

MISSION IN ACTION



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2008 Lenten Study Guide
Lutheran Church of Hope

Welcome to the Small Group Study for Lent 2008! This year, Lutheran Church of Hope's yearlong focus is Hope for the World. We know that the only true "hope for the world" is Jesus Christ, and in this year, we are learning what it means to be Christ's hands and feet in the world, and then practicing what we've learned. The Bible is very clear that our faith is lived out in action, so grab your Bible, your small group, and strap in, we're gonna get moving!

~Pastor Caroline

SO WHAT'S MY NEIGHBOR LIKE?

In our last session, we found that doing mission is a non-negotiable in the Christian walk. As you gather in your small group, begin by sharing your experience with “bothering” with someone this last week and what insights you’ve gained.

Our next question is “what is my neighbor like?” As Americans, we tend to be woefully uninformed regarding the rest of the world, and especially about what is termed the “2/3rds world.” The 2/3rds world is that part of the world that has not experienced the industrial or technological revolutions which we in the US and Western Europe have.

For example, if the world's population was shrunk into a village consisting of 100 people:

57 would be Asian; 21 would be European; 14 would be from the Western Hemisphere; 8 would be African

52 would be female; 48 would be male

70 would be non-white; 30 would be white

70 would be non-Christian; 30 would be Christian

80 would live in substandard housing

70 would be unable to read

50 would be near death

1 would be pregnant

1 would have a college education

1 would own a computer

6 would possess 59% of the entire world's wealth and all 6 would be from the US

- ❖ What surprised you most about this shrunken world?
- ❖ Given these statistics, are you materially rich or poor compared to the rest of the world?
- ❖ Does this exercise challenge the view you have of your place in the global village? If so, how?

Since Hope partners with Pr Sam Dunya in Ghana West Africa, let's do a little comparison between the village of West Des Moines, Iowa and the village of Ho, Ghana.

In Ho, people can go to the village market to buy food and clothes every five days

In West Des Moines, we can go to Dahl's, Hy-Vee, Costco, Super Target, Wal-Mart, Valley West Mall, Jordan Creek Mall, or West Glen Town Center every day of the week to buy food and clothes, and some of these stores are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In Ho, the usual meal consists of corn and cassava. Malnutrition is a serious problem, especially for the children; 36% of children are malnourished and malnutrition ranks in the top five causes of death for children under age 5.

In West Des Moines, we can eat sweet corn, tomatoes, and strawberries in the winter (if we don't mind the absence of flavor!), as well as a multitude of different fruits and vegetables, pork, beef, poultry, lamb, bison, ostrich. If we don't feel like cooking at home, we can head out to McDonald's, Taco John's, TGIFridays, Subway, Culver's, and a whole host of fast food restaurants. Obesity is a serious problem, with 60% of adults and 30% of children either overweight or obese.

In Ho, women walk to a well to get water for the day. This water may or may not be clean and free of diseases. One of the other top five killers of children under the age of 5 is diarrheal diseases.

In West Ds Moines, anyone can go to a water tap and drink (or cook with or bathe in or wash clothes in or wash the dog or water the lawn with) the safest water in the world.

In Ho, the life expectancy is 56 years.

In West Des Moines, the life expectancy is over 78 years.

In Ghana, the people have a worldview that holds relationship and the community in highest regard. They believe that meaning in life is derived from one's relationships, especially in the relationships between them and their parents and them and their children.

In the US, individual freedom is held in the highest regard. This freedom ultimately means being left alone by others and not having other people's values, ideas, or styles of life forced upon us.

- ❖ Can you think of other ways we who live in the village of West Des Moines are different from the people who live in the village of Ho, Ghana?
- ❖ What are the implications of having a worldview that is individual-oriented like that in the US? Of a world view that's community-oriented like that in Ghana?

Yet, as fellow human beings made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27), we are similar in many ways: we all want to have access to adequate food, water, shelter, clothing, and medical care; we all want to find and fulfill our purpose in life; we all want to raise healthy, happy kids who receive a good education so they can fulfill their own purpose in life; we all want to live to see our grandchildren grow up.

- ❖ What other dreams do you have for your life? What obstacles stand in the way of your dreams?
- ❖ What other dreams do you think the people in Ghana have for their lives? What obstacles do you imagine may stand in the way of their dreams?
- ❖ Are the dreams you have much different from the dreams the people of Ghana have? Are the obstacles different?
- ❖ Have you ever seen a U-Haul behind a hearse in a funeral procession? What might that say about the importance of material things in our lives?

Read John 4:1-42

Jews had a problem with Samaritans. The Jews felt the Samaritans were "half-breeds" because when the Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 721 BC, the Israelites who were conquered were forced to intermarry with non-Israelites – a favorite tactic of the Assyrians to break down national identity in the nations they defeated. The Samaritans, though they were the cousins of the Jews, were considered different ethnically, culturally, and religiously.

Nevertheless, Jesus, a Jew, shared a common need with the Samaritan woman – water. Jesus met her over a glass of water.

The Samaritan woman was probably blown away by the fact a Jew, and a male one at that, would deign to talk to her, given all the many, many differences between them, including her difficult living arrangements. The Samaritan woman remarks on this when she reminds Jesus that the Jews and Samaritans worshiped in different locations (4:20). Even worship was different and created a barrier, distance between two peoples.

Worship didn't need to be this way though. In the Garden of Eden, God walked and talked with Adam and Eve (and they probably didn't fall asleep during the sermon!) but as we read through the Bible, we find that progressively, worship becomes the responsibility of the head of the household (Gen 12:7) and then the professional priests (Ex 28:41; 40:12), which created increasing distance between people. Jesus wanted the Samaritan woman to understand that worship wasn't to be a thing that separated people; the location of worship wasn't the most important thing because location and real estate can divide people. What is important is the *how* of worship – worship in spirit and in truth – and the *who* of worship – Jesus. Jesus invited the woman to set aside the differences the world wanted to impose upon her and embrace the common need of people for a Savior – Living Water revealed himself over a simple glass of water.

- ❖ Think of other ways God reveals himself. Are these revelations meant to create barriers between people?
- ❖ What barriers in your life cause you to focus on the differences between people instead of similarities? What should you do with these barriers?
- ❖ Is your worship based on spirit and truth? How could you increase the truth in your worship? The spirit?

Read Luke 9:28-43

Throughout Church history, there have been attempts to separate worship from action. This is interesting since the Bible presents a picture of a very active God – creating the universe out of nothing, talking with Abraham, sending plagues, leading his people with fire and cloud, fighting battles, bringing water from a rock, despairing over peoples' sins, multiplying loaves and fishes, healing lepers.

- ❖ Can you think of other times in the Bible that God was active among the people?
- ❖ Would you expect an active God to want an active people? How's your "activity level"?

It's been a difficult time for the disciples. Jesus has just asked the disciples who they thought he was and dear ol' Peter blurted out, "You are the Messiah." The big surprise came when Jesus talked about dying instead of raising an army to kick out the hated Roman occupiers. A Messiah who died instead of conquered?? Preposterous!!

The disciples have just spent 8 days on the road to Jerusalem, not recruiting an army to fight against the Romans as they originally hoped, but so that Jesus could die there. They were all probably relieved when Jesus took a detour up the mountain to pray.

The prayer session turns into a most spectacular vision; Jesus' appearance changes and the disciples see Moses and Elijah. Peter, overwhelmed by the awesome sense of God's presence says, "Let's stay here on the mountaintop! Let's not let this "spiritual experience" fade! Let's build a retreat center with chapels, meditation rooms, and labyrinth walks for prayer and let's bask in the glow of God's presence!" (OK, this is a slight paraphrase).

- ❖ Have you ever had a powerful experience of God's presence? If so, how did it make you feel?
- ❖ Have you ever felt like Peter and been tempted to linger or prolong or repeat a mountaintop experience or a spiritual "high"? Have you ever wanted to stay up on the mountaintop and only commune with God, leaving the rest of the world and your responsibilities behind?

Jesus doesn't linger, probably because he knows the real action isn't on the mountaintop, but in Jerusalem, the exact place the disciples are reluctant to visit. As soon as Jesus comes down from the mountaintop, he's met by a father in deep distress, for a demon is tormenting his son with epileptic seizures.

The disciples are on a roller coaster ride from the mountaintop and ecstasy with God right down into the valley where they experience Satan creating havoc.

Did Jesus say, "Excuse me, Sir, but I've just had a most intense spiritual experience with my Father and I don't want to lose the glow. Could you have Luke, our traveling doctor, check out the boy and try a round of anti-epileptic medications? If that doesn't do the trick, I'll try to fit you into my schedule in about a month." Can you even *imagine* this scenario? No, we know Jesus is all about being in the immediate now, the messy, and even the ugly parts of our human lives. The Messiah is all about being in the midst of the poor, the sick, the helpless, the hurting, the lonely, the broken, the unlovely, the unloved.

Jesus understood that worship and action must be intertwined – "mountaintop experiences" must be combined with actively caring for others, especially those who the world would ignore or pass by or throw up their hands because the problems seem too huge and unsolvable.

- ❖ If you can't imagine Jesus passing by the father who was desperately seeking help for his son, what does that mean for your life as a follower of Jesus?
- ❖ Is worship to be linked with action? How does Jesus answer this question?

At the well, Jesus teaches the Samaritan woman about right worship over a glass of water. At the transfiguration, Jesus shows that right worship is linked with action, especially on behalf of others who are less fortunate. During Lent, Hope is linking right worship with action as we listen to the Living Water, Jesus, and respond by providing clean wells for villages in Ghana who share with us the same need for life-giving water.

Join us for a simple glass of clean, healthy water with our Ghanaian neighbors – because they're just like us.

Closing Prayer:

God, You have prepared in peace the path I must follow today.
Help me to walk straight on that path.
If I speak, remove lies from my lips.
If I am hungry, take away from me all complaint.
If I have plenty, destroy pride in me.
May I go through the day calling on You,
You, O LORD, who knows no other lord.
Amen

Ethiopian prayer

This week, practice understanding what our neighbors around the globe are like.

Choose a country like Ghana or South Africa or Mexico (all countries where Hope sends missionaries or is active in supporting mission work) and learn about the history of the country, the people and their day-to-day lives, paying special attention to those who struggle in poverty and want.

Now begin to pray that God would show you how you can become more active and involved in these areas. This could range from committing to pray for the country or the people working there on a daily or weekly basis, to contributing financially to digging wells in Ghana or financially adopting a child in South Africa, to going on a mission trip to Juarez, Mexico, and serving directly with the people there. Regardless, let the information you are learning spur you to become active in the lives of people who may seem very different but with whom we share so very much.



LUTHERAN CHURCH OF HOPE
925 Jordan Creek Parkway
West Des Moines, Iowa 50265
222-1520
www.hopewdm.org

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