

Compelling Vision

Together, as the Church of the Brethren,
we will passionately live and share the radical transformation
and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood
engagement. To move us forward, we will develop a culture of calling and
equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.

Bible Study Series

Session 1
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Our Vision, God's Vision

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Focus Question

What is vision? Why is it important for the faith community to have vision?

Scripture Texts

Philippians 2:1-5; Luke 4:14-21

Focus Statement

Paul and Jesus hit us between the eyes with the reality that to be led with a vision we cannot be walking alone. Rather, even when circumstances are difficult, we must always walk the journey together. Both preach to firmly formed communities in their day and urge them to have a sense of redirection. This is an appropriate call for us to hear today, as we consider ourselves in our own form of the Philippian church and Nazarene synagogue. As followers of Jesus, we must be united in our vision with Christ's light leading us.

Supplies

- Candle or battery-powered light
- Blindfold for each participant
- Mini LED keychain light for each participant (*optional*)

Media Suggestions

- **Article:** [“Six Surprising Ways Jesus Changed the World”](#) by John Ortberg on Huffpost
- **Song:** *Light One Candle* by Peter, Paul and Mary; *It's About Time* by John Denver
- **Poem:** “When You're Delighted” by Deborah Ann
- **Audio:** [Philippians 2:1-5 NIV](#) audio file from BibleGateway.com
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Room Setup:

- The room should be as dark as possible, with curtains drawn, and lights off. The only light should be a battery-powered candle or light on a center table.
- Arrange chairs in a circle, with the light or candle on a small table in the center.

Reflecting on the Texts

What is vision? Why is it important for the faith community to have vision? As we begin to think about these questions, Paul and Jesus remind us of the importance of having unity, purpose, and passion as we journey with God.

In Paul's and Jesus' day, people struggled to understand each other. Major questions of future survival and direction persisted. Concerns over one's place and that of the faith community's role in the current society were very much present. And yet, these two Spirit-led individuals still came and ministered, calling their audiences to bond together and reach out to one another in the love and joy of the Lord.

In the times in which we're living, shouldn't we want to adopt the same mentality in our local churches and our beloved denomination as sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus? As we continue his work, shouldn't we form our vision having his mind, his attitude, and his joy in our hearts? It seems such a simple concept, but it is not easy. We all have different ideas of who Jesus is and what Jesus means to us. So did the original hearers of Paul and Jesus. They were followers, yet they still needed the reminder to keep going where Jesus led them.

So is our joy in Christ complete? I attend Annual Conference year after year. I have friends with many theological understandings. I have the blessing of deep connections with family and friends in my own life. I love them all. I appreciate them all. And when I lose those connections, well frankly, something is missing.

In my mind, Paul is calling the Philippians not to miss opportunities to bond together and think of others first. As a denomination, our vision will be missing something if everyone is not coming along. We must heed Paul's call not to miss opportunities to be together and serve others. Let us encourage one another in love, compassion, mercy, and complete joy in Christ in our lives and our churches!

In Luke 4, Jesus goes back to Galilee early in his ministry and spreads the good news in various synagogues. Then a special reunion happens at Nazareth, Jesus' hometown. To the attendees, Jesus says that he is anointed to bring good news to the poor and sent by God to release captives, give sight to the blind, and free the oppressed. Jesus tells them they are tasked with that same mission. They are to work together to fulfill the vision of equality, freedom, justice, and love for all.

Jesus challenged and changed not only those in his hometown but so many others in his ministry. He fed the multitude on a hill with a boy's lunch and turned water into wine for a wedding feast. He changed the hearts of the thirsty Samaritan woman at the well and the skeptical but curious tax collector, Zacchaeus. He showed compassion for Mary and Martha as they sought the best way to serve him.

In our vision, we must have the mind, the attitude, and the joy of Jesus. We must seek to be unified in our call to serve and reach others. We must have a purpose and passion for welcoming more and more sheep to Christ, all while not assuming that anyone who disagrees with us is automatically a goat. We are simply urged to answer the call from Jesus to his disciples to go into the world and preach the gospel to every nation. Let us do so with complete joy in our hearts and with our eyes fixed on Jesus! Our best vision is his vision!

Gathering

Choose one of the following activities to introduce the theme of today's session.

- *Option 1*—How do you define vision? How might we live the qualities of Jesus, captured in the fruits of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23) for the church to form a vision? How might we work towards attaining those qualities? What gifts do you offer to contribute to the church’s vision moving forward?
- *Option 2*—Give each person a blindfold to put on. Ask them to walk around the circle of chairs or the room in their house if you meet online. Then ask, can you go outside the room and come back to where you were seated still blindfolded? Once everyone is seated again, discuss their experiences. Was it easy or difficult for you to find your seat? Did you feel alone, or did you feel the presence of others encouraging you? What feelings surfaced as you participated in this exercise?

Discovering God's Story and Vision

Ask participants to blindfold themselves again to concentrate on hearing God’s word.

Luke 4:14-21

Assign readers as follows: Reader 1 as Narrator, Reader 2 as Jesus, and read the passage twice. Pause to give participants time to reflect, then ask: What words catch your ear? How might you feel if you were Jesus or an audience member in the synagogue?

Philippians 2:1-5

At least twice, play the NIV audio version of this text using the link provided in Media Suggestions. An alternative option would be for one person in the group to read the passage twice. Invite participants to share words or phrases that stood out to them as they listened.

Exploring God's Story and Vision

Have participants remove their blindfolds and bring up the lights. Dig deeper into the texts using these questions.

- If you consider the setting and time for Paul and Jesus, how were their messages similar? How were they different?
- Later in Luke 4, we find that the hometown crowd rebuffed Jesus’ message. What might that tell us about life within that faith community? Why would that community have found Jesus’ message so challenging?
- Read Philippians 2:1-4. What struggles might the church at Philippi have faced? What vision is Paul putting in front of them amid these challenges?
- Read Luke 4:21 and Philippians 2:1. How do these passages inform the new Compelling Vision for the Church of the Brethren?
- The Luke 4 text lays out Jesus’ mission, while in Philippians 2, Paul urges his readers to take on Jesus’ attitude of humility as they continue that mission. Why do you think the Compelling Vision Team chose these two texts to begin a discussion around a vision for the church?

Responding to God's Story and Vision

Reflect on today's text as you discuss the following.

- What does it mean to you to be anointed and unified with the Spirit of God?
- What does Paul mean when he says, "make my joy complete" (Philippians 2:2)? What hope is he expressing for his readers as individuals and as a community of believers?
- How can we, as individuals and as churches, consider everyone's perspective and not be oppressors to anyone in any way?
- Jesus and Paul both challenged their faith communities with their vision. How does the Compelling Vision challenge our faith community?

Empowered by God's Story and Vision

To wrap up, choose one of these activities.

- *Option 1*—Read or summarize the brief article "Six Surprising Ways Jesus Changed the World" by theologian John Ortberg, listed in Media Suggestions. Discuss the following.
In these times, how might Jesus change the way we think about:
people we agree with, people we disagree with;
people who support us, people who ignore us;
people who we don't understand, or who don't understand us;
people who are privileged, people who are less fortunate;
neighbors; enemies; strangers;
and people who wonder why should I be part of the church?
- *Option 2*—Darken the room and pass the center light from one participant to another as you play the song "Light One Candle" listed in Media Suggestions. As the light is passed from one person to another, encourage participants to see the light of Jesus reflected in each brother and sister.

Sending

Share this unison blessing to close your time together.

We are Christ's ambassadors in this time. Are we joyfully ready to be vessels for change? Are we open to seeing everyone as a child of God who, even if it's hard to see it, offers a ray of Christ's light? No matter whether others say Christ and the church are dying, let us vow to live the reality that he's alive, he's shining, he's always guiding us! Let us leave shining his light in our hearts, in our homes, in our churches, with our neighbors, with strangers, with everyone we meet. When people are around us, may they see Jesus reflecting in our faces, forming our attitudes, and captured in our open minds. To God be the glory in Jesus' name. Amen!

Optional: Distribute keychain lights or mini flashlights to participants to take home as a reminder to be Christ's light throughout the week and look to that light as the source of the vision for their life and the church.