

The Church has Left the Building

Series Overview

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

On the following pages, you will find a 12-week small group study series called The Church has Left the Building. These guides are written in support of the Missional Church curriculum by David Wray and Chris Benjamin. It is designed around the concept of adults discussing material in Bible class and then processing it in small group meetings during the same week. Both series can also work independently.

These guides, as well as the Missional Church curriculum, are based on the book, *Treasure in Clay Jars*, by Lois Barrett and others (Eerdmans, 2004. ISBN: 080282692X).

Training tools and other study guides are at www.collegehills.org, under Ministries, then LIFE groups.

Using these guides

1. Each guide is two 8.5 x 11 pages, designed to be printed front & back like a booklet to fit inside a Bible.

In the text below, the middle page appears first, followed by the outside page. Copies of individual guides are available for PDF download at www.collegehills.org.

2. Each guide includes the following sections:

Page 1 – the cover of the booklet.

- An introductory section giving an overview of the guide and how it connects to the Bible class curriculum.
- A leadership tip, often connected to the topic for discussion.
- “Relate” questions to help group members begin talking.

Page 2-3 – the inside page.

“Group discussion” questions to help participants reflect on the biblical text and apply it to their lives.

Page 4 – the back page.

This section contains “other resources” that you might find helpful.

- A summary – because some groups will wander all around the topic.
- Suggestions for prayer
- Kid-friendly activities -- to include children in a discussion of the material. It works best if you do the kid-friendly activity first while everyone is fresh. Then dismiss the kids, so the adults can have deeper discussion or share prayer concerns.

II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

Read Acts 1:1-11 aloud.

1. What promise did Jesus confirm in verses 4-5?

How well do you think the apostles understood the Holy Spirit at this time? *Probably clueless, like they often were.*

If you had heard this promise, what kind of feelings would it have stirred in you?

In what ways does this promise apply to us?

2. When the apostles heard something bigger than John was coming, what did they think it meant?
Restoring the nation of Israel.

Why would the restoration of the Jewish nation be a big deal?

How was God's vision for the kingdom bigger than restoring Israel?
Verse 8 includes Samaria (unfaithful Jews) and the ends of the earth (people beyond Judaism).

3. What promise does Jesus make in verse 8?

What mission does Jesus propose in verse 8?

How do the promise and the mission relate to one another?

What does a witness do? *Describes his or her experiences.*

How do Jesus' promise and mission involve us? Was this only for the apostles, or does verse 8 have a longer life span?

How would you re-write verse 8 to include people you will contact this week?

4. With the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, what had

God accomplished for the world?

What are some ways God's dream for the world was still unfinished when Jesus ascended?

Isaiah 65:17-25 and Jeremiah 31:31-34 paint beautiful pictures of God's dream for the world.

What are some ways that God's dreams for the world are unfinished today?

What role does God play in making God's dreams happen? Did all the burden rest on the apostles' shoulders or was God involved?

How is our task like the job the apostles faced? How is it different?

5. What do you think is God's dream for our community?
Obviously, God wants the church to thrive and grow. But what else is involved in God's mission? What are some other ways God might like to make a difference here?

How would families be different if God was reigning in more hearts in our community? How might businesses or government be different?

How would life be different for poor people if God was reigning in more hearts?

6. What distracts you from playing your part in helping God's dreams become a reality in the world?

How could activities at the church building distract us from God's mission in the world?

7. What do you think was the angels' tone in verse 11?

When have you wanted to linger in God's presence?

How does worship relate to serving God?

III. Other resources

The point – God has a dream for the world, and it is bigger than nice church buildings that seat a lot of people. He has given us the Holy Spirit’s power so that we might be witnesses in the world. Rather than judging a church based on its seating capacity, we should evaluate its sending capacity!

Prayer

Thank God for the influence of the church in your life.
Pray for God to give us a bigger vision for the kingdom.
Pray for the three biggest challenges in our city.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

- a. Play a game – Going on a trip.
- Leader starts by saying his name and something with the same starting letter. (“My name is Bubba and I’m going to take a Bible.” “My name is Xavier and I’m taking a xylophone.”)
 - Go around the circle and have each person play the game.
 - To make it tougher, make the grown-ups say what the people before them are taking. (Ex: “My name is Velma and I’m going to take a vase, a xylophone, and a Bible.”)

b. Read Acts 1:1-11 aloud.

What kind of journey were the apostles going to take?

What territories were they supposed to reach? *The whole world!*

What was God going to give them so they would be prepared on their journey? *See verse 8.*

What did God want the apostles to accomplish in the world?

How is that like what God wants us to do today? How is it different?

What role can kids play in making the world the place God wants it to be?

The Church has Left the Building

Acts 1 – A mission bigger than a building

By John Grant (www.collegehills.org)

Theme: Most churches have invested big money in facilities that are attractive and functional. While a church building is a great tool, we have to keep in mind that **God’s mission for the world is much bigger than being nice people inside a beautiful facility.**

God has a mission for the world. It includes the things we do at the church building, but it is bigger because he is Lord of all creation. “All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:16-18).

The church exists to serve the mission of God, and he draws us out of the church building into the world he loves. Church buildings, like money, are a wonderful servant but a terrible master. This guide (and this entire series) calls us to lift our eyes from the concerns of day-to-day church life to reflect on God’s grand scheme for all of creation.

Leadership tip: Don’t underestimate the power of the “Relate” questions. Use these ice-breakers to help people relax and begin sharing. Sometimes they are the most important part of the meeting.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ What are your significant memories of church buildings?
- ❖ How would our congregation be different if a disaster destroyed our building and we were without a facility for a year?
- ❖ I have always wanted to be part of a church that...

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II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

Read Acts 11:1-18 aloud.

1. What item came up for discussion when Peter went to Jerusalem?

Who raised concerns about Peter's actions? *Jewish believers.*

What specifically was their concern in verse 3?

Why was eating the problem? Isn't baptism the bigger deal?

How well did this conference resolve the Gentile question?

It didn't. That's why they had to meet again in Acts 15.

2. What were some dietary differences between Jews & non-Jews?

Jews did not eat pork or food sacrificed to idols, and Gentiles often did not mind consuming the blood of slaughtered animals (see Acts 15:29).

What would be some challenges of bringing Jews and Gentiles to the same table, given their dietary differences?

Peter knew how disruptive it was to eat with Gentiles. Why did he take such a divisive action? *See verse 17.*

If God had not forced these Jewish Christians to include Samaritans and Gentiles, when do you think they might have done it? *Never!*

How do you think it felt for ancient Jews to recognize Gentiles as co-heirs in Christ? How difficult would it have been to respect a Gentile like Cornelius as a leader in the church?

3. How often do you suppose a significant change occurs in society that has no relationship to God's dreams for the world?

Spirituality has made a comeback – not so long ago, it was seen as archaic and superstitious. Now spirituality is widely accepted. How could God be involved in societal changes like this?

How could God be involved when a society's values change for the worse?

Romans 1:21-27 talks about how God encouraged unbelievers in the past to sin more so that they could experience the consequences.

I know God is not pleased with everything going on in our society, but I wonder if he might be using and even causing trends like...

Possible answers might be: the internet, the fall of communism, people's openness to spirituality, people who are starving for relationships, movies like The Passion of the Christ and The Chronicles of Narnia.

4. What changes in the world offer a new opportunity for serving God in our society?

5. When a society becomes hostile to Christianity, what are some faithful ways to respond?

What could be some advantages of the church having less power to direct society?

Fewer hypocrites to water down our witness. The only people who attend church now are the ones who are highly motivated. Less of a temptation for us to use the church for political objectives.

6. The first lesson in this series looked at Acts 1:8, where Jesus commissioned the apostles to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. How does Acts 10-11 fit with that commission?

When Acts 1:8 talked about going to the end of the earth, how many of the apostles would have thought that meant embracing Gentiles? *Probably none. They might have thought Gentiles would adopt Jewish customs, but they could not have foreseen the boundaries of Judaism changing.*

How well does our church welcome people who don't look "Christian"?

What might make it difficult for our church to welcome the following:

People with tattoos or body piercings?

Artists or intellectuals with wild hair and outlandish outfits?

Poor people?

People of other races?

III. Other resources

The point – Even though the world seems to be headed in the wrong direction, we believe that God is still working to bring people to faith. And we believe that he has placed us in the world as joyful witnesses of the wonderful blessings of faith in Christ.

Prayer

Pray for God to bless the world.

Ask God to help us love the world, just as he does (John 3:16).

Have silent prayer for the non-Christians we love.

Seek courage and wisdom as we let God's light shine through us.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Pair up adults and kids for a brief discussion.

Kids describe their class at school. Grown-ups share memories about what happened to them when they were that age.

How is this particular grade different now than it was then?

As you watch how our society is changing, what are some things that cause you concern?

Read Matthew 6:23-34 aloud.

How does this passage help you not to worry about the future? Look especially at verse 34.

How do Christians make the world a better place?

How do you make the world a better place?

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The Church has Left the Building

Acts 11 – It's a scary world out there

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme for this meeting: **Being faithful in a changing world.**

Our society is changing every day, and some of the changes are disturbing. There was a time when you could expect that most people went to church. If not, at least they closed their businesses on Sunday. Today, Sunday is a day for shopping and sports. Non-Christians are critical of or even hostile toward the church, and it is unusual to see Christians portrayed in a positive light in the movies. Makes you long for the 1950's (well, not really!).

The church and its members have been pushed from the center of society to the margins. How should Christians respond to this marginalization? This guide and the accompanying Bible class will help your group understand some of the changes and develop healthy responses.

Acts 10-11 is the story of another time when life was changing radically. God made it clear in Acts 8 that Samaritans belonged in the kingdom. Now Acts 10 says Gentiles are full participants. It would be tempting to say those changes were easy because they were led by God and were for the better, but that would ignore how dramatic and unsettling the changes were at the time. Relationships and customs, even interpreting the Law of Moses, had to be re-negotiated with Gentiles at the table. Transition is never easy, but God leads us and grows us through it.

Leadership tip: To prepare, read through the scripture and the questions. Star the best questions, and check the ones you might cover if time permits. If you ask all the questions in a single meeting, your group is not engaged. Ask friends in the group what might promote more conversation.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and "break the ice." No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ What is something you remember from 6th grade?
- ❖ One thing I don't miss about the "good old days" is...
- ❖ How many e-mails do you send and receive in a typical week? How has e-mail changed your life?

II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

Read II Corinthians 4:1-12 aloud.

1. What are some of the words in 2-4 that relate to seeing?

What does verse 2 say we are called to do?
Set forth the truth plainly.

Why is it that the gospel can be so clear to us, yet so difficult for others to swallow?

2. According to verse 6, what shines out of our hearts?

What kind of actions cause non-Christians to notice that God is living in us? *Probably not bombing abortion clinics.*

3. What keeps us from “losing heart”? *Look back to 3:18. The fact that God is revealing his glory and transforming us.*

So if God has put the light in us and sent us on a mission of proclaiming, all of us are pumped about evangelism, right?

What concerns do you have about letting God’s light shine through you to bless non-Christians?

How could we incorporate some II Cor. 4 optimism into our view of evangelism?

4. Why are we tempted to confine our faith to the church building?

What are some factors that diminish the brightness of God’s light in our lives?

Church bickering, sin in our lives, pretending we are perfect/unable to confess, lack of devotion to Jesus.

5. What are some words that verses 5 and 7 use to describe our

role? *Servants, clay jars.*

What do these two images say about our authority and power?

How does knowing that you are doing God’s work give you more confidence to serve him?

What is God’s work in the world? What is he striving to accomplish?

Why do you suppose God entrusted his precious light to clay jars that are so often unworthy vessels? *What other vessels are there?*

6. Verses 8-10 make some surprising contrasts between our situation and our attitude. What are some of them?

How can we be hopeful if our situation is rotten?

Who is someone who demonstrates this unbelievable hope?

7. If you summarize this passage, what does it say about...
Non-Christians?
God and his desires for non-Christians?
Our role in carrying out God’s plans for non-Christians?

How well are you doing at joining God in his desires for the non-Christians you know?

How could you be a better partner in helping God re-connect with the non-Christians you know?

How could our group support one another in carrying out God’s dreams for our community? How could we be more intentional about involving newcomers?
Invite non-members to the group, plan an outreach party, set aside an empty chair at each meeting and pray for a person to fill it.

III. Other resources

The point – God has a mission of reaching the world, and we are invited to play a part in that mission. We will be most fulfilled when we join God in this work.

Prayer

Pray for someone who does not know Christ to fill your empty chair. Ask God for open eyes to notice people who are ready to hear the story of Jesus.

Seek a greater influence for God. Ask that your light be brightened.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Bring a small clay pot to the meeting, or maybe multiple pots.

What are some good uses for a clay pot?

Divide into teams and see who can list 10 uses the fastest.

Read II Cor. 4:6-7 aloud.

How does God use clay pots? *Hold treasure.*

How many of you got that on your list?

Who are the clay pots? *You & me.*

How are we like pots?

What is God's treasure that he puts in us?

Verse 6 uses the word light 3 times.

How could we become clay pots who hold more light?

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For small group tools, go to www.collegehills.org, then Ministries, then LIFE groups.

The Church has Left the Building

II Corinthians 4 – outreach

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme for this meeting: **Sharing God's treasure with others.**

There is a good reason for the church to leave the building – God is at work in lives around us who have not yet discovered the light. God has a mission for the world, and we get to help! There are few things we can do to bring greater glory to God than to inspire another to praise God with us.

II Corinthians 4 is a powerful chapter that talks about God's incredible power that changes us so that others can see God's light in us. Even though we will always be far from perfect, others can see the change Jesus makes in our lives. Hopefully, they will want to find what we have found.

Leadership tip: Include an empty chair in your group meeting each week. Point out that there is an empty seat for a guest to be with us next time. Pray for God to bring someone to fill that chair. If there is no room for an empty chair in your circle, you may need to talk about multiplying into two groups. Your group will never enjoy its full potential if it is not reaching out to bring in new people on a regular basis.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and "break the ice." No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ When have you gone on a mission trip? What did you do? How did it impact you?
- ❖ My personal happy meal would include...
- ❖ Who led you to love Jesus? How did you come to be a believer?

II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

Pray for God to open the hearts and minds of the group as you open the scriptures together.

Read II Timothy 3:14-17 aloud.

8. This letter was written to Timothy from Paul. Based on this paragraph, what can you say about these two people?

What would you say Timothy needed spiritually?

9. What were some spiritual resources that Paul said Timothy had available to support him?

Memory of material, memory of teachers, scripture.

How adequate were these resources?

See verse 17 – thoroughly equipped for every good work.

How often do you feel like you lack a spiritual resource?

In what ways do we have fewer tools at our disposal than Timothy?

In what ways do we have additional tools at our disposal?

The completed 66 books of scripture readily available, along with study resources, plus 2000 years of the church's wisdom.

10. According to verse 16, what can scripture do for us?

In what ways does this verse relate to accumulating Bible knowledge or information about God?

How do these functions point to something broader and deeper than acquiring information?

How do the scriptures form us? What habits help you to let scripture shape your heart and your life?

11. What are appropriate ways to use the Bible?

What are some inappropriate ways to use the Bible?

12. When has the Bible been a blessing for you?

When has the Bible been a challenge for you?

13. Have you ever known someone with a huge knowledge of scriptural facts but with severe gaps in their spiritual life? What were they missing from II Tim. 3:16?

How could somebody study the Bible without it affecting their heart?

When you open the Bible, how do you allow the Spirit to use it to transform you?

How could prayer be part of paying attention to the scriptures?

How could it not?

14. When would it be valuable for scripture to rebuke you?

What is the difference between the rebuke of scripture and beating someone up with the Bible?

What are the risks of rebuking someone with scripture?

Beating somebody up with scripture does more harm than good. The person will resent you and God.

How would you know that you were called to rebuke someone using scripture? What cautions would you use?

Rebuke is appropriate only if:

a. You have a close relationship and can speak frankly.

b. You listen more than you speak.

c. The person is likely to respond with repentance.

d. You have tried to send a message through gentler means first.

e. You have prayed for wisdom and humility.

III. Other resources

The point – Let the scriptures form you into the person God wants you to be.

Prayer

Pray Psalm 119:33-48 aloud. Talk about how someone under the Law of Moses could have found such comfort in scripture. Pray for ears to hear the word of God every time we open the Bible. Confess to God your struggles with the Bible.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Everybody share your favorite verse.

Dismiss the kids to an art area with crayons & paper. Ask them to draw a picture of themselves living out their favorite scripture.

Work through the adult discussion while the kids color.

Gather the kids back and ask them to display their artwork. Give lots of praise. Then grown-ups also share stories of how their favorite verse affects their lives.

The Church has Left the Building

II Timothy 3 – Transformed by Scripture

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme for this meeting: **The Bible transforms us.**

The Bible is long and complicated, yet we believe that God speaks through this book in unique ways. If we are going to be make a difference for God in a world that has forgotten God, we need to soak up the words of scripture. His words need to fill our hearts and overflow into words and actions that show we are God's people.

Scripture is a powerful tool to transform us. In II Timothy 3, Paul encourages Timothy to remember his teachers and the scriptures he has heard all his life. These scriptures offered Timothy (and us) everything he needed to honor God.

Leadership tip: Include a discussion of scripture in every group meeting, even if it is a short meeting or an off crowd. These ancient words point the way to the future.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and "break the ice." No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ What is your favorite Bible verse?
- ❖ What is a class or Bible study that impacted your life?
- ❖ Aside from the Bible, what is your favorite book?

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Read Matthew 10:11-31 aloud.

15. Who was Jesus speaking to?

The twelve apostles, before he sent them out to preach.

What kind of welcome did he expect that they would find as they talked about him?

What were some of the risks the first followers of Jesus faced?

Are Christians known for being risk-takers or risk averse? How does this compare to Jesus' view of risk?

How could we develop a courageous spirit more like Jesus?

When you face a risky situation, what helps you move ahead in spite of the risks?

16. How did Jesus instruct his followers to respond to opposition?

See verses 16, 17, 19, 23, 28.

What kind of opposition have you faced because of your faith?

In what ways does verse 24 connect Christians' persecution with Jesus' suffering. How much do you think this helped?

How do you feel when you hear of believers who suffer for Christ? Do you ever feel guilty for having it so easy?

17. Matthew 10 was spoken to a specific group for a specific time. What was unique and applied only to these disciples?

In what ways could these words apply to Christians in every generation?

If Jesus was sending us into our community to call attention to the kingdom, what instructions do you think he would give us?

In ancient society, it was not unusual to have wandering speakers come to town. How would that go over in our community?

If not street preaching, what might be ways we could get the message into a form that our neighbors would appreciate?

See www.servantevangelism.com for an idea.

18. What might be some dangerous neighborhoods in our community where Christians are afraid to go?

Who is speaking for Jesus in such places?

How could we help children in those neighborhoods?

What is a way we could serve, even though it was a little crazy & risky?

What might help us offset the risks of going into dangerous places with the gospel?

19. Every church wants to recruit prosperous, educated, moral people as members. Who are some people that nobody is inviting to their church?

Troubled teens, the poor, minority groups, people with a rough past history, people with disabilities, etc.

How could we reach out to these "less-desirable" people?

Read the examples below about "Churches taking risks."

What might happen to our church if a bunch of "less-desirable" people joined us?

We might look more like the group that followed Jesus around!

If such people are reluctant to join us in our building, how could we go to them with the love of Jesus?

III. Other resources

The point – If God is for us, who can be against us? Christians have nothing to fear, not even death. So we can serve God boldly!

Churches taking risks

Treasure in Clay Jars tells the story of nine churches from several denominations who took risks to honor their calling from God. “Most of the congregations we visited took risks by ministering to those society has rejected. Bellevue houses a school for high-school dropouts in the church building. Diane, a woman at Spring Garden, has a ministry with women who have been sexually abused... She has experience a lot of support in the congregation for her ministry, even though the women with whom she works are generally uncomfortable in the church because of their marginalization...

Transfiguration Parish is located in a neighborhood that is predominantly Hispanic Catholic and Hasidic Jewish. One day Sister Marcy, principal of Transfiguration School, looked out her door to see several Jewish men chasing and then attacking an African-American man who had allegedly stolen something from a Jewish fruit market. She came running out as the police arrived, about to arrest the thief. She told the police, ‘If you arrest this man, you also have to arrest the ones who are beating him up.’” (p. 80).

Prayer

Pray for the lost

Pull out a local map and pray for specific streets where there is little light

Ask God for courage to take risks for the kingdom.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Sing “This Little Light of Mine”

Read Luke 10:25-37 aloud. You might act it out.

Pair up kids with adults. Share about a kid you know who has a rough time behaving at school. Adults share with kids about a struggling kid you knew when you were younger. How could we as God's followers help kids who are having a hard time?

What would be hard about helping a kid who is having a hard time?

The Church has Left the Building

Matthew 10 – Taking risks for God

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme for this meeting: **We take risks for the kingdom** by living in ways that non-Christians might consider unusual.

Unfortunately, Christians are sometimes known as timid, weak souls who would rather hide in a church building than be involved in real-world problems. Yet such timidity hardly represents the courageous love in action that Jesus demonstrated. If we want to be engaged in kingdom work, we need to develop eyes to see the problems of a hurting world and the courage to address those problems.

Matthew 10 was Jesus' commission of the apostles, and this journey was not for pansies. He warned them that they would face abuse and hardship, so travel light. May we find courage in these early marching orders!

Leadership tip: Take some risks with your group. Challenge them to be involved in the problems of society, in the name of Jesus.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ When have you done something risky? How did you come through the experience?
- ❖ What would be the most difficult part about being a missionary in a 3rd-world nation? What would motivate someone to give up the comforts of life for the sake of the kingdom? Offer a prayer of blessing for missionaries living in dangerous places.
- ❖ What would be the most dangerous place to live in our community? How many children do you think live in that neighborhood?

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II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

Read James 2:1-17 aloud.

1. This passage addresses two problems that were going on in this church. What problem is described in 1-4?

How could such a situation develop in a church?

Who might face obstacles when they desire to worship with us?

2. What problem is addressed in 14-17?

Faith that hesitates to act for the good of another.

Why are Christians drawn to faith without action?

When have you been tempted to discuss scripture without actually following it?

What helps you to put your beliefs into actions that help others?

Who is someone we should be helping? How?

3. When the world sees the church discriminate against certain groups (poor, handicapped, uneducated, non-Southerners, Auburn fans, etc.), what do they think about Jesus? *See John 13:35.*

What if we are not prejudiced, but the world perceives we are that way? How does that affect our proclamation of Jesus?

What could we do to let the world see that we are not acting like the James 2 church?

Why should we be aware of our image among non-Christians?

How could we improve our image?

4. This series of lessons deals with the church leaving the building and not being so focused on ourselves. So why should this series include a lesson on loving one another?

When have you seen a church do a great job of loving one another?

How did that affect their impact on their community?

5. How could love for one another be part of teaching the world to love Jesus?

What are some practical steps we could take to let the world know that our congregation is a place where people...

a. Listen to one another?

b. Help one another?

c. Practice forgiveness and reconciliation?

d. Overcome cultural barriers that divide people?

If our church was doing those things in a significant way, how much would we have to advertise that it was occurring? How much would word spread without publicity?

6. What is the biggest challenge about Christians loving one another?

How can we manage this challenge?

What is the difference between loving one another and having warm feelings toward one another?

How many of your close friends are in our church?

What is good about church friends? What is good about friends outside the church?

III. Other resources

The point – When we love one another consistently & patiently, we show that God has changed us. The world will notice.

Prayer

Pray for a brother or sister in Christ who is difficult for you to get along with.

Ask God to guide you into relationships with godly friends.

Pray for the unity of the church.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Ask an adult in the group to point out some constellations. If it's a cloudy night, meet indoors and turn off the lights. Hide some items around the darkened room, including some flashlights or something that glows in the dark.

Talk about why you can see stars or lights so well at night. What makes them stand out?

Read Philippians 2:14-15 aloud.

What causes Jesus' followers to stand out?

Why is it hard to do things without complaining or arguing?

What helps you to complain less and argue less?

The Church has Left the Building

James 2 – Love one another

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme for this meeting: **loving one another.**

This series is focused on the church turning its attention outward, but we cannot forget to love one another. In fact, the way we treat one another is one of our most important ways of showing the world that we have been changed by the power of God. There are plenty of places where people can find criticism or anger or conflict. But when they see a church that truly loves one another in specific ways, they want to know why we are different.

Leadership tip: Your small group is one of the most practical tools in the world for living out the one another commands of the New Testament. A newcomer can blend in a large crowd, but within your circle, everyone can enjoy a sense of community. Pray for God to give your group a sense of closeness and love.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ When is a time that you feel lonely?
- ❖ When have you felt like a minority?
- ❖ Who is someone who does a good job inviting others to feel like they belong?
- ❖ Where are some places in our society that people think they will feel accepted?

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Read I Cor. 14:22-28 aloud. Consider reading it from the Message:

²²So where does it get you, all this speaking in tongues no one understands? It doesn't help believers, and it only gives unbelievers something to gawk at. Plain truth-speaking, on the other hand, goes straight to the heart of believers and doesn't get in the way of unbelievers. ²³If you come together as a congregation and some unbelieving outsiders walk in on you as you're all praying in tongues, unintelligible to each other and to them, won't they assume you've taken leave of your senses and get out of there as fast as they can? ²⁴But if some unbelieving outsiders walk in on a service where people are speaking out God's truth, the plain words will bring them up against the truth ²⁵and probe their hearts. Before you know it, they're going to be on their faces before God, recognizing that God is among you.

²⁶So here's what I want you to do. When you gather for worship, each one of you be prepared with something that will be useful for all: Sing a hymn, teach a lesson, tell a story, lead a prayer, provide an insight. ²⁷If prayers are offered in tongues, two or three's the limit, and then only if someone is present who can interpret what you're saying. ²⁸Otherwise, keep it between God and yourself.

1. What was the problem in the church in ancient Corinth? Tongue-speakers were out of control and dominating the assembly.

Based on your reading of this text, what was occurring with speaking in tongues?

Could believers understand the tongue speaker? Could non-Christians understand the tongue speaker?

How might a non-Christian respond to a service that was mostly tongue-speaking? *See verse 23.*

2. Why does it matter what an unbeliever experiences in worship? Isn't worship primarily for believers?

In what sense is worship for believers? In what sense is worship for unbelievers?

Bring in the thoughts about 3 views of worship from the Bible class curriculum:

- Inside and outside – a holy huddle where Christians gather to prepare for our mission.
- Outside in – Seeker-sensitive worship where the service is geared toward non-Christians.
- Inside out – Worship is a way to join God's mission of reaching the world. Worship as a witness.

Which of these three views of worship fits your view?

How does it affect worship to have a non-Christian guest with you?

3. According to verses 24-25, what would be the ideal response from a non-believer?

What are some factors that might make it difficult for an unbeliever to recognize God among us?

What might help an unbeliever to recognize God among us?

4. What parts of our faith can be adapted to welcome those who know nothing about Jesus?

Musical styles, attire, meeting times, avoiding strange words (thee, thou, foyer, pew).

What parts of our faith cannot be adapted? What are the things we need to maintain, even though it might be difficult for a non-Christian? *Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, and now he calls us to imitate him by denying ourselves and serving others.*

5. Evaluate our assemblies for their sensitivity to guests. What parts of our assemblies proclaim that God is working today?

How does the Lord's Supper tell about the work of God? How could we deepen that focus?

How do we begin our services, and what does that say about our spiritual priorities?

How do we end our assemblies? How do these final words prepare us to continue what we have been doing in worship?

6. Why is it that outsiders know so much about how Christians are supposed to act?

How could God be involved in their knowledge?

III. Other resources

The point – Worship one way we proclaim that God is in charge of all creation and has changed our lives.

Prayer:

Pray for people God is trying to reach in our community. By name, if you know.

Ask God to make us more aware of what our assemblies communicate to outsiders.

Pray for the guests who will attend our next worship service.

Pray for our group to live in a way that is inviting to non-Christians.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Read I Corinthians 14:26 aloud.

Pair up kids & adults one-on-one and answer the following questions:

What is something that is good about worship?

What is something that is difficult about worship?

What are we trying to accomplish in worship? Why is it worth our time?

The Church has Left the Building

I Corinthians 14 – worship as a witness

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme for this meeting: **Worship is a witness that God reigns in our lives.**

Like the last lesson on loving one another, worship is something Christians do mainly with one another in the church building. Yet we need to bear in mind that there are always guests checking us out. Our worship is a witness to them and to one another that God is King!

Leadership tip: Always be on the lookout for new members to attend your group. Sunday worship guests are great candidates for group attendance. Make it a goal to invite one new person to your group every meeting.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ When was a time that worship was particularly meaningful?
- ❖ Where do you go for refreshment?
- ❖ When you visit a new church, what do you look for? What helps you find your way around?
- ❖ If a friend invited you to a wedding at a mosque or synagogue, what would be some of your concerns? How do you think your concerns resemble the way a first-time guest might feel in our assembly?

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II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

Read Matthew 10:5-20 aloud.

1. What type of supplies were the apostles to take for their journey? (9-10)

How is this different from the way you prepare for a trip?

What concerns would you have in traveling this way?

What does it mean when a traveler carries multiple bags?
Well-prepared, planning to stay for awhile, wealthy.

What does it mean when a traveler has no luggage?
Urgent business, in a hurry, poor, dependent, flew the wrong airline.

What was Jesus communicating by the type messengers he sent ahead of him?

2. How were the apostles to find a place to stay?

How many of the apostles would you guess were turned away?

When have you traveled without knowing where you would spend the night? How did you do it?

3. How were the apostles supposed to respond if they were arrested? What kind of preparation did Jesus give them?

How would it affect our faith if it became illegal to be a Christian?

What would happen to church buildings and professional ministers if Christianity was outlawed?

4. As they traveled, how dependent were the apostles on the Holy Spirit?

What factors keep us from being dependent on the Spirit?

How has hardship caused you to grow in your dependence on God?

5. Where do you believe the Holy Spirit might be leading us?

How do you think he intends for our lives to be different?

How do you think the Holy Spirit would like our church to grow and change and improve?

Fill in the blank: I have always wanted to be part of a church that...

How do you think the Holy Spirit has been involved in leading you to that dream for the church?

What is one step you could take to help our church move in that direction?

6. If we were to practice our faith outside the church building, what would be some concerns you would have?

What is happening in our society that might make you doubt that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world?

What does John 16:7-11 say about the work of the Holy Spirit in the world? How could this help our confidence for practicing our faith outside the building?

Just like the apostles, we can find courage in the thought that the Holy Spirit is already working in the world. When we leave the building, we are joining God's work

How confident are you that the Holy Spirit is working in our community? Do you believe John 16?

III. Other resources

The point – We have to depend on God to lead us to become the people of his dreams. Leaving the church building to serve in the world can be frightening, but we believe the Holy Spirit is already working in the world when we go there.

Prayer

Ask for the Holy Spirit to make his will abundantly clear for us. Ask for ears to hear and eyes to see and hands to serve.
Pray for courage to follow the Holy Spirit, even if he leads us beyond places of comfort.
Pray for God to lead us to become more the church of our dreams (and God's dreams).

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Blindfold some of the group members (kids and adults). Tell each one to find a treasure by listening only to one particular voice. Set them loose and have everyone shout directions to the treasure (candy hidden ahead of time). See how well they can focus on that one voice with clear directions in the midst of other voices.

How difficult was it to find the treasure? Why?

How much did you have to depend on the person leading you?

How is this like depending on God?

Read Matt. 10:5-14 aloud. How dependent were the apostles on God to lead them?

What are some ways we depend on God to lead us?

How could we be more dependent on God?

The Church has Left the Building

Matthew 10 – Depending on the Holy Spirit

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme for this meeting: **Depend on the Holy Spirit.**

A church who leaves its building will have to depend on the Holy Spirit. Living the Christian faith is pretty safe within the familiar surroundings of the church building. But going to serve others will stretch us. They do not share our views or follow our customs.

We studied Matthew 10 three weeks ago when we considered how the church takes risks to honor God. But this text also has significant implications for our depending on the Holy Spirit as we take those risks. Imagine what it must have been like for Jesus' apostles traveling around Judea with no agenda other than to represent him.

Leadership tip: Build bridges from your group to people who do not yet know Jesus. Include an empty chair in each week's meeting, and invite participants to pray for a friend who might fill that chair each week. Periodically, you might host a bring-a-friend party during a group meeting.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and "break the ice." No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ When are you most aware of how much you depend on God?
- ❖ On a typical one-week trip, how many pairs of shoes would you pack?
- ❖ What was your worst hotel experience?

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Read I Peter 2:4-12 aloud. You might make sure there is a rock somewhere in the room to point to as an illustration.

How do you explain all the references to rocks in this passage?
v. 6 quotes Isaiah 28:16, a warning to the Israelites that God was about to level their houses of lies and build a new house of faith.
v. 7 quotes Psalm 118:22, a passage that talks about how great it is when God re-builds his house.
v. 8 quotes Isaiah 8:14, which says that both houses of Israel will stumble when they face a holy God.

So how is Jesus like the rocks described in the Old Testament?
See verse 4.

How do Christians relate to Jesus the rock? *See verse 5.*

Our lives are a sign that God reigns

What kind of transformation is taking place in our lives, according to this passage? *See verses 5, 9, & 11*

What do these changes show non-Christians about the reign of God in our lives?

At a practical level, how can people tell that God is our king?

When have you seen someone's life demonstrate that God is in control?

How well does your life proclaim that God reigns? What would increase or improve your testimony?

Our lives are agents and instruments of God's reign

What are some ways that our lives are tools for God's reign, according to this reading? What are we doing to support his reign?
5 – We are his priests
9 – we declare his praises

12 – our good deeds cause others to praise God

Who is the builder of God's house? What is our role in building?
I Peter sounds like we are the raw materials. We are only rocks who make ourselves available for the builder to use at his pleasure.

If God is the builder and we are the stones, why should we invest our time and energy in "church work"? Why is our service needed?

Sometimes we refer to serving God as "building his kingdom." How would it change things if we viewed God's kingdom as a movement we join rather than something we build? How would our attitude be different if we viewed faith as a movement that takes hold of us rather than something we construct?

What is one way you are serving God that is a positive contribution to the kingdom?

Our lives are a foretaste of God's reign

How is the work of God still incomplete in us, according to I Peter?
5 – we are still under construction
12 – friends are not yet glorifying God

What are some ways that our lives show how wonderful it is to honor God as king? *See verse 9-10.*

What are some blessings you enjoy because of Christ? If God were not king of your life, how would you be poorer?

How would your life be different if most of the people around you put God first in all things?

Honoring our king

When can you see God reigning in the world or in your life?

When are some times that it is difficult to tell that God is in charge?

What keeps people from recognizing God's work in the world?

What helps people recognize God's work in the world?
Read John 13:35.

III. Other resources

The point – God is reigning, but not everybody knows it yet. We are invited to play a part in expanding that reign. We will be most fulfilled when we let God rule our lives, and we invite others to do the same.

Prayer

Pray for someone who does not know Christ.

Ask God for open eyes to notice people who are ready to hear the message of Jesus.

Seek a greater influence for God. Ask that your light be brightened.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Bring something the kids can build into a tower or building – rocks, Legos, blocks, Jenga blocks, Hershey bars, 3x5 cards, etc. Divide into two teams and see who can build the tallest tower.

Read I Peter 2:4-5 aloud.

How are we like building blocks in the hand of God?

Read I Peter 2:9-12 aloud.

What are some things God has done to make us more valuable?

What are some ways we act as a result of the ways God has built us?

Who is someone who is not a Christian and might be watching how you live? What kind of example are you setting for them?

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The Church has Left the Building

I Peter 2 – the reign of God

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme for this meeting: **Living as citizens of a new world.**

There is a new sheriff in town – Jesus Christ! Actually, he has always been in charge, but for a long time we did not recognize his reign. Since God redeemed us, we see the whole world in different ways. This discussion guide looks at I Peter 2 to highlight three ways that we honor the king:

- Our lives show changes for the better – godly words and deeds are a sign that God has been at work.
- Our lives are tools in God’s hand.
- Our abundant lives give us and others a foretaste of a better future.

While life in Christ is not the total fulfillment of God’s reign, the lives we enjoy are a taste of how wonderful it will be when all of creation honors God as king.

I Peter was written to encourage persecuted believers to stand strong in their service to God, so there is a hopeful optimism that changed Christian lives make a difference in the world.

Leadership tip: Be sure your life matches the group discussions. Nobody expects you to be perfect, but group members are watching to see if God is really in charge of your life. Let God rule your thoughts, actions, and words.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ What are some things you do out of concern for the environment?
- ❖ What images come to mind when you think of a king? How does that affect the way you view God as a king?
- ❖ What is your favorite appetizer?

II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

Read Acts 6:1-7 aloud.

1. What was the problem in this passage?

If a church led by apostles made a major goof (letting widows starve), what kind of expectations should we have for the church today?

As long as there are people leading the church, there will be mistakes. And sometimes we will make major mistakes.

When our leaders make decisions that prove to be wrong, what would be some godly ways to respond?

We could use tar & feathers, we could leave angry, or we could treat our leaders with the same mercy and love that God has shown us.

2. What are some things the apostles did right in this situation?

What could have been some other ways to address this situation of hungry widows?

What problems could have grown out of this crisis? If the apostles had not responded with wisdom, strength and love, how would it have crippled the life of the early church?

What are some ways that good leaders help the church act like a loving community?

3. Why did the apostles decide not to feed the widows themselves?

Why did the apostles let the community select people to address this problem? Why didn't Peter hand-pick some leaders?

What does it mean to discern your calling?

In what ways were the apostles discerning their calling through this encounter?

In what ways were the apostles leading others to discern their calling in this story?

4. When you look at the list of leaders selected to lead this ministry, how many traditional Jewish names (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Daniel, etc.) do you see?

Given the absence of Hebraic names, what do you think was the ethnicity of the leaders the church selected?

In Acts 1-7, everyone is Jewish. But it was Grecian Jews chosen to feed Grecian widows.

What can we learn about leadership from who was selected to address this problem?

Not only did the apostles delegate responsibility, they delegated it to the people who were closest to the problem. Quite possibly, they invited critics to become leaders.

What role do good leaders play in launching a community into action?

It is easier to discuss a problem than it is to address it. What are some keys to turning a good discussion into action?

How can good leaders motivate us to do God's work in the world?

5. Epilogue

How well did these new leaders do with their meals on wheels ministry, based on Acts 6 & 8? *Read 6:8-10 and 8:4-8. They used this positive leadership experience to launch other initiatives.*

When have you seen someone get an opportunity to lead and the person shines in amazing ways nobody had expected?

What is one way you are called to be a leader?

What is one way you might like to develop as a leader?

How could you start?

III. Other resources

The point – God gives the church leaders so that we might all grow to be like Christ (Eph. 4:11-13). Each of us can be a leader among our peers and in the church.

Prayer

Pray for the leaders of our congregation.

Ask God to raise up new leaders.

Seek wisdom on how each of us could develop as a leader for Christ.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Play follow the leader. You be the first leader, and be sure to do some things that are impossible for some of the kids (lift something, touch the ceiling, etc.)

What makes a good leader?

Why is it important for a leader to help group members do the things that they can do – no more and no less?

Read Acts 6:1-7 aloud.

What happened in this story?

Ask the kids to re-tell it in their own words.

What can we learn about being good leaders from this story?

What are some ways that kids are leaders? How are you a leader among your friends?

The Church has Left the Building

Acts 6 – Leaders with a Mission

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme for this meeting: **Leading in a way that honors God’s mission.**

The Bible class discussion talked about some key roles that leaders play in helping the church fulfill God’s mission in the world:

- Forming loving community – drawing people together in love.
- Helping the church discern God’s calling.
- Encouraging the church to carry out God’s calling – get it off the drawing board and into real-life situations.

This guide will lead the group to consider some ways the apostles did these things in Acts 6.

Leadership tip: One of the best tools for groups leaders is a covenant. This is a simple, one-page description of your purpose, goals, and procedures. It reads like a contract, but the ideal approach is to let a blank covenant raise issues to discuss (where to meet, what to eat, what about kids, etc.). Getting signatures is less important than getting open discussion that leads to consensus. About every six months or whenever your group hits a snag, pull out the covenant to remind people how you agreed to operate. Find a sample covenant at the website below.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ The worst thing about a belly button is...
- ❖ Who is a leader you admire?
- ❖ If you received bad news out of the blue, who are the first three people you would tell?

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II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

1. This discussion will compare our identity in Christ to colonists and refugees. What do refugees and colonists have in common? *Both live in a foreign land yet retain the identity of their homeland. Both are influenced by larger issues.*

What is the difference between refugees and colonists? *Colonists often have better resources, but the big difference is mindset – refugees left home against their will, while colonists have an agenda.*

How are Christians in America like refugees? *There was a time when nearly everyone gave lip service to Jesus, but now Christians are marginalized (what we discussed in week 2).*

How are Christians in America like colonists? *We are early adopters – subjects of the coming king. It is our dream that everyone would discover the blessings we enjoy in Christ.*

Read Isaiah 49:1-7 aloud.

2. Who is speaking in verses 1-3? *Israelites, speaking as one person.*

What claim does Israel make in 1-3? *God created me for a purpose.*

What vision did the Israelites have for themselves? *To be a great nation blessed by God.*

What vision did God have for Israel? *Read Gen. 12:2-3. Make you a great nation, bless you, and bless others through you.*

Which part of God's vision for Israel did they tend to forget? *The part about serving others.*

3. In Isaiah 49, how was Israel feeling in verse 4?

What might have led Israelite believers to express such frustration? *Many commentators think the second half of Isaiah addresses the Jews after their nation was destroyed and they were putting the pieces back together.*

In what sense does verse 4 express trust in God, even though God's people are not thriving at the moment?

How were the ancient Israelites like refugees? *We use the term "exiles" for the Jews we meet in books like Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah. But they were refugees and POW's -- removed from home against their will because of war.*

4. As Israel wallows in self-pity, how does God respond (5-7)?

How does 6-7 restore the promise to Abram from Gen. 12? *Re-kindles the vision of a great nation who invites other nations to worship.*

What kind of job does God give Israel? Is this a bigger or smaller burden? *Much bigger, yet no different from his vision at the beginning.*

How could a bigger vision transform Israel from refugees into colonists, wherever they live?

How does it affect you when you are stressed and the burden grows? *It will either kill you or make you rise to the occasion.*

5. What are some ways the church is in a position like ancient Israel? What causes you to feel like we're working hard but losing ground?

How could renewed vision help us to see ourselves as colonists (leaders, early adopters) rather than refugees (cry-baby victims)?

If Isaiah 49 was addressed to us, how would God complete it: "It is too small a thing for you to restore the New Testament church. I will also make you..."

III. Other resources

The point – In a changing world, Christians can feel like refugees because we have lost influence to govern. But we believe God still reigns and these changes could not happen without his permission. Rather than victims, we are colonists who follow the Holy Spirit into the new places where God is working.

Prayer

Praise God as the king and ruler of the universe.

Seek wisdom and courage to follow God into new ways to serve in the world.

Pray for the world – for God to bless people who do not yet love him.

Pray for good things to come to Muslims, Hindus, atheists, money-worshippers, etc., and that they will recognize the source of those blessings.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Imagine that our group has been given a deserted island in the Caribbean to start a new society. Each person tell about one part of life in our new community. Where would we live? How would we feed ourselves? What kind of government would we have?

Read Gen. 12:2-3 aloud.

In what ways was God inviting Abram and his family to start a new society?

When God asked Abram to leave his home, he also made some promises to Abram. Who was supposed to be blessed when Abram obeyed God?

What are some ways that we have been blessed through Abram's obedience?

What parts of Abram's promise hold true for Christians?

God may not give us the same material blessings he gave Abram. But when we serve God, we and everyone around us is blessed.

The Church has Left the Building

Isaiah 49 – Refugees or colonists?

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme for this meeting: **Living as colonists and refugees.**

The Bible class lesson offers some great perspective on joining Jesus “outside the camp” in serving and loving non-Christians. It contrasts discussions in a classroom versus “on the job” training in the world.

To explore these ideas further, this discussion guide takes participants to Isaiah 49. It is a wonderful passage for this theme because it challenged the ancient Israelites to look beyond themselves and recognize how much God loves other people. It fits with the promise to Abraham that God blesses people so that they might be a blessing to others (Gen. 12:2-3).

Leadership tip: Community is vital for people who hope to be different from others. When you try to be faithful in a world that worships other gods, you need supportive peers to give you encouragement, instruction, and wisdom. Your group can serve as such a community, so work to make it a safe place for sharing struggles and questions.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

❖ Where are some places you suspect God is at work in the world?

Habitat for Humanity, Hospice, AA, other groups that serve

❖ What are some ways a church building is a tool for carrying out God's dreams?

❖ Agree or disagree – a short-term mission trip makes a bigger spiritual impact on participants than a year's worth of Bible classes.

“The Church has Left the Building” is a series of Small Group guides written in support of the Missional Church curriculum by David Wray and Chris Benjamin. It is designed around the concept of adults discussing material in Bible class and then processing it in small group meetings during the same week. These guides, as well as the Missional Church curriculum, are based on the book, *Treasure in Clay Jars*, by Lois Barrett and others.

Training tools and study guides are at www.collegehills.org, then Ministries, then LIFE groups.

II. Group discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

6. We have spent 11 weeks discussing how the church's mission is bigger than what occurs in the church building. How would you describe God's mission? What is God's dream for the world?
The mission of God is loving relationships – to restore all of creation to harmony with himself and with one another. See Isaiah 65:17-25.

What role does the church play in God's dreams? What role could we play?
The church is called and sent community of love who serves the mission of God by demonstrating renewed lives, by practicing genuine relationships, and by serving others unselfishly.

What do you think God might do if the church failed to serve the mission? Do you think he would find another way to reclaim his kids?

Read Matthew 28:18-20 aloud.

7. What is the setting for this passage? Who is speaking, who is listening, and what is the occasion?

What does Jesus say about his authority? What gives him the confidence to make such a bold claim?
A dead man can say anything he wants because he has nothing to fear, especially if he just came back to life.

Who is a leader you know who commands respect in a way that people feel safe when he or she is around? How well does such a leader motivate you?

8. Based on this authority, what orders does Jesus give his followers? What are the action verbs in 19-20?

How well are we doing around the world?
Depends on which statistics you view, but most indicate Christianity is growing worldwide but losing ground in America.

How well is our congregation doing with Jesus' instructions? Which is our strength – going, making disciples, baptizing, or teaching?

9. What does Jesus promise in verse 20?

What obstacles keep you from joining Jesus serving in the world?

What gives you more confidence and motivation to serve – Jesus' resurrection authority or his promise of continued presence?

10. What is God's mission for your life?

How does the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20) influence your sense of mission?

If you wanted to bring your life in line with God's mission, how would you figure out God's dreams for you?

11. Who are some people God loves that we could reach in a better way? Who lives in our community but never attends our church?
There are multiple unchurched groups in every community – racial minorities, people with handicaps or family problems, people who think they would not fit (too poor, too dumb, too sinful, too messed up, etc.)

If people are reluctant to attend our church, what is a way we could take the church to them? How could we be Jesus around them?

12. In what ways does a church building support Jesus' instructions?

What are some ways that a church building can distract us?
Field of Dreams is a great movie, but a terrible outreach strategy – "If you build it, they will come." What happens too often is you build it and then your leaders' best energy goes to maintaining it.

What are we doing to get the church (us) out of the building and into the world? In what ways are we going?

III. Other resources

The point – God’s kingdom will not fail (Matt. 16:18). He loves the world and he will constantly work to bring more people back into loving relationship with himself. Our greatest honor and most satisfying work is to join him in realizing his dreams.

Prayer

Pray for God’s kingdom to succeed. And pray that we will love God’s kingdom more than we love our personal agendas. Ask for wisdom and courage to discern the best ways to serve God today. Pray about the future of your group. Pray for new people to join.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Assign each kid a mission.
Give someone a hug. Go get some soap. Do 10 jumping jacks. Etc.

When a leader gives you a mission, what should you do?

Read Matthew 28:18-20 aloud.

What authority did Jesus have as he spoke?

What mission did he give his followers?

What are some ways we are doing that today?

What are some ways that kids can follow Jesus’ mission?

The Church has Left the Building **Matt. 28 – Mission Accomplished? Not yet**

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme for this meeting: **Responding faithfully to the on-going call of God’s mission.**

The final class outline called participants to recognize that God’s mission is not yet finished. The church is not yet living up to our calling, and the world has not yet learned to honor Jesus. While the church undoubtedly does a lot of good, we have not lived out God’s dreams for the kingdom. And it will take an act of God to change us into the people he calls us to be.

This discussion focuses on the great commission in Matthew 28, and it calls the group to consider how we are doing.

Leadership tip: The end of a study offers a good time to evaluate. You can use a covenant to guide that discussion, or you can ask how everyone is doing. Most participants do not have a strong opinion on the next topic, but they will have feelings about how the group is doing. If you discuss curriculum, have at least one option in mind before raising the question.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ If you were dressed the way you feel, what would you be wearing?
- ❖ What has been the most helpful thing about this study?
- ❖ When is a time you felt good about the church? When is a time you think we failed to honor God’s calling?

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