

THE THEOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT

A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN MISSION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

JAY VAN GRONINGEN



COMMUNITIES FIRST

The Theology of Development

A Biblical Understanding of Christian Mission and Community Development

This is a seven-lesson series designed to help participants deepen their biblical understanding of Christian mission and community development.

This deepened understanding can impact all areas of life—including relationships with God, self, neighbors, and environment. In addition, the ideas can be applied to any line of work.

The church of Jesus Christ has vital roles as

a witness to the power of the gospel
and
an agent of change in the world.

The capacity of the church to fulfill its roles depends, among other things, on Christians having a good grasp of how the biblical story reveals God's own purposes and intentions. These lessons can help Christian leaders learn and grow together in understanding how the "wide and long and high and deep" love of God makes a difference for every part of the creation.

None of these lessons is a "final word"—they are insights along the journey of discovery. They help participants think about God, Christian faith, the mission of the church, and more. The Holy Spirit has revealed far more and will still reveal more than these lessons contain. They are only useful tools that will drive participants deeper into the biblical story and lead them all more faithfully into the missionary life of the church in relation to community development.

Through sharing of personal experience, through discussion of new ideas, and through study of Scripture, these lessons help adults continue a lifelong journey of exploring their faith and God's calling for Christians and the church in this world.

Acknowledgement

Colleagues who contributed to these learning designs are:

- Roy Berkenbosch
- Brenda Melles
- Tom Post
- Joy Witte

The learning designs are based on the dialogue education approach to adult learning as synthesized by Dr. Jane Vella and promoted by her books and company, Global Learning Partners (www.globalearning.com).

Lessons 1-7

Lesson	Title	WHAT? The Content: Knowledge, Skills, & Attitudes	WHAT FOR? The Achievement-Based Objectives: <i>Participants will have...</i> (see designs for details)	Time (not including breaks or Advance/Optional Readings)	Pages
1.	Do You See What I See? Worldview and Development	Introducing the Theme Comparing Worldviews The biblical Worldview Our Story: Applying the Insights Our Response Summary of the Learning	Illustrated, defined, compared, examined Compared, contrasted, analyzed Analyzed, examined, expanded Analyzed, developed Assessed, listed, synthesized Summarized, celebrated, examined	3 hrs. 35 min.	15
2.	God's Extravagant Love— Its Power to Transform Our Work in Communities	Introducing the Theme God's Story through a biblical Text Insights on God's Story Our Story: Applying the Insights Our Response Summary of the Learning	Given, interpreted Compared, contrasted Examined Composed, applied Written, synthesized Summarized, celebrated	4 hrs. 20 min.	9
3.	Beginning with Creation— God's Intentions for Humans and the World	Introducing the Theme God's Story through a biblical Text Insights on God's Story Our Story: Applying the Insights Our Response Summary of the Learning	Created Examined, created Compared, contrasted, examined Analyzed, compared, named Composed, posted, synthesized Celebrated, appreciated, summarized, shared	4 hrs. 40 min.	14
4.	Salvation— Liberation for the Whole Person	Introducing the Theme God's Story through a biblical Text Insights on God's Story Our Story: Applying the Insights Our Response Summary of the Learning	Told, drawn Examined, expanded Examined, selected Named Prioritized, described, synthesized Summarized, shared	4 hrs. 20 min.	12
5.	Restoring Understanding— Being Made in the Image of God	Introducing the Theme God's Story through a biblical Text Insights on God's Story Our Story: Applying the Insights Our Response Summary of the Learning	Examined, added, analyzed Examined, summarized, identified Created Reflected Identified, committed, synthesized Summarized, celebrated	4 hrs.	14

Lesson	Title	WHAT? The Content: Knowledge, Skills, & Attitudes	WHAT FOR? The Achievement-Based Objectives: <i>Participants will have...</i> (see designs for details)	Time (not including breaks or Advance/Optional Readings)	Pages
6.	Love Without Borders— The Healing Power of Inclusive Love	Introducing the Theme God's Story through a biblical Text Insights on God's Story Our Story: Applying the Insights Our Response Summary of the Learning	Listed, summarized, described, reviewed Examined Reviewed, examined, created Suggested, reviewed, identified Described, synthesized Summarized, celebrated, shared	4 hrs. 50 mins.	16
7.	Economic Well-being— Wealth, Poverty and Justice	Introducing the Theme Learning from the Creation Story Learning from the Exodus Story Learning from Old Testament Law Learning from the Prophets Old Testament Summary Learning from the Life of Jesus Learning from the New Testament Church Putting It All Together Applying the Learning Summary of the Learning	Spoken, reviewed, noted Highlighted, sketched, summarized Reconstructed, examined, added, identified, suggested Analyzed, determined, acted Analyzed, compared, created Examined, added, composed, performed Brainstormed, analyzed, examined Illustrated, compared, contrasted, identified, analyzed Examined, synthesized, drawn Culled, described, synthesized Summarized, celebrated, shared	7 hrs. 50 mins.	26

Lesson 1: Do You See What I See?

Worldview and Development

ESTIMATED TIME FOR THE LESSON:

3 hours, 35 minutes (not including breaks or Optional Reading)

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- ✓ Copy of this lesson for each participant
- ✓ Blank half sheets of paper
- ✓ Flip chart paper
- ✓ Markers (washable ink)
- ✓ Masking tape
- ✓ Bibles

OPTIONAL READING:

"For Further Reflection—Worldview and Paradigms" article at the end of the lesson

Task 1 Warm-Up: Do You See What I See? (20 minutes)

- 1A Place** a half sheet of paper on your forehead. Holding the paper there, **write** the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 on it with a marker. **Look at** the paper. What do you notice? **Discover** how many people wrote the numbers correctly. **Give** a cheer for those who got all five correct!

- 1B Look** at the picture at right. **Call out** what you see. We'll **hear** from all.

Note: Some people look at this picture and see a young woman; some look at it and see an old woman. It all depends on *how* you see. Hint: the young woman's ear is the old woman's eye; the young woman's nose is the old woman's wart; the young woman's neck is the old woman's chin.

- 1C Turn** to a partner and **discuss** what these two exercises teach about how you see. We'll **hear** a sample.



Task 2 Lesson Review: Objectives and Expectations (10 minutes)

- 2A This lesson helps us deepen a biblical understanding of Christian mission and community development. We'll introduce the concept of "worldview," analyze our own worldviews and build a biblical perspective. **Listen** to the achievement-based objectives for this lesson. What are your questions?
- 2B **Mark** (✓) the objective you are most interested in. What others would you like to add?

Task 3 Introducing the Theme: Worldview (45 minutes)

- 3A The warm-up exercises showed that we are accustomed to seeing the world in a certain way and it is hard for us to imagine seeing it another way.



If you wear glasses, **stand**. **Share** how the world looks with glasses on and with glasses off.

If you wear invisible glasses, **stand**. Every one of us sees the world through our invisible "worldview glasses." Looking through these glasses impacts everything, including our values, our relationships, and our work.

- 3B This Theology of Development series can help us develop a biblical worldview for our life and our community work so we'll wear our "gospel glasses" all the time. **Listen** to the following introduction:

The gospel message, which testifies to the extravagant love of God, should affect us in many ways. It is a source of great personal comfort, it strengthens us, gives us courage, motivates our love for others, and more. But even more profoundly it should also shape and direct the ways in which we see the world and our place in it. That is to say, the Bible provides us with a "worldview" that directs our understanding and action in the world.

In groups of four, **create** a definition for the word "worldview" by **completing** this sentence: "Worldview is..." **Write** it on chart paper. Then, **list** your ideas of where our worldviews come from. How do we learn them? **Post** your charts on the wall. We'll **hear** all definitions.

3C **Listen** to this description of “worldview” adapted from *The Transforming Vision* by Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton:

Worldviews are perceptual frameworks. They are ways of seeing the world. Everyone has a worldview (even though many people do not consciously think about their worldview). A worldview is never merely a vision *of* life, but it is also a vision *for* life.

Our worldview determines our values. It helps us interpret the world around us. It sorts out what is important and what is not, what is of highest value from what is least. A worldview then provides a model of the world that guides its adherents in the world. It stipulates how the world ought to be and it thus advises how its adherents should conduct themselves.

A worldview answers four basic questions:

1. Who are we human beings? Are we the product of evolution or creatures made by a loving God? Are we destined for greatness or tragedy? What is our task? Are we equal beings, or should some have more privilege than others?
2. Where are we? Is this God’s good earth that he cares for, or is it a place inhabited by evil? Does the creation matter to God and thus to us, or is this material world unimportant so it does not matter what we do to it? Is the creation destined to be renewed or to be destroyed?
3. What is our problem? Where does evil come from? What causes our suffering, pain, and trouble? Is our sin only personal and moral, or does it extend to structures and institutions as well?
4. What is the answer to our problem? How can we overcome the problem in order to fulfill our human vocation? In other words, how do we find (and define) salvation?

3D How do your definitions **compare** with the description from *The Transforming Vision*? What do these definitions reveal about *why* worldview is important? We’ll **hear** a sample.

Task 4 **Comparing Worldviews** (45 minutes)

4A The following chart lists the four basic questions and summarizes a western worldview. On your own, **add** your ideas to the “my own cultural worldview” column. Then, **assign** one question to each of four groups. Using Bibles and the Scripture passages provided, **summarize** your group’s biblical worldview question on chart paper. **Post** your summaries and we’ll **take** a gallery tour.

Basic Human Questions	Western Worldview	My Own Cultural Worldview	Biblical Worldview
Who are we as human beings?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are rational, independent, autonomous creatures. • We are capable of managing the world for our own purposes. • Our highest calling is to love ourselves. 		Genesis 1:26-30 Deuteronomy 10:12-14 Psalm 8 Micah 6:8 Matthew 22:35-40
Where are we?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We're on a planet that exists for our benefit alone. • We are in a world where there are no other "powers" like gods, ancestors, spirits, angels. • Reality is determined by facts and truth is determined by knowledge. 		Genesis 1-2 Psalm 104
What is our problem?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do not know enough and our ignorance gets us into trouble. People still believe old superstitions and religions, which leads to misunderstanding and war. 		Genesis 3 Psalm 14 Isaiah 28:7-8 Isaiah 58-59 Amos 2, 6 Romans 1:18-3-23, 5:12 Ephesians 4:17-19
What is the answer to our problem?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better science, more education, better technology, and less superstition • Become richer, stronger, more powerful 		Genesis 3:9-15 Isaiah 53, 58:6-14 John 1:1-14, 3:16 Galatians 4:4-7 Ephesians 1:18-23

Task 5 Insights on God's Story

(15 minutes)

- 5A Listen** to the way one teacher summarizes the biblical worldview. **Underline** what is significant to you.

A biblical worldview answers the four questions very differently from a Western worldview.

Who are we? We are creatures of God made in God's image to love and serve both God and neighbor. We are dependent on God for all our needs. We are given the profound task of being stewards of creation.

Where are we? We are in a world that God has designed to function in certain ways that we may discover, overflowing with blessing because God is still *in* the world, a world that we are to manage carefully on God's behalf.

What is our problem? The problem is sin: a spiritual condition of rebellion. Human beings trust themselves instead of God, care for themselves instead of others, and resist obedience to God's design—all with disastrous consequences.

What is the answer? The solution is to turn away from false gods and idols (and ideologies) and to follow again the way of God as it has been made known to us in and through Jesus Christ.

- 5B What is most significant for you? What would you like to add? We'll **hear** a sample of your responses.

Task 6 Our Story: Applying the Insights (45 minutes)

- 6A **Practice** applying a biblical worldview. Titles for the four following scenarios are posted in each corner of the room. **Read** each of them aloud. **Choose** the scenario you are most interested in and stand in front of the title. With the others gathered with you, **respond** to the following. In the end, we'll **hear** a sample of what you found most significant about this exercise.

- o Describe the worldview of the main character(s) in the story.
- o How could a Christian development worker respond to the characters with a biblical worldview?

(Note: These scenarios are suggested scenes to promote discussion. Feel free to create other scenarios appropriate for your context.)

Scenario 1: Another Hungry Year

A farmer is in the field, looking at her withered crops. The rains came late this year and she fears for her family. "The gods have cursed us," she whispers. She kicks the ground in disgust, hating this dry unproductive land. "I can do nothing," she says. "It's going to be another hungry year."

Scenario 2: Healing Potion

A woman brings her child to the health clinic. The child is feverish, thin and weak. "Why is my child sick?" she asks the health worker. The health worker responds, "Looks like malaria. Why have you not protected her from mosquitoes? Don't you know that the malaria parasite is transmitted by mosquitoes?" The mother responds, "Malaria? My neighbor's children are all well. Why would my child be the only one sick? I've been to the witch doctor and he told me the child has been poisoned. I'm going back to him to get a healing potion."

Scenario 3: Serve Me or Serve Yourself

A man arrives home from his market stall after a long day. He is tired and hungry. "Wife!" he shouts. She comes and kneels at his feet. "I am tired and hungry. Serve me my meal early," he commands. "Husband," she replies, "I am on my way to my literacy class. I cannot cook a meal now. But there is tea, which I can bring to you." The husband says, "Wife, why do you bother to learn to read? Serving me is more important than learning useless skills that serve only yourself."

Scenario 4: Rats

A farmer looks into the storage granary. He sighs and says to the agriculture worker at his side, "See, it's just as I told you. I knew this would happen. The rats got it again." The agriculture worker pauses and says, "Who is smarter, you or the rats?" The farmer laughs and says, "I guess the rats." The agriculture worker says, "Tell me, when God created the world, did he give dominion to men and women, or to the rats?" Reluctantly, the farmer says, "Well, I guess the rats have dominion now."

6B Listen to two volunteers read the following two stories.

In Ethiopia, a Christian relief and development organization completed a “successful” agricultural project. The project had called for increased agricultural production to raise family income so that the children in families could have better nutrition, basic clothing, and money for school fees. At the end of the project, family income was up. Pictures were taken, reports written, and the project was graded A+ by the donors evaluating it. Is this a success story for agricultural development? It is, only if you did not go back a few months later. Doing a post-project evaluation would have revealed that the farmers spent their increased income on alcohol, prostitutes, and gambling. When the farmers returned from their binge, their wives were furious that they had wasted resources intended to help their children. The “successful” project actually left the families and community in greater poverty.

About 20 years ago, evangelical missionaries moved into the unreached agricultural communities of the poorest province of Guatemala. They journeyed there to evangelize and plant churches. The people they were working with, the Pokomchi, were the poorest people in the poorest province in one of the poorest countries in the Americas. Many people came to Christ. Churches were planted. By mission standards, the task was done. The missionaries moved on to other communities. But, in one sense, little had changed. The Pokomchi were living in as much poverty after the missionaries left as when they arrived. What was different? Now, the people were *waiting to die!* They had hope for heaven. Praise the Lord! But they had no hope for today. Is this a picture of “success”?

— from *Biblical Holism and Agriculture*, edited by David J. Evans, Ronald J. Vos, and Keith P. Wright. The stories above are from Chapter 8, “Agriculture and the Kingdom of God” by Darrow Miller, pp. 141-142.

6C Call out your reaction to these stories. Do they sound familiar to you? Both were seen as successes, but what was the problem?

6D Listen to the way one writer uses a biblical worldview to reflect on the problem. **Write** an exclamation mark (!) where you agree and an **X** where you disagree. We’ll **hear** a sample.

Christ is the Lord of all of life, not just the spiritual part of life. In the biblical worldview, there is no sacred/secular dichotomy; there is no priest-laity hierarchy; there is no concept that doing religious or spiritual work is “full-time Christian service” and all non-spiritual vocations are somehow second-class. According to the biblical worldview, we live in one world, God’s world. God is the Lord of the entire world and as Christians, we are to live before the face of God. But today, many Christians live in two worlds—a spiritual world and a secular world. The spiritual world is the realm of church, Bible study and prayer meetings. The secular world is everything else, including for many Christian [development workers], their work [in community development].

—Miller, *Biblical Holism and Agriculture*, p. 159

Task 7 Our Response

(15 minutes)

7A **Listen** to a volunteer read the following summary.

There are many different and competing ways to answer the four worldview questions. Over and over the Bible challenges all our usual ways of thinking and calls us to a renewed worldview where the concerns of God are central and where our usual ideas undergo a radical shift. *The Bible invites us to “see differently.”*

7B On your own, **assess** and **strengthen** your current community work by answering the following questions:

How is my biblical worldview already evident in my community work? List up to three specific examples.	How can I strengthen my community work by better integrating a biblical worldview? List up to three practical ideas.

7C **Answer** the following question for yourself:

How does what I have learned in this lesson add to my understanding of effective community development?

Task 8 Summary of Learning (15 minutes)

- 8A** **Turn** to your neighbor and **share** one new insight you had today and one question that remains for you. We'll **hear** a sample in the large group.
- 8B** **Review** the achievement-based objectives for this lesson. What comments do you have about how well the group did in reaching the objectives? What suggestions do you have to improve this lesson in the future? We'll **hear** from several participants.
- 8C** **Pray** together and **celebrate** this new learning, asking that we not be conformed to this world, but that we would see differently and have our worldviews transformed by God's own story.

Task 9 Looking Ahead (5 minutes)

- 9A** The next six lessons are designed to help you develop a deeper biblical worldview to apply to all areas of life—including community development work. Blessings on your learning journey!
- God's Extravagant Love—Its Power to Transform Our Work in Communities
 - Beginning with Creation—God's Intentions for Humans and the World
 - Salvation—Liberation for the Whole Person
 - Restoring Understanding—Being Made in the Image of God
 - Love Without Borders—The Healing Power of Inclusive Love
 - Economic Well-being—Wealth, Poverty and Justice

Lesson 1 Optional Reading: For Further Reflection—Worldview and Paradigms

How the Gospel Message Changes Our Worldview

The gospel message, which testifies to the extravagant love of God, should affect us in many ways. It is a source of great personal comfort, it strengthens us, gives us courage, motivates our love for others, and more. But even more profoundly it should also shape and direct how we think about the world and our place in it. That is to say, the Bible provides us with a “worldview;” it becomes the *paradigm* we work from.

What Is a Worldview?

The following description of “worldview” comes from *The Transforming Vision* by Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton:

Worldviews are perceptual frameworks. They are ways of seeing the world. Everyone has a worldview (even though many people do not consciously think about their worldview). A worldview is never merely a vision *of* life, but it is also a vision *for* life. Our worldview determines our values. It helps us interpret the world around us. It sorts out what is important and what is not, what is of highest value from what is least.

A worldview then provides a model of the world which guides its adherents in the world. It stipulates how the world ought to be and it thus advises how its adherents ought to conduct themselves in the world. A worldview answers four basic questions:

1. Who are we human beings? Are we the product of evolution or creatures made by a loving God? Are we destined for greatness or tragedy? What is our task?
2. Where are we? Is this God’s good earth that he cares for, or is it a place inhabited by evil? Does the creation matter to God and thus to us, or is this material world unimportant so it does not matter what we do to it? Is the creation destined to be renewed or to be destroyed?
3. What is our problem? Where does evil come from? What causes our suffering, pain, and trouble?
4. What is the answer to our problem? How can we overcome the problem in order to fulfill our human vocation? In other words, how do we find (and define) salvation?

Where Do Worldviews Come From?

Where do worldviews come from? We learn worldviews from many different sources—from the stories we hear as children, from our religious texts, from the advertisements we see on billboards and TV, from the stories we hear about our history and the history of our nation, about wars and conquests, about victories and losses, and so on. Our worldviews are complex *narratives* woven together of strands that come from many different places.

How Do Worldviews Impact Our Values?

Different worldviews yield different values, as expressed in the following polarities:

Worldview A	Worldview B
values individuals	values community
strict about time	relaxed about time
removed from the land	tied to the land
not interested in ancestors	very interested in ancestors

high value on efficiency	high value on relationships
trusts technology	mistrusts technology
forward-looking	tied to tradition
true knowledge is scientific	true knowledge is spiritual
change is good	change should be avoided

The Modern Western Worldview

The modern Western worldview, which has been exported throughout the world, answers the four worldview questions more or less like this. Who are we? We are rational, independent and autonomous creatures, a law unto ourselves, capable of managing the world for our own purposes. Where are we? We are on a planet that exists for our benefit alone, in a world that is devoid of other “powers” like gods, ancestors, spirits, angels, etc. What is our problem? Our problem is that we do not yet know enough and our ignorance gets us into trouble; another problem is that people are still bound to old superstitious religions that lead to misunderstanding and war. What is the answer to our problem? The solution is better science, more education, better technology and a diminishing of “superstition” in the world.

The Biblical Worldview

A biblical worldview answers the questions very differently. Who are we? We are creatures of God made in God’s image to love and serve both God and neighbor; we are dependent on God for all our needs; we are given the profound task of being stewards of creation. Where are we? We are in a world that God has designed to function in certain ways that we may discover, overflowing with blessing because God is still *in* the world, a world we are to manage carefully on God’s behalf. What is our problem? The problem is sin, a spiritual condition of rebellion. Human beings trust themselves instead of God, care for themselves instead of others and resist obedience to God’s design, all with disastrous consequences. What is the answer to our problem? The solution is to turn away from false gods and idols (and ideologies) and to follow again the way of God as it has been made known to us in and through Jesus Christ.

What Is a Paradigm?

A *paradigm* is very similar to a worldview in that it consists of people’s assumptions, values, and concepts about how the world really works, including what is possible and what is not. A *paradigm* is a cluster of ideas that determines the kinds of questions we ask and the kinds of answers we can expect. It is often said that people live or work “within a certain paradigm.”

Examples of Paradigms and Paradigm Shifts

For many years people believed the earth was the center of the solar system. They organized all their thinking around that idea. We still speak of the rising and setting of the sun even though we know that it is the earth that moves, not the sun. When Copernicus discovered that the sun was at the center of the solar system, everyone’s thinking about the universe had to change.

Here is another example. For centuries, people were limited in their travel to walking or riding animals. All thinking about travel was controlled by that paradigm. However, when engines were invented and automobiles and airplanes appeared, suddenly the entire range of travel possibilities changed. Human life changed as well in some parts of the world.

In some cultures people believe illness is caused by evil spirits or curses or magic. They behave accordingly by seeking the protection of witch doctors and by offering gifts to the gods. But when such people discover that sickness is caused by bacteria and viruses, their whole concept of sickness changes and so does their behavior. Prevention now consists not of magic but of sanitation, clean drinking water, and safer health practices.

In all these examples, people experienced paradigm shifts. They learned, discovered, or experienced something new that changed their basic perceptions about the world. This leads to changed understanding, values and behaviors. Some paradigm shifts can be for the better; some can make things worse.

The Bible's Worldview as a Paradigm Shift

The Bible story is not simply a story about salvation. It is God's story about who God is, who we are, what kind of world we live in, and how we should live in it. The Bible tells us God's idea of what is wrong with us and teaches us what God has done and is still doing to save us. The Bible, therefore, is a book that shapes our worldview. In the presence of many different and competing ideas about how to answer the four worldview questions, God wants his people to have a worldview shaped by God's own story about how things really are!

In fact, the Bible's worldview will often be experienced by people, including Christians, as a paradigm shift because it challenges them to change many beliefs and practices. The Bible invites them into a different world: the story of liberation and transformation; of creation, fall, and redemption; the story of a loving, dying God; the story of God's people.... The Bible invites people to "see differently" (2 Corinthians 5:17) because of faith in Jesus.

- To people who believe they are the product of random and impersonal evolution, God says [*paradigm shift*], "You are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:10).
- To people who believe that women are less than human, God says [*paradigm shift*], "In the image of God he made him, male and female he made them" (Genesis 1:27).
- To people who believe that God is "out there" and uninvolved with the world, God says [*paradigm shift*], "The word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).
- To a slave people living under the yoke of Egypt, God spoke the paradigm-shifting words, "I will free you" (Exodus 6:6).
- To people who believe the lie that human success is all about being first, biggest, and strongest, God says [*paradigm shift*], "The last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:16), and "Blessed are the poor...the meek...the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:3,5,9).

Over and over the Bible challenges all our usual ways of thinking and calls us to a renewed worldview where the concerns of God are central and where our usual ideas undergo a radical paradigm shift.

A Problem in the Mission of the Church

Why is it that the Christian church has not made more of a difference in the world? Why are Christian communities not more profoundly transformed in terms of their worldview and paradigms? Why are so-called Christian societies often so deeply secular? Why are neighborhoods in which churches exist not more deeply touched by the presence of Christians? Why are Christians not turning the world upside down?

One answer might be that the church has settled for less than the "whole" gospel. Too often

- ♦ the church has accepted the idea of God's love for believers BUT has not understood that this goes hand in hand with neighbor love, expressed as actions on behalf of others.
- ♦ the church has accepted the message of the cross by believing in the forgiveness of sins BUT not in terms of a call to reconciliation with enemies.
- ♦ the church has accepted the idea of holding evangelistic services to lead people to faith BUT has not embraced its calling to "act justly, to love mercy" (Micah 6:8).
- ♦ the church has accepted the idea of salvation in terms of a secure afterlife with the Lord BUT not in terms of changed loyalties here on earth that express themselves in concrete actions in the world.

- ♦ the church has “spiritualized” the gospel so that it is all oriented toward the afterlife in heaven and to the interior life of worship and piety BUT overlooks the importance of the gospel message for the here-and-now life that we live in the world.

The Need to Shift Our Paradigms to Embrace God’s Whole Agenda

The Bible is all about changing our worldview and shifting our paradigms so that we are able to live faithfully and obediently as God’s people in the world, acting as God’s servants of love and agents of transformation. The Bible is not only about the forgiveness of sins and the security of an afterlife, but also about declaring that our world belongs to God, that God has a wonderful purpose for the creation, and that God continues to act in human history in order to bring about abundant blessings for all. The mission of the church is to be busy with God’s **whole** agenda. That agenda includes forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, justice, mercy, conversion and radical renewal, liberation of the oppressed, freedom for captives and blessings for the poor.

If we have too small an understanding of God’s whole agenda, we will have too small an idea of the missionary role God has called the church to play in the transformation of people, communities, and nations.

Lesson 2: God's Extravagant Love— Its Power to Transform Our Work in Communities

ESTIMATED TIME FOR THE LESSON:

4 hours, 20 minutes (not including breaks or Advance Reading)

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- ✓ Copy of this lesson for each participant
- ✓ Flip chart paper
- ✓ Markers
- ✓ Masking tape
- ✓ Note paper

ADVANCE READING:

Prior to participating in this lesson, **read** the article "The Extravagant Dimensions of God's Love" (located at the end of the lesson).

As you read, **circle** the ideas that are important in light of your experience.

Note any questions the reading raises for you.

You will have an opportunity to **share** these ideas and questions with others during Task 5.

Warm-Up: Symbolic Found Objects (30 minutes)

- 9B** Find an object in or just outside this space that symbolizes a characteristic of God that has special meaning for you. **Explain** the meaning of your object to a partner.

When you return to the large group, **share** your object with a brief explanation of how it symbolizes the special quality of God you chose.

We'll **hear** from everyone.

Task 1 Lesson Review: Objectives and Expectations (15 minutes)

- 1A** This lesson helps us deepen a biblical understanding of Christian mission and community development. We'll look at how God's extravagant love infuses all our life and work. We'll introduce an issue related to our church and community work. **Listen** to the achievement-based objectives for this lesson. What are your questions?

- 1B** On chart paper, **write** one or two personal expectations: what do you hope *to do* or *to learn* by the end of the lesson? **Post** the chart on the wall for others to read.

Task 2 Introducing the Theme: God's Extravagant Love (45 minutes)

- 2A Concentrate** on one of God's central characteristics: God's love. **Spend** a moment in quiet reflection. What Scripture passages or stories come to your mind when you think of God's love? **Call out** your ideas.
- 2B Listen** to this poem.

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God please
I want just \$3 worth
 just enough to equal a soothing cup of warm milk
 or a snooze in the sunshine
 not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep
Enough of God to make me feel loved and forgiven
 but not so much to make me love and forgive others
 not so much that it will make me seek justice for the oppressed
 or to embrace the person with AIDS
 or make room for the refugee
 or to feed the hungry
Just \$3 worth please
 enough to snack on for two Sunday morning hours of bliss
I want ecstasy
 not transformation
I want the warmth of the womb
 not the terrible pain of new birth
Give me a pound of the eternal
 \$3 worth of God please
 and could you put that in a brown paper bag —Adapted from Tim Hansel

In groups of four, **discuss** this poem using the following questions. We'll **hear** a sample of your discussions.

- What do you think the poem means by "\$3 worth of God"?
- How does the poem make you feel? Do you identify with the poet?
- Is it possible to separate God like the poem suggests? Why or why not?

Task 3 God's Story through a Biblical Text

(30 minutes)

- 3A **Listen** to a volunteer read the passage below from Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

—*Ephesians 3:14-21*

- 3B In the same groups of four as the previous task, **compare** and **contrast** the prayer to the poem you just read. We'll **hear** a sample.

Task 4 Insights on God's Story

(30 minutes)

- 4A **Listen** to a review of the major points of the advance reading for this lesson about the extravagant dimensions of God's love. **Underline** the points that are most significant for you.

God's love is **so wide** that there is no part of heaven and earth that does not come under God's watchful and loving eye. There is no race or tribe or ethnic group that God does not intend to bless. God's love can catch every kind of sinner and meet every kind of need.

God's love is **so long** that it has no bounds. God is the beginning and end of human life and history.

God's love is **so deep** that it penetrates to our hearts. God's love seeks to address not only human behavior, but fundamental ideas and beliefs. God's love can transform the political and economic ideologies on which we base our communities and societies.

God's love is **so high** that it rises above the mess of our lives and lifts us on eagle's wings.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate testimony of God's love.

- 4B** **Turn** to your neighbor and **share** what you thought was important and why. What questions did the advance reading raise for you? We'll **hear** a sample of your responses.

Task 5 Our Story: Applying the Insights (60 minutes)

- 5A** **Listen** to the following comments about the impact of God's extravagant love on our world. **Circle** what strikes you as most significant.

The gospel message, which testifies to the extravagant love of God, should affect us in many ways. It is a source of great personal comfort, it strengthens us, gives us courage, motivates our love for others, and more. But even more profoundly it also provides us with a "worldview"—a way of seeing the world that is not only a vision *of* life, but a vision *for* life. Over and over, the Bible challenges all our usual ways of thinking and calls us to a renewed worldview, where the concerns of God are central and where our usual ideas undergo a radical shift.

The gospel touches every dimension of life. God's agenda is not only about the forgiveness of sins and the security of the afterlife, but also about reconciliation, healing, justice, mercy, conversion and radical renewal, liberation of the oppressed, freedom for the captives, blessings for the poor.

But, there's a problem. Why are Christian communities not more profoundly transformed in terms of their "worldview"? Why hasn't the Christian church made more of a difference in the world? Why are so-called Christian societies often so deeply secular? Why are neighborhoods where churches exist not more deeply touched by the presence of Christians? Why are Christians not turning the world upside down?

Could it be that instead of embracing God's whole agenda, the church has settled for "\$3 worth of God"?

In new groups of four, **discuss** what you circled as significant in the reading above and **explain** why.

- 5B** In your group, **create** a sentence that begins, "I believe God's agenda in this world is..." **Write** it on chart paper and **post** it on the wall.

- 5C **Reflect** on your own community or church work. **List** three consequences this teaching has for you. **Share** this with your group. We'll **hear** a sample of the consequences.

What are the consequences of this teaching for my community or church work?

1.

2.

3.

Task 6 Our Response

(30 minutes)

- 6A **Read** the following quote.

God's concerns are all-embracing—not only the "sacred" but the "secular," not only religion, but nature, not only his covenant people, but all people, not only justification but social justice in every community, not only gospel but his law. So we must not attempt to narrow down God's interests. Moreover, ours should be as broad as his.

—John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*

- 6B This teaching has profound consequences for community development and church work. **Write** a note to yourself about how this teaching impacts you. Include one thing that you will **do differently** in your community work as a result of this new learning. **Share** your idea with a partner.
- 6C **Answer** the following question for yourself.

How does what I have learned in this lesson add to my understanding of effective community development?

Task 7 Summary of Learning (15 minutes)

- 7A In the large group, **turn** to your neighbor and **identify** one new insight you had today and one question that remains for you. We'll **hear** a sample.
- 7B **Review** the achievement-based objectives for this lesson. What comments do you have about how well the group did in reaching the objectives? We'll **hear** from up to three participants.
- 7C **Pray** together and **celebrate** this lesson, asking that the Holy Spirit will empower you to grasp the extravagant dimensions of God's love and fill you to all the fullness of God.

Task 8 Looking Ahead (5 minutes)

- 8A In the next lesson we'll ask What does the story of creation have to do with development work? And, how is all work—farming, politics, business, finances, service professions, the medical field, child rearing—part of worship?

Lesson 2 Advance Reading: The Extravagant Dimensions of God's Love

How wide is God's love?

- Remember, God so loved the *cosmos* that he gave his only son (John 3:16). So there is no part of heaven and earth that does not come under God's watchful and loving eye. God wants to redeem *everything* (Revelation 21:5).
- Remember, "Now there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" (Galatians 3:28). Paul wants to remind the church that God's love does not belong to a particular race or tribe or ethnic group, but God intends to bless all the nations through Jesus Christ and his church.
- Remember the Samaritan woman, Zacchaeus, the thief on the cross, the woman caught in adultery, and others to whom Jesus ministered in different ways. God's love is so wide that it can catch every kind of sinner and meet every kind of need.

How long is God's love?

- Remember, "The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting" (Psalm 103:17).
- Remember, God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the "genesis" and the "telos" of human life and history. His love has no bounds.

How deep is God's love?

- God does not love us superficially but penetrates the depth of the human heart.
- God's love addresses not only human behavior, but also fundamental ideas, beliefs, and deep religious loyalties.
- In Psalm 139, David confesses that even if he goes to the heights or to the depths of the sea (a way of speaking about desolation), even there God will meet him.
- God's love is so deep that it can transform the political and economic ideologies on which we base our communities and societies.

How high is God's love?

- God's love is as high as the heavens are above the earth. It lifts us up from the dirt of our existence and exalts us to share in the glory of God as adopted children.
- God's love rises above the mess of our lives and lifts us up on eagle's wings.
- God's love is high enough to lift us up into holiness.
- Jesus Christ, the ultimate testimony of God's love, descended to earth, descended into death and descended into hell. This downward spiral mirrored the descent of the human race from a position of glory and honor to being stuck in the mire of our existence. But the downward spiral has been broken by Christ's resurrection from death and by his ascent into heaven to rule the creation from God's right hand. He is exalted! He is glorified! And because he is glorified he glorifies us and calls us to live lives that are worthy of our high calling in Christ.

Lesson 3: Beginning with Creation— God’s Intentions for Humans and the World

ESTIMATED TIME FOR THE LESSON:

4 hours, 40 minutes (not including breaks or Advance Reading)

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- ✓ Copy of this lesson for each participant
- ✓ Flip chart paper
- ✓ Colored paper
- ✓ Markers
- ✓ Masking tape
- ✓ Task 1: Paper clips, rubber bands, plastic straws, bottle caps, modeling clay, balloons, stickers, buttons, etc. (Each group can have the same materials to compare results. Or, each group can have a different combination of materials for unique results.)

ADVANCE READING:

Prior to participating in this lesson, **read** the article “What Does the Creation Story Teach Us?” (located at the end of the lesson).

As you read, **circle** the ideas that are important in light of your experience.

Note any questions the reading raises for you.

You will have an opportunity to **share** these ideas and questions with others during Task 5.

Task 1 Warm-Up: Create Something New (20 minutes)

- 1A** **Form** groups of four. **Examine** the materials given to you. Working together, use your imagination and the materials to **create** something new. You have six minutes to complete this task! We’ll **admire** each group’s creation and **hear** an explanation of each.

Reflect on this creation exercise. What did you notice?

Task 2 Lesson Review: Objectives and Expectations (15 minutes)

- 2A** This lesson helps us deepen a biblical understanding of Christian mission and community development. We’ll examine the biblical teaching about creation and learn about God’s intentions for the world in the very beginning. We’ll respond to the worldview questions Where are

we? and Who are we? **Listen** to the achievement-based objectives for this lesson. What are your questions?

Task 3 **Introducing the Theme: Beginning with Creation** (15 minutes)

- 3A** Every story has a beginning. **Consider** the following provocative question: Where does the gospel begin? We'll **hear** a sample of your responses.
- 3B** **Listen** to a volunteer read the following. **Underline** what strikes you as significant.

The Bible's teaching about creation is like the foundation of a large house. If the foundation is not strong and solid, the house is weak and may fall in a rainstorm or be blown away by a strong wind. The creation story is the foundation on which the rest of the biblical story of salvation rests.

Turn to a partner and **discuss** this idea. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? We'll **hear** a sample of your responses.

God's Story through a Biblical Text (45 minutes)

- 3C** **Listen** while someone slowly reads Genesis 1:1- 2:3. This is a song! While you are listening, **identify** one thing from the passage that you have never noticed before.

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light" and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas.

And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.

"And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

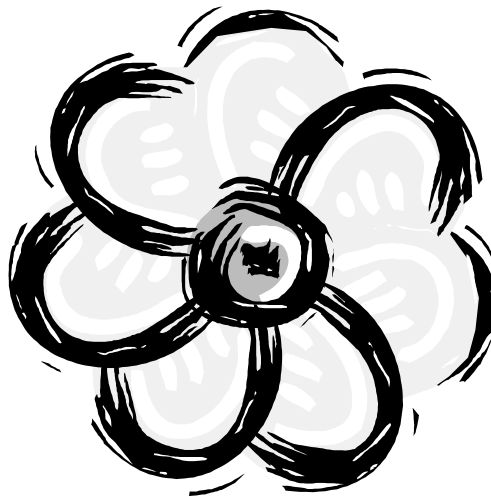
Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done and he rested on

the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

Genesis 1:1-2:3

3D Turn to a partner. **Share** one thing about this passage that you have not noticed before.

3E **Combine** two partner pairs to create a group of four. On a piece of chart paper, **draw** a flower. On each petal of the flower, **write** a principle you learned from the creation story. **Post** your flowers on the wall. We'll **walk around** the posted papers and **hear** all principles.



Task 4 Insights on God's Story through a Biblical Text (45 minutes)

4A **Listen** to the following review of the advance reading's major points about what the creation story teaches. **Underline** the points that are most significant for you.

1. **The world and everything in it belongs to God.** Since God has made everything, it all belongs to God. It does not belong to human owners; nor to governments, as powerful as they are; nor to large corporations either, even though they are very wealthy.

2. **God is an awesome creator!** God simply speaks and things appear. The Word of the Lord is powerful. There is no power or force that can destroy God's creation against his will.

3. **The creation is orderly and good.** Notice how many times you read, "God saw that it was good." On the sixth and last day there is a double affirmation: "God saw that it was *very* good."

4. **Human beings are made in God's image.** Human beings are made in the image of God and have a number of unique responsibilities, rights, blessings, and privileges. Female and male are both worthy of the honor and dignity that come from being made in God's image.

5. **Human beings are given a special task.** The human task in the creation is to "rule over" it, to "fill the earth," and to subdue it and have dominion over it. Having dominion over the creation does not mean using it up carelessly. It means caring for it as a farmer cares for a garden. Work is thus affirmed as a truly dignified part of what it means to be a human being imaging God.

6. **The creation is a place of abundant potential.** The Garden of Eden is a place of both *abundance* and *potential*. Plants bear seeds and birds and fish are expected to multiply. Human couples are to have children and raise families as signs of God's blessing of fruitfulness. God has designed the creation with the potential for further development, and has appointed human beings to guide and direct that development. Importantly, this includes not only tilling the soil and caring for other creatures; but also raising families; forming communities; building schools, villages, towns, and cities; and building human social and cultural institutions that allow life to flourish. We are called to form economic relationships, political organizations, to create science and art, music and literature, language and liturgy. From the beginning we were called to be deeply involved in forming human culture in ways that honor God and help the creation—especially the human community—to flourish. The whole human enterprise is anticipated in the creation of Genesis 1.

4B Turn to a neighbor. **Share** what you underlined as being important and why. What questions did the advance reading raise for you? We'll **hear** a sample.

4C Compare and **contrast** your group's principles from the creation story (Task 4) with the reading's "building blocks." What other principles would you like to add?

Task 5 Our Story: Applying the Insights

(60 minutes)

- 5A **Scan** the following teachings about the impact of the creation story. **Circle** what strikes you as the most significant impact for you personally and for your church or community work.

1. **The physical world is not “lower” than the spiritual world.**

The creation story affirms the goodness of the material creation. Physical things like bodies and earth and vegetation and work are not “lower” realms of material existence to be shunned in favor of “higher, more spiritual” things, but they are part of God’s good creation. Genesis 2:8 reads, “And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.” God made the material world and is active in it. This is contrary to dualism, which teaches God is interested in the “spiritual” person but not the “material” person.

2. **Work is good!** The creation story affirms work as an essential expression of being God’s image bearers. Work is not a cursed consequence of our sinfulness; it is part of the blessing of being human and having a calling from God. God has ordained us for all kinds of tasks and we honor God when we do them to God’s glory.

3. **Christians are called to develop human culture and society in all its forms.** God has called human beings to “preside over” the development of the potential in creation. Developing human culture and society is a God-given task that we can do obediently and faithfully. In fact, we may even talk about the “calling” of human institutions:

- the calling of government is to do justice and serve the citizens.
- the calling of industry is to carefully steward the resources of the earth, to develop useful and meaningful items for human use, and to provide labor.
- the calling of schools is to help students discover and develop their gifts and skills so they can explore God’s creation meaningfully.
- the calling of hospitals is to serve the sick and prevent illness.
- the calling of the church is to equip men and women to be faithful servants of God in all these possible expressions of living faithfully to God’s call to steward the creation and to develop its potential.

The whole world belongs to God!

5B Call out what you circled as most significant. **Respond to** the following questions:

- What in this teaching do you feel the most passionate about?
- What in this teaching is the most radical (different or hard to accept) for you?

5C By yourself, **reflect** on your own community or church work. How do these three lessons from the creation story **compare** with the worldview (the common outlook/beliefs about the world) in the community in which you work? What is one practical thing you could do to bridge a gap between the community worldview and the biblical worldview? We'll **hear** a sample of your "bridge the gap" ideas.

Lessons from the creation story	How these lessons compare with the worldview in my community	Practical ideas of how to bridge the gap between community worldview and biblical worldview
The physical world is not "lower" than the spiritual world.		
Work is good!		
Christians are called to develop human culture and society in all its forms.		

Task 6 Our Response

(45 minutes)

6A **Review** the following from the advance reading.

One of the lessons from the creation story is that Christians are called to develop culture and society in all its forms. We also learn that human beings are made in the image of God and that they are given a special task: to guide and direct the development of the creation. When all men and women are faithful to their calling, and all human organizations are faithful to what God has called them, then the outcome is harmony, peace, and well-being. Everything is working as it should and as God intended. This is what the Bible means by *SHALOM!*

6B **Examine** this list of roles. **Choose** up to three statements that apply to you (or create your own). Using what you have learned about a biblical worldview, **complete** the statements for yourself. We'll **hear** a sample of your responses and **pray** together that God will give you encouragement and blessing in these callings.

My calling as a farmer is to...
My calling as a pastor is to...
My calling as a businessperson is to...
My calling as a tailor is to...
My calling as a government official is to...
My calling as a cook is to...
My calling as a community development worker is to...
My calling as a parent is to...
My calling as a spouse is to...
My calling as a friend is to...
My calling as a _____ is to...

6C **Read** aloud together this summary:

We learn from the creation story that the world and everything in it belongs to God. Human beings have a special role to preside over the development of the potential of creation. Imagine this: the whole world is HOLY because it was made by God, is cared for by him and is filled with potential blessings that are realized through the obedient work of God's image-bearers in every part of life. This means *all of life is HOLY, and our work is part of our worship.*

Using colored paper, markers and tape, **make** stickers with the words, "HOLY TO THE LORD!" printed on them (see Zechariah 14:20). **Stick** these signs wherever you like: on your bicycle, on the door of your house, on your briefcase or school books, on your desk, on your hoe! **Know** that placing the sticker is a way of claiming that this thing is HOLY to the Lord, to be used in God's service and for the sake of *Shalom*!

6D **Answer** the following question for yourself:

How does what I have learned in this lesson add to my understanding of effective community development?

Task 7 Summary of Learning (30 minutes)

- 7A** **Take a walk** outside for two minutes. **Find** something from God's creation that you admire. Bring it in and place it on the table.
- 7B** **Gather** around the creation table. Spend a few moments admiring the wonder of God's created world. **Share** one new insight you had today or one question that remains for you. We'll **hear** a sample of your comments.
- 7C** **Review** the achievement-based objectives for this lesson. What comments do you have about how well the group did in reaching the objectives? We'll **hear** a sample.
- 7D** **Pray** together and **celebrate** this new learning.

Task 8 Looking Ahead (5 minutes)

- 8A** In the next lesson... surprise! A biblical understanding about salvation may be different than you thought. What does salvation have to do with the physical, material, social, spiritual, and political matters in community work?

Lesson 3 Advance Reading: What Does the Creation Story Teach Us?

The creation story teaches many things that are the foundation on which the biblical story rests. Some key building blocks include:

A. The world and everything in it belongs to God. Since God made everything, it all belongs to God. It does not belong to human owners; nor to governments, as powerful as they are; nor to large corporations either, even though they are very wealthy. It all belongs to God. He is the landowner! (See Psalm 24:1, Psalm 89:5-18, Psalm 95:3-5, Psalm 104.)

B. God is an awesome creator! God does not have to do battle with other gods to make the world, as some other creation stories teach. Nor does God have to work hard—God simply speaks and things appear. The Word of the Lord is powerful. There is no power that can destroy creation against God's will.

C. The creation is orderly and good. Notice how many times we read, "God saw that it was good." On the sixth and last day there is a double affirmation, "God saw that it was *very* good." There is also a beautiful pattern to the poetic song of Genesis 1 which reflects the harmony of God's orderly pattern.

D. Human beings are made in God's image. Animals are made "according to their kinds" (Genesis 1:24-25). Human beings—both male and female—are made in the "image of God," with a special relationship of love to God and special rights and responsibilities. Female and male are both worthy of the honor and dignity that come from being made in God's image.

E. Human beings are given a special task. Along with the special rights we have as image bearers of God, we are also given a special task in the creation: to "rule over" it (Genesis 1:26-27), to "fill the earth," to subdue it, and to have dominion over it. God gives to humans the abundance of the earth and all that is in it for their delight and stewardly care. Having dominion over the creation does not mean using it up carelessly; it means caring for it as a farmer cares for a garden. We are to use and look after all the other created things so that the whole creation can continue to flourish and bless each generation with its abundance. This is often called the "cultural mandate." Work is thus affirmed as a truly dignified part of what it means to be human imaging God.

F. The creation is a place of abundant potential. In Genesis 2, four rivers soak Eden's soil so that plants can produce their harvests. Adam and Eve find plenty of fruit and vegetables, air and water, all that they need in the garden God has made. The earth is full and rich. There is no poverty, no sickness, no violence, no hunger, no pain. The garden is a place of abundance.

It is also a place of potential. God has declared his creation to be very good! But it is not yet finished. There is potential for growth and development. Plants bear seeds so they can reproduce and birds and fish are expected to multiply (Genesis 1:22). That is part of their blessing from God. So, too, the human couple are to have children and raise families, to "increase," to prosper and thrive under the assurance of God's providence in the abundant garden. This means that God has designed the creation with the potential for further development; he has appointed human beings to guide and direct that development. This includes not only the tilling of the soil and care of the other creatures, but also includes the raising of families, the building of cities, the formation of human social and cultural institutions that allow life to flourish. We are called to form economic relationships, political organizations, to create science and art, music and literature, language and liturgy. The whole human enterprise is anticipated in the creation story of Genesis 1. This is all part of the cultural mandate. Literally, to develop something is to take it out of the "envelop," to reveal it and open it up.

Some Further Implications:

Overcoming dualism

The creation story affirms the goodness of the material creation. Physical things like bodies and earth and vegetation and work are not “lower” realms of material existence to be shunned in favor of “higher, more spiritual” things, but they are part of God’s good creation. This is contrary to dualism, which teaches that God is interested in the “spiritual” person but not the “material” person.

Affirming work

God has ordained us for all kinds of tasks. We honor God when we do them to his glory. When farmers till the ground or builders craft a house or teachers help children learn, they are fulfilling part of the cultural mandate. Work is affirmed as an essential expression of our being God’s image bearers. Work is not a cursed consequence of our sinfulness; it is part of the blessing of being human and having a calling from God.

Affirming culture

Since the whole world belongs to God, and since God has called human beings to “preside over” the development of the potential in creation, no part of the development of human societies is inherently evil. In fact, it has been a center point of the Reformed tradition that this part of the human calling is expressed in terms of developing human culture (*kosmos*) in all its various forms. It can become evil when we pursue that calling in ways that are disobedient and unfaithful to God’s purposes, and often we create structures that are evil. But that does not take away from the extremely important teaching that developing human culture and society is a God-given task that can be done obediently and faithfully. In fact, we may even talk about the “calling” of human institutions, such as governments, industry, schools, hospitals, banks, businesses, families and churches. Organizations, as well as individuals, have a calling to serve God.

- The calling of government is to do justice and serve the citizens.
- The calling of industry is to carefully steward the resources of the earth, to develop useful and meaningful items for human use and to provide labor.
- The calling of schools is to help students discover and develop their gifts and skills so they can explore God’s creation meaningfully.
- The calling of hospitals is to serve the sick and prevent illness.
- The calling of the church is to equip men and women to be faithful servants of God in all these possible expressions of living faithfully to the cultural mandate.

This means that being a Christian businessperson, for example, does not only mean being a businessperson who evangelizes clients (good as that may be). It also means being Christian in the way we do business, as well as trying to understand God’s calling for business and being faithful to that.

When all women and men are faithful to their calling, and all human organizations are faithful to what God has called them, the outcome is harmony, peace, and well-being. Everything is working as it should and as God intended. This is what the Bible means by *SHALOM*!

Try to imagine this: the whole world is HOLY because it was made by God, is cared for by him, and is filled with potential blessings that are realized through the obedient work of God's image bearers in every part of life. This means *all of life is HOLY* and our work is part of our worship. As God's people, the church has a central role to play in helping people discover the exciting vision of shalom for the world.

Here are some things to do:

- Read and celebrate the creation story in worship services.
- Pray with people in their work settings.
- Invite people to share about their work as part of worship times and pray for them.
- Affirm people as image bearers by treating all people with dignity and respect, not showing favoritism to the rich or the powerful.

Lesson 4: Salvation— Liberation for the Whole Person

ESTIMATED TIME FOR THE LESSON:

4 hours, 20 minutes (not including breaks or Advance/Optional Readings)

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- ✓ Copy of this lesson for each participant
- ✓ Flip chart paper
- ✓ Markers
- ✓ Masking tape

ADVANCE READING:

Prior to participating in this lesson, **read** the article at the end of the lesson: “New Testament Pictures of Salvation through Jesus Christ.”

As you read, **circle** the ideas that are *important* in light of your experience.

Note any questions the reading raises for you.

You will have an opportunity to **share** these ideas and questions during Task 5.

OPTIONAL READING:

“For Further Reflection—Understanding *Shalom*” article at the end of the lesson

Task 1 Warm-Up: Stories about Saving (15 minutes)

- 1A Find** a partner. Taking turns, briefly **share** a story of when you saved something—or someone. How did it feel? We’ll **hear** a sample of your stories.

What do these experiences have in common? What is different?

Task 2 Lesson Review: Objectives and Expectations (15 minutes)

- 2A** This lesson helps us deepen a biblical understanding of Christian mission and community development. We’ll examine the surprising biblical teaching about salvation and explore how it impacts our community work. We’ll respond to the worldview question, “What is the answer?” **Listen** to the achievement-based objectives for this lesson. What are your questions?

Task 3 Introducing the Theme: Salvation (45 minutes)

- 3A On your own, **draw** a picture of your worldview of salvation. **Post** it on the wall. **Walk** around and view each other's pictures.

Discuss as a group what strikes you about the drawings. What do they suggest about the meaning of salvation?

- 3B **Read** the following silently.

God's intention in creation was for the world to experience *shalom*—people of integrity and honesty living in relationships of justice and righteousness, experiencing abundant blessings. But human sinfulness and pride have spoiled God's plan. We remain God's image bearers, but our capacity to fulfill our calling has been severely damaged by our sin. We need to be saved from our terrible condition.

What does "being saved" really mean? Is it having our sins forgiven and our guilt removed? Is it being rescued "out of the world" to some safe place in heaven? Is it being restored as God's image bearers, with renewed identity and a renewed understanding of our calling? Or is it something else entirely?

In groups of four, **discuss** the reading. How would you answer the questions in the second paragraph? We'll **hear** from all groups.

Task 4 God's Story through a Biblical Text (60 minutes)

- 4A In the Old Testament the most common word for "save" is *hoshia*, the Hebrew word from which the name of Jesus is derived. ("You will call his name Jesus for he will *save* his people from their sins," Matthew 1:21.) This one Hebrew word is sometimes translated as *save*, sometimes as *deliver*, sometimes as rescue.

Read aloud the following Old Testament verses which use this word *hoshia*. (Each of six volunteers can read one verse.)

- Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. (Exodus 14:30)
- Then the LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred that lapped I will deliver you, and give the Midianites into your hand. Let all other go to their homes." (Judges 7:7)

- This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD and was saved from every trouble. (Psalm 34:6)
- O hope of Israel, its savior in time of trouble, why should you be like a stranger in the land, like a traveler turning aside for the night? (Jeremiah 14:8)
- Many are saying to me, "There is no help for you in God." Deliverance belongs to the LORD; may your blessing be on your people. (Psalm 3: 2, 8)
- May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy and crush the oppressor. For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. (Psalm 72:4,12)

Turn to two people near you.

- **Compare** and **contrast** what these verses have in common and what is different.
- How do these verses **add** to your understanding about what "salvation" means?

We'll **hear** a sample of your answers.

4B Listen to what we learn from the Old Testament about the meaning of salvation. It helps us develop a biblical worldview of salvation. **Circle** what you find significant or surprising.

The Old Testament teaches two important things about salvation.

First, salvation is always a work of God. God is always recognized as the one who saves his people. People cannot save themselves. In Hosea 1:7 and Ezekiel 34:22, the people are rescued by God, who alone can save them. Only God has the title of "savior" (Psalm 68:19, 88:1, 118:14).

Second, salvation usually is not about individuals being saved from sin or immorality. Rather, it has to do with the whole community being rescued from danger, from enemies, from suffering, from oppression, from famine and drought and other disasters.

Here's how one Bible scholar summarizes it: "God's salvation pertains to material prosperity, justice for the poor, liberation from oppression, and deliverance from enemies. Salvation has to do with physical, material, social, and political matters. Salvation is a deeply spiritual concern because it is GOD alone who rescues us; but the salvation he brings concerns every part of human existence."

4C In groups of four, **discuss**:

- What did you circle as significant or surprising and why?
- How is this teaching different from other ideas about salvation?
- How does this teaching challenge your worldview of salvation?

Task 5 Insights on God's Story (45 minutes)

5A **Brainstorm.** What New Testament stories, passages or examples can you think of that talk about salvation? **Call out** your ideas.

5B **Skim** the following summary of the advance reading for this lesson about the many different ways the New Testament describes the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. This teaching helps us to further build a biblical view of salvation. **Draw an oval** around each point that is significant for you.

The New Testament offers many different word pictures to describe the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. As in the Old Testament, many of these descriptions concern the restoration and renewal of people's material and physical well-being.

Salvation as the kingdom of God: Salvation is closely linked to a way of life centered on the teaching of Jesus. In his teaching, Jesus linked salvation to the kingdom of God. To follow Jesus and his teaching was to be saved. To reject him was to remain lost.

Salvation as physical healing: The most common word in the New Testament for "save" is the Greek word *sozo*, which is often translated as "heal" or to be "made well" or refers to "deliverance." Jesus did many healings because of his great compassion. These healings were also signs of the kingdom of God.

Salvation as cleansing and restoration to the community:

Many people in Jesus' time who were sick were also declared to be "unclean." They were excluded from the community and could not participate in worshipping God in the temple. By healing them, Jesus also restored them to community. Thus salvation is experienced as cleansing and restoration to community.

Salvation as changed values: When people follow the way of Jesus, their values change and their relationships are healed. For example, Jesus announced salvation had come to Zacchaeus because he committed himself to Old Testament laws about just economic relationships.

Salvation as the reversal of scarcity to abundance: Through his miracles, Jesus demonstrated that he had come to restore the creation as a source of abundant living for human beings. An example is Jesus' turning water into wine. The image of empty wine jugs is an Old Testament prophetic motif, a metaphor for the desolation of sin. The outpouring of wine is a metaphor for the renewal of all things. Jesus' miracles were signs that he was restoring the creation to yield the abundance for which it was intended. This is part of the renewing and restoring work of salvation.

Salvation as "being found:" Three parables in Luke 15 describe salvation in terms of the lost being found. Each time there was great joy in heaven. The shepherd, the woman, and the father never gave up hope until what they lost had been restored.

Salvation as forgiveness of debt: Forgiveness is described as liberation from a huge debt one is unable to repay. While forgiveness is offered freely, it can be withdrawn again if the same generous forgiveness is not passed on to others.

Salvation as reconciliation: Just as God has reconciled people to himself, forgiving them, healing them, and welcoming them home, so does he also call them to become ministers of reconciliation to others.

- 5C **Choose** one of these pictures of salvation as the most surprising or significant for you personally or for your community. We'll **hear** a sample.

Task 6 **Our Story: Applying the Insights** (30 minutes)

- 6A **Listen** to someone read aloud this summary about the impact of this learning about salvation. **Circle** what strikes you as significant.

These passages simply and wonderfully point out that the biblical idea of salvation, in both the Old and New Testaments, is much bigger than just being forgiven of sin and guilt before God. Salvation consists of healing, forgiveness of debt, change of values, reconciliation between

human beings and God and human beings with each other, restoration of relationships, abundant living, and even more. Salvation is really about restoring and renewing *shalom*, so that all broken relationships are made new and life can flourish as God intended it to.

Here's how Perry Yoder summarizes these ideas:

Biblical salvation is liberation for the whole person, both materially and spiritually. When we limit salvation to being only a "spiritual" concept, when we think of salvation only as the saving of some soul that has a separate existence of its own apart from the person's total being, we no longer have a full-bodied biblical salvation. Biblical salvation is TOTAL. It includes liberation of the whole person.

6B In groups of three

- **Discuss** what you like about this summary.
- **Discuss** what you find challenging.
- **Name** one way your current community or church work is an expression of God's TOTAL biblical salvation.
- **Name** one way your community or church work needs to change to express God's liberation for the whole person.

Task 7 Our Response (30 minutes)

7A On your own, **choose** one dimension of salvation, described in Task 5, that you believe has not been emphasized in your community or church's work.

- **Write** it in your own words.
- **Describe** one impact it has for your community or church work.
- **Outline** one action step you will take to ensure this teaching has a practical outcome in your church or community.
- **Name** at least two people with whom you will share this learning. Who will hold you accountable?

We'll **hear** a sample of your action plans.

7B **Answer** the following question for yourself:

How does what I have learned in this lesson add to my understanding of effective community development?

Task 8 Summary of Learning (15 minutes)

- 8A **Stand** and **look** again at your pictures of worldviews of salvation. If you drew another picture now, what would you change? **Call out** your ideas.
- 8B **Review** the achievement-based objectives for this lesson. What comments do you have about how well the group did in reaching the objectives? We'll **hear** from up to three participants.
- 8C **Pray** together and **celebrate** this new learning.

Task 9 Looking Ahead (5 minutes)

- 9A What do you see when you look in the mirror? What can Christians do to restore people's understanding of being made in God's image?

Lesson 4 Advance Reading: New Testament Pictures of Salvation through Jesus Christ

Introduction

The New Testament offers several word pictures to describe the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. As in the Old Testament, many of these descriptions concern the restoration and renewal of the material and physical well-being of people.

Salvation as the kingdom of God

In his teaching, Jesus linked salvation to the kingdom of God. He came announcing that the kingdom of God was at hand, and that all should repent and follow him as a way of becoming part of the kingdom. To follow Jesus and his teaching was to be saved. To reject him was to remain lost. Salvation is thus closely linked to a way of life which is centered on the teaching of Jesus.

Read Matthew 13:44-46. The kingdom is described as something so precious and of so much value that a person would be willing to give up everything else just to have it. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus reminds us that those who are willing to seek first the kingdom of God will also be given everything else they need.

Reflect: Does your preaching and teaching, and more importantly, the example of your life, make following Jesus sound so appealing that others would be willing to give up everything to do it?

Salvation as physical healing

The most common word in the New Testament for “save” is the Greek word *sozo*, which is often translated as “heal” or to be “made well” or refers to “deliverance.” It is very similar to the Old Testament *hoshia*. Jesus did many healings because of his great compassion, and these healings were also signs of the kingdom of God.

Read Matthew 11:1-6. The disciples of John the Baptist came to ask Jesus if he was truly the Messiah they had been waiting for. To what signs does Jesus point them as evidence of his ministry?

For further evidence of Jesus’ healing ministry, see also Matthew 8:28-34, 9:18-26, and Mark 1:29- 2:12.

Reflect: What kind of healing do people experience in your community? Do they recognize that this healing comes from God?

Salvation as cleansing

Many people in Jesus’ time who were sick were also declared to be “unclean.” They therefore were excluded from the community and could not participate in worshiping God in the temple. By healing them, Jesus also restored them to community. Thus salvation is experienced as cleansing and restoration to community.

Read Mark 1:40-45.

Reflect: How are people on the fringes of your community welcomed into fellowship? How do they experience cleansing?

Salvation as changed values

When we accept and live by values that are not in harmony with God’s values, we contribute to brokenness and injustice. When we follow the way of Jesus, our values change and our relationships are healed. In this way salvation is experienced as a change of values.

Read Luke 19:1-10.

Reflect: What was the status of Zacchaeus before he met Jesus? What did the people think of Zacchaeus? How did Jesus show love for him? What changes did Zacchaeus make?

Read Exodus 22:1 and 2 Samuel 12:6. What does this say about Zacchaeus’s conversion?

Notice that Jesus announced salvation had come to Zacchaeus because of his promise to obey laws of economic *shalom*.

Zacchaeus's encounter with Jesus led him to commit himself to Old Testament laws about just economic relationships. Zacchaeus not only became a "generous" man; he also became a "just" man.

Reflect: How do people in your community experience economic liberation? What role does your church play in that?

Salvation as the reversal of scarcity to abundance

Through his miracles Jesus demonstrated that he had come to restore the creation as a source of abundant living for human beings.

Read Luke 9:10-17. A place of scarcity became a place of abundance.

Read John 2:1-11 (compare with Isaiah 24:6-11). Jesus made abundant wine at the wedding as a sign that he had come to restore the joy of creation lost when people live under judgment.

Reflect: Can you name some ways in which your ministry contributes to the recovery of the "abundant" life of joy in the kingdom?

Salvation as being found

Read Luke 15. Three parables describe salvation in terms of the lost being found. Each time there was great joy in heaven. The shepherd, the woman and the father never gave up hope until the lost was restored.

Reflect: Think of one person or group who is "lost." How does your community seek these people to bring them "home," restore their relationships, and make them welcome?

Salvation as forgiveness of debt

Read Matthew 18:21-35. Forgiveness is described as liberation from a huge debt that one is unable to repay. While forgiveness is offered freely, it can be withdrawn again if the same generous forgiveness is not passed on to others.

Reflect: How do you celebrate forgiveness in your community? How do you pass forgiveness on to others?

Salvation as reconciliation

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16–6:2. As God has reconciled us to himself, forgiving us, healing us, and welcoming us home, so does he call us to become ministers of "reconciliation" to others.

Reflect: Can you think of people who need to be reconciled to each other? Perhaps family members who are estranged, or warring neighbors? How can the church help bring these people together so that the "dividing wall of hostility" is destroyed?

Lesson 4 Optional Reading: For Further Reflection—Understanding *Shalom*

Starting with Creation

We know from Genesis 3 that God’s good creation has been plundered. God’s intention was for the world to experience *shalom*, but human sinfulness and pride have spoiled God’s plan.

Instead of peace there is violence, instead of generosity there is greed, instead of love there is hatred, instead of life there is death. All of our relationships have been spoiled: we are estranged from God (Adam and Eve hide from God in fear), from each other (Adam and Eve live in a strained relationship), and from the creation (Adam has to struggle and sweat to bring in the harvest; Eve bears children in pain). Work is a painful and bitter struggle, marriage is filled with tension and inequality. Genesis 3-11 records the gradual descent of humanity into violence and chaos. We remain God’s image bearers, but our capacity to fulfill our calling has been severely damaged by our sin. God’s *shalom* intentions for us are at risk. We need to be saved from our terrible condition.

Shalom and Salvation

In the context of the creation story, the human calling, and God’s intentions, we can see that “being saved” is not only about having our sins forgiven and our guilt removed. It is also about being set free from the power of sin, being made whole from the brokenness that keeps us from living faithfully and fully for *shalom*. It is not about being rescued “out of the world” to some safe place in heaven. It is about being restored as God’s image bearers, with renewed identity and renewed understanding of our calling. Salvation is about the recovery of *shalom*.

The Meaning of *Shalom*

Shalom is a Hebrew word, commonly used in the Bible. It is often translated as “peace,” but its meaning is actually richer than that.

First, *shalom* refers to **physical and material well-being**.

- Genesis 29:6—Jacob asks about Laban’s *shalom*.
- Genesis 37:14—Joseph is told to check on the *shalom* of his brothers.
- Exodus 18:7—Moses and Jethro inquire about each other’s *shalom*.
- Numbers 6:26—Aaron’s blessing calls for *shalom* (abundance, prosperity).

In this sense, the Hebrew word *shalom* is usually translated as “being well.”

Second, *shalom* refers to **harmonious social relationships**.

- Isaiah 9:1-7, 11:1-9—These verses describe a situation of *shalom* that anticipates the coming Messiah.
- Isaiah 32:16-17—*Shalom* is the outcome of relationships marked by justice and righteousness.
- Psalm 35:27—*Shalom* pairs with righteousness.

Third, *shalom* concerns **outstanding personal character**.

- Psalm 34:14—Seeking *shalom* is contrasted with doing evil.
- Psalm 37:35-38—The person of *shalom* is contrasted with the wicked person.

In summary, a simple way to think of *shalom* is this: ***Shalom* is how things should be—the way that God intended them.**

People of integrity and honesty live in relationships of justice and righteousness and experience abundant blessings. This is *shalom*.

Shalom is a deeply *spiritual* idea, for it is grounded in God; but it is not other-worldly, since we experience *shalom* in our physical, material, earthly existence.

For a challenging exercise on how God's people can transform communities toward *shalom*, read Isaiah 65:17-25. It is a description of things as they should be and as God will one day again make them. The church is called to the exciting task of making this vision a reality!

Lesson 5: Restoring Understanding— Being Made in the Image of God

ESTIMATED TIME FOR THE LESSON:

4 hours (not including breaks or Advance Reading)

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- ✓ Copy of this lesson for each participant
- ✓ Flip chart paper
- ✓ Blank tablet paper
- ✓ Markers
- ✓ Masking tape
- ✓ Post-it notes

ADVANCE READING:

Prior to participating in this lesson, **read** the article at the end of the lesson: “How Can Christians Restore People’s Understanding That They Are Made in the Image of God?”

As you read, **circle** the ideas that are *important* in light of your experience.

Note any questions the reading raises for you.

You will have an opportunity to **share** these ideas and questions with others during Task 5.

Task 1 Warm-Up: Self-Portraits (30 minutes)

- 1A Draw** a self-portrait (an image of yourself) on a piece of blank tablet paper. Include something in your drawing that you believe is distinctly you. *Do not put your name on your drawing.* When you are finished, **post** your portrait on the wall. **Take** a gallery walk. **Guess** which drawing belongs to which person!

Task 2 Lesson Review: Objectives and Expectations (15 minutes)

- 2A** This lesson helps us deepen a biblical understanding of Christian mission and community development. We’ll explore the Bible’s message about being made in the image of God and learn how that impacts our community work. We are going to explore one of the basic worldview questions, “Who are we as human beings?” **Listen** to the achievement-based objectives for this lesson. What are your questions?

Task 3 Introducing the Theme: In the Image of God (45 minutes)

- 3A The following teaching explains God's intentions for the creation, including human beings, and God's plan of salvation to restore *shalom*. **Listen** to someone read this teaching and **underline** what you find most important.

God's intention for the whole creation, and especially for human beings, was that all things should exist in peaceful, loving harmony so that the whole creation could flourish. This is *shalom*: all things being and doing as God intended them to be and do. *Shalom* could only happen as long as human beings, God's image bearers, were faithful and obedient to God, honoring God above all else and trusting in him alone. The sinful actions of Adam and Eve's rebellion and disobedience caused *shalom* to be broken. And since they were given the task of helping the creation to develop and unfold, all their work was infected by their sin, so that the whole creation suffers because of it (Romans 8:22). God's plan of salvation is to restore *shalom* to the whole creation. At the heart of God's plan is his work to restore human beings and all their relationships.

Many people in our communities have lost their understanding of being made in the image of God. They often feel that they are much less than this. For example:

- Some poor people believe that, since they have little of value, they are themselves of little value.
- Women are not honored and respected; they are often treated simply as property or as sex objects.
- Disabled people who cannot work and require much care are not treated with dignity.
- People feel helpless to change their circumstances because decisions affecting their lives are made by others who are wealthy and powerful.
- People who feel insignificant in this world believe God has no interest in them either.
- Children are disregarded because they are not adults.
- Elderly people are discarded because they cannot contribute to the economy.
- Strangers are treated with suspicion because they are different.
- Enemies are treated in inhumane ways because others are afraid of them or think they are justified in acting violently towards them.

An essential ministry of the church is to restore people's understanding that they are made in the image of God.

Call out what you find most important about this teaching. What people or groups of people do you know in your community who feel they are less than made in the image of God? **Add** to the list above whatever is relevant from your context.

- 3B** We drew self portraits—images of ourselves. Where do we learn our ideas about ourselves? Where do we get our worldview about who we are as human beings? In groups of four, **discuss** positive and negative ideas or images people gain about themselves from the following:

	Positive Ideas/Images	Negative Ideas/Images
Families		
Media		
Church		
School		
Community leaders		
Others		

We'll **hear** a sample of your answers.

- 3C **Listen** to *why* it is important for the church and all Christians to act on their essential mission: to restore people's understanding that they are made in the image of God. This is, after all, the biblical worldview! **Circle** the ideas that are most significant to you.

1. ***People live up to (or down to) their self-image, or the understanding they have of themselves.*** People who believe they are unimportant will live defeated lives and will not act to improve themselves. People who believe they are made in the image of God, are loved and have a purpose, will be empowered and able to act meaningfully to change their own lives.
2. ***Being made in the image of God is the basis for understanding the ideas of biblical justice and human rights.*** Made in the image of God, we have the right to live in freedom, share in the world's riches, participate in decisions that affect us, make choices about our future, live without fear, and have access to education and health care. People who have lost their sense of being made in God's image often also lose their sense of rights and justice. Reminding them of their true identity will strengthen and empower them for change.
3. ***Being made in the image of God is the basis for confidence.*** It often happens that people are judged according to what they own, their social status or their occupations. However, the Bible affirms that our true value as human beings lies not in such things but rather in our being made in the image of God, who loves us unconditionally. This is a great source of encouragement and strength to those who are marginalized in our societies.
4. ***Being made in the image of God is the basis for living in communities of respect and peace.*** When we remember that not only we but also our neighbors, and even our enemies and those who harm us, are made in the image of God, we will treat them with respect and dignity. We will seek their well-being and renewal. This will help us to resist hatred, racism, vengeance, stereotyping and violence.

Turn to your neighbor and share what you circled and why. We'll **hear** a sample of your conversations.

Task 4 **God's Story through a Biblical Text** (45 minutes)

- 4A In small groups, **examine** the following passages. (Divide yourselves so each group has a different passage. The complete texts are on the next two pages.) **Summarize** your passage by adding one or two

sentences to this statement: "We need to remember that all of us are made in the image of God. Here's God's good news." Then **identify** the kinds of people in your community this good news would benefit.

Passage	What's God's good news?	Who needs to hear?
Luke 1:46-53		
James 2:1-7		
Romans 8:1-4		
Jeremiah 29:10-14		
1 Corinthians 1:18-30		
John 8:2-11		

Stand and **read** your passage aloud to the large group with hope and confidence. Then, **share** your summary of good news and who needs to hear it. We'll **hear** all.

Good News to Help Restore Understanding of Being Made in God's Image

Luke 1:46-53 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. "

James 2:1-7 My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored

the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

Romans 8:1-4 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Jeremiah 29:10-14 For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

1 Corinthians 1:18-30 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

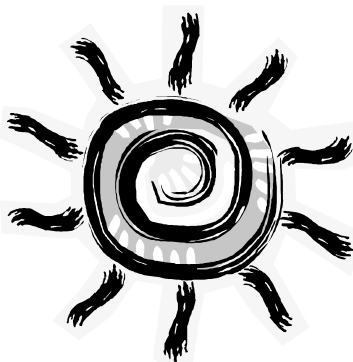
John 8:2-11 Early in the morning [Jesus] came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

Task 5 Insights on God's Story

(45 minutes)

- 5A** How can we remind others (and ourselves) that we are made in the image of God? How can we help provide a biblical worldview to answer the question "Who are we as human beings?"

Look at the sunshine wheel chart posted at the front. **Brainstorm** different things Christians can do to encourage a positive self-understanding in others. **Write** one idea per post-it note. **Post** your ideas on the rays of the sun.



- 5B** **Listen** to seven volunteers read short reviews of the major points of the advance reading. It tells what Christians can do to restore people's understanding that they are made in the image of God.

- 1. Affirm the worth and value of all people.** Treat people with respect. Resist and renounce all language and behavior that diminishes people. Refuse to participate in language that is racist, sexist, hateful of others, or incites violence against other people.
- 2. Affirm each person's giftedness.** Each person has been gifted by God for various tasks, even though they may not recognize that. Affirm the contributions people make even when these may be small; encourage people to be involved in activities. Resist doing for others what they can do for themselves.
- 3. Remind people that they are not powerless in their lives, even when it may seem so.** Made in God's image, people are not helpless pawns. People are able to act meaningfully and make choices about how they will think, feel, and behave.
- 4. Remind people that their true value lies simply in being human, and not in the things they possess or their status in society.** Treat all people with equality. Permit rich and poor alike to hold positions of leadership in the church and to participate equally in all decision making.
- 5. Affirm the dignity of everyone's work, even if the work they do is simple and ordinary.** God sees the work that people do and honors even the simplest labor, if it is work done "for the Lord." Pray for all workers, no matter how seemingly important or unimportant their task.
- 6. Pay special attention to people who do not have much status in society or are often overlooked and neglected, and offer them the dignity of attention.** Spend time with such people, inquire about their families, show interest in their personal stories and well-being, invite them to visit your home, and allow them to return the gift of hospitality to you. Remember, Jesus said, "The least is the greatest" (Luke 9:48).
- 7. Help heal broken relationships with God.** A central component in a person's self understanding is that person's relationship with God. Someone who feels rejected by God will have a difficult time accepting self or others. And someone who feels unloved by God will have difficulty loving self or others. The church has a powerful ministry to those whose self esteem is injured because they do not know about God's unconditional love for them.

Compare this to the sunshine wheel. What is the same and different?

Task 6 Our Story: Applying the Insights (10 minutes)

6A Reflect in silence on your own work. **Make notes** if it helps your process of reflection. Ask yourself:

- What people in my community have lost their understanding of being made in the image of God?
- How am I helping others live in the full joy and awareness of being made in the image of God?
- Where do I have room to grow?

Task 7 Our Response (30 minutes)

7A Think of the ideas on the sunshine wheel and the teaching on how to restore people's understanding of being in the image of God. **Choose** three important lessons or ideas on this biblical worldview for yourself. Then, **list** one specific thing for each that you will do as a result. **Name** the person you will invite to be your accountability partner.

Lesson or idea that is important for me	What I will do as a result	Accountability partner
1.		
2.		
3.		

7B Answer the following question for yourself:

How does what I have learned in this lesson add to my understanding of effective community development?

Task 8 Summary of Learning (15 minutes)

- 8A** In the large group, **make** a circle. In a short sentence, **call out** something valuable you learned from this lesson. We'll **hear** from anyone who wants to share.
- 8B** **Review** the achievement-based objectives for this lesson. What comments do you have about how well the group did in reaching the objectives? What suggestions do you have to improve this lesson in the future? We'll **hear** from up to three participants.
- 8C** **Pray** together and **celebrate** this learning, asking that all people—including you—will live with the full joy and awareness of being made in the image of God.

Task 9 Looking Ahead (5 minutes)

- 9A** In the next lesson...all you need is love. Why is love so hard?

Lesson 5 Advance Reading: How Can Christians Restore People's Understanding That They Are Made in the Image of God?

An essential ministry of the church and of Christians is to restore people's understanding that they are made in the image of God. So what must we do?

1. **Affirm the worth and value of all people.** Ephesians 2:10 says that "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do those good things which God has prepared for us to do." How can we do this?

Treat people with respect. Someone once said, "If we treat people as we find them, we will make them worse. If we treat them as they could become, we set them free to grow."

Resist and renounce all language and behavior that diminishes people. Refuse to participate in language that is racist, sexist, hateful of others, or incites violence against other people. Remember Paul's warning to "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

2. **Affirm each person's giftedness.** Each person has been gifted by God for various tasks, even though they may not recognize that. Many people believe they have very little to contribute to their own improvement or others', but we can help them to discover and use their gifts in the following ways:

Affirm the contributions people make even when these may be small; encourage people to be involved in activities.

Resist doing for others what they can do for themselves. In this way, one can avoid creating dependency

3. **Remind people that they are not powerless, even when it may seem that they are.** Because we are made in God's image we are not helpless pawns. We are able to act meaningfully in our own lives and make choices about how we will think, feel, and behave. Even when our circumstances are difficult and we cannot change them, we can still control how we think and feel about them.
4. Read James 2:1-7. **Remind people that their true value lies simply in being human, and not in the things they possess or their status in society.** Encourage this by treating all people with equality, permitting rich and poor alike to hold positions of leadership in the church and to participate equally in all decision making. Resist showing favoritism toward people just because they are rich and powerful.
5. **Affirm the dignity of everyone's work, even if the work is simple and ordinary.** God sees the work that people do and honors even the labor of housecleaning, if that work is done "for the Lord." Each person's work contributes to the whole. Do we pray only for those who have "important work," like politicians and doctors? Do we remember in our prayers the daily laborer and family cook?

6. Jesus said it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick (Matthew 9:12). Christians should **pay special attention to people who do not have much status in society, who are often overlooked and neglected, and offer them the dignity of attention.** Spend time with such people, inquire about their families, show a genuine interest in their personal stories and well-being, invite them to visit in your home, share a meal with them. Remember Jesus said, “The least is the greatest” (Luke 9:48).

Perhaps even more importantly, **allow such people to return the gift of hospitality to you.** “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” said Jesus (Acts 20:35). Allow the poor and the lowly the opportunity to give gifts that are recognized and appreciated.

7. **Help heal broken relationships with God.** A central component in a person’s self understanding concerns that person’s relationship with God. Someone who feels rejected by God will have a difficult time accepting self or others. And someone who feels unloved by God will have difficulty loving self or others. Someone who feels that God has abandoned them may not be motivated to act for positive change, and someone who feels guilty will suffer from shame.

At the center of the church’s mission is the joyful task of announcing to the world that “God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son, so whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16), that “while we were yet sinners, God sent his son” (Romans 5:8) and that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). God has reconciled us to himself.

The church has a powerful and particular ministry to people whose self esteem is injured because they do not know about God’s unconditional love for them. Knowledge of God’s love, forgiveness, and acceptance can be powerful energy for personal change and renewal.

Lesson 6: Love without Borders— The Healing Power of Inclusive Love

ESTIMATED TIME FOR THE LESSON:

4 hours, 50 minutes (not including breaks or Advance/Optional Readings)

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- ✓ Copy of this lesson for each participant
- ✓ Flip chart paper
- ✓ Markers
- ✓ Masking tape
- ✓ Bibles

ADVANCE READING:

Prior to participating in this lesson, **read** the article at the end of the lesson: "God's Inclusive Love for Israel and Other Nations."

As you read, **circle** the ideas that are *important* in light of your experience.

Note any questions the reading raises for you.

You will have an opportunity to **share** these ideas with others during Task 5.

OPTIONAL READING:

"Jesus as the New Beginning for Israel" article at the end of the lesson

Task 1 Warm-Up: Love Songs and Sayings (15 minutes)

- 1A** In groups of four, **list** as many songs and sayings about "love" as you can. You have exactly three minutes. Which group has the longest list? **Give** them a celebratory clap. **Sing** one of the love songs.

Call out the worldview(s) (the main messages) about love from these songs and sayings.

Task 2 Lesson Review: Objectives and Expectations (15 minutes)

- 2A** This lesson helps us deepen a biblical understanding of Christian mission and community development. We'll explore the Bible's message about God's radical inclusive love for all people and learn how that impacts our community work. **Listen** to the achievement-based objectives for this lesson. What are your questions?

Task 3 Introducing the Theme: Inclusive Love (30 minutes)

- 3A In your love-list groups, **describe** a personal story of when you have seen the healing power of love. We'll **hear** up to three stories in the large group. What strikes you as significant about the stories you have heard?
- 3B **Listen** to the following teaching. **Underline** what stands out as most important for you.

One recurring message of the Bible is that God is love, and God's love for his whole creation leads him to mighty actions in history that prove his love for us. Because God loves us, he longs for our salvation, for our freedom, for our renewal and wholeness. That is, God's love leads to *shalom*. The heart of the entire biblical story is found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—the most powerful and visible sign of God's love for us. Remember, God so loved the *world* that he gave his only son....

Another recurring message is that we, as people who have received God's love, are also to love all the things God loves. In fact, we learn from the Bible that if we do not love one another, we cannot truly love God. According to Jesus, such love must imitate his own love and is to be extended even to enemies and those who would do us harm.

There are many ways to speak about the various dimensions of the church's mission in the world: to serve the poor, provide education, teach the story of Jesus, speak prophetically to governments, minister to the needy. However, *all dimensions of mission are expressions of the two basic commands: to love God and to love one's neighbor*. For any mission activity to be legitimate, it must be motivated by deep love.

In a world torn apart by violent strife, abuse, neglect, hatred and racism, no message is more urgent than the message of the healing power of love. This is the message to be spoken and demonstrated by the church.

- 3C What did you underline as most important? We'll **hear** a sample.

Task 4 God's Story through a Biblical Text

(45 minutes)

- 4A** God's inclusive and healing love is demonstrated throughout the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament story deals mostly with God's love relationship to one nation: Israel. But God loves all people, not just Israel. **Read** to yourself the following two passages for some clues on God's attitude toward "the nations," or those outside Israel. **Underline** the clues you find.

*May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
that your way may be known upon earth,
your saving power among all nations.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.
Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.
The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, has blessed us.
May God continue to bless us;
let all the ends of the earth revere him.*

Psalms 67

*On that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the center of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border. It will be a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt; when they cry to the LORD because of oppressors, he will send them a Savior, and will defend and deliver them. The LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians; and the Egyptians will know the LORD on that day, and will worship with sacrifice and burnt-offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them. The LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing; they will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their supplications and heal them. On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage." *Isaiah 19:19-25**

- 4B** Turn to two people around you and **discuss** the following two questions:

- How would you describe God's attitude to "the nations" in ONE sentence?
- What did you discover in these readings that was new or unexpected?

We'll **hear** a sample of your answers.

Task 5 Insights on God's Story (60 minutes)

- 5A **Listen** to this summary of the advance reading, "God's Inclusive Love for Israel and Other Nations." **Put** a question mark beside points that need clarification. **Put** a checkmark beside points that agree with your conclusions about God's attitude to "the nations" from Task 4.

The Old Testament deals mainly with God's relationship to one nation: Israel. However, it is very important to understand God's attitude towards those who are outside of Israel, the other nations, because our attitude is to be patterned after God's attitude.

The following summary statements aim to clarify a long and complex biblical story about God, Israel and the nations.

1. One of the purposes of the Genesis creation story is to teach us that **God is not just the God of Israel, but of the whole creation and of all people.**
2. **God does not choose Israel for her own sake but for the sake of all the nations.** Israel is to become a "model people," a human "demonstration plot" where other nations can see the *shalom* life of a people who serve the true God and obey his commands.
3. **Because Israel is the "demonstration plot" and the instrument by which God will bless others, he performs mighty acts in history to protect this people, because his plan of redemption depends on them.** Whether they are under threat, enslaved, or forgetful of their mission or their special relationship with God, God acts to preserve his people so they can be his instrument for healing and renewing the whole earth.
4. The Old Testament vision is one in which Israel is faithful and obedient, shining like a light on a hill, so that **all the other nations of the earth are so attracted that they come to worship and obey God as well.** God's ultimate purpose is to bless the all people. That can happen only as they leave their false gods and turn away from injustice and violence.

5. Israel was a *missionary people*, specially appointed by God to be the instrument by which God's promises of blessing would be made real for all the nations of the earth. This is why God gave Israel a law and a land, why God sent the prophets to remind her of her calling, why God had such great expectations of Israel, why God wept over Israel and kept calling her back to her identity and vocation.

- 5B Turn to a partner you have not worked with before. **Discuss** what you **marked** with a question mark (needs more clarification for you) and with a check mark (agrees with your conclusions about God's attitude to the nations).
- 5C God's story of love for all people does not stop in the Old Testament, but continues marvelously into the New Testament! **Listen** to this brief teaching and **underline** what you find significant. We'll **hear** a sample.

God called Israel to be a blessing to the nations. As long as she loved and trusted God, and obeyed his commandments, Israel would be a *shalom* community that would be like a "demonstration plot" to the nations, attracting others to the worship of God.

The Old Testament story does not end on a happy note. Israel did not honor and obey God, but began to worship idols and to live unjustly like other nations. Instead of other nations becoming like Israel, Israel instead became like them. For this reason God punished Israel and sent them into exile (2 Kings 19, 25). But God also promised a new beginning for Israel: Jesus Christ.

Jesus represents the people of Israel (Matthew 1-3). He takes up their missionary task, to be a blessing to all people. It is important to notice that Jesus does not come with a nation-building agenda; he comes to gather to himself a messianic community of disciples committed to the kingdom way of life that he teaches and models. That community, which we call the church, is called to renewed trust in God, to faithful following of Jesus and to a way of life marked by radical love and obedience.

Jesus promises that we will be salt and light. He is the Light that shines in the darkness; the community of followers are called to continue shining that light. The church is really the new Israel, called by God in Jesus Christ to continue the mission that was entrusted to Israel, to be a people who receive blessings and promises for the sake of the whole world. The church of Jesus Christ is God's new "demonstration plot."

- 5D** The new beginning for Israel is Jesus. **Read** to yourself the following introduction to Jesus and the way of inclusive love.

Over and over, Jesus affirms the message that the way of the kingdom, by which people are to be saved, is the way of love: love for enemies, love for strangers, love that resists violence, love that expresses itself in servanthood, love that is willing to suffer and even die for the other. Jesus' own love was so strong and committed that he was willing to give up his life for others, including the very people who killed him.

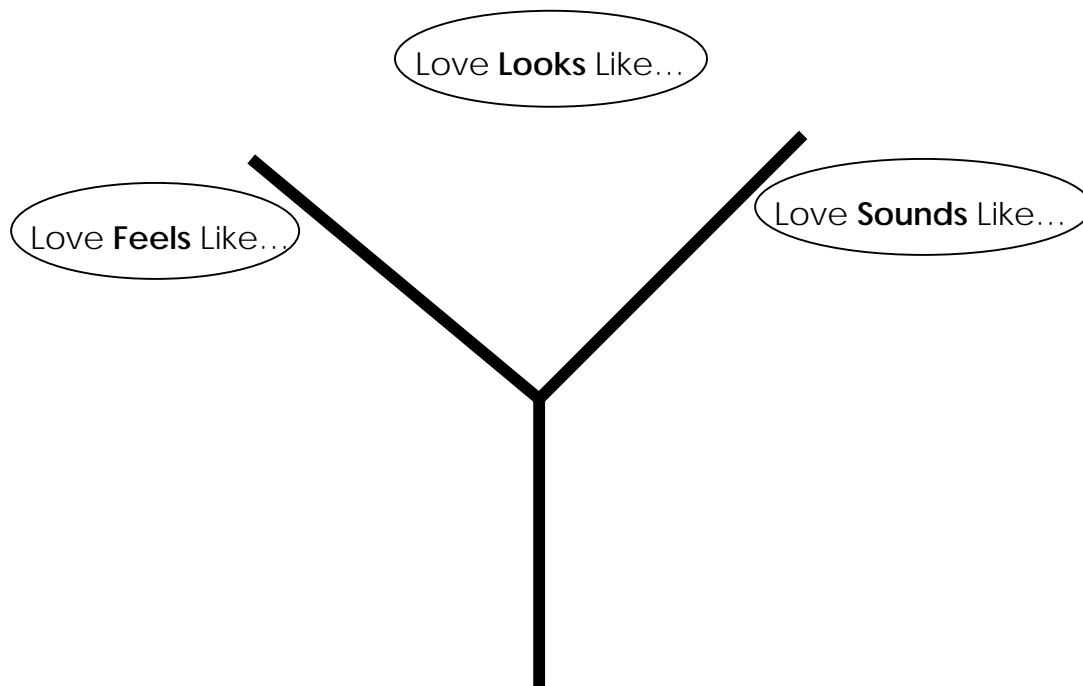
Jesus showed love for those who were often lacking in love. At the same time, Jesus rejected those who thought they could keep God's love for themselves and use it to justify remaining enemies of others.

Jesus said there were two commandments to follow: love God with our whole being and love our neighbor as ourselves. And he told us to go to all nations, teaching them to observe the very same things (Matthew 28:18-20).

- 5E** In groups of four, **create** a brief role play of an event where Jesus showed radical and inclusive love to others. You have five minutes. We'll **hear** each role play.
- (If you need examples, see Matthew 5:43-47, 8:1-4, 8:5-13, 12:15-21; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 4:18-30, 6:27-36; 10:25-37, 14:1-14.)

Task 6 Our Story: Applying the Insights (45 minutes)

- 6A** In the same groups, **think** about when you have seen the presence and love of God in other human beings. What does this inclusive love feel like, look like, sound like? **Complete** a Y chart and **post** it on the wall. **Walk** around the "love Ys" for a gallery tour.



6B Read the following principles about love. **Circle** the statement that is most challenging for you to apply in your life.

1. **Love is not simply a feeling; love is expressed in actions.** It can never be enough to *say* that I love my enemies (or my friends). For love to be real I must express it in actions that advance the well- being of the other(s).
2. **Love, as an *action*, often comes before love as a *feeling*.** I am called to act in love towards people, even if I do not have loving feelings towards them. If I wait until I have such feelings, I may wait a long time. However, I can act in love if I remember that Jesus loves them and calls me to do the same. Also, when I act in love toward someone, I may find that gradually my feelings toward them change as well. It is difficult to hate someone I pray for every day.
3. **To love someone does not mean I approve of everything they do.** Think about a mother who deeply loves her child, but strongly disapproves of behaviors the child does that may be wrong or harmful. In fact, the more I love people, the more strongly I want the best for them and the more vigorously I will want to challenge them

to live *shalom* lives. Likewise, while God loves me unconditionally, he does not love all the things I do; in fact, his love for me often leads him to correct me.

4. **Love is not easy.** To love another person requires an investment of time and energy. If I love my neighbor as Jesus loves me, I must be prepared to suffer for the sake of such love.
5. **It is my deep knowledge and conviction that I am deeply and unconditionally loved by God that gives me the strength and courage to love others, especially strangers, and even more especially my enemies.** I cannot expect that everyone will simply be able to love an enemy or to forgive someone who has harmed them in some way. I must first be very confident that I am loved. This gives me the strength and courage I need for radical neighbor love.

Task 7 Our Response

(45 minutes)

7A Listen to the following challenge:

Just as God called the Old Testament people of Israel to be his instrument for blessing all the nations of the earth, so now he calls the church to exactly the same mission. He has given us the example of Jesus and the powerful gift of the Holy Spirit to equip us for this task.

- 7B** How do we take up this challenge? On your own, **think** of two people who love you. **List** things they do to demonstrate their love. Then **think** of two people in your life who are difficult to love. Using Jesus' examples, the look like/sound like/feel like chart, and the love principles, **list** what you can do to demonstrate your love for them.

	I can demonstrate my love by...
People who love me	
People difficult for me to love	

7C The early church celebrated Jesus’ teaching about love and passed it on from one generation to the next.¹ The church strived to live out a biblical worldview of love. Is your church (or your community ministry) like a light on a hill, attracting people to God because of the of love in and to your community? **Think** about your church or your community work and answer the following questions. Then **share** your answers with at least one other person.

Who are the “other nations”—the excluded ones—in my church or in my community?	
How is my church or community work reaching out to these excluded people with God’s love?	
What are two actions I can take in my church or community work to demonstrate God’s love in new ways to those who are excluded?	
Love isn’t easy. What is the cost (the difficulty) of reaching out to the excluded in these new ways?	

¹ Some New Testament passages that teach about love are: Romans 12:9-21, 1 Corinthians 13, Colossians 1:15-20, 1 John 3:11-24, 4:7-21.

<i>Challenge: Will I use Jesus' example and the powerful gift of the Holy Spirit to love even when it is tough?</i>	
---	--

7D Answer the following question for yourself:

How does what I have learned in this lesson add to my understanding of effective community development?

Task 8 Summary of Learning (30 minutes)

8A The lessons of love are everywhere—songs, sayings, poems, Scripture passages, stories about Jesus, stories of our own. The biblical worldview of love is reflected well in the following passage. **Read** it aloud, one sentence per person.

Dear friends,

Let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us....

We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God" and hate their brothers and sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters.

1 John 4:7-12, 19-21

8B **Review** the achievement-based objectives for this lesson. What are your comments? We'll **hear** from up to three participants.

8C **Stand** in a circle. **Call out** one thing that challenged you most during this lesson. **Pray** together, asking for a deep sense of God's love in our own lives and for the Holy Spirit to equip us to love others. **Sing** a Christian love song known by most participants.

Task 9 Looking Ahead (5 minutes)

9A What does the Bible have to say about wealth, poverty, and justice—and what does it mean practically for my community work?

Lesson 6 Advance Reading: God's Inclusive Love for Israel and Other Nations

Introduction

God, the creator of all, is also the lover of all. God's love crosses all borders. All people, whether rich or poor, whether male or female, whether from the developed world or the developing world, are cherished and loved by God.

The Old Testament deals mainly with God's relationship to one nation: Israel. But it is very important to understand God's attitude towards those who are outside of Israel—the other nations—because our attitude is to be patterned after God's attitude. If we believe that God's love is partisan—for Israel only—and that God's will is to destroy his enemies, then we may act like this as well and justify a kind of nationalist ideology. If we believe God loves all nations and his ultimate purpose is to bless them, then that will be our hopeful and positive vision too.

God's Love for Israel and the Nations

The history of God's dealing with Israel and the nations is long and complex. There are times when it seems that the Bible is very confusing about this. The following summary statements can help make things more clear.

1. One of the purposes of the Genesis creation story is to teach us that **God is not just the God of Israel, but of the whole creation and of all people**. Since the Old Testament story deals mainly with God's relationship to one nation, Israel, it is easy to overlook the fact that God's concern is for all the nations. Genesis corrects that oversight. God's *shalom* intentions are for all people.

2. Genesis 3-11 describes the spiraling of sin and evil into chaos. God's response is to begin a "new creation," the creation of a new people, a special nation through whom God will bless the whole world. **God does not choose Israel for her own sake but for the sake of all the nations.**

Israel is to become a “model people,” a human “demonstration plot” where other nations can see the *shalom* life of a people who serve the true God and obey his commands. God’s choosing of Israel does not imply his rejection of everyone else, but rather demonstrates the way in which God will bless others.

3. Because Israel is the “demonstration plot” and the instrument by which God will bless others, he performs mighty acts in history to protect this people, because his plan of redemption depends on them. When they are under threat, God protects them, as when they are attacked by their enemies. When they are enslaved, God liberates them, as when they were in Egypt. When they forget their mission, God punishes them, as the book of Jonah teaches. When they forget their special relationship with God and act like the other nations, God judges them, even to the point of sending them into exile. Through all these actions, God preserves this people so they can be his instrument for healing and renewing the whole earth.

4. The Old Testament vision is one in which Israel is faithful and obedient, shining like a light on a hill, so that all the other nations of the earth are so attracted they come to worship and obey God as well. Then they will bring their gifts and treasures to God as a holy offering. But as long as the nations resist God’s gracious invitation and reject his people Israel, God will punish the nations. This is not because God hates them, but because God loves them. God’s ultimate purpose is to bless the nations. That can happen only as they leave their false gods and turn away from injustice and violence.

5. From all this it is clear that Israel was a *missionary people*, specially appointed by God to be the instrument by which God’s promises of blessing would be made real for all the nations of the earth. This is why God gave Israel a law and a land, why God sent the prophets to remind her of her calling, why God had such great expectations of Israel, why God wept over Israel and why he kept calling her back to her identity and vocation.

Note: _

These passages give insight on God’s inclusive love for “the nations”:

Genesis 12:1-3

Psalms 2

Psalms 46:10

Psalms 67

Psalms 96

Isaiah 2:1-5

Isaiah 19:19-25

Isaiah 56:1-8

Isaiah 60

Lesson 6 Optional Reading: Jesus as the New Beginning for Israel

God's Inclusive Love in the Old and New Testaments

God loves all people, not just Israel. This is made especially clear in some powerful stories from both the Old and New Testaments.

For example, the stories of Rahab in Joshua 2, the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:7-24, and Naaman the Syrian in 2 Kings 5 are vivid Old Testament examples of how God shows grace to people outside Israel.

God called Israel to be a blessing to the nations. As long as she loved and trusted God and obeyed his commandments, Israel would be a *shalom* community like a “demonstration plot” to the nations, attracting others to the worship of God. The Old Testament story does not end on a happy note. Israel did not honor and obey God but began to worship idols and to live unjustly like other nations. Instead of other nations becoming like Israel, Israel became like them. For this reason God punished Israel and sent them into exile (2 Kings 19, 25).

Compare Luke 4:18,19 with Isaiah 61:1,2. How are these passages different? Why did Jesus make reference to the Widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian?

But God also promised a new beginning for Israel because he never abandoned his plans for the salvation of Israel and all the nations. The new beginning for Israel was Jesus. He represented the whole nation of Israel (Matthew 1-3). He took up their missionary task, to be a blessing to all people. He came to renew Israel for the sake of blessing the nations.

In the New Testament, Jesus was a living example of God's love. Through both teaching and example, Jesus demonstrated radical and inclusive love to all he encountered. The early church celebrated the teachings of Jesus about love and passed them on from one generation to the next.

Jesus, the New Beginning

In Luke 4, Jesus made this aspect of his task—to renew Israel for the sake of blessing the nations—especially clear. He took the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and read from it about the coming of the Year of Jubilee. He then said that this hopeful prophesy was fulfilled in him.

The people were at first amazed, then angered. Why did they become angry? To understand the people's reaction, realize that the people were expecting a Messiah who would win great battles against their political enemies, the Romans. They wanted a Messiah who would be a warrior, like David, who would deliver his people from military and political oppression, one who would affirm the “special” status of Israel before God

and take vengeance on their enemies. But notice: when Jesus read Isaiah 61, he omitted the reference to the “year of vengeance.” He reminded Israel of times when God bypassed Israel and served citizens of other nations, even an enemy like the Syrian general, Naaman. The people were infuriated with Jesus because he was reminding them that God loved others outside of Israel. Also, he was teaching them that the Messiah would not bring military victory but a renewal of their missionary vocation to the nations.

The Way of the Kingdom as the Way of Love

Jesus reaffirmed this message over and over again in his ministry: the way of the kingdom, by which people are to be saved, is not the way of war and violence, of fighting fire with fire. It is the way of love: love for enemies, love for strangers, love that resists violence, love that expresses itself in servanthood, love that is willing to suffer and even die for the other. Jesus’ own love was so strong and committed that he was willing to give up his life for others, including the very people who killed him. He said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Jesus showed love especially for those who were often lacking in love. Lepers who were exiled from the community were healed so they could be welcomed. The woman caught in adultery, prostitutes, and tax collectors were people marginalized in their own society; but Jesus embraced them and forgave their sin. Children who were thought to be simply a nuisance were blessed, and Jesus said that people needed to become like children to be received into the kingdom (Mark 10:15). Jesus did not love these people because they were more worthy of his love, but because his love for them gave them a renewed sense of worth.

At the same time, as seen in Luke 4 and in encounters with the Pharisees, Jesus rejected those who thought they could keep God’s love for themselves and use it to justify remaining enemies of others.

Unconditional Love and the Mission of the Church

Jesus was tempted by others to seize political and military strength and to be a king in the usual human/historical way of conquest by might. He was tempted by Satan, by the crowds that followed him, and even by his own disciple, Peter. But this way leads to violence and bloodshed and does not truly restore people to *shalom*. Therefore, Jesus rejected being an ordinary king. He came instead to serve others and to reconcile enemies. And he did this through unconditional love of others.

This is the mission Jesus gives to his church. He told us there were two commandments to follow: love God with our whole being and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). And he told us to go to all the nations, teaching them to observe the very same things (Matthew 28:18-20).

Lesson 7: Economic Well-being— Wealth, Poverty, and Justice

ESTIMATED TIME FOR THE LESSON:

7 hours, 50 minutes* (not including breaks or Advance Reading)

**Note: This lesson is designed for two sessions. (A natural division of content is Old Testament/New Testament.) Some tasks are marked “optional” and can be omitted or designated for another opportunity.*

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- ✓ Copy of this lesson for each participant
- ✓ Flip chart paper
- ✓ Markers
- ✓ Masking tape
- ✓ Post-it notes
- ✓ “Pieces of the Exodus Story” task sheet (at the end of this lesson), cut apart and mixed up
- ✓ Bibles

OPTIONAL READING:

“Jesus, the Manna of Life—a Biblical Reflection” article at the end of the lesson

Task 1 Warm-Up: Storytelling (15 minutes)

- 1A Let’s tell a new story together. **Sit** in a circle. **Choose** a person to begin. The first person **says** one word to begin the story, a second person **adds** the next word, a third person **adds** the next word and so on. Each person says only ONE word, making sure it links to the word before. Soon we will have sentences and then a story!

Task 2 Lesson Review: Objectives and Expectations (15 min.)

- 2A **Listen** to this introduction:

This lesson helps us deepen a biblical understanding of Christian mission and community development. We’ll explore the Bible’s teaching about economic well-being related to wealth, poverty, and justice. We’ll look at the whole Bible’s story—from creation, to exodus, to law, to prophets, to Jesus, to the early

church. Each act of the story adds to what has come before, just as our story did in the warm-up.

- 2B** **Listen** to the achievement-based objectives for this lesson. **Write** a check mark beside the part of the biblical story you are most familiar with. **Write** a question mark (?) beside the part of the biblical story you are least familiar with. What are your questions?

Task 3 **Introducing the Theme: Economic Well-being** (15 min.)

- 3A** **Listen** to the following and **mark** an exclamation point by anything that is surprising to you.

In the beginning, when God made the heavens and the earth, there were no poor. God intended, as the human community expanded and filled the earth and exercised faithful stewardship over it, that all people and the whole creation would participate in his blessing.

The word “economics” comes from the Greek word *oikos*, which literally means “household.” The Bible teaches that the world in which we live as a global human community is really God’s “household,” a place where God intends for us all to be “at home.” In our “home” we are all intended to have enough food, to be part of secure families and safe communities, to enjoy the splendors of God’s world.

“Economics” is therefore not just about money. In its broadest sense it is about all the arrangements and decisions we make that affect the well-being of people everywhere.

The Bible has much to say about those arrangements and decisions. These reflections are in the Old Testament—including the creation story, the exodus story, the books of laws and the prophets—and in the New Testament through the teachings of Jesus and the leaders of the early church.

God takes a deep interest in the economic well-being of all his creatures. God takes a special interest in the poor and demands justice on their behalf.

- 3B **Turn** to your neighbor and **share** what you marked as surprising and why. We'll **hear** a sample.

Task 4 Learning from the Creation Story (30 minutes)

- 4A **Listen** to the following introduction to the **creation** and economic well-being.

We know from the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 that God made the world and declared it "very good." It was a world of great abundance in which the needs of all God's creatures were provided. Four rivers soaked Eden's rich soil so that grains and vegetables and fruits could grow and be harvested; each plant produced seeds after its own kind so that the cycles of growth and harvest could be sustained.

- 4B As someone **reads** Psalm 104 aloud, **circle** the key words or ideas that describe how God abundantly provides for all.

Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great.

You are clothed with honor and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment.

You stretch out the heavens like a tent, you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers.

You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken. You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. At your rebuke they flee; at the sound of your thunder they take to flight. They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys to the place that you appointed for them. You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth.

You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart.

The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. In them the birds build their nests; the stork has its home in the fir trees. The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the badgers.

You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting.

You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out. The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. When the sun rises, they withdraw and lie down in their dens.

People go out to their work and to their labor until the evening.

O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works—who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD.

Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more.

Bless the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD!

—Psalm 104

4C **Turn** to a new partner and **share** what you circled to show how God provides. Together, **sketch** on chart paper a picture to illustrate God's beautiful intentions of abundance where no one is poor or hungry. **Post** your pictures on the wall.

4D **Discuss** what lessons there are in the creation story and Psalm 104 about economic well-being. We'll **hear** a sample.

Task 5 Learning from the Exodus Story (60 min.)

- 5A **Listen** to the following teaching about the **exodus story** of the Old Testament and its connection to economic well-being.

Next to the creation story, the exodus event is the most important mighty act of God in the whole Old Testament. It forms the basis for Israel's religious belief and social practice. Old Testament writers often remind Israel of God's mighty deliverance in order to call them to radical neighbor love and obedience to God. God says to the people of Israel:

- God loved you, so you must love others.
- God delivered you, so you must seek the deliverance of others.
- You know what it was like to be an oppressed slave people, so do not oppress anyone.
- You know what it was like to be poor, so don't impoverish others.

- 5B **Refresh** your memory of the exodus story. **Take** one of the 13 strips of paper from the "Pieces of the Exodus Story" task sheet. (If you don't receive one, join someone who has a strip.) The story is mixed up. **Put** it in order by organizing yourselves with your strips into a line. **Read** the story from start to finish, each person reading their strip.
- 5C With two others, **list** on chart paper the lessons the exodus story teaches about economic well-being. **Post** them on the wall.
- 5D **Read** silently the following four key lessons from the exodus story that are important to the Bible's overall story.

1. **God is a God who liberates the oppressed.** God does not favor the rich and powerful, nor does he support them in their oppression and exploitation of the poor. Rather, God judges and punishes the wealthy nation of Egypt because it exploits and oppresses God's people. And God liberates his slave people and responds to the cries of the needy.

2. **God's salvation of Israel is *not* accomplished through military might.** Moses, God's servant, does not have any weapons except his confidence in the word of the Lord. In fact, when Moses takes matters into his own hands as a young man by killing an Egyptian taskmaster, he is exiled for 40 years. Only when he trusts in the power of God, and not the power of an army, is he able to liberate the people. The whole power of liberation rests in God. That means the things God values most, such as compassion, justice, and caring for the poor are the things that matter most.
3. **Israel is not called simply to leave the *land* of Egypt, but to leave the *ways* of Egypt.** Egypt is not only a geographic place; it is a way of life and a way of thinking (ideology/worldview) that must be rejected. Egypt represents scarcity, violence, genocide, and oppression. We may call it the *economy of death*. This shalom-violating ideology even interferes with the true worship of God; Moses tells Pharaoh the people must be set free so they can go to the wilderness to worship God. The commandments God gives Israel on Sinai are meant to form a society, based on God-love and neighbor-love, that is the exact opposite of Egypt. Later on when the prophets condemn the people of Israel, it is because they have become just like Egypt—unjust, oppressive, and materialistic.
4. **The manna story is a model for Sabbath rest, for trusting in God's provision and for not hoarding possessions.** When God liberates Israel from oppression in Egypt, he gives them a very powerful object lesson about how life with God will be much better than life under Pharaoh. Under Pharaoh's oppression the people groan in their labor and still they remain poor and oppressed. In the wonderful story of God's provision of manna in the wilderness the people are graciously provided their daily bread without having to worry about where the next meal will come from. They need not hoard for tomorrow—if they do, the food turns rotten. They need only trust God's gracious provision. Every day each person has just enough for his or her daily need. On the sixth day, God even provides double so Israel can rest on the Sabbath day. The total economic control and oppression under Pharaoh is undone by God's provision. How different God is from the Pharaoh! The wilderness of scarcity is transformed into a place of abundance.

5E Examine the lessons you listed in Task 5C and the four lessons in Task 5D. **Reflect** on your own community work and answer two questions:

- What is the most relevant lesson for you from the exodus story that will impact your community work?

- What action steps can you take to ensure that this lesson is put into practice?

5F **Share** your conclusions with a partner you have not worked with before. We'll **hear** a sample.

Task 6 Learning from Old Testament Law (60 min.)

6A **Listen** to a brief introduction of how **Old Testament law** about economic well-being continues from the exodus story.²

The Sabbath pattern, the confident trust in God's gracious provision, the liberation from anxiety and fear of scarcity—these are established in the manna story and continue in the Old Testament laws about economic life.

6B *(optional)* **Read** the following summary of an important passage of Old Testament law about economic life. As you read, **underline** what you find most significant.

In Leviticus 25, the law commands two special observances: the Sabbath Year (verses 1-7) and the Year of Jubilee (verses 8-54). They extend the Sabbath day of rest into wider and wider cultural patterns intended to distribute economic justice to the whole community, especially to the poor.

The passage explains that the Sabbath Year is a year of rest for the land. Notice how God includes the non-human creation in his saving grace. It is also a year of rest for people, for they do not need to till the ground or sow crops. They are permitted to eat what the land provides. The produce is to be shared also with the temporary residents, the passersby, strangers and sojourners.

The Jubilee Year was to be observed at the conclusion of seven cycles of Sabbath years, in the 50th year. In this year dispossessed families reclaimed their land, indentured slaves were to be released, and debts were forgiven (Deuteronomy 15). The purpose of these laws is the protection of people from *structural* disadvantages (such as loss of land or indentured slavery) that would trap them in their poverty and make it impossible to start over. Jubilee offers a *new beginning*.

² Examples of Old Testament laws about the poor and their care include: Exodus 23:1-10; Leviticus 25; Deuteronomy 15:1-15, 24:17-22, 26:12-15.

The passage closes with the reminder of the reason for these laws: "For to me [God] the people of Israel are my servants: they are my servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt" (v. 55).

6C *(optional)* **Share** what you found most significant and why. What lessons about economic well-being do you learn from this teaching? **Call out** your ideas.

6D **Read** to yourself Deuteronomy 15:1-11 (see next page). It's a passage about laws in the Sabbatical Year.

[1] At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts. [2] This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel the loan he has made to his fellow Israelite. He shall not require payment from his fellow Israelite or brother, because the Lord's time for canceling debts has been proclaimed. [3] You may require payment from a foreigner, but you must cancel any debt your brother owes you. [4] However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, [5] if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today. [6] For the Lord your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you.

[7] If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. [8] Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs. [9] Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward your needy brother and give him nothing. He may then appeal to the Lord against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. [10] Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.

[11] There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

6E **Divide** into groups of four. **Analyze** this passage using the following questions. We'll **hear** a sample of your responses.

- Verse 4 says, "...there should be no poor among you..." while verse 11 says, "...there will always be poor people in the land...." How do you account for this difference?
- Sometimes people quote verse 11 as justification for accepting poverty as a God-given situation they should not try to change. Based on this passage, how would you respond to that kind of thinking?

6F With your group, **create** a short role play that demonstrates how these laws would impact the poor in your community today. You have five minutes. **Perform** your role play for the large group.

Task 7 Learning from the Prophets (45 min.)

7A **Listen** to the following teaching about the **prophets** and their connection to economic well-being.

God called Israel to be a chosen people, specially set apart to be a "demonstration plot" of shalom, bearing witness among the nations of how God blesses those who keep his commandments. This was Israel's mission. The Old Testament tells the long, sad story of God's struggle for Israel's soul—time and time again Israel chooses other gods and other ways of life. Ultimately God judges Israel by allowing other nations to conquer the people and take them into exile.

The Old Testament prophets warned Israel about the judgment that was coming. They urged Israel to repent and be faithful. One of the major sins the prophets pointed to in Israel was that of economic injustice, reminding us of how critical this is to God's purposes.³

Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

³ Examples of prophetic passages that speak of God's passion for economic justice include: Isaiah 1:10-23, 10:1-4, 58; Amos 2:6-8, 5:11-24; Micah 2:1-5, 6:6-16.

"The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen.

Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

"Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her— but now murderers! Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them. — Isaiah 1:10-23

7B (optional) **Create** a new group of three and **discuss** the following questions:

- What common things do you see between Isaiah's time and our time?
- Where might such prophetic words be needed today in your community, your country, your world?

7C **Imagine** your group of three has the opportunity to deliver a prophetic message in our time. In the spirit of the lessons from the creation story, the exodus story, and the Old Testament law, **write** a short paragraph with a prophetic message for your

communities. You have about 10 minutes to write. **Stand** and **proclaim** your message! We'll **hear** from each group.

Task 8 Old Testament Summary (30 min.)

- 8A **Listen** to the following summary of the messages from the creation story, the exodus, and the law and the prophets in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament teaches consistently that in his deep concern for the economic well-being of his people, God instituted laws by which their common life was to be governed. The care of the poor is not simply left up to people's charity or compassion, but is written into God's own laws. It is therefore made a matter of justice and salvation. Even worship is unacceptable to God if there is no economic justice. The life of *shalom* that God intends for his people, and through them for the whole creation, includes economic well-being as one of its defining features.

- 8B In groups of four, **compose** a song that captures what you see as the essence of the learning about economic well-being from the Old Testament. You have six minutes to compose it. **Perform** your song.

Task 9 Learning from the Life of Jesus (60 min.)

- 9A **Listen** to this introduction about Jesus and New Testament teaching and its connection to God's intentions for economic well-being.

The New Testament continues the message of God's interest in economic *shalom* and concern for the poor. As the prophets remind us, one of the reasons for God's judgment of Israel was because she abandoned God's principles for economic life. Israel forgot what it meant to be the special "demonstration plot" of God, planted among the nations for their healing.

The New Testament tells the story of Jesus and how he came to renew the people of God and their mission to the nations. Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus planted seeds and erected sign posts of the *shalom* kingdom of God, which he both announced and embodied. An important feature of Jesus'

kingdom message was his concern for a renewed economic life.

- 9B Brainstorm** scenes, stories, and sayings of or about Jesus that show Jesus was concerned about poverty, wealth, and economic justice. **Write** your ideas on post-it notes and **post** them on the wall. **Stand** and **look** at all the ideas. **Analyze** what common themes you notice.
- 9C Read** to yourself this teaching about how Jesus expressed his concern for renewed economic life. **Mark** a star (*) by any ideas that are new to your brainstormed list.

1. **Jesus lived among the poor and identified with them.** He freely gave up the opportunity to make a decent living as a carpenter for the sake of his ministry. While he traveled with his disciples he depended on the generosity of others. He once said that the son of man has no place to lay his head (Matthew 8:20). This conveys that Jesus did not consider the pursuit of wealth to be very important. (Read 2 Corinthians 8:8-9:...though he was rich, for your sakes he became poor....)
2. **Jesus taught a childlike dependency on the providence of God.** (Read Matthew 6:25-34: ...don't worry about what will we eat or what will we drink....)
3. **He included the poor in his ministry.** (Read Luke: 7:18-23....the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them....)
4. **He challenged the wealthy not to trust in their riches for salvation.** (Read Luke 18:18-30....Jesus told the rich ruler to sell all he owned and distribute the money to the poor, and he would have treasure in heaven; then he was to come and follow Jesus....)
5. **He taught that faithful observance of Old Testament laws about restitution could bring about salvation.** (Read Luke 19:1-10.... Zacchaeus said he would give half his possessions to the poor and follow the law of Exodus 22:1-2 and 2 Samuel 12:6 by paying back four times as much to those he cheated. As a result, Jesus said, today salvation came to this house....)
6. **Jesus taught that people's regard for the poor was a measure of their regard for him.** (Read Matthew 25: 31-46....just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me....)

7. **Jesus warned against ignoring the poor.** (Read Luke 16:19-31....In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Abraham tells the rich man that if his five living brothers did not listen to Moses and the prophets, they wouldn't be convinced not to ignore the poor even if someone rose from the dead....)
8. **Jesus defended the cause of the poor widow.** (Read Mark 12:41-43....This passage is usually interpreted as if Jesus commended the widow for giving up her last coins to the temple treasury. Many sermons have urged people to give money to the church just as she did. But the context in the surrounding verses—where Jesus denounced the temple leaders for devouring widows' houses and warned that the temple stones would be thrown down—may suggest a different meaning....)

Call out which items you marked with a star (*).

9D Turn to a partner and **discuss** the following two questions. We'll **hear** a sample of your practical ideas on how to strengthen your work to bring it closer to Jesus' example.

- In what ways does your community work already model Jesus' example of a concern for renewed economic life?
- What practical ideas do you have on how to strengthen your community work and bring it closer to Jesus' example?

9E *(optional)* **Listen** to this teaching of how Jesus transforms lives and places of scarcity into lives and places of abundance—and calls the Christian community to do the same.

If Israel lived in trusting confidence of God's gracious provision and if Israel's economic life was a model of Sabbath rest and Jubilee shalom, then Israel would be a sign of abundance in the world where sin had turned God's creation into a place of scarcity. But Israel did not do that.

Jesus did. Jesus is a sign of God's abundant provision by which he transforms places and lives of scarcity into places and lives of abundance. We see this in many stories. For example, when the wine runs out at a wedding in Cana, Jesus turns water into abundant wine.

One of the clearest signs of this is in John 6, the story of Jesus feeding the hungry multitudes. Just like Israel of old (the people wandering in the wilderness in the exodus story), the crowds are hungry and in a place of scarcity. The disciples think there could never be enough to feed so large a crowd. But with just a few fish and loaves, Jesus feeds them all with plenty left over.

And then Jesus teaches them that he is the Bread of Life—provided by the same God who provided manna in the desert. He is the one who finally and fully establishes God’s abundance in the midst of scarcity. And he invites people to participate deeply in his life, so that they will never hunger again.

He teaches that we are to eat of his body—by which he means we are to join ourselves to his life, trust his grace, follow his example, embrace his kingdom teaching. Then his abundant life will flow through us and into the world.

The gracious provision of God in the wilderness now comes about by Jesus’ own ministry. And Jesus calls together a community of people, the church, to participate in his life and his death—symbolized by the eucharistic meal. He calls the church to be a sign of God’s intentions for economic life and to transform lives and places of scarcity into lives and places of abundance.

- 9F *(optional)* What people in your context are “in the wilderness”? How is your community work a sign of God’s gracious provision? **Call out** your ideas.

Task 10 Learning from the New Testament Church (45 min.)

- 10A **Listen** to this introduction about the New Testament church and economic life.

The early church took Jesus’ teachings about economic life very seriously. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection they had an abundant experience of God’s love. This experience led to transformed economic relationships of sharing, generosity, and peace.

- 10B Reflect** on your own church. In what ways does your church already demonstrate the faithful practice of economic justice and transformed economic relationships? **Draw** a picture—using images, symbols, scenes etc.—to illustrate. We'll **see** a sample.
- 10C** Let's look at an example of how the early church put into practice biblical teaching about God's desires for economic shalom.⁴ **Listen** to the following passage from Acts—and then to the quotation from the writing of the ancient philosopher Aristides, as he described the character of the early church.

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

—Acts 4:32-37

Aristides described the early church this way:

They walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them, and they love one another. They despise not the widow, and grieve not the orphan. He that has distributes liberally to the one who has not. If they see a stranger they bring him under their roof, and rejoice over him as if he were their own brother: for they call each other brothers and sisters, not after the flesh, but after the spirit and in God; but when one of their poor passes away from the world, and any of them see him, then he provides for his burial according to his ability; and if they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs, and if it is possible that he may be delivered, they deliver him. And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and they

⁴ Other examples include Acts 5:1-11, 6:1-7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15.

have not an abundance of necessities, they fast for two or three days so that they might supply the needy with necessary food.

10D Turn to your neighbor. What principles about economic shalom (the way God intends things) were being practiced in the early church? **Compare** this behavior to your church's actions. What is the same? What is different?

10E (optional) Like our own churches, the early church was not perfect in its practice of faith, as any New Testament letter to the churches shows! **Read** to yourself the following example.

The church in Jerusalem was experiencing hardship and needed assistance from other Christians elsewhere. The church in Corinth had pledged an offering but had not fulfilled its commitments, while the poor church in Macedonia had given much, even though they were financially poor. Paul used their example to motivate the Christians in Corinth to be generous.

The story is in 2 Corinthians 8: 1-15. (see next page)

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."

10F (optional) **Imagine** that members of the early church in Macedonia and in Corinth came to visit your church. What key messages would they share with your church about economic well-being? **Create** a conversation they would have with your church leaders.

10G **Reflect** on your own. What is one action your church could take to bring it closer to God's vision for economic well-being?

What could my church do to bring it closer to God's vision for economic well-being?

10H (optional) Teachings about economic life in the New Testament sometimes come from surprising places! Consider Paul's teaching on the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. **Read** the following:

One of the most powerful signs of the unity of believers with Christ and with one another is their sharing in the meal of the Lord's Supper: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." But it seems the unity of the one body was not being observed very well in the church at Corinth,

because some were eating too much, even becoming drunk, while others had too little and remained hungry. At the meal which ought to have been the most profound sign of their unity and equality in Christ, there was serious economic injustice. This caused the apostle Paul to give them a stern warning about their practices at the Lord's Supper: "All who eat and drink without discerning the Lord's body eat and drink judgment against themselves." What does Paul mean by discerning the body? We must take care not to spiritualize this, as if discerning the body meant simply discovering the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine. The body to be discerned is the body of believers who have fellowship with Christ and one another.

Fellowship in that one body (the church) implies responsibility for one another, sharing of goods, and provision for needs, weeping with those who weep, rejoicing with those who rejoice. Those who eat and drink to excess while others in the body of Christ go hungry and thirsty, eat and drink judgment against themselves. They defile the Lord's Supper.

Ron Sider, a Christian who has written much on this subject, has said "As long as any Christian anywhere in the world is hungry, the Eucharistic celebration of all Christians everywhere in the world is imperfect."

- 10I** (*optional*) **Use** your body to demonstrate your response to this teaching about economic life and the Lord's Supper. **Stand** if you agree whole-heartedly. **Sit** if you disagree. **Half-stand** if you are not sure.

Task 11 Putting It All Together

(30 min.)

- 11A Listen** to a summary of this lesson.

Throughout the biblical story we constantly encounter a God who cares deeply about the well-being of his creation. God does not concern himself simply with the well-being of our hearts, but of our whole being, including our economic lives. God provides an abundant creation for all to enjoy, liberates slaves from oppression, utters commandments for ordering a just society, sends his own son to be the embodiment of abundant life made possible by the gift of his life and sends the Holy Spirit to empower the church to be a community that models the economic shalom of the kingdom of God. In our world, where many different ideologies compete for the loyalty of nations, the church has a unique and powerful story to

tell—the only story which reveals God who is the divine economist, the one to whom all the nations of the earth belong, the one who is restoring all things, whose kingdom will come and whose will shall be done.

What do you have to add? **Call out** your ideas.

11B Divide into teams of about five people each. Each team will **create** a two-column chart by writing letters A-M down the left side and the letters N-Z down the middle. When the facilitator calls, “Start!,” **write** next to each letter a word from this lesson that corresponds to it. For example, for the letter C you could write “creation.” Be especially creative for X, Y, and Z! **Post** your charts on the wall for a fun review.

11C (optional) Draw a picture that illustrates how your community work looks now versus how it might look if the teaching about economic well-being was practiced. **Post** your pictures on the wall.

Task 12 Applying the Learning (45 min.)

12A On your own, **reflect** on the learning from this lesson. What made the most impact on you from each of the key Scriptural sections? Use key words or short sentences to **note** these ideas below. Then **list** practical things you can do to apply this learning in your community work.

When you are finished, **share** your ideas with a partner. We’ll **hear** a sample in the large group.

Scripture section	Most impact on you	Practical ideas for applying the learning
Creation Story		
Exodus Story		

Old Testament Law		
Prophets		
Jesus' Life and Teaching		
New Testament Church		

12B Answer the following question for yourself:

<p>How does what I have learned in this lesson add to my understanding of effective community development?</p>
--

Task 13 Summary and Celebration (20 min.)

13A In the large group, **make** a circle. In a short sentence, **call out** something valuable you learned from this lesson. We'll **hear** from anyone who wants to share.

- 13B Review** the achievement-based objectives for this lesson. What comments do you have about how well the group did in reaching the objectives? We'll **hear** a sample.
- 13C Pray** together and **celebrate** this learning, asking that God would give the courage and generosity to live out God's passion for the poor and for economic well-being in our world.
- 13D Sing** the following song to a tune you know (try "How Lovely Is Your Dwelling" from Psalter Hymnal #243), or **read** the powerful words aloud together.

Inspired by Love and Anger

Inspired by love and anger, disturbed by need and pain,
Informed of God's own bias, we ask him once again:
How long must some folk suffer? How long can few folk mind?
How long dare vain self interest, turn prayer and pity blind?

From those forever victims of heartless human greed
Their cruel plight composes a litany of need:
Where are the fruits of justice? Where are the signs of peace?
When is the day when prisoners and dreams find their release?

From those forever shackled to what their wealth can buy,
The fear of lost advantage provokes the bitter cry,
"Don't query our position! Don't criticize our wealth!
Don't mention those exploited by politics and stealth!"

To God, who through the prophets, proclaimed a different age,
We offer earth's indifference, its agony and rage.
When will the wronged be righted? When will the Kingdom come?
When will the world be generous to all instead of some?

God asks, "Who will go for me? Who will extend my reach?
And who, when few will listen, will prophesy and preach?
And who, when few bid welcome, will offer all they know?
And who, when few dare follow, will walk the road I show?"

Amused in someone's kitchen, asleep in someone's boat,
Attuned to what the ancients exposed, proclaimed and wrote
A savior without safety, a tradesman without tools,
Has come to tip the balance with fishermen and fools.

—John Bell and Graham Maule
Iona Community, Scotland

Lesson 7 Optional Reading: Jesus, the Manna of Life: A Biblical Reflection

The story of Jesus feeding 5,000 people is a familiar one. Who would not be amazed by this miraculous sign of Jesus' abundant provision for the great crowd that came to see him! Further study shows that the meaning of this story is even richer. The following reflection exercise helps to reveal some of that hidden richness.

First, look at the story in its New Testament context. Read John 6:1-15 and John 6:25-71. Notice that the occasion for the miracle is the time of Passover.

Next, read Exodus 16. Compare some verses to each other.

Exodus 16:2, 7-9	John 6:41, 43
Exodus 16:4b	John 6:6
Exodus 16:19- 20	John 6:27a

Comparison of John 6 with Exodus 16 reveals that Jesus has the story of the manna in mind when he performs his own miracle. By providing an abundant meal (12 baskets left over!) in the wilderness (a place of scarcity), Jesus presents himself as a sign of God's abundant provision. He even says of himself, "I am the bread of life" and that those who eat of him will never go hungry (verse 35).

The manna feeding of Exodus 16 was a sign to Israel that God's *shalom* economy of gracious provision was more desirable than the *shalom*-destroying economy of Egypt. Likewise, Jesus' miracle teaches that devoting ourselves wholly to following him and joining his kingdom movement (this is what "eating his body" means) offers us the same abundant life alternative that is far more desirable than the kingdoms of this world.

God's economy of abundance, signified in the manna feeding as an alternative to Egypt's economy of scarcity, was codified in Israel's laws of Sabbath and Jubilee. Jesus' miracles and teachings present him as the fulfillment of those laws. He is the presence of God's abundance among us. As we follow him and observe all his teaching, including that about economic well-being, we will be fed by the "bread of life." He is our Sabbath rest and our Jubilee liberation.

PIECES OF THE EXODUS STORY (for Task 5B)

The people of Israel are in exile. They are slaves in the brickyards of Egypt.

The people of Israel suffer poverty and humiliation; they are forced into hard labor by the Egyptians.

The people cry out to God in anguish. God hears them.

Through his servant leader Moses, God confronts the Pharaoh with demands of liberation for his people.

Through a mighty struggle, God demonstrates that his power is far greater than the Pharaoh, the Egyptian magicians, and all the false gods they worship.

God leads the people out of Egypt and across the Red Sea.

The people of Israel wander in the wilderness.

The people complain that they wish they had died with their stomachs full in Egypt instead of hungry in the desert.

God hears the complaints of the people. God promises to provide meat at twilight and to rain bread from heaven each morning. And it is so!

God commands people to gather only as much bread as they need for that day. (On the sixth day, they are to gather twice as much, so they do not have to gather or cook on the Sabbath.)

Some people gather more food than they need—but the food spoils.

On the seventh day, some of the people go out to gather food, but there is none. So the people rest on the seventh day.

The Israelites eat manna for forty years, until they come to a land they can live in.

THE THEOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT

A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN MISSION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

This seven-session workshop series will deepen your Biblical understanding of Christian mission and community development. Each session takes about 4 hours in a workshop setting and includes the following topics:

- Worldviews: analyze our own worldviews and build a biblical perspective
- God's love and its power to transform our work in communities
- What the creation story teaches us
- Salvation: Liberation for the whole person
- Restoring understanding: Being made in the image of God
- Love without borders: The healing power of inclusive love
- Economic well-being: Wealth, poverty and justice

The book includes complete instructions for leading small group sessions or workshops.

This book is part of the *Communities First* series, designed to help churches and Christians bring unique gifts to their neighborhoods and communities. Combined with consultation, these materials will help you engage with your community and influence it in ways that will make life better for everyone here and now. As a result, you will see your community respond and change in surprising and redemptive ways. The Church and God's Kingdom will grow.

In addition to the cornerstone book simply titled *Communities First*, other workbooks include:

The Theology of Development: A Biblical Understanding of Christian Mission and Community Development

Through God's Eyes, With God's Heart: Building Readiness for Community Ministry

Meeting Needs: Moving from Relief to Individual Development

Case Management: Creating a Plan for Change through Covenantal Commitment

Developing a Community Vision

Community Strengthening

Community Organizing

Justice: Creating Policies, Laws and Systems that Work for Everyone



Center on
FAITH IN COMMUNITIES



CRWRC

CHRISTIAN REFORMED
WORLD RELIEF COMMITTEE

Living Justice, Loving Mercy