

I imagine that all who choose to covenant together for immersion into a Season of Discernment through education, examination, experimentation, and celebration will need to overcome internal trepidation in order to discover God's joy. As you stand by the water's edge, waiting, please know the water will not grow any warmer, yet neither will it ever be any less life-giving. So, come on—let's dive in together!



# The Power of Transformational Education

By Brad Munroe, Presbytery Pastor

I was first introduced to the phrase “banking model of education” by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. I understood Freire’s phrase immediately and intuitively, for I had spent the majority of my life (to that point) having knowledge “deposited” into my brain by mind-numbing lectures: information overload in 50- or 100-minute lectures. It was Freire who pointed me toward a better way, a deeper truth, a path to life: education as transformation.

Freire sought to transform the way Brazilian educators engaged their students. Rather than merely dumping knowledge from teacher to learner, Freire advocated for engagement with one another and the world. Freire argued that information must be married to action and action be married to reflection.

When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into *verbalism*, into an alienated and alienating “blah.” It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action.<sup>1</sup>

Freire wrote persuasively that teachers must abandoned their “circles of certainty” to facilitate students and teachers together becoming “co-investigators of reality,” able to transform their surroundings and allow themselves to be transformed through ever deeper engagement.

The more fully he or she enters into reality..., knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them.<sup>2</sup>

Freire sparked passion within me. I knew, from my own life and the lives of my parishioners, that we

Presbyterians make great Christians—from the neck up. We know how to think critically and expansively, concisely and incisively. We know how to argue our point into a sharp, two-edged sword and use it with brute force to compel our enemies into submission. Our knowledge is our glory.

And it is our shadow side, too.



The temptation to inflict a banking model of education upon our churches is ever-present. We possess such a wealth of information in the Scriptures, our confessions, and our pastoral, personal, and church libraries, as well as our personal and communal experiences, that we are each a localized mini-seminary. We can access any or all of these sources through the touch of our fingertips and yet remain undereducated. We will believe ourselves to be educated because we possess much knowledge. However, without also experiencing the engagement of action and reflection in community, we are merely overstuffed deposit boxes. True education seeks transformation of self, community, and the world.

As your congregation seeks to enter into the Season of Education, the temptation before you is subtle. What follows this essay are six essays and six Bible studies on

<sup>1</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York: Continuum, 1986), <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon2/pedagogy/pedagogychapter3.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon2/pedagogy/pedagogypreface.html>.

the six Great Ends of the Church. How short a step is it to move from reading these essays to believing you understand what “church” is all about? How quickly can you travel from doing a Bible study to believing you have (all) the right answers? Such thinking is conditioned by the habits formed through a lifetime of experience: Once you make the knowledge deposit, then you know what you need to know, right?

Life doesn’t work that way, of course. College students need an internship. College graduates need a first job. Trade school graduates need an apprenticeship. Heck, even medical school graduates (who are called doctors), need an internship, residency, and sometimes more! So it is with the Christian faith. Reading the Bible and studying one’s theological tradition are essential first steps, but, on their own, they lack the ability to transform.

Education as transformation comes in community as, together, we wrestle with information, prejudice, and perspective. Transformation comes as majority voices are heard in their shouts and their minority-voiced siblings are heard in their whispers.<sup>3</sup> Transformation comes as all

voices are heard at the same volume, heard with mutual respect, and heard as those seeking understanding of God’s will—not just for oneself, but for everyone in the community. As you engage the Season of Education, are you wanting to know a wee bit more information, or are you open to being challenged, persuaded, compelled, and, therefore, liberated by what you hear?

Do you have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to *your* church?



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<sup>3</sup> The words *majority* and *minority* are specifically used here to highlight racial, gender, and power differentials and also the common phenomenon of a homogenous group having a

popular, assumed position and another, less-considered opinion.



**Essays on the Six Great Ends of the Church:**  
toward a common sense of our purpose



## The First Great End of the Church:

### the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind

Few Presbyterians want to be called a “Jesus Freak.” Even worse would be to be called a “Presbyterian Jesus Freak” – wouldn’t that be a contradiction in terms?

No one wants to be called a “Christian Hypocrite.” As Presbyterians, we tend to recoil at the disparity we too often see between profession and confession, that we too easily allow between the thing we want to do and what we actually do (c.f. Romans 7).

No one believes evangelism is best done by a committee. Even as Presbyterians, we must admit the disconnect found in outsourcing the sharing of our faith to a group of two volunteers and three others who felt bad saying no to the poor nominating committee folk.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God” (2 Corinthians 4:7). *We* are the jars of clay; to *God* belongs the extraordinary power. How do we share the Good News of what God has done and is doing in Jesus Christ? How are we sharing Jesus because our life is shaped and formed by the rhythms of his life, death, and resurrection? How is it that who we are—in our core identity—seeks to reflect the overflow of Christ in our life? How do we share faith through relationship rather than program, as a conversation rather than a lecture, as breathing rather than compulsion?

The first Great End of the Church is the proclamation of the Gospel for the salvation of humankind. This first Great End raises several questions:

- What does it mean to proclaim?
- What is the Gospel?
- What is salvation?
- Does your congregation have a common, consistent definition for these terms?

An example of a divergence of opinion about the definition of proclamation is found in the interchange between a pastor and elder following the worship service where the pastor had just preached on the need to tell people about Jesus. The elder thanked the pastor for a

good sermon and then said, “Of course, you know, St. Francis said, ‘Preach the Gospel always, and, if necessary, use words.’” While most Presbyterians love St. Francis and agree with him on the need to live one’s faith—to walk the walk and not just talk the talk—is it appropriate to use his quote to recuse oneself and one’s congregation from the obedience to speak the Gospel message? What is to distinguish a Presbyterian from a committed supporter of the United Way?

In a similar fashion, congregations sometimes assume all their members agree about the content of the Gospel. The Greek word for Gospel is *euangelion*, which literally translates as “good news.” But what news? Is the news merely a reductionist version of Christian faith such as the Four Spiritual Laws or Romans Road made popular by parachurch organizations like Navigators? Or, more expansively, is the news confined exclusively to the historical Jesus as conveyed in the canonical Gospels? Or, even more expansively, does the news incorporate a wider perspective that includes the Old Testament? Where does the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit—what some call the work of the Universal Christ—fit into the news a congregation is sharing with the world? What is the Story a congregation shares?

Finally, a congregation must define salvation. Is salvation limited to the afterlife or is there a sense that salvation is intended for “earth as it is in heaven”? Is salvation motivated by a fear of eternal torment or amazing grace or both? Is salvation limited to those who believe a certain dogma or practice particular rituals or live a lifestyle that conforms to a set of standards? How does the church express the reality that in Christ God reconciled Godself to humanity, creating a new humanity, deepening intimacy with our Creator, and calling both individuals and communities to work for the healing of communities as a foretaste of God’s eternal restoration of all creation? Without a shared vision of proclamation, Gospel, and salvation a congregation cannot move forward together in ministry and mission.

The verb in the first Great End of the Church is instructive, and it is necessary to focus special attention



there: proclaim. While all Presbyterians agree that proclamation can and should be done in deed as well as word and in work as well as worship, and with apologies to St. Francis, there is a Story to tell to the Nations. The first Great End, therefore, invites us to practice an intentional, authentic, and relational evangelism. Healthy congregations move people, even Presbyterians, beyond a fear of evangelism that has been formed by caricatures of the street-corner preacher. Healthy congregations create an ethos of being *invitational and relational, encouraging the natural telling of God's calling and care amidst the relationships of our lives.*

What does it look like to practice intentional, authentic, and relational evangelism? The answer will be different for individuals and congregation, but individuals observe the following practices:

1. Invites a friend to church to hear the Gospel.
2. Tells another person their story of coming to faith.
3. Tells another person what God means to them in their life.
4. Tells another person how Scripture declares God's love for all.
5. Is described by others as having at least three of the following characteristics *while sharing her or his faith*: authentic, personal, warm, honest, open, inquisitive, empathetic, and humorous.
6. Understands that the integrity of her relationships, actions, and words serves as a basis upon which her witness to faith will be judged.
7. Has conversations about God or faith with people outside of the church.
8. Demonstrates genuine concern through acts of love and justice before inviting someone to faith.
9. Is present with people in difficult situations as a witness to God's care and justice in the world.
10. Says to another, "What can I do for you in the name of Christ today?"

Alongside the life of the individual Jesus follower stands a congregation. What does it look like for a congregation to live into faithfulness toward the first Great End of the Church by promoting and training their flock in the practice of intentional, authentic, and relational evangelism? The congregation who lives the first, great end with faithfulness practices the following:

1. Encourages its members to share their faith story with others.

2. Trains its members in how to share their faith story with others.
3. Has members practice sharing their faith story with one another in worship, small groups, at Session/Deacons and its committees in both verbal and written form.
4. Teaches/wrestles with the meaning of salvation and has a clearly defined, broad-consensus definition of salvation that is understood and regularly articulated within the congregation.
5. Generates members who demonstrate a willingness to offer mercy, to speak the truth in love, and to look beyond their own good to the concerns of a wider world with humility and joy.
6. Equips its members to invite personal faith and have conversations that nurture a relationship with God when those who are without faith, those seeking faith, and those of fragile faith come to worship or another church event.
7. Talks about the difficult questions about faith and the Bible.
8. Performs acts in the world that bear witness to God's love for the world as proclaimed in scripture.
9. Shares faith-based posts on social media.
10. Baptizes adults at least several times a year

Most Presbyterian churches will wrestle with cultivating the above values; indeed, this may be the most difficult of the Six Great Ends for a church to practice. This wrestling is not with the angels, but with our own demons of memory, embarrassment, and mortification that have often come from evangelistic encounters which were focused on harsh judgmentalism. Too seldom have we experienced faith sharing borne of love, filled with wonder, that invites us to notice the Spirit at work among us. This is the kind of evangelism to which we refer when we talk about intentional, authentic, and relational evangelism. Some may suggest that growing in healthy evangelism is not necessary in order for the Presbyterian Church to discover God's revitalization. Others would respectfully suggest that the scriptures, especially the New Testament, would disagree. Here's an invitation to prayer: If you resist *healthy* evangelism, how interested are you, *really*, in revitalization?

As a final note, it has been observed that the first Great End of the Church is meaningless without the other five Great Ends being lived out by the Church through robust practice. As one presbyter who responded to the

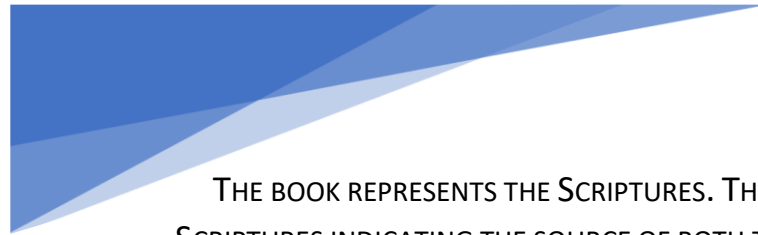
Presbytery Pastor wrote, “It would seem to me that the first Great End of the Church is actually the end of the cycle not the beginning. People do not come to faith and then go do something. People of faith do something and other join them.” That is, congregations who practice intentional, authentic, and relational evangelism also *proclaim* in works what is said in words regarding God’s

love for the world. Maybe St. Francis was correct after all. Then again, maybe St. Francis spoke a valuable word for his day and age that only partially applies to today’s social and spiritual context.

What do you think?



**We will share the Good News of Jesus in our words and deeds.**



THE BOOK REPRESENTS THE SCRIPTURES. THE DOVE IS RISING FROM THE SCRIPTURES INDICATING THE SOURCE OF BOTH THE ORIGINAL WITNESS AND OUR PRESENT UNDERSTANDING. THE SAME SPIRIT THAT INSPIRED THE ORIGINAL WRITERS ENABLES US TO RECEIVE THE GOSPEL. THE CROSS BEHIND THE BOOK AND DOVE REMINDS US THAT THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST IS GOD WITH US AND FOR US.

[Cite your source here.]



## The Second Great End of the Church:

### the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the people of God

At the Last Supper, Jesus said to his disciples, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Jesus’ words connect our faithfulness as disciples to our care for one another in a straight, direct, and continuous line. An elder once commented during a Session meeting that our best outreach was the way we cared for one another. The pastor flippantly responded, “No, that would be called in-reach.” At the time, he wanted to push against the tendency to care only for “our own” without engagement with the community. However, there is truth in the elder’s words: How we care for each other matters.

How caring is your congregation?

The second Great End of the Church is likely at or near the top of the list for what most Presbyterian churches do well: the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the people of God. The Biblical call to care is what drives us to elect deacons, to form Stephen Ministries, and to be intentional in our welcome and hospitality toward visitors. But the work of caring cannot be outsourced to a committee. It is the work of all the Body of Christ.

Often, the greatest obstacle to the full expression of our care is busyness. For most Presbyterians (and perhaps all folks), overburdened schedules limit our capacity to notice needs and diminish our ability to stop and heed the cry of the one whom God has placed before us. It may be that our sanctification—our growing into holiness—in caring relationships is connected to our willingness to allow margins to exist in our calendars!

#### **Noah and the Narrative Arc (pun intended) of Salvation**

Carol Schurr, a ruling elder at Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Tucson, wrote to the Presbytery Pastor,

...to the best of my knowledge, there is nothing in Scripture and nothing in the Book of Order that defines “children of God” as only “Christ followers....” For any individual, the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship in the Church should feel welcoming, accepting, and reassuring regardless of

one’s current beliefs. One should feel like one has come home. One can relax and be oneself. The recognition of belief, and the profession thereof, may well likely follow the actual receiving of shelter, being nurtured, and feeling part of a fellowship that professes some sort of spiritual sense of being.

Carol’s insights raise a salient question. She is correct that a Christian theology of God as Creator claims all people are children of God. However, from the perspective of a Christian theology of God as Redeemer and God as Sustainer, a congregation must ask, “What is the relationship between the church’s responsibility toward those within the congregation and those beyond the congregation?” Put another way: Is there a distinction to be made between the good to which the church is called in the second Great End from the good to which the church is called in the fifth Great End—the promotion of social righteousness?

When the Presbytery Pastor asked people what it looks like to live out the second Great End of the Church to provide shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship to the people of God, his email inbox was flooded with amazing examples of congregations supporting migrant, refugee, and homeless hospitality, orphanages in Uganda or sales of fair market products from Kenya, as well as disability ministries in the Ukraine and relief efforts in Indonesia. All of these projects are to be commended as examples of the powerful Presbyterian urge to embrace all people as God’s children! However, for the sake of operational clarity, it is necessary to distinguish between the second and fifth Great End, between our inward glance and our outward gaze.

Former General Assembly Moderator Jack Rodgers used the symbolism of Noah’s Ark and comparing it to the narrative arc between the second Great End—the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God—and the fifth Great End—noting the confessions of the early Church and Reformation Church “depict the church as an ‘ark of salvation’...the primary functions of this church are to bring people to salvation—a right relationship with

God—and to guide them in living a Christian life.”<sup>4</sup> What this implies is there is a relational arc that connects the second Great End, with its inward glance, to the fifth Great End, with its outward gaze. For the purposes of this study, therefore, attention will be focused on those within the church and our privilege to shelter, nurture and provide spiritual fellowship.

What, then, does it look like for an individual to practice the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the people of God? Such an individual practices the following:

1. Prays for other church members on a regular basis.
2. Shares one’s life experiences and God experiences in conversation with other church members.
3. Instructs children and youth on the nature and practices of the Christian life.
4. Visits church members who are in the hospital, homebound, or confined to an institution.
5. Participates with deacons or pastors in ministries of care.
6. Notices when someone is in grief, pain, or discomfort, and then stops, inquires, listens, cares, and responds to that person with prayer or action.
7. Learns people’s names whenever possible and is not afraid to ask for someone’s name if they forget it.
8. Seeks out visitors to offer welcome and greeting, and to invite them to other events (e.g. lunch, potluck, Bible study, etc.).
9. Provides full-time caregiving and nurture to an elderly husband or wife and ensures their continued quality of life.
10. Encourages the presence of children and youth in church through tolerating noise or commotion while yet modeling and guiding young ones toward learning the ways of respectfully being church together.

The congregation who practices the shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship of the children of God does the following:

1. Regularly communicates to all members how to request prayer for oneself or others and then prays for one another in worship and throughout the week.

2. Organizes, trains, and sends deacons, Stephen Ministers, and pastors to visit those in the hospital, homebound, or confined to an institution.
3. Educates its members in how to refer people to and utilize community services (e.g. memory care, low vision, low-income housing, etc.).
4. Promotes care groups (e.g. 12-Step groups, Divorce Recovery).
5. Ensures its building structure and administrative practices emphasize accessibility.
6. Celebrates life events (e.g. births, graduations, anniversaries, achievements).
7. Creates opportunities for church members to share life experiences and God experiences in smaller, more intimate settings.
8. Instructs and trains younger disciples in the practices of the Christian life.
9. Organizes mentoring relationships between older adults, youth, and children.
10. The following types of events/experiences are the norm:
  - a. A member suffers from a spinal deformity. She doesn’t like to go out at all because people point and stare. At church, we see her for who she is and she feels “sheltered” from the mean actions of others.
  - b. One of the church’s official photographers is legally blind. He is still a part of the team—his sense of worth is nurtured even though his contribution may be “fuzzy.”
  - c. Each week about 50–80 people regularly sign a “thinking of you card” for one of the members who is unable to attend. While the recipient may not know every signer, the sheer number of individual signatures wraps that person in a spiritual fellowship.
  - d. A committed foster parent brings children born with special needs into her home, particularly infants who need constant nurture. These children are welcomed in worship and church events by the entire congregation.
  - e. Members handknit blankets which are then prayed over by deacons and other congregants and given to people in need of prayer and

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<sup>4</sup> Jack Rogers, *Claiming the Center: Churches and Conflicting Worldviews*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996, p.52. Quoted in Joseph D. Small and Frank T.

Hainer, *The Great Ends of the Church: Short-Term Study Course for Adults*. (Louisville, KY: Witherspoon Press), 2003, p. 9.

blessing, such as those facing surgery, those who are in hospice, or those who have made a decision to move to a home closer to family.

- f. A longtime member handknits blankets which are then prayed over by deacons and other congregants and given to people in need of prayer and blessing, such as those facing surgery, those who are in hospice, or those who have made a decision to move to a home closer to family.

It is surely narcissistic for a congregation to focus only on “in-reach,” only on the care and needs of its own

members to the exclusion of one’s neighbors—there remains a narrative arc between the inward glance of the second Great End and the outward gaze of the fifth Great End. However, it is also true that in a busy, frantic, anxious, and polarized world dominated by technology how we love one another matters. Human connection is essential. So I ask again: How caring is your congregation?



**MULTI-HUED HANDS REPRESENT ALL THE CHILDREN OF GOD. THE DOVE’S WINGS ARE TIPPED DOWNWARD, SHELTERING THE PEOPLE OF GOD. THE TRIANGLE OF LIGHT LINKS THE DOVE TO THE PEOPLE.**

[Cite your source here.]

**We will love and care for one another.**



## The Third Great End of the Church: the maintenance of divine worship

Clergy often have pet peeves regarding the worship of God. Here are a few examples.

*Pet Peeve #1* – Using “worship” as a synonym for “music” or “the emotional feel I receive from a particular string of chord progressions” as opposed to its Reformed and historical usage: the retelling of the divine narrative of God’s salvation.

*Pet Peeve #2* – Prayers of invocation at Reformed churches. God is always present! Why would one invoke the presence of God if God is already here?

*Pet Peeve #3* – Narcissistic focus—in prayers, hymns and songs, and some sermons—rather than the expression and appreciation of a corporate faith. Enough said.

Clergy—and laity—naturally feel strongly about worship. It is through the worship experience that many come to life in Christ. Personal stories connect to God’s Story through worship. As a result, we all have prejudices on the subject. But what if our prejudices are getting in the way of experiencing the Living God?

If our congregations are going to discern the call of God upon us, we will, of necessity, need to embrace the Reformed faith’s gift of “both/and” worship that is:

- *both* rooted in history *and* expressive of contemporary meaning,
- *both* embracing a communal expression of faith *and* inviting personal encounters with the Living God,
- *both* respecting the narrative form of worship as the retelling of God’s salvation *and* inviting opportunities for each individually and all collectively to connect their story to God’s Story.

Beyond the “worship wars,” with arguments about musical styles and prayer forms, Spirit-filled worship seeks to integrate heart and mind and be guided by the whisper of the still, small voice, as spoken into and through faith communities by the Holy Spirit. How is your congregation listening to where God is leading you in worship?

This vital sign of congregational health calls for worship in which the focus is on God and the experience is of coming onto holy ground: an encounter with God, leading to an experience of wonder. This vital sign presumes an active participation in the living relationship of the triune God, in which all people feel welcome to come as they are, yet also expect to go forth as those touched and transformed for God’s purposes. This vital sign suggests worship that challenges, teaches, transforms, encounters, convicts, and sends people into the world to be the blessing of Christ Jesus in human form. Such worship moves beyond self-gratification or consumeristic entertainment, yet also breaks through the calcification of rituals divorced of meaning. Such worship is *both* hard work *and* high calling, *both* personal offering *and* holy promise that God will be upon us, within us, between us, and through us.

The individual who lives the maintenance of divine worship,

1. Participates regularly in the gathering of the worshipping community to observe Sabbath.
2. Prays on a daily basis.
3. Prays praise, adoration, and thanksgiving (focus on God) as well as confession and petition (focus on us).
4. Prays with a time set aside for silence in order simply to be with God, listen, and experience God’s presence.
5. Reads Scripture devotionally.
6. Studies Scripture in-depth.
7. Practices the Prayer of Examen/Reflection at the end of the day to connect one’s daily life to God.
8. Seeks in one’s experience of worship to glorify God in thought, word, and deed.
9. Is open in one’s experience of worship to move beyond education to transformation, beyond “What am I getting out of this?” to “How can I bless God and those around me?” and beyond mere words to becoming like Jesus.
10. Sings like she or he means it!

The congregation who lives the maintenance of divine worship,

1. Centers all worship on the person, character, and saving actions of God in Jesus Christ.
2. Crafts worship around the Word—music, prayer, and all other elements point to the Word.
3. Crafts worship in ways that:
  - a. engage the mind yet allow times for silence, personal reflection, and personal response;
  - b. connect the Word proclaimed to God’s call upon us to live as instruments of God’s grace, mercy, and peace in the world;
  - c. bring awareness of ancient liturgical rhythms and modern, contemporary expression;
  - d. balance “Presbyterian wordiness” with creative, multi-sensory rituals that engage the whole person;
  - e. make room in worship for mystery and awe, and expect to encounter the Holy Spirit; and
  - f. incorporate intentionally designed “sending” rituals.
4. Trains liturgists in the practice of leading and trains ushers and greeters in the art of hospitality.
5. Creates opportunities for members to use their spiritual gifts in worship.
6. Remembers and responds to those who cannot be in worship either because of health (e.g. homebound, nursing home residents) or vocation (first responders).
7. Generously finances the maintenance of divine worship.
8. Provides and prepares creative and appropriate worship spaces.
9. Nurtures the congregation’s worship life through elements they have memorized and can repeat together.
10. Enjoys a large and varied repertoire of congregational songs.

How does the worship at your church reflect the above?



THE CHALICE, A REMINDER OF THE TRINITY, REPRESENTS THE LORD’S SUPPER, AND THE THREE DROPS OF WATER, BAPTISM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. THE DOVE REMINDS US THAT THE SAME SPIRIT IS PRESENT IN THE SACRAMENTS AS IN THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL. THE SACRAMENTS ENACT THE GOSPEL. THE RAISED ARMS SIGNIFY OUR RESPONSE OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING; OUR WORSHIP OF THE LIVING GOD.

**We will gather as a community to worship the triune God.**



## The Fourth Great End of the Church:

### the preservation of the truth

#### (discipleship as the living experience of Jesus, the Truth)

Truth is in short supply: fake news in politics, opinion masquerading as fact, actual facts being framed in such a way the message created distorts into parody, debates about science vs. pseudo-science. Is truth a function of power? A function of philosophical ideas? A function of scientific empiricism?

The Hebrew people perceived of truth as a lived reality, which may help us understand Jesus' words, "...I am the truth..." (John 14:6). Jesus is not merely an idea (though he is the eternal *Logos*), nor is Jesus' Way merely a set of rules for behavior (though one can argue the Sermon on the Mount is a particularly compelling summary of ethics). Rather, to say Jesus is the truth is to acknowledge an organic interconnection between head and heart and hands, between one's beliefs and one's behaviors, and between the personal and the public, that lead toward the creation of God's *shalom* on earth as in heaven. Truth is a lived reality.

Presbyterians have always been strong on education, and it is tempting to view this fourth Great End exclusively through an educational lens. To do so would be a lost opportunity. Seeing the fourth Great End exclusively through an educational lens might cause us to see only that with which we are most comfortable seeing (using our intellects) and, like a Clydesdale with blinders, limit our vision. Truth, according to Jesus, is found incarnate in a person. It is intended to be lived incarnate in a person as well.

Healthy congregations have some common traits that encourage, nurture, and lead people toward discipleship that lives the truth rather than merely knowing correct doctrine. One common trait is that they move people beyond mere piety, simple morality, and offering the latest programs to invite, encourage, plan, structure, and live out their communal life toward the goal of becoming Christ-like. Healthy congregations plan their discipleship ministries in ways that nurture folks' ability to discover their core identity in Christ: daily and with depth; at

home, work, and in the community; "in season and out of season." Healthy congregations understand Christian discipleship as a journey of spiritual intention and support each other in making the intention a practice and the practice a habit.

The individual who preserves the truth, in the sense of promoting a lived experience of Jesus, does the following,

1. Listens to the sermon and allows God to influence them through it.
2. Reads Scripture, studies the historic confessions, and reads contemporary works that connect faith to life.
3. Prays, then ponders, contemplates, and converses about what one is hearing, reading, and doing, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide one's actions.
4. Sets life goals that conform to Biblical values.
5. Acts in ways such that what one does publicly and privately express a unity, a life of integrity, where one's reputation, character, and behavior are integrated.
6. Practices the faith in daily life beyond the politically popular/correct issues, including also the practices of humility and hope, justice and joy, a willingness to seek and offer mercy, and looking beyond their own good to the concerns of a wider world.
7. Courageously yet politely calls out prejudice, injustice, and distortions of the Christian faith, verbally and in writing, through interpersonal conversations, in small groups, and on social media, always remembering to speak the truth in love (especially on social media!).
8. Thinks globally and acts locally.
9. Treats other people—all other people—according to their being created in *imago dei* (the image of God).
10. Responds to seasons of spiritual blandness—aka, "The Wall," "The Dark Night of the Soul"—with patience and perseverance, continuing to practice the faith and seeking deeper means of hearing God's Word and Spirit.

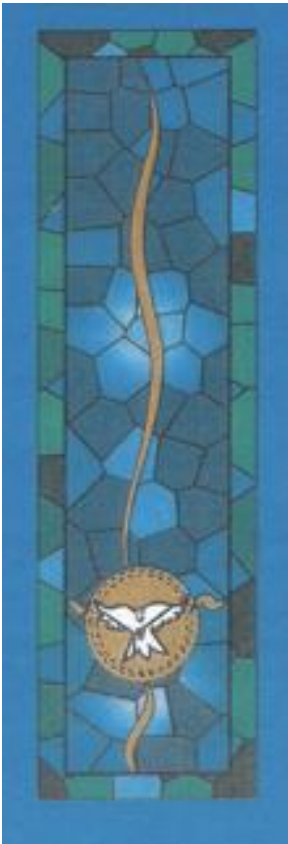


The congregation who lives the preservation of the truth, again, in the sense of promoting a lived experience of Jesus, does the following:

1. Teaches Scripture, the historic tradition, and contemporary application of faith to life.
2. Trains people in both ancient and contemporary practices of prayer.
3. Trains people in living one's faith in daily life.
4. Offers discipleship curricula with different entry points: seeker, beginner, intermediate, and advanced.
5. Offers discipleship curricula on ways to get unstuck in one's spiritual journey—aka, beyond “The Wall” or beyond “The Dark Night of the Soul.”
6. Facilitates discussion of personal, local, national, and global events through the lens of Biblical values to offer insight, critique, and affirmation as appropriate.

7. Creates opportunities for members to express Biblical values through service in the church and in the community.
8. Encourages the sharing of diverse perspectives as a means of seeking God's truth.
9. Participates in, financially supports, and promotes activities that advocate Christian values in the public sphere.
10. Expects to be kept apprised of denominational positions on current events, including potentially divisive subjects.

There is so much more that could be said about discipleship training that focuses on helping people live and experience the living, resurrected Jesus but this is enough for now. All is well! God is Sovereign in love! Let's be the Church God is calling us to be!



THE BANNER REPRESENTS THE LIGHT OF TRUTH SHINING IN THE DARKNESS.  
THE DOVE REMINDS US THAT THE TRUTH WE PROCLAIM TO THE WORLD IS  
THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, GOD WITH US AND FOR US.

**We will live in ever-growing obedience to the truth discovered in Jesus Christ.**



## The Fifth Great End of the Church: the promotion of social righteousness

The fifth Great End is beloved of Christians for whom Matthew 25 is their life verse, “I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink...” The fifth Great End points back to the prophets, “Do justice...” and, “Let justice roll down like a river” (Micah 6:8 and Amos 5:24). It reminds us of James’ wisdom, “...I will show you my faith by my deeds” (James 2:19).

Presbyterians *love* the fifth Great End.

What stumbles *some* Presbyterians, however, is the peculiar phrase “social righteousness,” which was born out of the “Social Gospel” of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and its emphasis on radical, social transformation in society (e.g. the implementation of child labor laws). While everyone now agrees with the need for child labor laws, the critique of “social righteousness” is that it can seem to bifurcate the Gospel into a social Gospel and a spiritual Gospel as an either/or choice when, in our Reformed faith, there is only one Gospel, and it is both/and: both spiritual and social

If “social righteousness” was the buzz word of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, “missional” is the buzz word from the early 21<sup>st</sup> century that essentially means the same thing. For pastors, missional is familiar territory, as it is a theological word, a seminary word. For others, “missional” sounds like the kind of buzz word preachers love but which creates distance between pulpit and pew: “Come on, preacher, get real!” Here is an easy way to think about it:

Mission + Relational = Missional.

“Missional” is the Church’s attempt to convey the unity of the Gospel, to call for “social righteousness” while also remembering the Christian faith is relational: loving God and loving neighbor – both/and rather than either/or.

What does it mean, then, to say the Church, the Body of Christ, is to promote social righteousness/be missional? For starters, it means our focus needs to be outward, not inward. The motto of some churches is: “Outwardly focused, inwardly strong.” The insinuation of such churches is they balance their outward ministries and their inward ministries in roughly a fifty-fifty manner. Ministry experience suggests, however, there will always

be gravitational forces pushing leaders toward inward-focused ministries. When the choice for a pastor is between getting to the hospital to visit the beloved matriarch or spending her or his time in the church parking lot listening to a panhandler wend a long tale of woe, the panhandler usually is ignored in favor of the matriarch.

What does it mean to say the Church, the Body of Christ, is to promote social righteousness/be missional? Churches are the Body of Christ for the world, to the world, and in the world, so we must sustain a commitment to being the Body of Christ in the world. Theologians call this being “incarnational” (another buzz word). Incarnational means we are called to be the hands and feet of Christ, to be Jesus with meat (*en carne*), in the flesh, not just a skeleton but an enfleshed Jesus whose presence is felt because Jesus’ people are at work in the world.

What does it mean to say the Church, the Body of Christ, is to promote social righteousness/be missional? Churches that live according to our calling to be missional adopt the motto: “Go and Show the Gospel.” Such missional thinking is in contrast to the dominant methodology most of have experienced throughout our lives. Most of our shared experience is with attractational ministry, the motto for which is: “Y’all Come to the House of the Lord.” While there is nothing wrong with having people come to the House of the Lord, in the missionary context that is 21<sup>st</sup>-century North America, attractational ministry alone is insufficient to fulfill our calling.

Jesus said to his disciples, “Greater works shall you do” (John 14:12). Surely the works we do are greater in quantity, not quality. These greater works happen because of a willingness to act with missional intent, to incarnate Jesus in our communities. So, what does it look like to promote social righteousness/be missional?

The individual who promotes social righteousness,

1. Participates in the congregation's *passive* ministries of compassion (e.g. donating canned goods and gently used clothes, or writing a check, etc.).
2. Volunteers in the congregation's *active* compassion ministries (e.g. reading to school children, serving at a soup kitchen, or helping Habitat for Humanity build a home, etc.).
3. Prays for those whom Jesus called "the least of these, my brothers and sisters," whether in one's community, the nation, or around the world.
4. Seeks *cooperative* mission engagement, asking those one seeks to serve, "What is it that you would find helpful?" Then, only after listening to the answer, responding as one is capable.
5. Seeks *mutual* mission engagement, serving "with" rather than "for" others, building relationships of mutuality that break down hierarchical, "Big Brother/Sister" interactions in favor of "We, together..."
6. Seeks to become more educated about the history of religious protest and historic issues that impact today's events (e.g. Doctrine of Discovery, Abolitionists, Great Reforms of the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Women's Suffrage, Civil Rights, etc.).
7. Seeks to become more educated about economic, social, cultural, and political issues that impact minorities, people living in poverty, and any other group that has the potential to be marginalized or disenfranchised.
8. Advocates for just and humane policies and laws in the public square, especially those policies and laws related to the protection of minorities, people living in poverty, and any other group that has the potential to be marginalized or disenfranchised.
9. Kindly and consistently confronts actions and attitudes of racism, homophobia, xenophobia, sexism, and ageism, first looking to oneself and then to the actions and attitudes of others.
10. Practices good stewardship through living responsibly, disavowing consumerism in favor of generosity.

The congregation who promotes social righteousness,

1. Provides opportunities for members to express care for others through *passive* compassion ministries (e.g.

food drives, clothing drives, and financial giving, etc.).

2. Provides opportunities for members to express care for others through *active* compassion ministries (e.g. Habitat for Humanity, school reading programs, Family Promise, etc.).
3. Works with existing community organizations who provide care in the community.
4. Organizes and promotes new ministries that provide care in the community.
5. Includes in worship opportunities for prayer and other liturgical elements that uphold social righteousness.
6. Educates the congregation on social ethics by connecting Scripture to real-world issues confronting our communities, state, nation, and world.
7. Educates the congregation about the history of religious protest and historic issues that impact today's events (e.g. Doctrine of Discovery, Abolitionists, Great Reforms of the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Women's Suffrage, Civil Rights, etc.).
8. Educates the congregation on sociological, economic, and political complexities that impact minorities, people living in poverty, and any other group that has the potential to be marginalized or disenfranchised.
9. Advocates for just policies and laws, especially for minorities, people living in poverty, and any other group that has the potential to be marginalized or disenfranchised.
10. Educates the congregation on the values and practices of good stewardship, living responsibly in the world, and the importance of disavowing consumerism in favor of generosity.

Do we know our neighbors? Do we have actual relationships with the lowly, with strangers, with the marginalized—not just ministries to them, but actual relationships? Do we see Christ beyond our church walls, and, when we do, do we dwell there as well? The opposite of missional action is inward and institutional: closed communities of exclusion, seeking assimilation rather than encounter and engagement, safe and secure, dying.

Please, for the love of Jesus, don't be that kind of church.



THE BANNER REPRESENTS AMOS 5:24, "BUT LET JUSTICE ROLL DOWN LIKE WATERS, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS LIKE AN EVER-FLOWING STREAM."

We will live in ways that reflect compassion,  
seek justice and work for God's Shalom.



## The Sixth Great End of the Church: the exhibition of the kingdom of heaven to the world

The Scottish reformer John Knox remarked about Calvin's Geneva that "it was the most heavenly city." Knox' words were neither commentary on the cleanliness nor the precision of the Swiss but on the quantity of nationalities represented among the city's population. While Luther started the Reformation, Calvin conveyed it to the nations, which is why there are over 150 Reformed denominations throughout the world.

The sixth great end of the church is the exhibition of the kingdom of heaven to the world and arguably is the most all-encompassing, mysterious, and difficult to do of the six Great Ends. All of the first five great ends are encompassed within this sixth end, and it points toward a reality beyond what the church currently is, currently does, currently looks like, currently expresses. The sixth great end is as much inspirational and aspirational as it is real and actual, for it asks us to imagine what the kingdom of heaven will look like when the New Jerusalem descends from God to earth (Revelation 21:2). Here are two, brief vignettes that capture the spirit of the sixth Great End.

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The pastor spent two of the last three weeks in bed; illness zapped her strength and vitality. In the "You know you're sick when" department, she knew she was sick when, after taking a long nap, she was able to get out of bed but, prone on the couch, found watching Netflix too difficult to watch because they required too much concentration! She went back to bed.

The sixth Great End shows a church its congregational health. Healthy congregations are healthy communities, and a healthy community is one that can embrace diversity of race, culture, and perspective. Healthy communities engage in difficult discussions with respect rather than rancor. Healthy *Christian* communities imagine what it will be like in heaven and then seek to relate to one another "on earth as it is in heaven." How is your congregation's health?

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A pastor once served a congregation in a small, rural community that was undergoing a transformational shift:

the completion of a major highway from a top-five metropolis had made this region of rustic charm and beauty accessible to commuters and retirees. The town, and all of its churches, were growing, changing, and dealing with the rupture of new wine in old wineskins.

The dynamic within the community's congregations was common to all: "Insider" versus "Outsider," "Town Folk" versus "Country Folk." Not surprisingly, the established church members sought to hold on to their power and position. Within that Presbyterian church, over a ten-year period, 86% of ruling elders came from one of four families. Life-long Presbyterians were being stifled in their desire to work for Jesus; vital ministries were blocked, not on merit, but because of the birthplace of those proposing an idea. It was the pastor's wife who helped him put words to his frustration when she commented over dinner, "It's as if they have forgotten it's about ministry, not dynasty."

Ministry, not dynasty. Her words unlocked for that pastor the necessary verve, patience, and perseverance to break through the stalling tactics of those seeking to prevent others from using spiritual gifts to serve the church, the community, and our Lord. Yet "ministry, not dynasty," ironically, also gave him compassion for the country folks and helped him understand their pain at the changes happening all around them, the loss of their former community. It was during this season that he learned the gift of acceptance of those who were not yet able to embrace the changes toward which God was calling the congregation.

Here are some ways to imagine what it looks like to live toward the exhibition of the kingdom of heaven to the world: The individual who exhibits the kingdom of heaven to the world,

1. Practices hospitality and welcome toward strangers.
2. Cultivates friendships with all people regardless of social, economic, racial, national, or sexual status/orientation.
3. Practices equality and protects the human dignity of all people.

4. Lives in ways that affirm faith, hope, and love and that reject fear, despair, and judgment.
5. Lives with humility before God and others, demonstrating respect toward all people.
6. Cultivates the practice of civility and respect with intentionality, especially toward those with whom they disagree.
7. Practices active listening and the use of “I-language” as a means of creating connection through communication.
8. Refrains from seeking control over others through “having the same mind that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5–11).
9. Demonstrates care toward every part of God’s creation.
10. Lives the first five Great Ends fully, wholly, completely, and utterly (Greek: *telios*)!

The congregation who exhibits the kingdom of heaven,

1. Trains its members in the ministry of welcome and hospitality.
2. Has an official, written policy of openness and inclusivity that is communicated to members.
3. Discusses ways its congregational customs either create welcome or convey unwelcome, making changes as needed.
4. Contextualizes their worship, fellowship, and educational ministries for the people living in their neighborhood.
5. Serves the community more than it serves itself, toward the motto: Be a helper, not an obstacle; Be a giver, not a taker; Be a friend, not an adversary.
6. Promotes and trains congregants in healthy communication best practices (e.g. active listening, I-

empathy building, interest-based negotiation, etc.).

8. Discusses issues of the day, regardless of how sensitive the topic, with courage and kindness because members possess a spirit of love, grace, and humility toward one another.
9. Has an intentional focus on both friend and stranger, both neighbor and the world, both the Kingdom now and the Kingdom to come.
10. Participates together as a congregation in ministries of creation care.

The great challenge to the full expression of our exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world will likely be extending our care beyond the inner circle of those who look, think, and act like us. We are called to embrace larger and wider circles; to include those who appear as stranger, as other, as “the least of these,” but who are surely also those for whom Christ died. In a nation whose demographics are evolving by the hour, whose projection is that soon the Anglo population will be a plurality, yet not a majority, the need to offer welcome and hospitality for all, the need to care for those who differ from us, will be a necessity.

It is already a Gospel imperative.



**THE DOVE IS IN FLIGHT OVER THE GLOBE, CARRYING AN OLIVE BRANCH, ECHOING THE NOAH STORY. THIS REPRESENTS THE EIGHTH DAY OF CREATION, GOD’S GRACE COMING INTO THE WORLD, THE REIGN OF GOD PROCLAIMED BY JESUS CHRIST. THE LIGHT RISING BEHIND THE EARTH REPRESENTS THE DAWNING OF GOD’S KINGDOM.**

language, etc.).

7. Promotes and trains congregants in conflict reconciliation best practices (e.g.

We will live in ways that reflect God's heart and God's eternity—  
on earth as it is in heaven.



**Bible Studies on the Six Great Ends of the Church:**  
engaging scripture as a mirror for our life together



## Thrive Bible Studies – The First Great End: the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind

### *Opening Prayer*

O Lord of the Good News, make us instruments of your grace,  
where there is judgment, let us sow clemency;  
where there is hypocrisy, let us show integrity;  
where there is clamor, let us speak the truth gently and in love;  
where others are broken, let us sow blessing;  
where others are crushed in spirit, let us sow conviction of soul;  
where others scorn, let us speak of the sacred with humility and hope.  
O Divine Sower, let us not so much seek to be heard as to hear,  
to argue against as to be with,  
to avoid darkness as to shine light.  
For it is in sharing with others that we learn of our own need,  
it is in sharing good news that we learn to become it,  
it is in offering grace that we finally and fully learn how to embrace eternal life.

—A Prayer of St. Andrew, patron saint of evangelism<sup>5</sup>

### *Scripture Reading*

**John 4:1-41; John 1:35-50; Acts 8:26–39**

### *Commentary*

- (1) The Samaritan woman “represents the ultimate outsider, whom Jesus transforms into an informed insider.’...” This happens because Jesus is willing to cross “three barriers—socioethnic, gender, and moral.... Jesus...did not seek out members of the religious elite; even open-minded Nicodemus had to come to Jesus; but Jesus went to great lengths and took serious risks to reach the Samaritan woman....’ [Jesus opens the conversation with his request for water; as always...the initiative lies with Jesus....’ Our Samaritan woman may be appropriately called the *prima apostola*.”<sup>6</sup>
- (2) The best evangelism is one friend sharing with another about a personal encounter with Jesus. This passage from the Gospel of John is a ladder of such sharing: John the Baptizer told Andrew (and another, unnamed disciple), Andrew told Simon Peter, Andrew or Peter presumably told Philip and so prepared him for Jesus’ command to “follow me,” and then, finally, Philip told Nathanael about Jesus. On this ladder of sharing, we see that each one speaks of Jesus in a different way, to help the hearer listen and accept the good news. John spoke to his own disciples about Jesus as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Andrew spoke quite simply when he told his brother Peter that Jesus was “the Messiah.” Philip, speaking to Nathanael, highlighted the connection between the Law and the Prophets and Jesus: “the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote.” Bruner says of this kind of evangelism: “We most naturally want to approach people at their point of greatest interest.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Brad Munroe, “O Lord of the Good News,” 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 253–254, 277.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.



- (3) “Jesus, the one who hated righteousness, loved making wine for parties, always stood up for the underdog, and gave the stuck-up and self-righteous hell[.] How do we learn to talk about that real Jesus?”<sup>8</sup> That’s the Jesus I want to follow!
- (4) “The simple program of Christ for winning the whole world is to make each person he touches magnetic enough with love to draw others.”<sup>9</sup>
- (5) “Preach the Gospel always; if necessary, use words.” –St. Francis of Assisi

### *Questions to Ponder and Discuss*

- (1) Jesus was prompted by the Spirit to go through Samaria. When have *you* witnessed or experienced the power of obedience to Spirit drawing someone toward living water?
- (2) Jesus chose to cross the socioethnic, gender, and moral barriers before him. When have *you* witnessed or experienced courageous choices unlock doors for the Gospel?
- (3) Notice the progression in the way Jesus speaks with the woman: requests, banter, (gentle) challenge, and direct statements. What does Jesus’ conversational style tell us about evangelism as a relational and invitational process?
- (4) The word “evangelism” comes from the Greek word *euangelio*, which means “good news.” What is the good news in your life from living as a Jesus follower? Write down five bits of “news” you believe are good and are reasons you find joy, purpose, and meaning in following Jesus.
- (5) The spiritual gift of the evangelist is given to some but not all; however, every Christian is called to evangelize. The progression of evangelism (1) begins with being salt and light in our words and deeds, (2) continues as we learn the grace of inviting someone to join us at activities that will lead to their encounter with the Jesus Story, (3) deepens as we begin to share with others our personal story as it connects us to God—both daily events and the re-telling of grand moments of spiritual encounter, and (4) culminates in our ability to tell how Scripture proclaims the beautiful narrative of God at work in calling people into loving relationship through Jesus Christ. We do not need to be at the fourth stage in order to learn, grow, and live more faithfully the first three stages. Where are you now? Where are you going? How might your church train people to become more comfortable in practicing relational and invitational evangelism?



### *Application*

- (1) Five Golden Rings of Evangelism
  - Be a *spiritual* friend
  - Be ok with not knowing all the answers
  - Speak with humility and grace
  - Pray
  - Invite

<sup>8</sup> Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism*, 113.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Charles Laubach, *Man of Prayer: Selected Writings of a World Missionary* (Syracuse: Laubach Literacy International, 1990), 217.

- (2) Which of the above rings sparks a “Spirit nudge” within you?
- (3) To which of the above rings are you willing to commit this week as a spiritual practice?

### *Closing Prayer*

Dear Jesus, help me to spread Thy fragrance everywhere I go.  
Flood my soul with Thy spirit and love.  
Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly  
that all my life may only be a radiance of Thine.  
Shine through me and be so in me  
that every soul I come in contact with may feel Thy presence in my soul.  
Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus.  
Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as you shine,  
so to shine as to be a light to others. Amen.

—Daily prayer of Mother Teresa<sup>10</sup>

### *Additional Resources*

- <http://www.uscongregations.org/resources-for-congregations/> (scroll down to the section on Evangelism and Church Growth).

### *Videos*

- **Adam Hamilton: Christians and People of Other Religions:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMu8HRI9IVY>
- **Foundations of Presbyterian Discipleship 1: A People of Grace:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fcr2OAcZqNo>
- **Skit Guys—Bad Ways to Witness:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7Ek9jvDge4>  
**Skit Guys—Awkward Invites: Goulash:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXSihlfcQUA>

### *Books*

- Office of Evangelism, *Engage: A Curriculum on Congregational Evangelism*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church U.S.A., 2013. Available from [pcusastore.com/curriculum](http://pcusastore.com/curriculum).
- Martha Grace Reese, *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008.

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<sup>10</sup> ThoughtCo., “The Daily Prayer of Mother Teresa,” August 28, 2018, <https://www.thoughtco.com/daily-prayer-of-mother-teresa-542274>.



## Thrive Bible Studies - The Second Great End: the shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship of the people of God

### *Opening Prayer*

Give us, O Lord, steadfast hearts which no unworthy affection may drag downward;  
give us unconquered hearts which no tribulation can wear out;  
give us upright hearts which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside;  
and then bestow on us, O Lord our God, such passion of purpose to serve your will  
that all people will know that we have been with Jesus.

—A Prayer of Thomas Aquinas<sup>11</sup>

### *Scripture Reading*

**John 13:1-17; John 21:1–17; Galatians 6:1–10; Philippians 2:5-11; Acts 2:42–47**

### *Commentary*

- (1) John tells us that Jesus, having loved his own that were in the world, now showed them the full extent of his love. Let's pause for just a moment to wonder about that phrase: "the full extent of his love." What is the full extent of *Jesus'* love? It has never, ever, not even a little bit, occurred to Peter that what Severian of Gabala, a fourth-century Syrian bishop wrote about Jesus might be true: "He who wraps the heavens in clouds wrapped round himself a towel. He who pours the water into the rivers and pools tipped...water into a basin. And he before whom every knee bends in heaven and on earth and under the earth knelt to wash the feet of his disciples."<sup>12</sup>
- (2) "Most foot washing in the ancient world was a menial task. It involved washing off not just dust and mud but also the remains of human excrement (which was tipped out of houses into the streets) and animal waste (which was left on country roads and town streets). The task of doing this as an act of hospitality to honor guests was therefore normally assigned to slaves or servants of low status, particularly females, so much so that foot washing was virtually synonymous with slavery.... What makes the Fourth Gospel's account so extraordinary is that there is no parallel in extant ancient literature for a person of superior status voluntarily washing the feet of someone of inferior status. Jesus' act therefore represents an assault on the usual notions of social hierarchy, a subversion of the normal categories of honor and shame.... It is not just an honored teacher who is performing a shameful act but a divine figure with sovereignty over the cosmos who has taken on the role of a slave."<sup>13</sup>
- (3) Virtually all Bible commentators see a Eucharistic allusion in John 21:13: "Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them." Raymond Brown comments that "in primitive [Christian] iconography, meals of bread and fish (rather than of bread and wine) were the standard pictorial symbols of the Eucharist."<sup>14</sup> There is, therefore, a powerful reminder here of the importance not only of Christian community but of Christian communion. We are designed to be with and for one another, and our togetherness as Christian community must be centered in Christ; indeed, only Christ-centered community brings healing and the forgiveness of sins. This is a truth Peter was about to learn most profoundly.

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<sup>11</sup> *Book of Common Worship*, 829. Adapted.

<sup>12</sup> Bruner, *Gospel of John*, 748.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John* (London: Continuum, 2005), 367.

<sup>14</sup> As quoted in Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 1221.

- (4) Commentators do not see any significance between lambs and sheep, nor between directives to feed and take care; these phrases are synonymous with one another. What is significant is the cumulative weight of the three-fold commissioning: care, concern, and compassion; grace, gentleness, and generosity are to be the hallmarks of Peter's leadership and, by extension, all Christian leadership. The most important thing Jesus wanted Peter to know was that those he was entrusting to Peter's care belonged to Jesus; they were, said Jesus, "my lambs" and "my sheep."<sup>15</sup>
- (5) In Galatians 6:2, what translation one reads is significant. The NIV translates 6:2 as "carry each other's burdens," while the NRSV translates 6:2 as "bear each other's burdens." The difference may seem slight, but therapists and clinical social workers see a difference. The rule of thumb among practitioners of the helping professions is to "bear each other's burdens but carry your own load." This means the caregiver's job is to support, encourage, and guide, but not to take over another person's problem. To carry another's burdens (load) is to prevent them from experiencing the freedom and joy of growing stronger, healing, and living into their capacity to handle difficult things.
- (6) When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. "The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing...not healing, not curing...that is a friend who cares."<sup>16</sup>
- (7) When Philippians 2:7 says Jesus "made himself nothing" (NIV) or "emptied himself" (NRSV), the Greek word is translated *kenosis*, which denotes the manner in which Jesus, with forethought and intention, let go of both his divine power and divine prerogative to grasp the mantle of humanity and the life of servanthood. Scholars marvel at the notion of a "self-emptying God." Jürgen Moltmann declared, "When the crucified Jesus is called the 'image of the invisible God,' the meaning is that *this* is God, and God is like *this*. God is not greater than Jesus is in this humiliation. God is not more glorious than he is in this self-surrender. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than he is in this humanity."<sup>17</sup>
- (8) "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."—Martin Luther<sup>18</sup>



### Questions to Ponder and Discuss

- (1) When have you received the blessing of another's care? When has someone borne your burdens while simultaneously allowing you to carry your own load? Recall as many specifics as possible, regarding what was said and the manner in which the words were spoken. If there was a prayer offered, can you remember it? What made the experience a moment of grace or growth?
- (2) When have you experienced someone love *you* enough to "wash your feet"—either literally or figuratively? Describe the experience and how it affected you. When have you demonstrated Jesus' love by "washing the feet" of another?

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1228.

<sup>16</sup> Henri Nouwen, *Brainy Quote*, [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/henri\\_nouwen\\_131151](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/henri_nouwen_131151).

<sup>17</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), 295.

<sup>18</sup> *Martin Luther: Three Treatises*, trans. W. A. Lambert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 277.

- (3) It is worth noticing that Jesus (a) washed Judas' feet, too, and (b) broke and shared bread with Judas, a cultural symbol of friendship and brotherhood, immediately preceding Judas' betrayal. What is startling or remarkable about these details? When have *you* experienced reconciliation and peace with one who has betrayed you?
- (4) How comfortable are you with silence when listening to another person's pain? As you listen to another, what would help you grow more comfortable with *not* having answers, *not* being able to "do something," and *not* feeling the need to fill the void of silence with words, chatter, and verbiage?
- (5) What are ways that your entire church feeds Jesus' lambs and takes care of Jesus' sheep? How is this an act of the entire congregation and not just the pastor or designated leaders?

### *Application*

(1) Practice praying for another:

- *Beginner version* – Person A shares about a need they have, a specific prayer request, and person B only listens, without asking any questions. When person A is finished, person B prays for person A.
- *Intermediate version* – Person A shares a story from the last 24 hours without highlighting a specific prayer request, and person B only listens, without asking any questions. When person A is finished, person B prays for person A based on the concerns and longings they heard in the story.
- *Advanced version* – Person A tells about what has been happening in their life recently. Person B listens, offers concern, asks questions only to get clarity and understand, but *not* to offer guidance, *not* to make suggestions, and *not* to mention how the story affects them or is similar to an experience that occurred to them. When person A is satisfied that they have told all of the story they want to tell, person B will pray for person A based on the hopes and heartache, the joy and sorrow, the cares and concerns they heard.

Repeat the appropriate prayer practice(s) above with other people whom you trust and who trust you.

(2) Comparison between servanthood and servitude:

#### Servanthood

Calling  
Liberty  
Energizing  
Grace  
Own Desire  
Being Good  
Healing

#### Servitude

Obligation  
Bondage  
Fatiguing  
Guilt  
Other's Expectation  
Looking Good  
Hindering

In the columns above, put a check next to each word that describes you. Circle the words that describe your congregation. Choose a word from the Servanthood list to which you will commit this week as a spiritual practice—first in prayer, then in action.

(3) Write a brief, specific prayer for another person. Include the following:

- address the person and character of God,
- offer praise and thanksgiving to God,
- lift to God a request for help,
- express confidence in God’s care, compassion, and desire to draw others to Christ Jesus.

### *Closing Prayer*

Almighty God, we pray for your blessings on the church in this place:  
 here may the faithful find salvation and the careless be awakened,  
 here may the doubting find faith and the anxious be encouraged,  
 here may the tempted find help and the sorrowful comfort,  
 here may the weary find rest and the strong be renewed,  
 here may the aged find consolation and the young be inspired,  
 here may we all encounter Jesus. Amen.<sup>19</sup>

### *Additional Resources*

- [www.stephenministries.org](http://www.stephenministries.org)

### *Videos*

- **Stephen Ministry Care Receivers Share Their Stories:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OoTjIa-D-c>
- **Simon Sinek: Why Good Leaders Make You Feel Safe,** : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmyZMtPVodo>
- **Rod Beckstrom—The Starfish and the Spider (Decentralized Networks):**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wc1ZFTnSSVM>
- **Ordered Ministry 2—Being Leaders:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VICZ4qownvI>

### *Books*

- Kenneth C. Haugk, *Christian Caregiving: A Way of Life*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984.
- Kenneth C. Haugk, *The Quest for Quality Caring: Improve Your Ability to Relate to Others*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990.
- Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*. New York: Doubleday, 1979.
- Brene Brown, *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Heart*. New York: Random House, 2018.

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<sup>19</sup> *Book of Common Worship*, 19. Adapted.



## Thrive Bible Studies - The Third Great End:

### the maintenance of divine worship

#### *Opening Prayer*

Too late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient, O Beauty so new. Too late have I loved you!  
You were within me but I was outside myself, and there I sought you!  
In my weakness I ran after the beauty of the things you have made.  
You were with me, and I was not with you.  
The things you have made kept me from you—  
the things which would have no being unless they existed in you!  
You have called, you have cried, and you have pierced my deafness.  
You have radiated forth, you have shined out brightly, and you have dispelled my blindness.  
You have sent forth your fragrance, and I have breathed it in, and I long for you.  
I have tasted you, and I hunger and thirst for you.  
You have touched me, and I ardently desire your peace.

—Prayer of St. Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 27, 38<sup>20</sup>

#### *Scripture Reading*

**Isaiah 6:1–8; Psalm 46:10; Psalm 95:1–7; Psalm 100; Psalm 150**

#### *Commentary*

- (1) If our congregations are going to discern the call of God upon us, we will of necessity need to embrace the Reformed faith's gift of "both/and" worship—worship that is *both* rooted in history *and* expressive of contemporary meaning, *both* embracing a communal expression of faith *and* inviting personal encounters with the Living God, *both* respecting the narrative form of worship as the re-telling of God's salvation *and* inviting opportunities for each and for all to connect their story to God's Story. Beyond the "worship wars" with arguments about musical styles and prayer forms, Spirit-inspired worship seeks to be guided by the whisper of the still, small voice as spoken into and through faith communities, which is to say, "How is your congregation listening to where God is leading you in worship?"
- (2) In Christian worship, the focus is on God. That is experienced as a coming onto holy ground, an encounter with God, leading to an experience of wonder. Christian worship presumes an active participation in the living relationship of the Triune God, in which all people feel welcome to come as they are, yet also expect to go forth as those touched and transformed for God's purposes. Christian worship challenges, teaches, transforms, encounters, convicts, and sends people into the world to be the blessing of Christ Jesus in human form. Such worship moves beyond self-gratification or consumeristic entertainment, yet also breaks through the calcification of rituals divorced of meaning. Such worship is *both* hard work *and* high calling, *both* personal offering *and* holy promise that God will be upon us, within us, between us, and through us.
- (3) Henri Nouwen on solitude: "As soon as we are alone...an inner chaos opens up in us. This chaos can be so disturbing and so confusing that we can hardly wait to get busy again. Entering a private room and shutting the door, therefore, does not mean that we immediately shut out all our inner doubts, anxieties, fears, bad memories, unresolved conflicts, angry feelings and impulsive desires. On the contrary, when we have removed our outer distractions, we often find

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<sup>20</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions: Book X, Chapters 27, 38*. Translated by Henry Chadwick, 1991. Accessed online at <http://www.deeper-devotion.net/augustine-confessions.html>.

that our inner distractions manifest themselves to us in full force. We often use the outer distractions to shield ourselves from the interior noises.... This makes the discipline of solitude all the more important.”<sup>21</sup>

- (4) Blended worship has been trivialized to mean “a compromise in the worship wars” in which both contemporary and traditional music are used. In its original intent, however, blended worship was described as the organic convergence<sup>22</sup> of the four classical worship traditions: high liturgical (e.g. Catholic), mainline (e.g. Presbyterian), praise and worship (e.g. Vineyard), and creative (e.g. Orthodox and minority streams within the other three traditions). Robert Webber proposed that churches blend the strengths of each of these traditions: the poetic rhythms of the liturgical tradition, the intellectual clarity of the mainline tradition, the emotional immediacy of the praise and worship tradition, and the artistic opening of the creative tradition. By blending the different traditions into a coherent whole, churches could create new rhythms for worship that would be both ancient and modern, receiving the spiritual gifts of multiple or even all traditions.

### Questions to Ponder and Discuss



(1) Isaiah 6 is the template for the historic catholic (universal) four-fold rhythm of Christian worship: (a) coming into the presence of God with praise, (b) responding with confession and being forgiven of our sin, (c) hearing the voice of the Lord, (d) responding to God’s Word by being sent into the world to do God’s work. This four-fold rhythm of Christian worship is a rehearsal of the larger, meta-narrative of Scripture: God acts in the world to redeem and such action demands a response of awe, lament, faith, and obedience in the world, by God’s people, to God’s creation. How does your congregation’s worship convey the rhythm of historic Christian worship?

(2) Isaiah 6 invites readers to imagine the throne room of God, to imagine the experience of what Rudolph Otto called the *mysterium tremendum*, that sense of awe and wonder that comes from being in the direct presence of God. Worship that does not lead us to an experience of the Almighty misses the mark. What are the rituals and rhythms of your congregation’s worship life—both in ordinary time and on “high holy” occasions—that lead you to experience God as majesty and mystery, and also as immediate and intimate?

(3) Psalm 46:10 links solitude with deeper faith: “Be still” and “know that I am God” are inseparable. Moreover, the knowledge of the Lord, in the psalm, is not an intellectual cognition but a lived experience. How do your congregation’s worship rhythms encourage you to be still? How does worship help you know the Lord is God?

### Application

- (1) Brief descriptions of Sabbath:

<sup>21</sup> Henri Nouwen, *Making All Things New and Other Classics* (London: HarperCollins, 1982), 29.

<sup>22</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995). See also Brad Munroe, *Blended Worship in PCUSA Congregations* (unpublished dissertation, San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1995).



- Rocking Chair Discipleship—“Sometimes I jus’ sets and thinks an’ sometimes I jus’ sets.”
- Anybody can observe the Sabbath; making it holy takes the rest of the week.
- “Last in creation, first in intention.”<sup>23</sup>

(2) Choose one of the above Sabbath descriptions upon which to meditate, live, and experience this week as a spiritual intention.

### *Closing Prayer*

O Gracious and Holy God,  
 give us diligence to seek you,  
 wisdom to perceive you,  
 and patience to wait for you.  
 Grant us, O God,  
 minds to meditate on you,  
 eyes to behold you,  
 ears to listen for your Word,  
 hearts to love you,  
 and lives to proclaim you—in word and in deed—  
 through the power of the Spirit and to the glory of Christ Jesus our Lord.

—A Prayer Attributed to Benedict of Nursia (c. 480–547)<sup>24</sup>

### *Additional Resources*

- [www.worshipdesignstudio.com](http://www.worshipdesignstudio.com) (Marcia McFee)

### *Videos*

- **Come to the Table: A Winter and Warm Videos:** <http://vpc.church/ministries/music/#videos>
- **Ordered Ministry 10—The Dynamics of Worship:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYg-3cBOd5E>
- **Ordered Ministry 12—The Sacraments in Worship:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HV9fd5RK-4w>

### *Books*

- Theology and Worship Ministry Unit, *Book of Common Worship*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.
- Ruth C. Duck, *Flames of the Spirit: Resources for Worship*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009.
- Howard Rice, *Reformed Spirituality: An Introduction for Believers*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991.

<sup>23</sup> Rabbi Solomo Alkabez, *Lechab Dodi*, as quoted in Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 14.

<sup>24</sup> *Book of Common Worship*, 29. Adapted.



## Thrive Bible Studies - The Fourth Great End:

### The preservation of the truth

(discipleship as the living experience of Jesus, the Truth)

#### *Opening Prayer*

God, grant me the Serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
And Wisdom to know the difference...  
Living one day at a time,  
Enjoying one moment at a time,  
Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace,  
Taking, as Jesus did,  
This sinful world as it is,  
Not as I would have it,  
Trusting that You will make all things right  
if I surrender to Your will,  
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,  
And supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen.

—A Prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr<sup>25</sup>

#### *Scripture Reading*

**Matthew 28:16–20; Romans 12:1–2; Deuteronomy 6:4–9**

#### *Commentary*

- (1) Between “make disciples” and “teach them to observe all I have taught” is a curious step: baptize. Why baptism? Why is baptism the intermediate link between helping another become a disciplined follower of Jesus through observance of Jesus’ teachings? It is because baptism is the sacrament of identity—in baptism, we learn our true name: Beloved of God. Jesus’ commission, then, is for us to make folks able to know, able to practice, able to live into and become their truest, God-intended selves, fully and eternally loved. This is the Great Commission.
- (2) In Romans 12, Paul contrasts conformity with transformation. Disciples without spiritual intention find themselves too often being poured into the mold *de jour*, created by culture. It requires spiritual intention for disciples to place themselves in the position of having their minds renewed—not just knowledge but wisdom, not just facts to recite but truth to live, not just occasionally but daily—and so allow God to perform the work of transformation. The Greek word Paul uses is *metamorphusthe*, from which we get our English word metamorphosis, the change within and without, from caterpillar to chrysalis to butterfly.
- (3) Dr. Mike Johnson of Ascending Leaders describes four stages of discipleship in the Gospels:<sup>26</sup>
  1. Come and see (John 1:38-39) – introduced to Jesus, observing and considering faith
  2. Come and follow (Matthew 4:19) – listening to Jesus, accepting friendship, beginning obedience

<sup>25</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, “Serenity Prayer,” Wikipedia.

<sup>26</sup> Mike Johnson, *Disciple Forward I*, Ascending Leaders, ascendingleaders.org, conference in Tucson, Arizona, October 14, 2017.

3. Come and be with me (Mark 3:14) – asking questions, actively seeking, attempting deeper obedience
  4. Abide/remain in me (John 15:4) – intimacy with Jesus, experience of enduring presence, living as an ambassador
- (4) “Piety in our church tradition is focused upon a kind of safe morality that deals only with private conduct, especially sexuality, which in turn nurtures an excessive scrupulosity where personal conduct become the be-all and end-all of morality. What is needed is an ethic that unlocks the emergence of genuine human life, a morality that has less to do with purity issues and more to do with energy, courage and freedom.”<sup>27</sup>
- (5) “Although spiritual consumerism seems like a great deal, at the end of the day it leads to self-absorption, self-centeredness, self-futility and, ultimately, death at the core of our being... If spirituality doesn’t get us beyond self-centeredness and self-absorption into a bigger life and a larger perspective, I think it’s a bad spirituality.”<sup>28</sup>

### *Questions to Ponder and Discuss*

- (1) Notice the *verbs* (action words) in the Great Commission. What do these verbs suggest to you about what it means to be a disciplined follower of Jesus?
- (2) Jesus bookends the words of the commission with a claim (28:18) and a promise (28:20b). How do Jesus’ claim and promise impact how you read the words of the commission?
- (3) What are common, ordinary, easy-to-fall-into molds our culture has waiting for those who live without spiritual intention?
- (4) In your experience, when is God’s transformation of a Christ-follower noticed? What are the “symptoms” that someone is being transformed?

### *Application*

- (1) **L.I.G.H.T.**<sup>29</sup>

**L**isten to the Holy Spirit: follow Spirit promptings; practice one hour of silence per week.

**I**nvoke others to share a meal: spend time; don’t rush; give the gift of time.

**G**ive a blessing: a kind word, a civil gesture, the gift of another’s humanity.

**H**ear from the Gospels: learn to live the Way of Jesus; read the same Scripture verse every morning for a week (narrow reading) and several chapters of Scripture every night (wide reading).

**T**ake inventory of the day: where did I see God and respond? Where did I miss God? (Prayer of Examen)

- (2) Which element of the L.I.G.H.T. acronym above makes your heart sing?
- (3) Which element of L.I.G.H.T. sounds like too great a challenge?



<sup>27</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, describing Therapeutic Moralistic Deism, [www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/mtd-not-just-a-problem-with-youth-ministry/](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/mtd-not-just-a-problem-with-youth-ministry/), accessed January 31, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Rick Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 117, 119.

<sup>29</sup> Brad Brisco and Lance Ford, *Missional Essentials: A Guide for Experiencing Gods Mission in Your Life*. (The House Studio: Kansas City, MO), 2012, pp. 89-90.

(4) To which element of L.I.G.H.T. will you commit this week as a spiritual practice?

*Closing Prayer*

May the strength of God pilot us,  
may the power of God preserve us,  
may the wisdom of God instruct us,  
may the hand of God protect us,  
    may the way of God direct us,  
may the shield of God defend us,  
    may the host of God guard us.  
    May Christ be with us,  
        Christ before us,  
        Christ in us,  
        Christ over us.  
    May your salvation, O Lord,  
be always ours this day and forevermore. Amen.

—A Prayer of St. Patrick of Ireland<sup>30</sup>

*Additional Resources*

- [www.ascendingleaders.org](http://www.ascendingleaders.org)

*Videos*

- **Disciples in the New Testament: Disciple-Growing Part 1:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zmc3RRAqro8&t=26s>
- **Defining “Disciple” and “Discipleship”: Part 2 in Disciple-Growing:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDX13KhvCRY>
- **The Continuum in Churches Today: Part 3 of Disciple-Growing:**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDcH\\_LfTXdM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDcH_LfTXdM)
- **Group Sizes and the Continuum: Part 4 of Disciple-Growing:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVhrOxIhzqE>
- **Foundations of Presbyterian Discipleship 4: Update Your Faith System:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OAk17hxRz8>

*Books*

- Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*. Westmont, IL: IVP Connect, 2019.
- Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017.
- Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002.

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<sup>30</sup> “St. Patrick’s Prayer,” traditional. Adapted.



## Thrive Bible Studies - The Fifth Great End:

### the promotion of social righteousness

#### *Opening Prayer*

Lord make me an instrument of your peace  
Where there is hatred let me sow love  
Where there is injury, pardon  
Where there is doubt, faith  
Where there is despair, hope  
Where there is darkness, light  
And where there is sadness, joy  
O divine master grant that I may  
not so much seek to be consoled as to console  
to be understood as to understand  
To be loved as to love  
For it is in giving that we receive  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned  
And it's in dying that we are born to eternal life.

—The Prayer of St. Francis

#### *Scripture Reading*

**Luke 4:18–21; Matthew 25:31–46; Jeremiah 29:4–7**

#### *Commentary*

(1) Evolution of the word “missional”:

- *Apostoleo* = Greek (from which we get the word “apostles”)
- *Missio* = Latin (from which we get the word “mission”)
- *Sending* = English (c.f. Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 6:8; Luke 4:18; John 3:16; John 20:21)

(2) *Outwardly Focused*: There is an axiom that states that thriving churches are Inwardly Strong, Outwardly Focused. This axiom, while true, is problematic because too often Inwardly Strong overpowers Outwardly Focused. The reasons why an inward stance is elevated over an outward focus is easy to imagine: The people who pay the bills comprise the inward half of the axiom. The theology of Butts and Bucks exclusively favors the inward glance; that such exclusivity ultimately kills the church does not seem to matter. This dilemma is why missional churches prioritize the Outwardly Focused half of the axiom. Inward things will always get attention; therefore, outward things must take priority. Missional ministry understands this; missional churches live accordingly.

(3) *Asking Beyond the Room*: Former Texas Governor Ann Richards is supposed to have said, “When you miss a meeting, you’re not there.” Too often, churches accept that those who are not present at our gatherings do not have a voice in what we do and how we do it. This leads to a bevy of problems: insider-outside language, irrelevance, and a complete disconnect from the community. The classic example of this is a church mission study that does not extend beyond its walls to ask the simple question, “How can we be of service?” Missional churches, however, intentionally and actively seek out those beyond their faith family in order to hear *their* views, *their* desires and to encounter *their* lives. Missional ministry understands this; missional churches live accordingly.

- (4) *Questioning Culture*: While it is difficult to question our own customs in a church, to see as if from the outside while we live on the inside, much more difficult is it to question our own culture. Yet churches that seek to be “in the world but not of the world” question our culture of consumerism and consumption, our ideals of individualism and self that reject community and sharing. Missional churches are relentless in this pursuit because they understand that “those for whom Christ died” are immersed in this culture. Unless we understand the patient, we cannot enter into conversation about the disease. Similarly, unless we understand the false deities presumed by our society, we cannot enter into dialogue about the kind of Spirit that makes us whole. Missional ministry understands this; missional churches live accordingly.



#### *Questions to Ponder and Discuss*

- (1) Scholars call Luke 4:18–21 Jesus’ Programmatic Speech, which is a scholarly way of saying Jesus articulates his agenda or personal mission statement in these verses. Would you describe Jesus’ personal mission statement more in terms of compassion actions or advocacy for justice? Explain your answer, using the text.
- (2) How does Matthew 25 call for followers of Jesus to show compassion to others? In what ways does Matthew 25 move beyond compassion to call for a deep, abiding sharing of our humanity with others? In what ways does Jesus identify with the least of these?
- (3) An old proverb says, “Give a person a fish, you feed them for a day. Teach a person to fish, you feed them for a lifetime.” This proverb has been extended to add, “It’s also necessary to ask why the person has not already learned to fish—is there something wrong with the educational system? Are the nearby rivers and lakes environmentally satisfactory? Does the person have fair and adequate access to a fishing pole?” These two proverbs, old and new, display a continuum from compassionate actions to advocacy for justice. Where along the compassion/advocacy continuum do Luke 4 and Matthew 25 call for you to stand?
- (4) “Missional” ministry (Go and Show the Gospel) is often contrasted with “attractational” ministry (“Y’all Come to the House of the Lord!”). In reality, most churches have a bit of both missional and attractational ministry. What about your congregation? Where is your congregation currently living the Gospel outside the walls of your church, building a better community, and connecting with others in the name of Jesus?

#### *Application*

- (1) Four Marks of Missional Living
  - Beyond the church walls: “Go and Show” rather than “Y’all Come!”
  - Service-oriented: Building a community of justice and joy through compassion and service.
  - Creates community: Seeking mutuality, knowing and being known, working “with” and not “for.”
  - Builds bridge to the church: Including some kind of invitational connection back to the Christian community.
- (2) Which of the above marks of missional living does your *church*, as a unified body of Christ, do best? With which mark does your *church* most struggle?

- (3) Name one thing you can do this week that engages you in missional living to which you will commit as a spiritual practice.

### *Closing Prayer*

Come, Holy Spirit.  
Come as Holy Fire to burn within us.  
Come as Holy Wind to cleanse us within.  
Come as Holy Light to lead us from darkness.  
Come as Holy Truth to lead toward wisdom.  
Come as Holy Power to enable us in our weakness.  
Come as Holy Life to dwell within us.  
Convict us! Convert us! Consecrate us!  
And then, O Holy Spirit, unleash us upon a world  
in need of love,  
in need of compassion,  
in need of justice.  
Come, Holy Spirit, and set us free from service to ourselves  
that we may be your servants in the world. Amen.<sup>31</sup>

### *Additional Resources*

- [www.missionalchurch.org](http://www.missionalchurch.org) (Center for Parish Development)

### *Videos*

- **The Missional Church...Simple:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arxfLK\\_sd68](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arxfLK_sd68)
- **Start with Why—How Great Leaders Inspire Action:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4ZoJKF\\_VuA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4ZoJKF_VuA)
- **Foundations of Presbyterian Discipleship 5: Blessed to Be a Blessing:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S14oyv97gwY>
- **“Mama Used to Say”—Love An Other:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBohnt8WO3Q&list=PLJRSb3sWofj3TNTcy-mEnwnUsxyUs-TdJ&index=4>

### *Books*

- Anthony B. Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008.
- Allan Roxburgh and Frank Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.

Allan Roxburgh and Martin Robinson, *Practices for the Refounding of God's People: The Missional Challenge of the West*. New York: Church Publishing, 2018.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 22. Adapted.



## Thrive Bible Studies - The Sixth Great End: the exhibition of the kingdom of heaven to the world

### *Opening Prayer*

God beyond all that is good,  
Lord beyond all that is fair,  
in you is calmness, peace, and concord.  
Heal all that divides us from one another and bring us back to a unity of love,  
that we may more fully bear the image and likeness of your divine love.  
Through the embrace of love and the bonds of godly affection make us one in the Spirit,  
By your peace that makes all things peaceful,  
And by your mercies which are new every morning.  
We ask all this through the grace, mercy and peace of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

—Dionysius of Alexandria<sup>32</sup>

### *Scripture Reading*

**Matthew 18:15–22; 1 Corinthians 13:1–8, 13; 1 Corinthians 12:4–12, 27**

### *Commentary*

- (1) Jesus compares the spirit of Lamech (Genesis 4:23–24) with the spirit of mercy (Matthew 18:21–22). Missing the reference to Genesis in Jesus' words makes the work of mercy into a math problem. It is *not* a math problem, but a heart problem that requires a heart solution.
- (2) *Crucial Conversations*: A crucial conversation is defined as something that needs to be said in the moment it needs saying, yet without rancor. An important component to a crucial conversation is the ability to see and to understand both the story we *are* telling ourselves about someone's motivations and other stories that *could be* told about someone's motivations. Listening to the other person with an empathetic ear and open heart helps us hear their story through the lens of their motivations rather than our own assumptions. Listening in this manner offers enough grace that the conversation may lead toward healing.
- (3) *Family Systems*: Healthy congregations practice direct and open dialogue, which becomes more difficult during anxious times. Unfortunately, the prevailing currency in families and congregations, as emotional systems, is anxiety. Healthy congregational practice, therefore, encourages leaders to be a “non-anxious presence” in the midst of change or stress, a practice that is made possible through self-differentiation. Self-differentiation is a combination of defining ourselves (being who we are as *individuals*) while remaining connected (being who we are as a *community*). The mantra of non-anxious, self-differentiated leaders is “calm, clear, consistent, and connected.”
- (4) *God Alone is Lord of the Conscience*: Theologian Paul Ricœur had a concept he called “second naïveté.”<sup>33</sup> It defines that place we come to in healthy spirituality when, after coming to terms with our own sense of core convictions, deeply held values, and sense of identity before God, we are able to sit with others who have a different understanding.

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<sup>32</sup> *Book of Common Worship*, 812. Adapted.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon, 1967), 351.



Historic Presbyterian principles mirror Ricœur’s second naiveté by insisting on the rights of faithful, intelligent Christians to sometimes disagree, and, therefore, encouraging mutual forbearance toward one another.

### *Questions to Ponder and Discuss*

- (1) What specific steps does Jesus direct his disciples to take when confronted with a difficult relationship problem? How does Matthew 18 express the principles articulated above to describe family systems practices?
- (2) What, for you personally, makes a crucial conversation difficult? When have you experienced someone else misunderstanding your intentions—telling the wrong story? When have you understood someone more deeply by hearing their story more fully?
- (3) *Silence or Violence*: The typical response to encountering conflict of any kind is “violence” (fight) or “silence” (flight or freeze). This is equally true of relationship “violence” that is marked by elevated tone and volume and, perhaps, physical-space or personal-boundary violations. To which are you most prone: silence or violence? What story are you telling yourself that leads you toward violence or silence? What story might you tell yourself that will help you communicate in a calm, clear, consistent, and connected manner?
- (4) *Second Naivete*: How far along are you on the journey toward second naivete? How much further would you like to journey or need to journey along this path? How present within you is the urge to label others?
- (5) When have you encountered someone you respect but with whom you do not agree? What internal or external struggles did you experience in being comfortable living with this dissonance?
- (6) Father Brennan Manning asked congregations to imagine the one question Jesus will ask them when they get to heaven. Go ahead and think of your one question. What do you think Jesus will ask? (Then Father Manning would give his answer to the question: “Jesus will ask us, ‘Do you know how much I love you, how much I have always loved you?’” How does this compare to your question?



### *Application*

- (1) *Active Listening Tools*: Which of the following active listening tools do you use on a regular basis? Choose one to practice this week as a spiritual intention.
  - Mirroring: convey back to someone their words, tone, and meaning
  - Empathy: convey to someone that/how you understand their feelings
  - Validation: convey to someone that/how you understand the logic of their thought process
  - I-statements: speak what you, as a self-defined individual, think or feel
  - Preference statements: speak what you, as a self-defined individual, would prefer
  - Impact statements: speak what impact another’s actions had or has on you

## *Closing Prayer*

Eternal God, you have called us to be members of one body.

Join us with those who, in all times and places, have praised your name,  
that, with one heart and one mind, we may show the unity of your Church and bring honor to your name.

Grant, O Lord Jesus,

that the ears which have heard the voice of your songs may be closed to the voice of dispute;  
that the eyes which have seen your great love may also behold your hope;  
that the tongues which have sung your praise may speak the truth in love;  
that the feet which have walked in your courts may walk in the region of light;  
that the bodies which have received your Spiritual Presence may be restored to newness of life;  
and that all these things may be done with gratitude for your inexpressible gift.

—Liturgy of Malabar, 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>34</sup>

## *Additional Resources*

- [www.houseunitedmovement.org](http://www.houseunitedmovement.org) (Allen Hilton—reconciliation ministries)

## *Videos*

- **“You People”:** Love an Other, Episode 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OR85dCEQgg&list=PLJRSb3sWofj3TNTcy-mEnwnUsxyUs-TdJ>
- **Women in Peacemaking:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RykXo3sZn0w>
- **Embodied Peacemaking:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTLsF7y8QQow>
- **Good/Bad: A Simple Message** (scroll down to watch): [www.dixiletta.com](http://www.dixiletta.com)
- **Radical Hospitality for the REST of Us:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fj-ztamQa5Q>

## *Books*

- Ed Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*. New York: Church Publishing, 2017.
- Brad Munroe, *Waging Peace: Developing Interpersonal Skills for Conflict Transformation*. Self-published, 2017.
- Peter Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*. Lanham, MD Rowan and Littlefield, 2006.

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<sup>34</sup> *Book of Common Worship*, 26. Adapted.