

BIBLE REFLECTION

from the Witness Season Web site

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www.pcusa.org/witness

Introduction

This four-part Bible study guide has been created to help church leaders and members reach their own understanding of the biblical and theological foundation and importance of evangelism. Each session is intended to take one hour, but can be easily extended to ninety minutes to provide more time for discussion. The sessions can be used as a weekly class, a special course, or a retreat.

The word *evangelism* means different things to each of us. Many church members are uncomfortable with the word because of some past experience; yet it is a central theme of our faith. In this study we will use the terms *Good News*, *Good News Story*, and *Gospel* (from Anglo-Saxon godspell: “God’s story”). Simply put, evangelism is our witness to what we have seen and heard—the story of God with us, especially in Jesus Christ, and the change that story brings to us that we then offer to the world. This study has been divided into four sessions: **Know the Story** (posted January 1, 2004); **Tell the Story** (posted April 1, 2004); **Be the Story** (posted July 1, 2004), and **Do the Story** (posted October 1, 2004). It would be helpful to have participants read the Scripture selections before each session.

This study guide is an adaptation of material developed by Ann Weems for the former Evangelism Program of the Program Agency of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

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SESSION ONE

Know the Story

SCRIPTURE:	GENESIS 9:8–17	JEREMIAH 31:1–7
	GENESIS 17:1–9	JEREMIAH 31:31–33
	EXODUS 6:1–13	LUKE 1:67–79
	EXODUS 29:45, 46	HEBREWS 8:8–13
	EXODUS 32:1–14	HEBREWS 9:11–15
	DEUTERONOMY 9:6–8	1 CORINTHIANS 15:1–19

GOAL: To put into words what God’s Good News is—to know the story.

A. **5 minutes.** Allow each person to write down for his or her eyes only what the Good News is. Set aside.

B. **10 minutes.** Our purpose in this study series is to understand our church and ourselves as evangelists—bearers of the Good News of God conveyed through the Bible and embodied in Christ. We are called to tell, be, and do the Good News in and for our world.

The first step is to know the Good News, or Gospel. Some of you may say, “Well, of course, we know what the Gospel is. What we want to know is how to get more new church members.” But the fact is that we as church people, as Christians, as evangelists, are going around telling different stories. We want to establish at the start of this study what God’s Good News Story truly is, and we do this by turning to the written Word.

The story begins with God reaching out to the chosen people, Israel. The word Israel means “contenders against God.” Israel is

representative of all nations. God calls Israel to him. The Old Testament Scriptures tell of the covenant God has with the people: God would be their God; the people would be God's people. God was faithful to them, delivering them and saving them time after time, but Israel was faithless.

The story is one of a faithful God and a faithless people, a righteous God and an unrighteous people. The covenant was one-sided. One partner kept it; the other broke it. The incredible Good News is that in spite of the faithlessness of the people, God broke into history and sent Christ Jesus into humanity. Christ, on behalf of Israel, was faithful to the covenant. The covenant is now fulfilled, for Christ died keeping faith.

Mark 14:23–24 (TEV): "This is my blood which is poured out for many, my blood which seals God's covenant."

In spite of the people's faithlessness, in spite of the broken covenant, God raised Christ from the dead. The Scripture now speaks of a new covenant. In the beginning was the Word that God would love the people, and now the Word has become flesh. God not only kept the covenant, but God made it possible for the people to keep their covenant. In Christ, God revealed grace and peace. God accepts and reconciles people.

This is the Good News: God is in our history, in our present, and will be in our future, calling us, loving us even in our unfaithfulness. God calls us to move away from our lives of self-centeredness. God calls us to the resurrection from the death that we have chosen, the death of divisiveness, jealousy, hatred, gossip, greed, mercilessness, meaninglessness, oppression. God calls us to covenant with him. The Good News is that God is with us.

Matthew 1:23 (NSA): "And they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us."

C. **20 minutes.** Divide into pairs or groups of no more than five. Assign one of the Scripture passages on page 1 to each group. Using the Scriptures, ask yourselves these questions:

1. What does the Scripture say about God's faithfulness and continuing presence with us?
2. What does it say about human unfaithfulness in light of God with us?
3. Where are we unfaithful as individuals? What kinds of death have we chosen for ourselves?
4. Where are we unfaithful as a congregation?
5. As a church of Jesus Christ, what exactly is it that we want the world to know about God and Christ?

D. **10 minutes.** Let's take a look at what the good news is not. In pairs or small groups, discuss one or more of the following points. Try to be objective in your evaluation of them.

(Make copies of these points for participants.)

1. **The Good News is not getting new members to join your church.** Evangelism is often defined as getting new members, but the Good News is not a larger church roll. Increased membership is often a by-product of an evangelizing congregation, but certainly not the goal of evangelism. The goal is the realization of new beings in Christ. Telling others about the wonderful fellowship and the sermons may be good, but it is not the Gospel. God's Good News results not in new members, but new persons.

2. **The Good News is not insider jargon.** When we try to reduce God's story to catchy words and worn-out phrases, it means nothing. We as Christians have been guilty of memorizing words in church dining halls, and then going out to ring doorbells and repeat those words in robot fashion. The Good News must be spoken in words readily understood by those we want to hear it. How does our use of "churchy jargon" create barriers for those not part of the church?

3. **The Good News is not incomplete.** It is not the story of a baby born in Bethlehem or a man hanging on the cross. Those are only parts of the story. We as Christians have the responsibility of knowing the whole story.

4. **The Good News is not a “good feeling.”** It is not vague and ambiguous. It is real, clear, and concrete. Its consequences are not vague feelings, but changed lives and new beginnings.

5. **The Good News is not: Be good and God will love you.** The Good News is that God loves us from the beginning, as a parent does. We do not have to prove ourselves or earn God’s love.

E. **15 minutes.** Call the groups back together and ask the following questions:

1. Where in the life of our church do we help people know the Good News story?

2. What can our church do to help all members know the Good News story?

(Record and keep these answers for use in the last session).

Ask if anyone has learned anything new that he or she would care to share with the others. Does anyone have any new feelings about what evangelism is? Ask the participants to look now at the papers they wrote at the beginning of the session.

Close by asking someone to verbalize what the Good News is for your group.

Offer a prayer that God might use you and this church in spreading the Good News.