

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 13
Eric Landram



Session 13

Innovative, Adaptable, and Fearless Discipleship

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.**

Focus Question

How does God call us to be innovative, adaptable, and fearless?

Scripture Texts

1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Romans 8:31-39

Focus Statement

Paul's ministry and writing are full of examples of how he encouraged churches to faithfully live the gospel message authentically. He urges the believers to be adaptable and innovative as they build relationships within their communities. Paul also encourages them to live and share the gospel with confidence. This is a way to show others how powerful and compelling the Jesus way can be for everyone. These are powerful adjectives to embody! Paul had a gift for relating to people. In his letter to the church in Corinth, we see the lengths Paul would go to share the hopeful message of Jesus with anyone.

Supplies

- Newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- Note cards, pens or pencils
- *Hymnal: A Worship Book*

Media Suggestions

- **Video:** "[New Testament Letters: Historical Context](#)" The Bible Project (YouTube)
- **Blog:** "[Cross-cultural Discipleship](#)" by Fr. Richard Rohr
- **Video:** "[Growing More Than Veggies](#)" TEDxSalisbury talk with Martin Hutchison

Reflecting on the Texts

Jesus has set for us a timeless example of what it means to exist as a human. Throughout his ministry, he spells out what it sounds like and looks like to be images of God in creation. He shows us behaviors that lead to blessing, healing, and reconciliation. He gives us compelling adjectives to embody and live out in our neighborhoods and communities. Adjectives such as merciful, forgiving, encouraging, just, and kind are the driving forces behind being God's representatives in the world. This way of living is transformational and radically different. This way of existing is also counter-cultural to the adjectives the world might offer in return: vengeful, discouraging, dominant, and oppressive.

To live out our heavenly job descriptions, we need to consider a few more adjectives that help us get the job done: innovative, adaptable, and fearless. These are three adjectives laid out by the Church of the Brethren Compelling Vision process. This vision gives us a unique north star in living out our beliefs and practices as a historic peace church.

If we need to know what it looks like to be innovative, adaptable, and fearless, Paul provides some great examples. Paul was an accessible teacher and a prolific writer who encouraged and motivated communities of disciples to live out the Jesus way. He was also a faithful architect of community engagement and church mission. He did all of this in a wide variety of environments while walking alongside diverse and eclectic people. Paul had to think on his feet and continually discover new ways of authentically linking the message of Jesus with the Gentiles.

In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul encourages the community to meet people where they are so that they might see the gospel message thrive and flourish. He calls them to be adaptive by being relatable. It sounds simple, but it works. He says, "to the weak, I became weak so that I might win over the weak" (1 Corinthians 9:22). Paul is sharing the unifying message from Jesus in a way that is real, honest, and relatable to a diverse community of people.

Didn't Jesus do the same thing? Throughout his ministry, we see Jesus interact with citizens from all walks of life. He relates to others through personal human connection by meeting them on their level. This is a real blessing to people that are already vulnerable. He talked fish with fishermen, gardening with farmers, heady theology with the theologians. Jesus is God meeting us where we are and calling each one of us to something new.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul, too, is using improvisational adaptability for the gospel's sake as he shares its blessing. Churches would do well to be adaptable for the sake of the gospel. Adaptability means change and sometimes on the fly. This requires discernment and should be led with trust and compassion. It is important to note that change is hard. Adaptability and innovation can be hard work for just about anyone.

We may not write letters like Paul, but we have adapted and innovated our means of conveying the eternal message of Christ. Our work helps others uncover the God-given adjectives in their lives and use them to transform the neighborhoods they inhabit. Disciples that trust the message they proclaim do so in a fearless and God-honoring way. Paul used many adjectives to describe God, Jesus, and even love. How are we living into those advantageous adjectives today? Jesus encourages diversity in the Kin-dom of God—so let's be on our toes, ready to embody whatever adjective is called for in the moment!

Gathering

Choose one of these options to introduce today's theme.

- *Option 1*—What is an adjective, and why are they important? What is one adjective you would use to describe yourself? What is an adjective others might use to describe you? What adjectives would you use to describe God? What adjectives would you use to describe Jesus? What adjectives would you use to describe the ideal disciple?
- *Option 2*—Open today's session watching "Growing More Than Veggies," the TEDxSalisbury talk listed in Media Suggestions. What need did Martin Hutchison see in his community? What adjectives would you use to describe what Martin and the collective of churches did in this community?

Discovering God's Story and Vision

Paul's life was spent growing and nurturing disciples. He took Jesus' instruction to deliver his message to a broad and expansive audience seriously. As a result, he had to think on his feet in innovative, adaptive, and fearless ways. Paul became many things for the sake of the message. We hear Paul reflect on that important work as we read today's texts from 1 Corinthians and Romans.

Invite two volunteers to read these passages. Ask them to read it as though it is the first time anyone has ever heard these words before. Read in a fearless way! Ask the rest of the group to listen as though these words have never been heard or uttered before. It is exciting to open a new letter from Paul!

Exploring God's Story and Vision

Dig deeper into today's texts with these questions.

- Invite participants to turn to 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 in their Bibles. What does it mean for Paul to describe himself using the adjective "free"? How does he use his freedom in Christ for the sake of others?
- What are the benefits to adapting and innovating like Paul is describing here? Any pitfalls to watch for?
- How do churches, like Paul, "become all things to all people" as a means of saving others while remaining loyal to the gospel?
- In Romans 8:31-36, Paul answers five questions. What was his purpose in raising these questions? What sustains him and us in the face of questions and opposition?
- Of the forces listed in verses 38-39, which are most real to you? How can you and your faith community be innovative, adaptable, and fearless in the face of these forces? What does Paul's assurance that "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" mean to you personally and as a community of faith?

Responding to God's Story and Vision

Paul's invitation to be adaptable and innovative for the sake of introducing people to the gospel is important work. Invite participants to respond to the texts using these activities.

- Using newsprint or whiteboard, have someone write a list of ways you see your faith community or the Church of the Brethren being adaptable or innovative in reaching people in your community or in the larger world. Use creative and vivid adjectives! It will be good to name a few ways that have been done in the past but designate more time to naming how adaptability and innovation are working in the present.
- Spend time naming other historical figures who have modeled a faith that is adaptable, innovative, and fearless and how they did so. Examples include: Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, Dietrich Bonhoeffer or more recent examples such as Shane Claiborne. Distribute note cards and allow participants a few moments to name and connect how they are personally being adaptable, innovative, and fearless in their own faith journey.

Empowered by God's Story and Vision

To wrap up, choose one of these activities.

- *Option 1*—If you watched the TEDxSalisbury talk with Martin Hutchison in Gathering, discuss the following questions. In what ways were the planners of Camden Community Garden innovative, adaptable, and fearless? How was the community transformed as a result? Brainstorm needs that you see in your community. What one thing could you do today that would bring your church closer to meeting one or more of those needs?
- *Option 2*—Develop an action plan to incorporate the Church of the Brethren's Compelling Vision into your faith community's life. How can you empower others to embrace a life of adjectives that bless others? Consider setting a timeline on your goals. Remember, adaptability does not always mean conformity, but it may mean relatability and accessibility. Your goals for adaptability and innovation should not cost you the core message of faith that Jesus is offering. Perhaps a sermon series, in-depth bible study, trainings, and leadership development seminars would do the trick.

Sending

Close your time together by singing "Help us to help each other" in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, #362.

If the group is not up for singing the hymn, ask a few volunteers to joyfully read the verses.