



Dear Reader,

This is a “beta” version of a conversation guide that is still under construction. It includes the first seven sessions (out of a total of 11). We’re releasing it now because we know of many churches, home groups, Sunday school classes, and Bible studies that are going through the book together. We’re working hard on the final four sessions.

We would be deeply grateful if you would send us feedback on how to make the conversation guide better. This might include:

- Facilitator resources that should be included
- Questions that should be added or re-worded
- Ways in which the conversation guide worked (or didn’t quite work) in your context
- Any other words of encouragement or helpful suggestions

Send your feedback directly to John at [johnepattison@gmail.com](mailto:johnepattison@gmail.com).

Thank you,

John Pattison

Chris Smith

## First Session

### Read:

- Foreword, by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove
- Introduction
- Chapter One—A Theological Vision for Slow Church

### Facilitator Prep (Optional):

- Slow Food Manifesto. Online at [www.slowfood.com/about\\_us/eng/manifesto.lasso](http://www.slowfood.com/about_us/eng/manifesto.lasso)
- TED Talk. Carl Honoré, “In praise of slowness.” Online at [www.ted.com/talks/carl\\_honore\\_praises\\_slowness](http://www.ted.com/talks/carl_honore_praises_slowness). Running time: 19 minutes
- Audio recording. David Fitch, “A Slow Church Ecclesiology” (Introduction by John Pattison). From the 2014 Slow Church Conference at Englewood Christian Church, Indianapolis, IN. Online at: <http://erb.kingdomnow.org/david-fitch-slow-church-conference-audio/> Running time: 87 minutes.

## Welcome:

“Trust in the Slow Work of God”

A poem by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

...

Give our Lord the benefit of believing  
that his hand is leading you,  
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself  
in suspense and incomplete.  
Above all, trust in the slow work of God,  
our loving vine-dresser. Amen.

Full text online at <http://www.deeper-devotion.net/slow-work-of-god.html>

## Lectio Divina:

Read the following text with these three questions in mind:

- First reading: What word or phrase touched my heart?
- Second reading: Where does that word or phrase touch my life today?
- Third reading: What is the text calling *me* to do or become? What is the text calling *us* to do or become?

*Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. He included everyone in his death so that everyone could also be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own.*

*Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore. Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh*

*start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.*

*How? you ask. In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God.*

—2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (The Message)

## **Conversation Starters:**

1. Slow Food, Slow Money, Slow Cities, and the other Slow movements differ in scale, scope, and strategy. What they have in common is their opposition to what the Canadian journalist Carl Honoré describes as “the cult of speed”—a philosophy of life that is controlling, aggressive, impatient, etc. What are some ways we have ceded ground to the cult of speed—in life, society, culture, and even the church?

2. Why do you think people are attracted to the Slow movements? The authors of *Slow Church* suggest that what makes the Slow movements so compelling is that they bring the possibility of “real and meaningful” presence. How does Fast Life threaten to short-circuit real and meaningful presence—with God, with one another, with our own selves, and with the natural world?

3. Smith and Pattison write: “Many churches...come dangerously close to reducing Christianity to a commodity that can be packaged, marketed, and sold. Instead of cultivating a deep, holistic discipleship that touches every aspect of our lives, we’ve confined the life of faith to Sunday mornings, where it can be kept safe and predictable, or to a ‘personal relationship with Jesus Christ,’ which can be managed from the privacy of our own home. Following Jesus has been diminished to a privatized faith rather than a lifelong apprenticeship undertaken in the context of Christian community” (p. 14). This is flamethrower language. Do you agree or disagree with their assessment?

4. *Slow Church* was written by non-specialists. Neither author is a pastor, church planter, or professional theologian. They are “proud amateurs” motivated by “a love of God, a love for the body of Christ in the world, and a desire to be more than passive consumers of religious goods and services.” How will the fact that the book was written by non-specialists change the way you read the book, if at all? Are non-specialists and other laypeople empowered to speak into the church? Do you feel so empowered in your faith community?

5. No one is a passive observer in the biblical drama. God desires collaboration with humanity, which “undermines our cultural impulse to be consumers and spectators rather than faithful participants in the unwritten fifth act of God’s play” (p. 23). What will happen when more people move from being “church consumers” to co-producers of God’s Story in the world?

6. “Our calling in Christ is to *community*, to a life shared with others in a local gathering that is an expression of Christ’s body in our particular place. The people of God become a sort of demonstration plot for what God intends for all humanity and all creation” (p. 30). What are the theological and practical convictions that we share as a congregation and that give shape to our following together in the way of Jesus? What are our shared practices for intentionally nurturing the formation of our congregation as a local church community? What are the particular strategic initiatives to which God has called our local congregation, in its particular time and place, and in participation with God’s mission?

## **Closing Thought**

“It can only be that God begins in a small way, at one single place in the world. There must be a place, visible, tangible, where the salvation of the world can begin: that is, where the world becomes what it is supposed to be according to God’s plan. Beginning at that place, the new thing can spread abroad, but not through persuasion, not through indoctrination, not through violence. Everyone must have the opportunity to come and see. All must have the chance to behold and test this new thing. Then, if they want to, they can allow themselves to be drawn into the history of salvation that God is creating. Only in that way can their freedom be preserved. What drives them to the new thing cannot be force, not even moral pressure, but only the fascination of a world that is changed.” —Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church*, p. 27



## Second Session

### Read:

- Chapter Two—Terroir: Taste and See

### Facilitator Prep (Optional):

- Video. Alan Roxbrugh, “Why Join God in the Neighborhood?” The Missional Network. Online at <https://vimeo.com/77079681> Running time: 5 minutes.
- Videos. “The New Parish Movement” Playlist on the InterVarsity Press YouTube Channel. See [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLS0Lg51WigdO\\_7k1KXCuIKrF8N8OWo9C](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLS0Lg51WigdO_7k1KXCuIKrF8N8OWo9C)

### Welcome:

“Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front”

A poem by Wendell Berry

...

Ask the questions that have no answers.  
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.  
Say that your main crop is the forest  
that you did not plant,  
that you will not live to harvest.  
Say that the leaves are harvested  
when they have rotted into the mold.  
Call that profit. Prophesy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus  
that will build under the trees  
every thousand years...

Full text online at <http://www.context.org/iclib/ic30/berry/>

## Lectio Divina:

Read the following text with these three questions in mind:

- First reading: What word or phrase touched my heart?
- Second reading: Where does that word or phrase touch my life today?
- Third reading: What is the text calling *me* to do or become? What is the text calling *us* to do or become?

*Then when you pray, God will answer.*

*You'll call out for help and I'll say, "Here I am."*

*If you get rid of unfair practices,*

*quit blaming victims,*

*quit gossiping about other people's sins,*

*If you are generous with the hungry*

*and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,*

*Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness,*

*your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.*

*I will always show you where to go.*



*I'll give you a full life in the emptiest of places—  
firm muscles, strong bones.*

*You'll be like a well-watered garden,  
a gurgling spring that never runs dry.*

*You'll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew,  
rebuild the foundations from out of your past.*

*You'll be known as those who can fix anything,  
restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate,  
make the community livable again.*

—Isaiah 58:9-12 (The Message)

### **Conversation Starters:**

1. “Slow Church is rooted in the natural, human, and spiritual cultures of a particular place. It is a distinctively local expression of the global body of Christ. ‘The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood’ (Jn 1:14, The Message)” (p. 43). What impact do you think the re-localization of the church will have on our congregations, neighborhoods, etc.?
2. The word *terroir* refers to “the taste of the place.” What is the *terroir* of your neighborhood? Identify a few of the people, places, rhythms, and shared beliefs that give your community its unique taste and texture. How can our churches tease out some of the delicious flavors already present there? How can we celebrate these things in ways that do not vainly “puff up” but rather bear witness to the transforming work of God?
3. Were you familiar with the details of the Church Growth Movement before reading this chapter? Can you see its influence in your church and in churches around you?
4. The standard for ministry given in Scripture is not numbers but faithfulness. And yet the primary metric by which we try to judge the success or health of our churches is by counting: attendance, tithing, souls saved, baptisms, etc. If numbers can’t be the primary metric by which we measure success, what are the alternatives? Is it possible to be more narrative-driven? For example, what if you designated someone as your church’s “memory keeper,” someone to record the stories of God’s faithfulness in your church and in your neighborhood. Then, at least once a year, recite those stories, rehearse them together, and remember well God’s provision. David Fitch encourages congregations to regularly ask themselves these questions:

- When was the last time someone spoke a hard truth into your life? Was it done with love?
- When was the last time you confessed sin to someone you felt safe with in this community?
- When was the last time you prayed with someone over an issue of needs or discernment in this body?
- When was the last time someone in this body visited you in the hospital or brought over a meal when you were sick?
- When was the last time a homeless person was brought into this congregation and made whole?

5. The four primary values of McDonaldization are *efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control*. The book gives examples of how each of these values have grown to have an outsized influence on our churches, “flattening out the flavor of our witness before the watching world.” Can you add some examples of your own?

6. In several places throughout the book, Smith and Pattison use the language of experimentation and apprenticeship. For example: “We find out who Jesus is along the way. We walk the way with Jesus, only to discover that Jesus himself has been the Way and also the destination. Jesus invited people who were skeptical about his teachings to try them on for size: ‘Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own’ (Jn 7:17).” (p. 56). Are you comfortable with the language of apprenticeship to describe a life of discipleship? Why or why not?

7. After a Slow Church event, Smith and Pattison are often asked “What do we do next?” While there are many wonderful things churches can do to slow down and to become more faithfully present in the place and pace of their neighborhoods, the *Slow Church* authors encourage churches to think twice before adding yet another well-intentioned program, practice, or activity. Instead, think about the *how* and *why* of what you’re already doing. For example, does your church sing, pray, and study scripture together in order to be productive and “get something done”? If so, how can these practices be re-oriented toward deep presence?

8. What things bring the greatest joy to your congregation? Which celebrations are most anticipated each year? Why are they met with great joy, and how did they come to be so?

### **Closing Thought:**

“We are bound one to another. But a culture built on speed wants to fling us out from the center like a centrifuge. Thus, to commit ourselves to cultivating goodness through practices of nearness and stability, and to conversationally develop shared traditions, is to take a stand against alienation. It is a way of crafting a new, shared story for the community, while connecting us to the cosmic church across time and prefiguring the kingdom of God. It is also an acknowledgement that our fates are wrapped up with the fates of our neighbors. As the prophet Jeremiah wrote in his letter to the exiles: ‘But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare’ (Jer. 29:7).” — *Slow Church*, pp. 43-44

## Third Session

### Read:

- Chapter Three—Stability: Fidelity to People and Place

### Facilitator Prep (Optional):

- The Wisdom of Stability for Churches. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove  
[http://youtu.be/00Fu4jo\\_qok](http://youtu.be/00Fu4jo_qok)
- The New Parish by Dwight Friesen, Tim Soerens and Paul Sparks  
[http://youtu.be/3EZVj9d\\_cgE](http://youtu.be/3EZVj9d_cgE)
- The Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter IV “What are the Instruments of good works?”  
[http://www.ccel.org/ccel/gregory/life\\_rule.iv.v.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/gregory/life_rule.iv.v.html)

### Welcome:

From a Sabbath poem by Wendell Berry:

Because we have not made our lives to fit  
Our places, the forests are ruined, the fields eroded,  
The streams polluted, the mountains overturned. Hope  
Then to belong to your place by your own knowledge  
Of what it is that no other place is, and by  
Your caring for it as you care for no other place, this  
Place that you belong to though it is not yours,  
For it was from the beginning and will be to the end

...

This knowledge cannot be taken from you by power  
Or by wealth. It will stop your ears to the powerful  
when they ask for your faith, and to the wealthy  
when they ask for your land and your work.  
Answer with knowledge of the others who are here  
And how to be here with them. By this knowledge  
Make the sense you need to make. By it stand  
In the dignity of good sense, whatever may follow.  
Speak to your fellow humans as your place  
Has taught you to speak, as it has spoken to you.

Full text online at <http://johnsuhar.wordpress.com/2010/12/30/wendell-berry-a-poem-on-hope/>

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*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;  
love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in  
showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the  
Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.  
Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to  
strangers.*

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.  
Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in  
harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with  
the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay  
anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight  
of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably  
with all.*

—Romans 12:9-18 (NRSV)

## Conversation Starters:

1. Where do the members of your church live? What things is the church doing (or could the church be doing) to connect members who live in close proximity? How might members be able to share life together on a daily (or several times a week) basis?
2. What is the story of your congregation? Have you always existed in your current location? If not, where were you located before, why did you move and what were the effects of your move on the church and the former neighborhood? If you have always been in your current location, have there been times when the congregation was tempted to move, and what factors led to resisting that temptation?
3. Where are the third places—neither home nor work—where people gather in your neighborhood? Are there members of your congregation regularly engaged in those places? How can they build stronger bridges between your church and the neighborhood? If not, who in your congregation might be to become engaged in that third place?
4. What practices does your church have of listening to your neighbors? Are there times when you eat meals together? How are the members of your church encouraged to be more attentive to their neighbors?
5. What neighborhood efforts is your church involved in? (And by neighborhood effort, we mean an event or program organized primarily by those outside the church, not a church-run program that neighbors are invited into.) Who from the church participates in these efforts?
6. Pick a radius appropriate for your context (shorter for urban places, longer for rural). Identify all the churches within that radius. How have you gotten to know those congregations and to work together with them? If there have been no such opportunities to date, how can you move in the direction of collaboration?
7. How many people leave your congregation in a given year? Is there any recognition of their leaving? What conversational practices do you have (or could you develop) for helping people discern whether they should stay in or leave your congregation?
8. Have each participant consider their own personal stories. How many addresses have they lived at in the last ten years? How many major moves were involved – i.e., from one city, state or country to another? Why did each of the moves happen? What are the positives and negatives of having moved (or not moved) so frequently?
9. What things do you do (or could you do) to help you get to know and appreciate your neighborhood better? What are things that you are already doing that you could do out in your neighborhood – e.g., exercising (walking/running/biking), eating out, going out for coffee, etc.?

## **Closing Thought**

“God is transforming creation. If we slow down and stay put long enough, we too will be changed into the likeness of Christ. The scope of our vision will also be changed. Instead of speaking in broad generalities about changing the world, we will find ourselves free to imagine in more specific ways the transformation of our own particular places. We can trust that God is orchestrating the renewal of all creation and that God will raise up people in other places who will care for those places as much as we care for ours.” — *Slow Church*, p. 74

## Fourth Session

### Read:

- Chapter Four—Patience: Entering Into The Suffering of Others

### Facilitator Prep (Optional):

- Crash Course: History of the Industrial Revolution (feat. John Green)  
<http://youtu.be/zhL5DCizj5c> Running time: 11 minutes.
- Renovare: Intro to Eugene Peterson's The Jesus Way:  
<http://j.mp/Renovare-TheJesusWay> Running time: 5 minutes.
- "All I Need is Everything" Over the Rhine  
<http://youtu.be/98fO4r-GzM0> Running time: 5 minutes.

### Welcome:

From "All I Need is Everything" by Over the Rhine:

Slow down. Hold still.  
It's not as if it's a matter of will.  
Someone's circling. Someone's moving  
a little lower than the angels.  
And it's got nothing to do with me.  
The wind blows through the trees,  
but if I look for it, it won't come.  
I tense up. My mind goes numb.  
There's nothing harder than learning how to receive.



...

All I need is everything.  
Inside, outside, feel new skin.  
All I need is everything.  
Feel the slip and the grip of grace again.

Full lyrics online (and listen) at <http://overtherhine.com/albums/good-dog-bad-dog-back-porch/>

## Lectio Divina:

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*Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'*

*Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.'*

—John 14:5-11 (NRSV)

## Conversation Starters:

1. In what sorts of situations do you find yourself most impatient? Why are you impatient? How do you deal with your impatience?
2. To what extent do we question the technology of our age and its effects on our lives? Describe some ways in which technology has made you more impatient? Are there ways in which a particular technology has made you more patient, or has helped cultivate some other virtue in you?
3. Reflect on times when you have acted impatiently as a congregation. What was driving your impatience? What were the outcomes of your impatient action? What would you do differently if you were faced with a similar situation now?
4. Are there things that you believe are worth pursuing (or protecting) “by any means necessary”? If so what? And why?
5. If Jesus is not only the person that we are to embody together in our neighborhood but also the Way in which we are to do so, then who do we understand Jesus to be? What did he teach? How did he live? And how are these questions related?
6. What practices of confession does your church have? Are there stories of when that practice has worked well and benefited the health and well-being of your congregation?
7. Eugene Peterson says, “A Christian congregation, the church in your neighborhood, has always been the primary location for getting this way and truth and life of Jesus believed and embodied.” (see p. 92). If Peterson is right, what might this mean for the ways in which we share life together?
8. In what ways do you as a church enter into the sufferings of others in your church or neighborhood? Tell stories of times when you have failed to enter into (or to enter fully into) the sufferings of others.

## Closing Thought

“The local church is the crucible in which we are forged as the patient people of God. We have been united with each other in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. As we mature together into the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13), over time and in our places, we learn patience by forgiving and being reconciled to one another. Our brothers and sisters may incessantly annoy us. But we are called in Christ to love and to be reconciled to them. Just as marriage vows serve as a covenant bond that holds a couple together in difficult times, our commitment to our faith community is essential if we are to learn patience and practice stability. Patience can hold us together when other forces conspire to rip us asunder.”

— *Slow Church*, p. 87

## Fifth Session

### Read:

- Chapter Five—Wholeness: The Reconciliation of All Things

### Facilitator Prep (Optional):

- Opening pages of Howard Snyder's *Salvation Means Creation Healed*  
<http://j.mp/HowardSnyder-Ecology>
- Jo Bailey Wells – The Psalms of Lament: [http://youtu.be/X\\_w0KSin3dE](http://youtu.be/X_w0KSin3dE)  
Running time: 4 minutes.
- Parker Palmer on Clearness Committees: <http://j.mp/ParkerPalmer-Clearness>  
Running Time: 13 minutes.

### Welcome:

“Brotherhood” by Liberty Hyde Bailey:

Weather and wind and waning moon

Plain and hilltop under the sky

Ev'ning, morning and blazing noon,

Brother of' all the world am I.

The pine-tree, linden and the maize

The insect, squirrel and the kine

All-natively they live their days—  
As they live theirs, so I live mine.  
I know not where, I know not what:—  
Believing none and doubting none  
Whatso befalls it counteth not,—  
Nature and time and I are one.

...

I am the bird in its nest of straw  
And I abide by my time and law,  
I am the tree standing night and day,  
And I am the plant that fades away;  
And men grow green and the men grow brown,  
And life rises up and death drops down;  
And men, and life, and the things that be  
They flow on and on unceasingly.

I am the wind that blows to the sky,  
And ageless cloud that goes floating by;  
I am the rain and the river flow,  
I am the seasons that come and go;  
I am the dusk and the morning light,  
The call of day and the voice of night;  
And I pass out to the silent sea,  
Flowing and flowing eternally.

Full poem online at <http://erb.kingdomnow.org/poem-liberty-hyde-bailey-brotherhood-vol-2-27/>

## Lectio Divina:

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*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

*And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him— provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.*

—Col 1:15:23 (NRSV)

## Conversation Starters:

1. Name some of the fragmentations that exist in your congregation. Race? Age? Economic class? Political party? Where are the spaces in your life together where people on either side of any of these divides can actively engage with those on the opposite side—talking and working together and knowing each other first and foremost as brothers and sisters in Christ? How can you nurture more of these opportunities for healing and reconciliation to begin?
2. Name some of the fragmentations that exist in your neighborhood. Race? Age? Economic class? Political party? Where are the spaces in your neighborhood where people on either side of any of these divides can actively engage with those on the opposite side—talking and working together and knowing each other first and foremost as neighbors who share together in this place?
3. Howard Snyder describes creation as an inter-connected whole in which “everything is related to everything else.” (see p. 102). Do you agree? And why or why not? What are some of the implications for our Christian life that follow from our convictions about whether or not creation is an inter-connected whole?

4. What are some ways in which we think and act dualistically as churches and individuals? Specifically, what are some ways we divide life up into spiritual and material/secular? What are some of the effects of our dualism?
5. Is there any group of people that you would say is barred as whole from your church? Why are they barred?
6. Does your church have any practices of lament? Tell a story about a time when you lamented together. What were you lamenting? What happened as a result of the lament?
7. What is your congregational process for decision making? How do you ensure that as many people as possible can speak into the decision-making process if they so desire?
8. How carefully do you examine the impact your decisions might have on your neighbors? On other churches? On the land or creation as a whole? Are there ways for people outside your congregation, who might have wisdom pertinent to a particular decision, to speak into your discernments?

## **Closing Thought**

“In all your efforts at law making, in all your official acts, self-interest shall be cast into oblivion. . . . Look and listen for the welfare of the whole people and have always in view not only the present but also the coming generations, even those whose faces are yet beneath the surface of the ground—the unborn of the future nation.”

— The Constitution of the Iroquois Nations, *qtd. Slow Church*, p. 119

## Sixth Session

### Read:

- Chapter Six—Work: Cooperating with God’s Reconciling Mission

### Facilitator Prep (Optional):

- Videos from *Christianity Today*’s “This Is Our City” series. See especially, “Furniture Fit for the Kingdom,” “Yes I Am the Mechanic,” and “Business as God Meant it to Be.”  
<https://vimeo.com/thissourcity/videos>
- Videos from *Leadership Journal*’s “Redeeming Work” conferences, featuring Andy Crouch, Tom Nelson, Amy Sherman, and more.  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/live/>

### Welcome:

“[The Church] has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as result, the secular work of the world is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that the greater part of the world’s intelligent workers have become irreligious, or at least, uninterested in religion.

But is it astonishing? How can any one remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life? The Church’s approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.



Church by all means, and decent forms of amusement, certainly – but what use is all that if in the very center of his life and occupation he is insulting God with bad carpentry? No crooked table legs or ill-fitting drawers ever, I dare swear, came out of the carpenter’s shop at Nazareth. Nor, if they did, could anyone believe that they were made by the same hand that made Heaven and earth. No piety in the worker will compensate for work that is not true to itself; for any work that is untrue to its own technique is a living lie.” —Dorothy Sayers, “Why Work?” Full text online (PDF) at <http://centerforfaithandwork.com/sites/default/files/Sayers%20Why%20Work.pdf>

## **Lectio Divina:**

Read the following text with these three questions in mind:

- First reading: What word or phrase touched my heart?
- Second reading: Where does that word or phrase touch my life today?
- Third reading: What is the text calling *me* to do or become? What is the text calling *us* to do or become?

*For I am about to create new heavens*

*and a new earth;*

*the former things shall not be remembered*

*or come to mind.*

*But be glad and rejoice forever*

*in what I am creating;*

*for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,*

*and its people as a delight.*

*I will rejoice in Jerusalem,*

*and delight in my people;*

*no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,*

*or the cry of distress.*

*No more shall there be in it*

*an infant that lives but a few days,  
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;  
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,  
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.*

*They shall build houses and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.*

*They shall not build and another inhabit;  
they shall not plant and another eat;  
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,  
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.*

*They shall not labor in vain,  
or bear children for calamity;<sup>e</sup>  
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—  
and their descendants as well.*

*Before they call I will answer,  
while they are yet speaking I will hear.*

*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,  
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;  
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!*

*They shall not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain,  
  
says the Lord.*

—Isaiah 65:17-25 (NRSV)

## Conversation Starters:

1. What was the first job you had that you really loved? What did you love about it?
2. In the book, the authors write, “Work is such a complex, important and even intimate part of what it means to be human that it’s surprising how little the American church has had to say about it in recent decades.” Has your church talked about work, in all its complexity and ambiguity? If so, what was the conversation?
3. Has your theology of work changed over time?
4. Describe a work experience you had that was alienating. Describe a work experience you had that was deeply satisfying.
5. Do you see your work—whether that work is paid or unpaid—as a calling?
6. Do you think there is a connection between a “rationalized operating manual like the McDonald’s ‘Bible’” described on p. 132 of the book, and the way some people approach the actual Bible? Which metaphors for the Scripture are you comfortable with—operating manual, roadmap, GPS, compass, etc.
7. What are some practical ways the neighborhood church can begin to reclaim work as an expression and instrument of God’s *shalom*?
8. What are some of the work-related injustices in your community? What should be the response of the church?
9. Do you think the local church’s role in its neighborhood should be this expansive: “What if our churches became clearinghouses for good work in our neighborhoods, facilitating connections between employers looking for good workers and good workers looking for good jobs? What if our church communities became incubators of small business, nonprofits and volunteer associations built on the assets that are already in our community, waiting to be nurtured and to grow?” (p. 136)
10. What gifts and skills do people in your congregation have that they are willing to make available for the reconciling work of the kingdom?
11. How can you connect people with particular skills that would benefit your neighborhood and empower people to begin exploring how they can use their gifts together in this way?
12. What spaces does your church have in its life together for people to talk about and reflect theologically on the work they do? How does your congregation strengthen the bonds between the daily work of your members and the mission of the church in your place?

## **Closing Thought**

“All vocations are intended by God to manifest His love in the world. For each special calling gives a man some particular place in the Mystery of Christ, gives him something to do for the salvation of all mankind. The difference between the various vocations lies in the different ways in which each one enables men to discover God’s love, appreciate it, respond to it, and share it with other men. Each vocation has for its aim the propagation of divine life in the world.”—Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island*

## Seventh Session

### Read:

- Chapter Seven—Sabbath: The Rhythm of Reconciliation

### Facilitator Prep (Optional):

- “Prayer Time.” Chapter Three of Eugene Peterson’s *Working the Angles*.
- Norman Wirzba, “A Sabbath Way to Lead.” Online at <http://www.faithandleadership.com/content/sabbath-way-lead>
- *This Day: Collected Sabbath Poems*, by Wendell Berry
- Sabbath Manifesto. <http://www.sabbathmanifesto.org>

### Welcome:

I go among trees and sit still.

All my stirring becomes quiet

around me like circles on water.

My tasks lie in their places

where I left them, asleep like cattle.

Then what is afraid of me comes

and lives a while in my sight.

What it fears in me leaves me,

and the fear of me leaves it.

It sings, and I hear its song.

Then what I am afraid of comes.

I live for a while in its sight.

What I fear in it leaves it,

and the fear of it leaves me.

It sings, and I hear its song.

After days of labor,

mute in my consternations,

I hear my song at last,

and I sing it. As we sing,

the day turns, the trees move.

—Wendell Berry, “Sabbath Poem 1979: I”

Online at <http://spirit-into-matter.blogspot.com/2012/06/wendell-berry-poem-i-go-among-trees.html>

## **Lectio Divina:**

Read the following text with these three questions in mind:

- First reading: What word or phrase touched my heart?
- Second reading: Where does that word or phrase touch my life today?
- Third reading: What is the text calling *me* to do or become? What is the text calling *us* to do or become?

Psalm 92

A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath Day

*It is good to give thanks to the Lord,*

*to sing praises to your name, O Most High;*

*to declare your steadfast love in the morning,*

*and your faithfulness by night,*

*to the music of the lute and the harp,*

*to the melody of the lyre.*

*For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work;*

*at the works of your hands I sing for joy.*

*How great are your works, O Lord!*

*Your thoughts are very deep!*

*The dullard cannot know,*

*the stupid cannot understand this:*

*though the wicked sprout like grass*

*and all evildoers flourish,*

*they are doomed to destruction forever,*

*but you, O Lord, are on high forever.*

*For your enemies, O Lord,*

*for your enemies shall perish;*

*all evildoers shall be scattered.*

*But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox;*

*you have poured over me<sup>a</sup> fresh oil.*

*My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies;*

*my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants.*

*The righteous flourish like the palm tree,*



*and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.*

*They are planted in the house of the Lord;*

*they flourish in the courts of our God.*

*In old age they still produce fruit;*

*they are always green and full of sap,*

*showing that the Lord is upright;*

*he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.*

### **Conversation Starters:**

1. The book describes Sabbath as a rebuke even to church cultures that pride themselves on their busyness. What are some of the temptations of churches towards busyness?
2. Sabbath, when it is kept at all, is usually observed as a personal practice. How can your church or small group practice the sabbath together? What practices do you have of pausing and reflecting together on who God is and who you are and how you are being called to follow in God's mission.
3. If your church doesn't have any shared Sabbath practices, what small steps can you take together in this direction?
4. The economics of Sabbath compel us to ask ourselves tough questions about "enough." What does "enough" look like for your family? for your church? If you were going to experiment with "enough", what area of life would you choose (see p. 143)?
5. Are there places in your life together where you can transparently discuss your finances as individuals, as families, and as a church, as you strive toward understanding what it means to have enough.
6. The word "redistribution" is a politically charged one. How comfortable are you with its use to describe the economics of Egypt, the wilderness, and the early Acts church?
7. Sabbath is not just about rest. It's about delight. How would you answer Dan Allender's question on page 147: "What would I do for a twenty-four-hour period of time if the only criteria was to pursue my deepest joy?"
8. Is there something scary about delight and/or its pursuit?
9. Sabbath trust—"seven days provision for six days work"—was so integral to what it meant to be a part of God's chosen people that the Israelites were instructed to keep a jarful of manna in the ark

of the covenant, an ever-present reminder of God's love and provision. What is the "manna" for your church? And what is your "jar"? In other words, how does your church recognize, and then memorialize, God's abundant provision?

## **Closing Thought**

"Of the Ten Commandments, the longest commandment is the one that begins, 'Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.' It's long, because it goes on to talk about all the other people you have to make sure honor the Sabbath along with you. Not just you, but your children; not just your family, but the people who work for you; and not just the people who work for you, but any foreigners who are resident in the place where you live. God cares about Sabbath. It's interesting that the God who made us to work makes the command not to work. We are not machines; we're creatures. And the Sabbath reminds us that we're creatures who need to rest. One of the tragedies of our culture is that we've lost this. So now we just have to choose it. It's no longer just sort of part of the fabric of our world that things stop on Sundays. Now, we have to stop, and it's the best thing you can possibly do if you want to be an image-bearer who contributes to the world."—Andy Crouch. Video online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEGE0MbTEg4>