



## Making a Connection that Counts!

### Leader's Guide

**Opening Prayer:** (Pray Together) Lord, Jesus, open our eyes and ears really wide to the potential harvest which you have called us to reap. Give us willing hearts, hands, and feet so that we might serve communities and souls that are precious to you. Amen.

#### INTRODUCTION

Knowing our community – a quiz

- ❖ Do an online search of the demographics for your community or have your Evangelism team do a search. Go to [www.bestplaces.net](http://www.bestplaces.net) or [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov) and search: American Factfinder.
- ❖ With your report in hand—quiz the Bible Class to see how well they know the community. Ask questions like: “What do you think the average household income of our community is?” “What percentage of our community is Hispanic/White/Black, etc.?” “What percentage have a college degree? Are divorced?” “What is the age breakdown of our community?”
- ❖ You may be surprised with what you find and what the perceptions of your members are! Use this as an illustration for the need to know our community before we can connect with it. What are some of the needs of our community?

#### LIVE AND LOVE IN EXILE

📖 Read Jeremiah 29:4-7

1. The Lord Almighty, the God of Israel was speaking to all those that were carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. What directives does he give them?  
*Build, plant, eat, marry, reproduce, seek peace and prosperity of their new community, pray for their community to prosper. In other words, live your normal life! I'm putting you in front of people, interact with them—live as a believer in an unbelieving setting.*
2. While the Babylonians took the people into exile, it was the Lord that did it. As Christians, how is our life like those exiles?  
*“In” this world but not “of” this world; I am but a stranger here, heaven is my home. But in the meantime, we will seek the prosperity of our communities even in “unchristian settings.”*

3. God does not want us to isolate ourselves or drone around like robots while here on earth. He wants us to live our lives and show love for our communities, seeking its prosperity! How would you define “love”—is it primarily something that we do (action) or something we feel (emotion)?

*It is not enough to feel bad about our neighbor’s situation if we do nothing to help him. At the same time to say that love is an action devoid of feelings is to forget that God made us complex, emotional beings with feelings and affections. Such loving feelings will lead us to imitate the loving actions our Savior had for us and all people. When defining Christian love, it is wise to include both aspects—emotion and action. For example, the author offers the following definition: Christian love is a deep concern for another that leads us to act in that person’s best interests. [John Schuetze, WLQ vol. 104 p.266]*

4. How well does our congregation express emotion? Love?

*Weddings and funerals no clapping; no testimonials; no tears; 7th and 8th grade boys reading their x-mas readings; “We’ll now sing “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus,” please remain seated. Tenebrae Service, one of people’s favorites, because it allows for emotion as we set a tone with lighting and music.*

Think about it! It’s easy for a congregation to become introverted—list ways that a congregation can get caught in a “help your own” mindset.

*Cutting support of area Lutheran High Schools or Synod to meet budget. Benevolence fund is only meant for members! Concentrating on primarily “Grow in the Word” congregational endeavors and not on “Go with the Word” endeavors. Using a school as a tool only to train our own, with little or no attention to outreach. Unwillingness to change worship times, increase or have an Evangelism budget, do things a little “different” in general (i.e. step out of our comfort zones a touch), sign a Friendship register, etc. to better meet the community needs.*

If we were to poll the community—what adjectives might people use to describe our congregation?

*Answers will vary. Make sure comments are not all positive or all negative. As with everything, we do some things well and others we need to work on.*

What can our congregation do to love our community and seek its prosperity?

*Offer community events or services to familiarize people with your facility and put a “friendly face” on your church. Answers will vary depending on your community and setting. Things like this help build relationships and give people a trust in you to listen when you share the gospel.*

## CONNECT WITH YOUR LIFE

### Read I Peter 2:9–12

1. We've been talking about our congregation, let's bring it back to the individual. According to Peter, who are you?  
*A chosen person (before the creation of the world), a royal priest (remember that priests of God reflect God's holiness, represent him, offer spiritual sacrifices to God and intercede with their prayers), a person that belongs to God (one must think of their baptism when God made each one his own). What a privileged status!*
2. Explain the transformation that God worked in you and how it affects your daily life.  
*As the Bible says, we were dead in sin, enemies of God, and destined for hell. But by the mercy and grace of God, he called us out of darkness through Baptism and the Word, and brought us into his light to be alive, "friends" with God and assured of heaven! How does that affect my life? I'm alive! I know who I am and why I'm here as well as where I'm going! Everything I think, do, and say is to live out my life as a priest of God, offering him my life as a spiritual sacrifice in whatever vocations I have been blessed with.*
3. What does Peter urge you to do as a royal priest of God?  
*Abstain from sinful desires—live out who I am! Live such a good life that unbelievers will see my life and glorify God! I can make a meaningful connection by how I live.*
4. A big part of "living such good lives" has to do with your vocations or your "callings." Luther referred to the callings we have (e.g. spouse, parent, employer, etc.) as the masks God wears to provide for his creation. List several callings that you have. How do/can those callings serve your neighbor?  
*Answers will vary.*
  - ❖ *Husband: By loving my wife as Christ loved the church, I make a "happy home." I reflect how Christ loves me and how a husband should treat his wife to everyone who sees. Most important of those eyes are those of my children, who see what it means to love your wife and treat her well.*
  - ❖ *Father: Again, I reflect godly discipline to my neighbors and even strangers—showing love, not frustration, etc.*
  - ❖ *Friend: I can reflect the caring and compassion of Jesus and have a positive impact on the lives of my friends.*
  - ❖ *Pastor: I am able to share Jesus with every member and those who are not yet members. My job is to share the Gospel and God's promises that will not return empty.*

Think about it! Have you ever heard the phrase: “They’re ‘good members.’ They are really involved at church doing \_\_\_\_\_.” “I wish there were more church members like them; they’re at church all the time.” What dangers are there in speaking like this?

*The danger is that we give people the impression that if service is not done within the four walls of the church, that’s it’s not service to God. We will want to encourage people to live out their vocations, not only in the church, but also out in the world. It’s not all about what needs to be done at church.*

The apostle Peter talked about “making a connection” with your lives. What kind of a connection to the community can you make through the vocations you’ve been blessed with?

*What is your vocation—how do you touch people’s lives with it every day. Consider the following quote: “Service in the church is not the only service that is pleasing to God. In a word, what God wants from us is love—for him and for our neighbor. We love our neighbor any time that we unselfishly reach out to him to meet his needs. What does our neighbor need? Someone to preach the gospel to him, certainly; but he also needs someone to grow his food, make his clothes, heal his sickness, teach his children, police his streets, etc. Any occupation that meets a real human need can be a way of pleasing God. Jesus commended the Good Samaritan for taking care of his neighbor’s physical needs (Luke 10). The Samaritan’s work had nothing to do with “church,” but he pleased God by his actions. Through faith, God is pleased both with you and with what you do. One good definition of a God-pleasing work is “any work done by a God-pleasing person”—in other words, a believer. [from WELS Q and A: [www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net)]*

## CONNECT WITH YOUR FAITH

As we live our lives in our communities, developing relationships in our communities through the vocations that we’ve been blessed with, we are building bridges and making valuable connections. But we still need to cross that bridge and make the connection that really counts. We need to share the gospel! Jesus, the one who made the connection with us by dying and rising for us and making us royal priests in our baptism, provides us with the perfect example of making a connection of faith.

 **Read John 4:5-26**

How did Jesus break down a perceived social barrier?

*The fact that Jesus went through Samaria instead of around, as many other Jews would have elected to do, is one point. That he spoke to a Samaritan (Israelites who mixed with resettled foreigners after being conquered by Assyria) was definitely crossing the line for a Jew. That he spoke to a Samaritan woman was doubly taboo!*

*What can we learn about humility here?*

*You think of Jesus' encounter with so many people throughout the gospels—he ate with tax collectors and sinners; he spoke with prostitutes and outcasts; he granted healing to the daughter of the Canaanite woman. He could have said, "I am better than you. You don't deserve the time of day." But he didn't! Instead he came to die for all people—no one was left out—that includes you and me (Romans. 5:8). May we have the humility to realize that if Jesus could approach all people and consider no one a "lost cause," then we ought to realize that we can as well since we all are in the same position before God (i.e. sinners redeemed by the blood of Jesus).*

1. Jesus starts with a comfortable social interaction—he asks for some water to drink. What things are most striking about Jesus' words when it comes to connecting to the woman with his faith?

*Jesus kept the conversation spiritual—he knew where he was going with the conversation and kept it on track. Another point to note is that Jesus was not afraid to speak the law to this woman. She needed that preparatory law just as each one does in order to appreciate the gospel he wanted to share. First, she needed to thirst to realize her need for the living water Jesus offered!*

We have a hard time keeping the conversation spiritual many times. What are the reasons for that? Are any of them good reasons? Explain.

*The reasons could be numerous—many of which deal with the desire to preserve our own self-image: What will this person think of me? Will I be perceived as a spiritual nutcase? Will someone think I'm unloving?*

*Most of us do not like confrontation and so at the first sign of it, we back away. Obviously, the reasons are not good ones when we recognize the work we are doing as God's royal priests. We are carrying out the Great Commission. Do you ever need to be ashamed of God and what he says (Matthew 10:32)?*

What message did Jesus bring to the Samaritan woman?

*Law and Gospel. The same message we have been entrusted with to win souls for Christ. He met her where she was at and addresses her life specifically.*

Think about it! Wouldn't it be wonderful to know everything about someone we're talking to about Jesus? Perhaps you don't have the advantage that Jesus had here, but there is a way to get to know the person you want to share Jesus with: Talk to them! Love them! Connect with them! There are many different styles of doing evangelism—give a Biblical example for each style listed:

- ❖ *Confrontational* – “In your face”  
*God’s Great Exchange could be characterized this way (i.e. “If you were to die tonight, etc.”). Peter at Pentecost could be a good example of this: “This Jesus, whom you crucified” – wow! (Acts 2)*
- ❖ *Intellectual* – Apologetics  
*C.S. Lewis is a notable example from recent history. We might think of Paul in Athens (Acts 17) as he reasons with the philosophers just as he did so often with the Jews in the synagogue.*
- ❖ *Invitational* – “Come and See”  
*The classic example of this is Philip’s invitation to Nathanael in John 1.*
- ❖ *Interpersonal* – “Friendship”  
*Jesus didn’t just preach to people, he also got involved with their lives. He ate with tax collectors and sinners! He ate with Pharisees!*
- ❖ *Testimonial* – “Telling your story”  
*Think of Paul explaining his conversion story in Acts. Think of the demon possessed man (i.e. “I am Legion”) in Mark 5 who wanted to follow Jesus, but instead Jesus told him to stay and tell others how much the Lord had done for him. N.B. It appears the man did his job well as Jesus was welcomed in the Decapolis the next time he came, instead of being asked to leave.*
- ❖ *Serving* – “Love in Action”  
*Think of Tabitha (Dorcas) in Acts 9 who was known for always doing good and helping the poor. Because she was so well loved, her living testimony to God’s love for her spoke volumes to those around her.*

*What is your style? How has God gifted you? Use it!*

*Confrontation is not the only style of Evangelism and it doesn’t fit everyone’s gifts. But we have all been gifted to live our faith and it’s important to know how we’ve been gifted.*

## **CONCLUSION:**

Know your church. Know your community. Given what we studied today—how will you, personally, make connections to your community? What can you suggest to your evangelism leaders and help accomplish to make more connections to your community?

Answers will vary—notice that we are encouraging everyone, not just the evangelism leaders to get involved!

***Share with him.***