

Gospel

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Writer: Boyd Lien

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Writer:

BOYD LIEN, an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), has recently retired from Reid Memorial Presbyterian Church in Augusta, Georgia. Boyd has served as pastor and educator with congregations in Verona, New Jersey; New Castle, Pennsylvania; Eugene, Oregon; Houston, Texas; Richmond, Virginia; and Augusta, Georgia. As a church educator he has pursued his passion to share the good news by creating and publishing a wide variety of educational resources through Abingdon Press, the Logos Program, and the Kerygma Program. As an artist he has designed logos, illustrations, and brochures for individuals, congregations, and the denomination. Most recently he is the author of the revised resource book and leader's guide for Kerygma's *Discovering the Bible: A New Generation*.



Introduction

It should be easier than telling someone about your favorite television program. It should be easier than sharing your enthusiasm for a particular team. It should be easier than sending a Facebook “like” message. It certainly is more important and invites others into a life-changing experience. Telling another person about God’s love in Jesus Christ and the difference that has made in your life should be the easiest thing of all.

But most of us have not found this to be easy. We worry about what to have to say. We wonder how our words will be received. We are uncomfortable talking about ourselves. We are concerned about intruding into another’s space. And we certainly don’t want to sound judgmental.

Yet, what could be more rewarding than guiding someone else to the abundant life of grace and love that we have come to know in Jesus Christ? What could be more significant than leading someone to the source of life’s meaning and purpose? What could be more joyful than to welcome someone into the body of Christ, the community of faith? What could be more fulfilling than to cooperate with God’s healing and reconciling work?

The resources *Engage: Gospel*, *Engage: Discipleship*, and *Engage: Mission* have been created to make sharing the good news of Jesus Christ just a bit easier. Putting in a good word for Jesus, especially among people needing to hear that word, is never easy. But joining together to share our faith openly, to enlarge our understanding, to connect our stories with God’s redemptive story, to practice various approaches, and to encourage and pray for one another will make our call to be evangelists easier.

Yes, you are called to be an evangelist! You are called to share your faith in Jesus Christ and to serve others in his name. You are called to embody and proclaim love in the midst of fear, life in the midst of death, and hope in the midst of despair. You are called to share a passion for the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ. This may not be the easiest thing you have been called to do but it is by far the most rewarding. Grace and peace to you!

Boyd Lien



A Word to the Group Leader

You are more than a dispenser of information. In your role as group leader, you cooperate with God in the formation of faith and in the transformation of lives. You are the lead learner. You are not trying to cover a lesson but to uncover truth.

These gatherings are designed to encourage group participation. Discussion and sharing create community and provide practice that all of us need in expressing our faith and wrestling with our questions. When asking questions, be comfortable with some silence while group members contemplate a response. Resist the urge to fill up the silence with your words.

The gatherings encourage you to try some new things to light up the hearts and minds of more people. Choosing one new activity during each gathering will stretch you and open a door to someone who learns differently than you. Over the weeks, you will notice what your group enjoys and what they are unwilling to do. Let those observations rather than your preferences be your guide as you prepare to lead.

If your group members like to talk, you might not be able to ask every suggested question. Also it will make a difference in your gathering if group members have read the articles prior to the session. If you find it necessary to read from the participant's book during the gathering, choose the passages that convey the core ideas.

Engaging Your Story

Scripture

2 Timothy 4:1–2, 5 An evangelist’s work

Luke 19:1–10 Jesus and Zacchaeus

Philippians 1:3–5 Paul’s joyful prayer

Main Idea

Evangelism is sharing the good news of God’s saving and healing love in Jesus Christ. Evangelism is not about introducing a new program, gaining more members, or increasing budgets. Every follower of Christ is called to be an evangelist, to share the good news with others in words and actions.

Teaching Points

This session invites participants to:

1. Define various terms used within the course: gospel, good news, disciple, evangelism, evangelist, healing, witness, redemption, and reconciliation.
2. Listen to one evangelist’s story in order to discover the elements that make it winsome and effective.
3. Look at individual timelines as well as the local church’s timeline to consider the ways God has been present and faithfully at work.

Resources Needed

Bibles

Participant’s books

Christ candle and lighter or matches

Name tags with key words: *gospel, good news, disciple, evangelism, evangelist, healing, witness, redemption, and reconciliation*

Brennan Manning video *Live at Woodcrest* downloaded from YouTube.com (3:42 minutes)

Computer, television, video projector

Sheet of butcher paper (if not using whiteboard)

Marker

Hymnals with the hymn “Lord, You Give the Great Commission”



Leader Prep

Engage: Gospel is intended to train and encourage evangelists, individuals who know not only how to share the gospel story but also how to share their own faith stories. There will be those who are uncertain about the meaning of “evangelism” and those who are uneasy about sharing personally. Thus, this first session eases into defining terms and introducing ourselves through our stories.

Before teaching, preview the scope of the course by looking through the themes, Scriptures, and activities of the seven sessions. To prepare for leading each session you will want to read the participant’s book, underlining its major points, highlighting questions to pursue, and noting significant insights. Involve the participants throughout the course by inviting them to share in the readings of the Scriptures, quotations, and prayers.

For Gather, place a Christ candle on a table in the center of your teaching space. Each session begins by lighting the candle, reading Scripture, and uniting in prayer. Enlist members of the group to share in the reading and in lighting the Christ candle.

In Encounter, decide how you will view the video. Depending on the size of the group, you could use a laptop computer, a television monitor, or a video projector. The YouTube video can be accessed within the room through an Internet connection or transferred from the Internet onto a flash drive or burned onto a DVD, and then shown on a computer. One of your younger members will help you out!

After viewing the video, guide a discussion on the impact of the presentation more than on the content of the message. Elicit from the participants the elements that communicated well, such as the speaker’s personal information, storytelling style, easy-going manner, conversational style, and so forth.

Explore and Engage always depend on asking substantive questions. When asking questions make sure that you give enough time for the participants to respond, especially to those questions in which they will share something personal. Do not be anxious about moments of silence. Most people need time to think and prepare their thoughts. The Holy Spirit is at work!

Provide enough time during Engage for those in the small groups to share their timelines. It may take longer than you anticipate.

For Depart, consider inviting an accompanist to lead the singing of a hymn.

Leading the Session

Gather

- Light the Christ candle with Paul's words from 2 Timothy 4:1–2, 5:
I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching . . . do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.
- Pray together the prayer in the participant's book.
- Give each participant a name tag bearing one of the following words: *gospel, good news, disciple, evangelism, evangelist, healing, witness, redemption, and reconciliation*. Go around the group and ask them to define the term using their own words. Indicate that these terms will appear throughout the seven sessions to help them to better communicate and share their faith in Christ.
- Introduce the purpose of the course by referring to the participants' book and reading the first paragraph in Explore. Introduce the scope of the course by previewing the themes of the seven sessions.

Encounter

- Play Brennan Manning's video *Live at Woodcrest*. Introduce it by asking the participants to view it with analytical eyes. Ask: *What is it about his testimony that makes it so effective in sharing the good news of Jesus? What are the elements that help him communicate his faith to others?*
- Reflect on his core question, which he imagines Jesus asking: "Did you believe that I loved you, that I desired you, that I waited for you day after day, that I longed to hear the sound of your voice?" Ask: *What do you feel, not think, when you hear this question? What do you feel about God's addressing you in these words? What may we learn about evangelism from this short video?*
- Jones and Loleng write, "We are able to mark the time in our lives when our faith in God became our own personal faith and less the faith of those who encouraged us along the way." Ask: *When was that time in your life? What led to your confession of faith? What event or individual led you to faith? In what ways does your experience influence the ways you now share faith with others?*

Explore

- Read Luke 19:1–10. Jones and Loleng write, "As one explores this story further, it is possible to identify three phases of Zacchaeus's transformation: the time before he encounters life's meaning, his

experience of meeting the love of God in Jesus Christ, and a life lived in response to God's love."

- Reflect on the participants' imagined time lines of Zacchaeus.
- Discuss some of the questions posed in the participant's book.

Engage

- Form small groups. Direct the groups to share their individual time lines.
- Draw a horizontal line on a white board or a length of butcher paper to represent a time line of the last hundred-plus years. Add markers along the line for significant dates for both your congregation and the participants, such as the year your church was established, participants' birthdays, and other local, national, and global events. Mark the current date, but of course add nothing to the right of it.
- Gather together, and invite reflection on Jones and Loleng's words: "No matter what the time line looks like, God has been present at every point in your life, whether recognized or not. Along with those Spirit-filled moments in which you were sure of God's presence, looking back allows you to become aware of the less-obvious fingerprints God has left on your life." Ask: *What have you discovered about God's presence by looking back? When has it taken you longer to discover God's fingerprints?*

Depart

- Follow up on the "write a letter" activity in Express, and invite the participants to talk about the person they remembered and how they responded.
- Sing or read together the hymn "Lord, You Give the Great Commission."
- Join in a prayer expressing gratitude, joys, and concerns.
- Extinguish the Christ candle.

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Editor:

BOYD LIEN, an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), has recently retired from Reid Memorial Presbyterian Church in Augusta, Georgia. Boyd has served as pastor and educator with congregations in Verona, New Jersey; New Castle, Pennsylvania; Eugene, Oregon; Houston, Texas; Richmond, Virginia; and Augusta, Georgia. As a church educator he has pursued his passion to share the good news by creating and publishing a wide variety of educational resources through Abingdon Press, the Logos Program, and the Kerygma Program. As an artist he has designed logos, illustrations, and brochures for individuals, congregations, and the denomination. Most recently he is the author of the revised resource book and leader's guide for Kerygma's *Discovering the Bible: A New Generation*.



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Yet, what could be more rewarding than guiding someone else to the abundant life of grace and love that we have come to know in Jesus Christ? What could be more significant than leading someone to the source of life’s meaning and purpose? What could be more joyful than to welcome someone into the body of Christ, the community of faith? What could be more fulfilling than to cooperate with God’s healing, reconciling, and redemptive work?

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Engaging Your Story

Scripture

Luke 19:1–10 Jesus and Zacchaeus

Philippians 1:3–5 Paul's joyful prayer

Prayer

Loving and Holy God, we give you thanks for the gift of your grace in Jesus, which continues to transform our lives. For the people who have helped us see you and draw closer to your call on our lives, we are grateful. As we give you praise for the many ways that your love has been invested in us, we seek your strength as we live into our stories of faith with confidence and hope. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Encounter

In the forty-eight years since I was first ambushed by Jesus in a little chapel in the Allegheny mountains in western Pennsylvania, and literally the thousands of hours of prayer and meditation, silence and solitude over those years, I am now utterly convinced that on Judgment Day the Lord Jesus is going to ask us one question, and only one question: "Did you believe that I loved you, that I desired you, that I waited for you day after day, that I longed to hear the sound of your voice?"¹

These words from Brennan Manning, carefully chosen to tell his story of faith in Jesus Christ, come from his life experiences and provide just a glimpse of a much larger story.

Each one of us has a story to tell. We have been changed by what God has done in Jesus Christ, and God's unconditional love has transformed our lives. If we stop for a moment and rest in God's love of us, we begin to realize that our relationship with God is making all the difference. We realize we do have a story to tell about God's amazing love. It matters not how we came to faith; all that matters is that we have faith. And faith is a gift.

*Each one of us
has a story to tell.*

1. From *Brennan Manning Live at Woodcrest*, youtube.com/watch?v=pQi_IDV2bgM.

Each of us has a different story to tell. Some are clear stories of conversion, times when we can clearly, distinctly mark that our lives were out of control and had little meaning until we met Jesus. Others of us have never known a day in which we did not have an experience of the love of God in Jesus Christ. Even so, we are able to mark the time in our lives when our faith in God became our own personal faith and less the faith of those who encouraged us along the way. Our call, as those who have encountered Jesus Christ, is to live out of a personal relationship as we seek to follow him.

Explore

Engage: *Gospel* seeks to offer encouragement as well as provide possible approaches for sharing faith in Jesus Christ with those individuals who are around us. The seven sessions, each centered in a biblical encounter with Jesus, are intended to deepen our awareness of God's love, intensify our response to God's call on our lives, and strengthen our abilities to share the good news of Christ.

Read Luke 19:1–10 to examine the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus.

Try to imagine what life must have been like for Zacchaeus. Here are some things to ponder about his life:

- Scripture records that Zacchaeus was small and needed to climb a tree to see Jesus. Apparently, he had no friends along the parade route to help him see Jesus. Zacchaeus, who worked for the Roman Empire, not only collected taxes for the occupying power but likely also took extra taxes to increase his riches. These actions made him a despised man in the community. Notice that as Zacchaeus scrambles through the crowds to get a glimpse of Jesus, not one person in the crowd says to him, "Hey, step in front of me; I want you to see him!"
- The cool thing is that he climbs a tree to see Jesus, and Jesus notices him up in that sycamore. Jesus invites him to come down from the tree, and then Jesus takes another step toward intimacy: he enters into the home of Zacchaeus!
- Because Zacchaeus meets Jesus and forms a personal relationship with him, his life is transformed. He makes amends with the people he has cheated, and he decides to serve the poor.

As one explores this story further, it is possible to identify three phases of Zacchaeus's transformation: the time before he encounters life's meaning, his experience of meeting the love of God in Jesus Christ, and a

life lived in response to God's love. Consider the ways these three phases of transformation take place with Zacchaeus by sketching out a simple time line of his life. Even though little additional information is shared in this brief story, we are still able to imagine what might have happened.

Draw a horizontal line on a sheet of paper. First, place some markers along the left part of the line to indicate the period of Zacchaeus's life before he climbed the sycamore tree to meet Jesus. What are some possible experiences he had as a child, youth, and adult?

Second, place a mark to signify the day he met Jesus. What type of mark should describe the occasion? An exclamation point? A question mark? A shining sun? A tree? A bolt of lightning? A smiley face?

Third, place some markers to the right of that marker to indicate events in Zacchaeus's transformed life. We know he sought to make things right with those he had cheated. But what other things might he have done? Was Zacchaeus present at other events in Jesus ministry? Is it possible he traveled from Jericho to Jerusalem and was there to witness Jesus' final week? Could he have been among the crowds lining the street on Palm Sunday? Was he among those looking on at Jesus' crucifixion?

Our speculation about Zacchaeus's new life of faith could go on and on. But we will draw even closer to the story of Zacchaeus by examining our own faith stories and sketching out our personal time lines.

Engage

What does it mean to engage the gospel? The word *engage* can be used in a variety of ways. The definitions that relate to this study include the following:

- To pledge; to promise
- To draw into; to involve
- to involve oneself or become occupied; to become engrossed; to participate.²

Each of the definitions suggests a way we may respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet even as we seek to engage the gospel, God reaches out in Christ to seek and engage us.

Engage (“participate in,” “draw into,” “be engrossed in”) the continuing story of God's love in Jesus Christ by sketching out a time line of your life. Make it as simple or as intricate as you wish.

Draw a horizontal line on a sheet of paper. Starting from your birth and continuing to the present moment, indicate significant events that have

2. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006).

happened in your life. Whether whatever took place was a mountaintop experience or a desert wandering, a time of intense significance or a period of steady consistency, mark the event on your time line. Designate in some way whether you feel the experience drew you closer to God or kept you at a distance from God. In what way will you mark those life events that occurred before you encountered life's meaning? What type of marker would be appropriate for your experience of meeting God's love in Jesus Christ? A cross? A heart? An exclamation point?

After that initial meeting, what significant experiences will you want to add further along the time line? As you look over your time line, think about those events that continue to exert power in your life.

What conversations do you continue to have with the past? At which times along your time line are you able to respond affirmatively to Jesus' question, as imagined by Brennan Manning: "Did you believe that I loved you, that I desired you, that I waited for you day after day, that I longed to hear the sound of your voice?"

What conversations do you continue to have with the past?

Engaging *your* story, and in doing so engaging the gospel, is a crucial part of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with someone else. It may be that drawing a horizontal line may have depicted your life too simply, as if it has unfolded effortlessly. A wavy or jagged line with highs and lows might seem more accurate—or a line that is broken and reconnected at those times you were able to find your way again. No matter what the time line looks like, God has been present at every point in your life, whether recognized or not. Along with those Spirit-filled moments in which you were sure of God's presence, looking back also allows you to become aware of the less-obvious fingerprints God has left on your life.

Express

The apostle Paul, in a joyful letter to the church in Philippi, wrote, "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now" (Philippians 1:3–5). Just imagine the names that came to mind as Paul remembered those who had come to faith in Jesus Christ and were now partners in the gospel.

Paul experienced a dramatic conversion to faith in Christ. On the way to persecute Jesus' followers, he encountered Jesus! Paul's life was dramatically turned around, and he was sent to preach the good news of Christ to Jews and Gentiles. Following his life-changing encounter on the road to Damascus there was even more to come. Paul's transformation continued through

the care, teaching, and guidance of others. In Antioch, Barnabas and other Christians, earlier called “Followers of the Way,” taught, encouraged, and prayed for one another.

Your experience of meeting the love of God in Jesus Christ may have been a dramatic, life-changing experience, or your story may witness to a steady, growing, confident awareness of God’s presence and providence in your life. Yet whatever your story is, like each one of us, you have been cared for, guided, loved, lifted up, and inspired by other Christians.

*Whatever your story is,
you have been cared for,
guided, loved, lifted up, and
inspired by other Christians.*

Remember the name of someone who has helped you see and know Jesus, someone through whom you have experienced a life-changing relationship with God. It could be a parent, friend, Sunday school teacher, youth group advisor, mission trip leader, or countless others in the family of faith. Consider the impact of that person on your life. Inspired by Paul, write a letter to that person expressing thanks for the ways he or she helped you to know Jesus’ love for you. Whether the person is alive or no longer living, write the letter and, if possible, send it through the mail. Inspired by Paul, do not send an e-mail, but write a letter by hand that will be treasured and saved.

Of course, engaging the gospel comes with a call to you to care for, guide, lift up, and inspire others. Reflect on the people in your life whom you can help to see and to know Jesus. In what ways can you be a winsome guide to a person seeking to know Jesus Christ? What is it about your life experiences that could be helpful in sharing faith with someone else? Just imagine; someone completing an activity like this in the future may be thinking of you and thanking you!



This week in your prayers imitate the apostle Paul. Pray with joy for all those who have shared their faith in Jesus Christ with you and have helped you come to faith. Pray for openness to those individuals in your life whom you can help to see Jesus. Name their names, thanking God for all that has been and all that is yet to be.