



In*cultur*ating the Gospel

This companion study guide and related resources connects the seven faith practices of *Pray, Study, Worship, Invite, Encourage, Serve and Give* to the Practice Discipleship webinar session, “In*cultur*ating the Gospel.” To view the original webinar and for more information on Practice Discipleship, visit www.practicediscipleship.org.

For group discussion:

Pray

Opening Prayer: God of love, bless this time that we set apart to draw closer to you. Open our eyes to see your gospel in the world. Strengthen our hearts to live it. In your name we pray, Amen.

As we have learned, different words speak to different people. Encourage your audience to write prayers that can be used in worship services. One way to encourage ideas is “Mad Lib” prayers (this works particularly well with middle school students). Silently brainstorm names for God that speak to you (Yahweh, God, Trinity, Father, etc.), adjectives to describe God (Holy, Almighty, Loving), words of petition or praise (thank, praise, beseech, ask, etc.), and particular things or people to pray for (the sick, nature, etc.). Write all of these down on pieces of paper and place them in containers for each type. Have members of your group draw words and put them in combinations. Sometimes these work just as they are, sometimes they need some adjusting. You can also do this with Post-it® notes and stick them on the wall, encouraging people to walk around the room, writing their words and sticking them in the appropriate category.

Study

Read Hebrew 11:3 - 12:3 in several translations of your choice. The website www.biblegateway.com provides over 50 translations, including several in languages other than English. Depending on the makeup of your group, you may wish to include other languages in your reading.

- How do the different translations change your understanding of the text—or do they?
- Which one speaks to you? Why?

- All of these texts, regardless of translation, emphasize the word *faith*. What is faith?
- What does faith mean to you, and what does it look like in our world today?
- What might it have looked like in the time of the Bible?

Worship

Part of understanding culture is finding law, gospel, and God in our own world. For a form of non-traditional worship, go outside your own ministry setting. Is there a shopping mall? Go, and challenge your people to find law, gospel, and God within this cultural setting. Pray for the people in this setting. Then look for law, gospel and God, in a church, ideally not the one where you worship. Pray for them. Visit another place that is unique or central to your culture, and repeat the activity. Discuss, and close in prayer. You may use your own or the following: “God of law and grace, we give you thanks for your promises and presence in our world. We pray for the people and places in our culture. May we continue to seek you and to see you and to live into the gospel, wherever we are. Amen.”

Invite

- What are events or situations where we invite people?
- How do we do it? Formal written invitations? Informal phrases? Text messages? E-vites?

Talk about the ways, languages and situations where we invite others.

- Could any of these be adapted to your ministry setting to invite someone to worship?
- If so, what would that look like?

Challenge your group to an action plan to invite others to a form of ministry—whether within your setting (worship, dinner, etc.) or in service (soup kitchen, clothing drive, etc.) for Christ.

Encourage

Terms of encouragement change by cultures, be it generational, geographical or others. Brainstorm words and ways of encouragement that have been meaningful to you. Why? Challenge yourself to think of ones that may be particular to you because of a cultural setting. For example, yolo (you only live once) is a form of encouragement that was (maybe still is?) popular among our youth.

Serve

- What are the particular needs of your community?
- Where do you see hurt?
- What in your own community makes you cry “kyrie eleison”? (*Lord, have mercy*)

Think of different kinds of communities: your school/work/family setting, the neighborhood around your ministry setting, your town, your state, the church, the global community, etc.

- What are specific ways you can serve any of these? Discuss as a group and challenge each other to an action plan.

Give

Read the local paper, craigslist, facebook, TV, radio or whatever other communication channel is meaningful to you within your community.

- What are the communities and cultures asking for help or who need support right now?
- How could you give in time, money and/or prayer?

Closing prayer:

God of all cultures, we give you thanks for the law, gospel, grace, and community that you have given us. Help us to stretch beyond ourselves and beyond our comfort zones to share these gifts with the world around us. Amen.

Related Resources for congregations

Pray

World Prayers offers a selection of contributed prayers from many traditions across the globe. Search by topic or through the index. <http://www.worldprayers.org/>

“Cross Cultural Prayers,” by James Lumsden offers the perspective of a United Church of Christ pastor who was requested to pray in a way that was outside of his cultural comfort zone. How can we pray within our own traditions and culture, but also be open to other models? This essay offers one possible answer to this question and could be used as a starting point for others.

<http://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2010-10/cross-cultural-prayer>

Study

ELCA social statement on culture: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Race-Ethnicity-Culture.aspx>

Faith and Culture: A Guide to a Culture shaped by Faith by Kelly Monroe Kullberg (Zondervan: 2011) is a study that provides readings, questions, and reflections on ways that our faith can shape and change our culture.

When Jesus Came to Harvard: Making Moral Choices Today by Harvey Cox (Mariner Books: 2006) is inspired by an ethics class the author taught at Harvard. He proposes ways that the cultures of the Gospels intersect with our world and how that affects our decisions. The book also includes a set of questions for further discussion.

Worship

Practicing the Sabbath is a worship tradition that was familiar to Jesus and still a part of Jewish culture. *Mudhouse Sabbath: An Invitation to a Life of Spiritual Discipline* by Lauren F. Winner (Paraclete Publishing, 2008) presents the author’s experience as a Jewish convert to Christianity with Jewish spiritual disciplines. Her description and applications of the Sabbath, among other traditions, have relevance for Christians as we explore ways to bow down before God.

Invite

Ways of sharing the gospel vary across geographical regions and age generations. The Barna group has done a study exploring and summarizing these different styles and methods: <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/186-survey-shows-how-christians-share-their-faith>

Encourage

Inculturating the gospel may seem scary or overwhelming at times. Brian Beckstrom's article provides encouragement on ways we can share the gospel in approachable ways.

<http://www.livinglutheran.com/blog/2013/05/called-to-witness-not-judge.html>

Serve

The ELCA recommends different ways to serve and share the Gospel in many ways:

<http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Service-Opportunities.aspx>

Give

Lutheran campus ministries across the country teach undergraduate and graduate students how to live the gospel in their world and support them throughout their journey. For many lay and rostered church leaders, campus ministry was formational in their faith development. Like many programs, they are also experiencing cuts. Find a campus ministry near you to offer them support:

<http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Ministry/Campus-Ministry.aspx>

The Practice Discipleship Initiative is a ministry of the ELCA Youth Ministry Network (www.elcaymnet.org), in partnership with the ELCA, ELCA Seminaries and ELCA Colleges. The purpose of Practice Discipleship is to foster faithful, thoughtful and intentional leaders in congregations who follow Jesus in their daily lives. For more information, visit www.practicediscipleship.org.