

Mission

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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 liking something on Facebook. 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 it to be easy. We worry about what 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 welcoming someone into the body of Christ, the community of faith? What could be more fulfilling than cooperating 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. It 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 participant's book chapters 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.

Aligning Our Lives with God's Mission

Scripture

2 Corinthians 5:17–20 We are ambassadors for Christ.

Ephesians 4:1–16 Each is given grace and gifts by God.

Main Idea

The good news of Jesus Christ compels his disciples to share with others in both words and actions. Our mission is not only to tell others of salvation through Christ but also to call others to live righteous and compassionate lives.

Teaching Points

This session invites participants to:

1. Explore the ways God's mission leads to action outside the boundaries of the church.
2. Identify the gifts given by God to serve as ambassadors of Christ.
3. Share inventories related to worship, Scripture, prayer, fellowship, and breaking bread.

Resources Needed

Bibles

Participant's books

Christ candle and lighter or matches

Newsprint, marker

Hymnals with the hymn "We All Are One in Mission"

Leader Prep

Engage: Mission is intended to challenge, inspire, and support Christ's disciples sent to respond to a world in need. The seven sessions are intended to challenge congregations to reach out with Christ's care to the greater community; to take a good look at current ministries in order to strengthen those that are most effective; to determine new mission initiatives in response to Christ's call to service; and to respond with thanks to those currently serving as a part of God's mission.

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. Begin each session by lighting the candle, reading Scripture, and uniting participants in the authors' prayer. Enlist members of the group to share in the reading and also in lighting the Christ candle.

In Encounter, you may want to start things off by providing a few actions descriptive of God's mission.

For Explore, the theme of gifts continues the insights offered in *Engage: Discipleship*. If your group has used that resource, you may want to refer to it.

Provide sufficient time in Engage for each of the participants to share inventories within the small groups.

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!

In Depart, consider inviting an accompanist to lead the singing of a hymn. There are numerous possibilities for the gift of a cross: one kept in a pocket, a bookmark, a refrigerator magnet, a pin, or a cross that is to be given away.

Leading the Session

Gather

- Light the Christ candle while reading 2 Corinthians 5:17–20:
So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.
- Pray together the prayer in the participant's book.

Encounter

- Begin this gathering by asking two questions raised by the title, followed by having the participants list an action that might result:
 1. *What is God's mission? List an action that describes what God has done, is doing, and will do.*
 2. *What does it mean to align our lives with God's mission? List an action that describes what you have done, are doing, and will seek to do.*
- Introduce the purpose of this course by referring to the participant's book and reading this section of Explore: "Our focus is on what it takes to align our lives with God's mission. How can local congregations better articulate the gospel by helping members authentically live the life of Christ beyond the walls of the church? What missional practices nurture growing disciples to be on mission as ambassadors of the kingdom of God?"

Explore

- Read Ephesians 4:1–7. You may wish to involve the participants in the reading by inviting them to say the word *one* when the reader gestures to them.
- Jones and Loleng expand on this passage and the image of the body of Christ. Read the first two paragraphs of Explore in the participant's book. Ask: *Where do you see these gifts in evidence within our church? What do you understand as "the work of ministry"? What are the settings where you are using your gifts? What are the areas of influence where your words and actions can make an impact?*

Engage

- Jones and Loleng write, “In *Engage: Mission* we engage the notion that God is already at work in our communities. We begin the process of discerning how we can join God in what God is already up to in our communities. We will affirm once again that our mission is to join God in healing the brokenness that is not only inside us but also around us. A major question addressed in this resource is ‘How will the church help us align our lives with God’s mission?’”
- Form small groups. Focus attention on the Express section in the participant’s book. Direct them to share with one another their responses to the simple inventory on worship, Scripture, prayer, fellowship, and breaking bread.

Depart

- Read 2 Corinthians 5:19–20:
In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.
- Reflect on what it means to be an “ambassador of Christ.” Ask: *What gifts are needed to be Christ’s ambassadors? What gifts does God provide? In The Wizard of Oz, what were the gifts—the tangible symbols—given to the scarecrow (a diploma), the tin man (a heart clock), and the lion (a medal)?*
- Give each ambassador (each participant) a cross—a tangible sign of his or her call to be an ambassador.
- Sing or read together the hymn “We All Are One in Mission.”
- Join in a prayer expressing gratitude, joys, and concerns.
- Extinguish the Christ candle.

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Writers:

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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 welcoming someone into the body of Christ, the community of faith? What could be more fulfilling than cooperating 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. It 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

Aligning Our Lives with God's Mission

Scripture

Acts 2:42–47 Believers follow the daily lives of the apostles.

Ephesians 4:1–16 Each is given grace and gifts by God.

Prayer

O God, we are grateful for your love in Christ that continues to mold us and form us as your children. As our lives are aligned with your compassion and mission, may we experience our unity in you and our growing maturity as directly related to joining you in mission. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Encounter

We can no longer simply wait in our churches for people to show up. We have lost home-court advantage. The church is no longer at the center of culture. People are not waking up each day thinking that if the church simply had its act together, they would get up and go. Even though many people in our culture are spiritually sensitive, the bad news for the church is they do not see our gatherings as offering helpful resources for their journey. The church is not on their radar.

In *Engage: Gospel* we explored how our own stories of faith and the larger witness of Scripture are essential avenues for connecting with people beyond the church walls. In *Engage: Discipleship* we examined the discipleship directions that allow us to go deeper in our relationships and follow Jesus into the fullest life possible.

Our purpose in *Engage: Mission* is to explore what it means to be the church within our communities. If people are not showing up in our buildings, what does it mean for us to be the church where they live? We will explore what it means to be a sent people (Matthew 28:18–20). We will address the sending capacity of our churches. In other words, what does it look like to be missionaries to our own neighborhoods? The latest statistics describe America as the fourth largest mission field in the world.

Part of our experience in *Engage: Gospel* was to encounter the witness of Scripture as God's loving, redemptive mission to rescue a broken world.

We examined how our stories of transformation are part of God’s mission to transform a world.

In *Engage: Mission* we engage the notion that God is already at work in our communities. We begin the process of discerning how we can join God in what God is already up to in our communities. We will affirm once again that our mission is to join God in healing the brokenness that is not only inside us but also around us. A major question addressed in this resource is “How will the church help us align our lives with God’s mission?”

Explore

Read Ephesians 4:1–16, Paul’s vivid picture of the nature of a community aligned with the mission of God.

First, this is clearly a community centered in Christ. As different as individuals are from one another, all are made one by the peace of Christ. Second, Christ gives gifts to the church to equip the saints to accomplish God’s mission: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Through these gifts each disciple is built up and equipped so that all can cooperate in God’s mission and not be distracted.

Some in the community of faith have a gift of apostleship; they have a heart for people beyond the church. Some have a prophetic gift; they help focus and align the gospel to our particular context. Some have a gift of evangelism; they freely share the good news of Christ with others. Some have a gift of serving as pastor; they nurture people along the faith journey. Some have a gift of serving as teacher; they instruct and challenge people in living as disciples. Paul is clear that each one of these gifts is a crucial aspect of the expansive nature of God’s mission. Through the church, a community gifted with apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, people are equipped and nurtured to carry out God’s mission in homes, workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods.

Our focus is on what it takes to align our lives with God’s mission. How can local congregations better articulate the gospel by helping members authentically live the life of Christ beyond the walls of the church? What missional practices nurture growing disciples to be on mission as ambassadors of the kingdom of God?

In *Engage: Discipleship*, we defined *discipleship* as the ministry of equipping and nurturing the followers of Christ for mission. Therefore, we continue to provide missional practices that are necessary for sending disciples into our surroundings as people of love, peace, and justice. The church can no longer solely feed the spiritual needs of its members. Our

call is to train people to engage in God's mission in our neighborhoods and communities.

Our foundational belief is that in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God's purpose for the world is realized. We must then pursue those practices that will lead us into living the life of Christ.

Read Acts 2:42–47. Led by the Holy Spirit, the disciples of Christ exhibit the new life through five practices.

Joining in worship: It is essential that we give our praises to God on a regular basis. The gods of culture are seductive and are always demanding our worship. Regular corporate praise and thanks focused on God keeps us engaged in God's mission.

Involvement with Scripture: In both our personal and corporate encounters with Scripture, we engage the purposes and character of God. As we immerse ourselves in God's story, we are inspired to go deeper into our own stories. Also, ways to focus not only on the spiritual needs of our members but also on the needs of those beyond the church are revealed.

Practice of prayer: Prayer undergirds everything. Our words and deeds come from our time in prayer.

Sharing in fellowship: Fellowship is essential to the formation of a sending community. In this fellowship we are nurtured and held accountable in the life of Christ through the Word, sacraments, and prayer. It is not possible to be on this mission alone!

Breaking bread: There is nothing like sharing meals together to make us aware of our need for one another and the gifts of God. Often it is around meals that the differences we bring to the community find their unity in the saving love of God in Jesus.

Engage

In *Engage: Discipleship*, we examined various spiritual practices that enable us to connect more deeply with people inside the body of Christ so that we can be equipped as people of God and then sent out into the neighborhood. We are always asking, "How are our lives becoming more and more like the life of Christ? How are these practices leading us into deeper intimacy with God and instilling personal humility? Are they increasing our willingness to enter into our own pain and the suffering of others and instilling a desire to step out in faith and risk our lives for the kingdom?"

Mission is all about relationships. We are in the body of Christ, going deeper in our relationships with one another so that we will be equipped and nurtured for intentional mission through our own lives. Part of our alignment

with the mission of God is being aware of the people in our lives who are not connected to the faith community. We covered one way of being on mission in the gathering titled “Out” in *Engage: Discipleship*. We must be continually aware of the people in our lives. However, another part of our mission is the justice of God.

As we are in alignment with God’s mission, we recognize in deeper ways the connection between faith sharing and justice. Ray Jones reflects: “One of the important lessons of ministry I learned as a pastor in my last church was the significance of not only serving people but also including them in the life of the faith community. On learning that a group of homeless men and women were living in a tent city about ten miles from our church, a group of people in the church walked to that community, prayed with people, and asked about their needs. One of the needs was food during the weekends. A small group in the church decided to start serving breakfast to these homeless people on Sunday mornings. They would serve breakfast, have worship together, and then return to the church for our 11:00 a.m. worship service. As this ministry continued, they started inviting these homeless men and women to worship at the church. Soon these men and women were attending Bible studies at the church and sharing a community meal on Wednesday nights. As the homeless became more and more a part of our community, the lives of people started to change. Some of the homeless experienced a change of life as they entered into a community that loved them and helped them find places to live and work. People inside the community started to experience a change of life as they experienced people dying and as they saw the profound life change in people who had discovered the power of the body of Christ for the first time.”

Express

The following question, or one similar to it, is asked of new disciples when they unite with the church as members: Will you be Christ’s faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love, to your life’s end?

It is the question once asked of you. As you think about your life from the time you responded, “I will, with God’s help,” until right now, reflect on how you have endeavored to keep your promises.

In what ways have you sought to be “Christ’s faithful disciple”?

At what times have you been aware of “obeying his Word and showing his love”?

Just as at the beginning of *Engage: Discipleship*, it is beneficial at the beginning of *Engage: Mission* to complete a simple inventory. Significant change often happens when we take stock of our lives and determine ways to take further action. First, using the categories of worship, Scripture, prayer, fellowship, and breaking bread, complete the following:

Worship

In what ways does worship invite and equip you to join in God’s mission?

What specific act of worship challenges you to step out in faithful discipleship?

Scripture

In what ways do you hear God speak to you and inspire you through the Scriptures?

What significant insights have you learned about God’s vision for the world by reading and studying Scripture?

Prayer

In what ways do you engage in prayer, both personally and within the community?

What other spiritual disciplines do you practice that guide you in cooperating with God?

Fellowship

Where in the church do you receive support, encouragement, and partnership for your ministry?

In what ways does the church's fellowship bring the community together for mission?

Breaking Bread

What are your significant times for breaking bread and sharing around the tables at church?

In what settings do you regularly break bread with the greater community outside the church?

Second, reflect on the apostle Paul's image of a community overflowing with gifts. He writes, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Ephesians 4:4–7).

What have you discerned to be your gift?

In what ways is your gift being used in God's mission?



Pray. This week in your prayers, pray for the gift of discernment, that among the multitude of voices that cry out for attention you may listen for and hear the voice of God; that among the array of things demanding your time you may respond to human need; that among the smorgasbord of temptations you may be faithful to God. Pray for discernment to know God's mission in the world and God's desire for your life, one gifted and graced by Jesus Christ.