

The Church's Portraits of Jesus

Leader's Guide

by

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This *Leader's Guide* provides suggestions for guiding a group study of *The Church's Portraits of Jesus* by Linda McKinnish Bridges. The book is available from Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., by calling **1-800-568-1248** or by visiting our on-line bookstore at **www.helwys.com/online.html**

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Introducing the Leader's Guide

This *Leader's Guide* provides suggestions for guiding a group study of *The Church's Portraits of Jesus* by Dr. Linda McKinnish Bridges. This book is available from Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., by calling this toll-free number: 1-800-568-1248.

How the Leader's Guide Can Help You

Dr. Bridges' book effectively blends providing information about the Gospels with provoking thought and eliciting personal responses to them. The study of the Gospels with her book as a guide will be most meaningful when all of these elements are blended in the study sessions, too.

These teaching suggestions are intended to help you achieve this result with the group you lead. They're meant to provide you with step-by-step ideas for helping the group understand, think about, and personalize the content of *The Church's Portraits of Jesus*. Too, the suggestions in this *Leader's Guide* are intended to save you time in preparation.

The teaching suggestions for each study session are sequenced and numbered so you can follow them step-by-step. When followed step-by-step, the suggestions will help you lead the group through the chapters in *The Church's Portraits of Jesus*. If you choose to adapt the suggestions, rearrange them, skip some, or let them stir your creative juices to develop other suggestions, you'll find them helpful when used in those ways, too.

What These Study Sessions Can Be Like

Imagine your study group in an informal setting, either in a classroom at church or in someone's living room. Everyone in the group feels free to make comments, ask questions, and share personal insights about their lives and their faith. That's the kind of setting in which these teaching suggestions on *The Church's Portraits of Jesus* will have their most natural use.

These teaching suggestions provide guidance for leading a ten-session study of *The Church's Portraits of Jesus*. Each study session is envisioned to be about fifty to sixty minutes long. If participants in your group engage freely in discussion (uh, talk a lot!) and you worry about "covering all the material," don't

worry. Remember that we can sometimes help people learn more by teaching less. Connecting with significant ideas by talking about them can be a key part of the learning process.

The suggestions in this *Leader's Guide* follow the pattern of *The Church's Portraits of Jesus* and thus provide a survey of the four Gospels. If your study group wishes to extend the study and devote more time to particular passages of Scripture or particular issues, fine, of course! You may find it best, however, to use this study as a survey of all four Gospels prior to digging in to one or more.

Resources You'll Need to Lead This Study

The basic resources you'll need to lead this study include a copy of *The Church's Portraits of Jesus*, by Dr. Linda Bridges; a Bible; and this *Leader's Guide*. For a few of the sessions, a chalkboard or other large writing surface will also be helpful, though not essential. For small group work, providing the assignments in written form will likely be helpful, though also not essential.

Beyond these basics, the study mainly depends on the personal insights and willingness to discuss them that you and your fellow participants bring to it.

How to Help Study Group Participants Get the Most Out of the Study

As you lead the study of *The Church's Portraits of Jesus*, try to develop an atmosphere of informality, friendliness, and mutual support that will encourage individual discussion and personal sharing. Here are some suggestions about how to make this happen:

- Try to distribute the book *The Church's Portraits of Jesus* to group members prior to the first session.
- Be prepared to listen at least as much as you talk!
- Be willing to share your own personal pilgrimage so that others will more readily share theirs.
- Set up the meeting room in an informal way—with chairs in a circle or semi-circle, perhaps around a table.
- Agree on a beginning and ending time for the sessions, and stick to it.
- Encourage participants to enter into an agreement with one another to attend faithfully, prepare for each session, offer

support to one another, and keep any confidences that are shared.

- Suggest that participants use one of these translations of the Bible if they do not have a modern translation: the New Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, the New American Standard Version, or the Contemporary English Version.

If possible, try to stay at least a session ahead of the group in your preparation. Also, if different leaders are leading various sessions, be sure those arrangements are made at least one session ahead—preferably more. Planning ahead may enable you to find ways of involving participants more in the study, perhaps by making some assignments in advance.

How Study Group Participants Can Get the Most Out of the Study

Your fellow study group members will get the most out of the study if, prior to the study session, they will read the passage of Scripture to be dealt with and also will read the study book chapter. As they read, perhaps they will also want to jot down questions and comments for class discussion. They'll certainly want to think about the meaning and personal relevance of the information.

Best wishes to you and your fellow study group participants!

Session One

Introduction: The Four Gospels— A Portrait Gallery

Overview: This study session focuses on helping participants see the four Gospels as portraits of Jesus. Each Gospel's portrait portrays Jesus in a unique manner, related to the particular needs and circumstances of its first readers and to the needs and circumstances of current readers, too.

Learning Activities

1. If participants don't know each other well, provide time for introductions, including using an icebreaker activity. One possibility is to have participants mingle and identify the person whose birthday (just the month and the day!) is closest to their own. They could then find out two other facts they have in common.

2. Call attention to the quote from Albert Schweitzer on the reverse side of the title page of *The Church's Portraits of Jesus*. Ask the group how they respond to that statement. Encourage discussion with these ideas:
 - In what sense is this One “unknown” and “known?”
 - How true is it that a person's knowledge increases as a person obeys this “One unknown”?
 - How have you come to know this “One unknown” in your “toils”? What do you think might be included in your “toils”? your work? your daily activities? the work of marriage? the work of parenting?
 - What about the “conflicts”? Could this include conflict with oneself as well as conflict with others? In what sense does one learn of this “One unknown” through them?
 - The suggestion is that people learn through “their own experiences Who He is.” How is this related to the learning we receive from Scripture, particularly the Gospels?

3. Then ask people to suggest what they'd like to learn from the study. Put suggestions on chart paper. Add to the suggestions from session to session. Look for ways to slant the study in the direction of what participants would like to learn. Suggest that the overarching agenda for the study could be to help them discover and find personal meaning in what each Gospel's

portrait of Jesus looks like, especially the unique coloring each Gospel brings to its portrait. Encourage participants to process what occurs in light of their own agenda, however, and also to look for ways to help fellow participants achieve their goals.

4. Point out that in the Preface on pages vii and viii, Dr. Bridges gives credit to various people from whom she has “learned Christ.” Ask:

- If you were writing the preface to your own manuscript of what you know of Christ, whom would you cite?
- How much of your own learning of Christ is from your head, and how much from your heart? Is only one sufficient? Or are both kinds of learning of Christ important?

5. Point out that on the first page of the Introduction, Dr. Bridges asks, “What did Jesus *really* look like?” and proceeds to describe possibilities. Ask:

- What picture of Jesus comes to mind when you consider that question?
- How adequate or inadequate is that picture?
- What benefits do having that picture provide you?
- What limitations do you see in the picture of Jesus that you have?
- Note that we have no reliable records to tell us how Jesus looked. How would it help if we did? How is it good that we don’t?

6. Refer to the story on pages 2-5 of Dr. Bridges’ experience while flying. Ask: What do you think of it? What did you learn from it? What experiences have led you to think seriously about Jesus?

7. Invite participants to close their eyes and “draw” a picture or portrait—either visually or in words or both—of Jesus as they envision him. Then ask them to talk about this portrait in a small group of two or three people. Ask the group to discuss how and whether their view of Jesus deals with these matters: physical features, manner of dress, circumstances, activities, attitudes.

8. Invite comments from groups. Explore the ideas further by asking, How would our portraits of Jesus change if we envisioned Jesus in a modern setting?

9. Point out two ways of producing a portrait, according to the definitions on page 5—collage or formal portrait. Ask: How is a portrait in words sometimes more effective in portraying

meaning than is a picture or portrait? Refer to the saying, “One picture is worth a thousand words,” but also note that we use words to convey that picturesque thought!

10. Lead the group to think about how the Gospels came to be, with their source in small groups of followers remembering what Jesus said and did and talking about these memories among themselves (pp. 7-8). Ask: What historical happening led the church to shape these oral memories into written records and then into Gospels? (Passing away of eyewitnesses, p. 8)

11. Note on page 9 the various depictions of Jesus in visual art. Ask:

- What does the variety of ways of portraying Jesus suggest?
- How is this variety of portraits helpful? (Aids in understanding Jesus in light of own culture and needs.)
- What are the dangers of such portraits that are tailor-made to the views of individuals and cultures? (Problematic if we feel they are the only “true” portraits or that they contain all the truth about Jesus.)

12. Refer as needed to the story of the artist on pages 11-12 and then to the question on page 13, “How does all of this work for understanding the portraits of Jesus?” Note the identification of text, context, and readers as three elements in understanding the portraits of Jesus in the Gospels. Each Gospel attempts to understand the text—Jesus—in light of its context—the situation in the community that gave rise to the Gospel and interpret the meaning to its first readers and its readers in their various cultural and historical situations, including now.

13. Note the sentence at the top of page 15: “The church remembered Jesus because they needed help for their lives at that moment.” Point out that among the reasons that memories of Jesus were recalled, written down, and shaped in differing ways by the Gospel writers was the varying needs of early communities of Christians. Each Gospel developed as early Christian communities remembered, passed along, and eventually saw the story closest to its need written down. Ask:

- What is the difference between a Gospel and a biography of Christ or a life of Christ? (A Gospel represents meaning about Jesus based on the text—Jesus’ historical existence—and the context—the circumstances of need of Christian communities and individuals in particular historical situations.)

- What do these thoughts suggest about why we have four Gospels and not just one?

14. Note that the communication of this meaning involves the reader. Each reader views the portrait of Jesus in each Gospel with her or his own eyes, that see from her or his own particular need and circumstance. Consider the idea on page 16 that each reader shapes the Scriptures as he or she reads them and that the reader in turn is shaped by what is read. Ask:

- What's positive about this?
- What's the danger?
- How can we maximize the positive and minimize the danger? (Ideas: Read with sensitivity to experiences and circumstances behind the Scriptures that led them to be remembered. Read with willingness to apply to own experience. Read with willingness to examine, reshape, and surrender the presuppositions we bring to the Scriptures.)

15. Encourage the group to evaluate the portrait of Jesus that they paint by asking themselves to what extent their portrait of Jesus is true to the portraits in the Gospels. What does their portrait say about Jesus? What does their portrait of Jesus say about themselves?

For next session: Suggest that the group read chapters 1—8 of The Gospel of Mark plus chapter 1 of *The Church's Portraits of Jesus*.

Session Two

The Portrait of Jesus in Mark—Part One

Overview: This study session focuses on chapter 1, “The Portrait of Jesus in Mark,” and deals mainly with Mark 1—8.

Learning Activities

1. Invite the group to name one thing they remember from the first session, to suggest questions that might have been raised that they'd like to talk about further, and to make comments about the first session. Refer to agenda items developed last week of things the group would like to gain from the study.

2. Encourage the group during the study to consider how each Gospel helps them answer this question in light of their circumstances and needs: *Who is Jesus?* Also ask the group to consider this question during the study: If we had only one Gospel, not four, which would you like it to be?

3. Summarize Dr. Bridges' overview on pages 19-20 of the writing of Mark and the other Gospels.

4. Refer to Dr. Bridges' statement on page 20, "the four Gospels cannot be harmonized." Note that harmonies of the Gospel have been attempted for centuries, certainly since the time of Augustine. (Bring a harmony of the Gospels to show the group if possible, such as A. T. Robertson's *A Harmony of the Gospels*.) Explain that harmonies of the Gospels print the Gospels side by side to show each Gospel's similarities to and differences from the other Gospels. Ask:

- Why have harmonies of the Gospels been compiled? (To show likenesses and differences; to find "what actually happened when.")
- What benefits do harmonies provide? (We can see more clearly how the Gospels are alike and different.)
- What are potential problems with harmonies? (They suggest we can discover "what happened" and that that's what's important. They fail to appreciate each Gospel's unique approach and message.)
- What is the value of studying each Gospel individually instead? (We see the unique contribution each Gospel makes.)

5. To help the study group see each Gospel's uniqueness, ask groups of two or three to work together to compare the Gospels and

- note the way each Gospel begins.
- note the way each Gospel ends.
- note the number of chapters in each Gospel.

6. Lead the group to think about how each Gospel may have come together. Refer to the information on the bottom half of page 21. Suggest that the group may want to consider this further in a later session. (If now seems to be the best time to deal with this idea in more detail, see step 3 in the learning activities for session four.)

7. Point out that another distinguishing element that makes each Gospel unique is that the perspective of each Gospel is different.

Refer to Dr. Bridges' illustration on page 30 of witnesses to an auto accident. In the study of *The Church's Portraits of Jesus*, the group will be able to see the unique features of each Gospel.

8. Refer to Mark 1 and note that one unique feature in the way Mark depicts Jesus can be seen in one word. Invite someone to read 1:12, 18, 20, 21, 29, 42. Ask the other participants to listen for one word or idea that is used in each verse. (The word or idea of "immediately" or "at once" is used in many English translations and is present in each verse in the Greek of these verses.) Note that Mark portrays Jesus as acting in an urgent fashion, as with no time to waste.

9. Using pages 23-26 as a guide, lead the group to scan Mark 1:1 to 8:30 and note the actions and teachings of Jesus. Ask the group especially to look for which of these qualities is more apparent in these actions and teachings—Jesus' power and strength? or Jesus' suffering and weakness? (Jesus' power and strength) Use these suggestions to consider these specific passages:

- Review Mark 1. Ask the group to identify and list the incidents. Ask: Which is the most prominent emphasis—power or suffering?
- Point to the five conflict stories in Mark 2:1—3:6. Ask the group to name them (paralytic, eating with Levi and other sinners, fasting, Sabbath observance, Sabbath observance).
- Note the various responses to Jesus in 3:7-35.
- Refer to the parables in Mark 4. Note that none emphasize weakness or suffering.
- Refer to the accounts in Mark 4:35 to 5:43 and note that they depict Jesus' power. Ask the group to identify three ways in which Jesus was victorious. (Victory over a storm, over demons, and over disease and death.)
- Note the responses to Jesus in Mark 6. Point out that though there is a sense of foreboding, the emphasis continues to be on Jesus' power, not his suffering.
- Point out that the events and teaching of Mark 7:1—8:30 do not deal with suffering, either.

10. Lead the group to consider Mark's picture of a powerful Jesus. Guide discussion with these questions:

- In what circumstances of the early church would this message have been especially important?
- What message would this picture have conveyed?

- In what circumstances today would this message be especially important today?
- How have you experienced Jesus' power?

For next session: Suggest that the group read chapters 9—16 of The Gospel of Mark.

Session Three

The Portrait of Jesus in Mark—Part Two

Overview: This study session focuses on chapter 1, “The Portrait of Jesus in Mark,” and deals mainly with Mark 9—16.

Learning Activities

1. Refer to the section that begins on page 26 of *The Church's Portraits of Jesus*, under the heading of “Jesus' Pain.” Recall that Mark 1—8 emphasizes Jesus' power and strength. Comment that the emphasis changes beginning with Mark 8:31. Ask someone to read Jesus' three predictions of his death in Mark 8:31; 9:30-31; and 10:33-34. Point out that Jesus' power and strength dominate in the first half of Mark, while Jesus' suffering and weakness dominate in the second half. In Mark, these two different pictures of Jesus are superimposed on each other to form a whole. When put together, these two pictures form a portrait of Jesus as the Suffering Son of God. This image combines power and strength with suffering and weakness. Ask:

- What difficulties do people have in putting these pictures together into one image? (We prefer the image of strength since that is the way cultures tend to operate.)
- Would people have been likely to put this picture together themselves, on their own? (We likely would not have put it together if God hadn't.)
- What needs would this portrait of Jesus as the Suffering Son of God have met for Mark's first readers? (Perhaps it would have provided assurance as they faced difficulty and also a way of facing this difficulty.)
- What needs does this portrait of Jesus as the Suffering Son of God meet for us?

2. Lead the group to consider how the disciples responded to the portrait of Jesus as one who suffers. Ask someone to read aloud

Mark 8:31-33, then Mark 9:30-35, and finally Mark 10:33-44. Ask the group to listen for how the disciples responded in each instance to Jesus' announcement of his coming suffering and death. After the reading, ask for reports. Discuss the incidents by asking these questions:

- Why do you suppose the disciples responded as they did?
- What would have been a better response in Mark 8:31-33?
- What would have been a better response in Mark 9:30-35?
- What would have been a better response in Mark 10:33-44?

3. Lead the group to consider two other incidents in the Gospel of Mark that portray Jesus as one who suffers—in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42); and at the cross (Mark 15:33-37). Ask the group to imagine they are Christians facing persecution. They are reading these passages in the Gospel of Mark for the first time. Form groups of three or four people to discuss these questions:

- How did the accounts of Jesus' in Gethsemane and at the crucifixion affect you when you read it?
- How do these accounts speak to your situation?

4. Review the two possibilities for the community of the first readers that Dr. Bridges describes on pages 32-34—the traditional picture of the church at Rome facing persecution and the picture of the church in an agrarian culture in Palestine. Form two groups. Ask one group to scan Mark 9—16 and think of events and teachings in Mark's portrayal of Jesus' suffering that would have spoken especially to Christians in the traditional setting as they faced persecution in Rome. Ask the other group to scan Mark 9—16 and think of events and teachings in Mark's portrayal of Jesus' suffering that would have spoken especially to Christians in an agrarian culture as they faced opposition from both the Jews and the Romans.

5. Lead the group to consider how the Gospel of Mark relates to their experiences by asking these questions:

- Where do you see yourself in Mark's story?
- How do you identify with Jesus' power?
- How do you identify with Jesus' suffering?

6. Write these statements from Dr. Bridges' book on pieces of paper and distribute them to the participants. Ask that others respond to the statement after it has been read aloud by suggesting how that statement relates to their experiences and to their understanding of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark.

- a. “One of the greatest paradoxes of all time is that in order to find life, you must lose it.” (p. 36)
- b. “The Christian faith was never intended to be a quick, get rich, get power, get health, scheme.” (p. 37)
- c. “To see power in suffering, glory in crosses, and abundance in loss is to view Mark’s portrait of Jesus.” (p. 37)
- d. “The church was learning that there is power in pain, strength in weakness.” (p. 38)

7. Close by asking the group to suggest words and phrases that summarize Mark’s portrait of Jesus as they see it.

For next session: Read chapter 2, “The Portrait of Jesus in Matthew,” and Matthew 1—7.

Session Four

The Portrait of Jesus in Matthew—Part One

Overview: This study session focuses on chapter 2, “The Portrait of Jesus in Matthew” and deals mainly with Matthew 1—7.

Learning Activities

1. Begin by asking participants to recall some words that characterize the Gospel of Mark. Then note that the group likely will find that different words will characterize the Gospel of Matthew. Encourage the group to watch for ways that their understanding of the Gospels and of Jesus is enriched as they are able to see the varied colors, shapes, and backgrounds in each Gospels’ portrait of Jesus.
2. Refer to the first paragraph on page 39. Ask someone to read aloud the paragraph, and encourage the group to listen for what it suggests about how each Gospel came to be. Invite responses. Summarize by explaining that, as with Mark, the Gospel of Matthew is not simply a literary compilation for all time. Rather it was for a specific time to meet a specific need among its first readers. Each Gospel intends to give a theological understanding of Jesus’ ministry to meet the needs of its audience in that day. Recall the *Peanuts* cartoon in which one of the characters says that every time he reads the Bible he feels like he is reading someone else’s mail!

3. Point out that one question many Bible students and scholars have had through the centuries is how the four Gospels are related. Note that the weight of current scholarship suggests that Mark was written first and Matthew afterward. Ask, Since Mark is sixteen chapters long and Matthew is twenty-eight chapters long, what's the first thing that has to be explained if Matthew is first and Mark is second? (why Mark left out so much good stuff) Note that for this and other reasons, Mark is considered the first Gospel to have been written. [If the group has further questions and comments, you could illustrate and explain one way in which the Gospels may have come together. Note that Bible students who study and compare all four Gospels can see that there are five major "chunks" of material in these four Gospels: (1) Mark; (2) events and teachings that are only in Matthew; (3) events and teachings that are only in Luke; (4) events and teachings that are in both Matthew and Luke; and (5) the Gospel of John. You could draw five boxes on a chalkboard to show these five "chunks." Underneath these five boxes, draw two circles, one for Matthew and one for Luke. Point out that most of Mark is included in Matthew and in Luke. Draw arrows from Mark to Matthew and Luke. Then draw an arrow from (2) to Matthew and from (3) to Luke to connect the material that is unique to each of these Gospels. Finally, draw arrows from (4) to Matthew and to Luke to connect the material that Matthew and Luke have in common. Note that this is one way of explaining the relationships among the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke.]

4. To help the group identify Matthew's unique portrait of Jesus, ask the class to form groups of three to five people each, with each group having one of the following assignments. (If fewer than nine people are present, you can use the assignments with the entire group.) Give each small group about five minutes in which to do the assignment. Ask that groups decide on a reporter to report the results of their study.

- a. *Assignment 1:* Scan Matthew and identify as many elements as you can that are in Matthew that you do not recall seeing in the Gospel of Mark.
- b. *Assignment 2:* A unique feature of Matthew's portrait of Jesus is that it "has a clear Jewish tone." From pages 41-44 of *The Church's Portraits of Jesus* plus the Scripture references mentioned, describe how these three elements in Matthew give this "Jewish tone": the genealogy, Jesus and Abraham, Jesus as Son of David.

c. *Assignment 3*: A unique feature of Matthew's portrait of Jesus is its emphasis on Jesus as "the Teacher." From pages 44-46 of *The Church's Portraits of Jesus* plus the Scripture references mentioned, paint a portrait of Jesus as teacher as we see it in Matthew.

5. After about five minutes, receive reports on each assignment. Add to the reports as needed and invite others to add to the reports also.

- a. On assignment 1, note that among the major elements unique to Matthew are these: the genealogy, the birth story, a lengthy description of Jesus' temptation experience, the Sermon on the Mount, the resurrection appearances, the Great Commission..
- b. On assignment 2, discuss the genealogy in more detail. Be sure to note that among the unusual elements is the presence of women. Suggest that readers of Matthew could well ask these two questions about their presence: (1) What are these *women* doing in this list? (2) What are *these* women doing in this list? Use Dr. Bridges' ideas to add to the class discussion of the genealogy. Review the Old Testament Scripture references for the women. (If participants seem concerned that Matthew traces the genealogy through Joseph when Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus, you may wish to point out that this is another way in which we see that we are not the first audience for the Gospel. The genealogy affirms to readers related to Judaism that "Jesus belongs" ; its prime goal is not to answer questions that come out of our scientific, logical mindset.)
- c. On assignment 3, note that the major summaries of Jesus' teachings in the Gospel of Matthew may have been one reason that Matthew became the favorite Gospel of the church.

6. Pick up on the emphasis in assignment 3 on the teaching ministry of Jesus. Note the structure of the Gospel, that Matthew is composed of five major teaching sections, each preceded by events in Jesus' ministry that lead up to it.

7. Refer to the first major teaching section, Teachings on Righteousness, in Matthew 5—7. Summarize Dr. Bridges' discussion on pages 46-47. Invite further discussion with these questions:

- How is the way of life Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount a radical, new kind of righteousness?
- What problem do you see with the statement that the world would be a better place if we'd all just live by the Sermon on the Mount?

- In a world like ours, how practical is following Jesus' teachings?
- Read the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12. What would happen in your place of work if people behaved in that manner?

For next session: Read Matthew 8—28.

Session Five

The Portrait of Jesus in Matthew—Part Two

Overview: This study session focuses on chapter 2, “The Portrait of Jesus in Matthew” and deals mainly with Matthew 8—28.

Learning Activities

1. Ask the group to recall two major parts of Matthew's portrait of Jesus that makes the Gospel of Matthew unique. (Relation to Judaism; emphasis on Jesus' teaching)
2. Remind the group that Matthew's Gospel is constructed so that it contains five major teaching units, each preceded by a narrative section. Connect with Dr. Bridges' thought that these teaching units represent “teachable moments” in the flow of Matthew's Gospel (see page 47, *The Church's Portraits of Jesus*). Suggest that as the group studies the remaining four major teaching units in Matthew that they consider how each section relates to their own “teachable moments” and try to relate Jesus' teaching in Matthew to their own current search for help and growth.
3. Remind the class that the first section of teaching was “Teachings on Righteousness,” found in Matthew 5—7. This section emphasized Jesus' higher standard of righteousness, the kind of righteousness that characterizes life in God's kingdom.
4. Lead the group to consider Jesus' “Teachings on Travel—The Missionary Speech” in Matthew 10:5—11:1. Ask someone to read this passage aloud. Ask one-third of the class to listen as if they were the twelve disciples; ask another third to listen as if they were the first readers of Matthew's Gospel; ask the remaining third to listen as current disciples. Each is to try to

answer these questions:

- a. Why do I need to hear this?
- b. What does this mean?
- c. What should I do?

5. Use the questions in the preceding step to guide discussion of this passage. In addition, you might ask such questions as these:

- a. How do you think the disciples might have responded?
- b. What positive elements would they have found in these teachings?
- c. What might have bothered them?

6. To help participants review and understand the third section of teaching in Matthew 13 on “Teachings on the Secrets of the Kingdom,” summarize Matthew 11—12 by using the information on pages 50-51 in *The Church’s Portraits of Jesus*. Then ask someone to read aloud Matthew 13:1-2,10-11,36,51. Ask the class to listen for two settings and two results. After the reading, invite responses. Help the group see that in Matthew 13:1-35, Jesus teaches from a boat, and the crowd hears but doesn’t understand; and in Matthew 13:36-52, Jesus is in a house, and the disciples hear and do understand.

7. Identify the parables Matthew records in Matthew 13:1-52, and summarize Dr. Bridges’ insights on pages 51-52 about each parable. Engage the group in conversation about Matthew 13:1-52 by asking these questions:

- a. What needs of people in Jesus’ day and in the day of early church do you think this passage would have helped to meet?
- b. What needs in our day would this passage help to meet?

8. Refer to the fourth major teaching section, “Teachings on the Church” in Matthew 18:1 to 19:1. Ask, what do you think about the idea that leaders of the church are to “look like children”, according to Dr. Bridges’ comments on Matthew 18:1-4? How can church leaders be childlike but avoid being childish?

9. Approach the remainder of this section by inviting participants to scan Matthew 18:5 to 19:1 and identify passages they’d like to consider further. Use these questions to guide thought and reflection on each passage identified:

- a. What does Jesus’ teaching say about what the church and individual Christians should be like?
- b. To what extent is our church like that?
- c. To what extent am I like that?

10. Refer to the title Dr. Bridges has given to Matthew 24:1 to 26:1, the fifth section of Jesus' teachings in Matthew—"Teachings on the End of Time" (Bridges, 53). Note that the narrative section that precedes the teaching section has to do with Jesus' journey to Jerusalem to be rejected (19—23). The whole passage conveys a sense that something climactic is about to happen. In that context, Jesus provides teachings related to the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age. To help the group sense the urgency plus Jesus' intent in his teachings, ask them to scan Matthew 24:1 to 26:1 and identify the commands Jesus gave his disciples. (For example: Beware that no one leads you astray. Flee. Pray. Learn the lesson of the fig tree. Be ready.)

11. Refer also to the concern for preparedness and accountability in the teachings in Matthew 25 on the wise and foolish bridesmaids, the talents, and the judgment.

12. Summarize Dr. Bridges' description on pages 55-57 of the community that gave rise to the Gospel of Matthew. Refer to Dr. Bridges' observation that "The church had not been driven to despair but to faithfulness" (Bridges, 57). Ask, What are some events and teachings in the Gospel of Matthew that you think led them to faithfulness instead of despair?

13. Lead the group to consider to what extent their own portrait is in this Gospel along with Jesus' portrait and the portrait of the Matthean community. Refer to the description on pages 58-59 of the age group born between 1961 and 1981 and ask how they resonate with that description. Inquire further:

- a. If you are not in that age group, which words would describe the age group you are in?
- b. How does the Gospel of Matthew speak to the needs of that age group?
- c. To what extent do the two contrasting T-shirt messages mentioned on page 59 speak to your group—Just do it, Just say no?
- d. What similar T-shirt messages might describe your age group? (For example: Just think about it. Just study about it. Just put it off. Just don't bother. Just forget it. Just go ... jump in the lake or elsewhere.)
- e. Which teaching section in Matthew most fits your present "teachable moment"?

14. Use one of these ideas as a way to move toward concluding the session:
- Refer to Bonhoeffer's statement on page 59. How can people be motivated to do more than just study about Jesus' teachings and not do much if anything about them?
 - Refer to Matthew 28:19-20. How well are we doing with this command?
15. Ask the class to suggest words that summarize Matthew's portrait of Jesus and to recall words they suggested for summarizing Mark's portrait of Jesus. Note the likenesses and the contrasts.

For next session: Read chapter 3, "The Portrait of Jesus in Luke," and also read Luke 1—20.

Session Six

The Portrait of Jesus in Luke—Part One

Overview: This study session focuses on chapter 3, "The Portrait of Jesus in Luke" and deals with themes that run throughout Luke's Gospel.

Learning Activities

- Engage the group in conversation by asking questions like these:
 - What does eating together socially generally mean? (Acceptance)
 - What does refusing to invite some person or group to sit down and eat together socially tend to mean? (Rejection)
 - How has refusing to allow persons or groups to eat with other persons or groups been used in our culture to indicate rejection and exclusion? (Segregation laws and practices)
 - What people in our community would you most not like to sit down and eat with?

Point out that this common feeling about eating together is a tip-off to how Luke will paint his unique portrait of Jesus.

- Refer to Dr. Bridges' comments on page 64, paragraph 1, about Luke "pushing the traditional edges of portraiture." Especially note that Luke did this by portraying Jesus enjoying a meal with various people, including people who were the unacceptables of the culture in which he moved.

3. Use the ideas in steps 3—6 to summarize Dr. Bridges' points about Luke's "Orderly Gospel" on pages 64-66. Be sure to identify the main points mentioned as indications of Luke's "Orderly Gospel," as follows:

- (1) attention to historical details
- (2) a literary structure that highlights Luke's special emphases, especially the role of women
- (3) a prologue that telegraphs Luke's setting and intention to follow an orderly purpose

4. Provide additional information on point (1), attention to historical details, as suggested on page 64.

5. Then refer to point (2), Luke's emphasis on women. Review the Scripture passages listed at the top of page 65. Review these additional passages, too.

- a. Women with Jesus—Luke 8:1-3
- b. Teaching Mary—Luke 10:38-42
- c. The poor widow and the rich men—Luke 21:1-4
- d. Women mourning for Jesus—Luke 23:27-28
- e. The women standing by Jesus—Luke 23:49,55-56

Ask class members what they think this emphasis on women indicates about Luke's portrait of Jesus and about Luke's purpose. Then ask what meaning they think Luke's emphasis on women indicates for today.

6. To lead the class to review point (3), Luke's prologue, ask: What do we learn about Luke and his Gospel from Luke 1:1-4? (Luke's Gospel is not the first. Luke is not an eyewitness. The use of sources is implied. Luke intends to write an orderly account, to a person. Luke's Gospel intends to generate certainty and assurance.)

7. To move further into the study of the Gospel of Luke, ask the class to recall meals they've experienced that indicated acceptance and fellowship and meals or other social situations they've experienced that did not. After participants have shared their recollections, invite participants to explore what made the difference in each. Invite further sharing by asking about occasions when class members may have enjoyed a social occasion that involved people beyond their regular group of friends—even beyond what might be considered acceptable.

8. Refer to Luke 7:34 and Dr. Bridges' suggestion that the theme of Jesus enjoying meals and parties "permeates the Gospel" (p.

68). State that we can learn much about Luke's portrait of Jesus by looking at the occasions where Jesus ate with people, noting who ate with him, and identifying who was happy about the situation and who wasn't. Distribute the following Scripture passages to small groups of three to six participants each to read and discuss, using these questions: (1) What's the occasion? (2) Who was there and/or what happened? (3) Who was happy, and who wasn't? (4) What light does this incident throw on Luke's portrait of Jesus?

- a. Luke 5:27-32
- b. Luke 7:36-50
- c. Luke 11:37-41
- d. Luke 14:1-6

Allow about six minutes for small groups to work together. Then receive reports.

9. Summarize Dr. Bridges' thoughts on page 72 about Jesus' "two principles for the new table of God" and how both were against social custom. For the first principle, refer to Luke 14:7-11 and note its teaching on humility. For the second, note Jesus' emphasis on inclusiveness. Ask:

- To what extent do you think we follow these two principles?
- What social customs do we risk breaking if we practice these principles?

10. Ask the group to suggest a theme for Luke's Gospel based on Jesus' experiences of eating meals with people. (For example: "Come to the party—yes, you, all of you.") Perhaps the group could also suggest popular songs that convey this idea.

11. Ask the group to recall words that describe the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Mark and then to suggest words that capture the thrust of the Gospel of Luke.

12. Consider planning the next session on Luke's Gospel around a meal. Think about whom you will invite and whether others would be on Jesus' guest list.

For next session: Read Luke 21—28.

Session Seven

NOTES

The Portrait of Jesus in Luke—Part Two

Overview: This study session focuses on chapter 3, “The Portrait of Jesus in Luke” and deals mainly with Luke 14—28.

Learning Activities

1. If you planned this session around a meal, great! Enjoy! Whether the group is gathered around a meal or not, consider such questions as these: Who’s here and also who in your community is not here? Why aren’t they here? Does their absence matter? How? Should the group be concerned? What should we do? What will we do? What are the consequences of doing something? of doing nothing?

2. Invite volunteers to summarize the previous session. Then give an overview of the three movements and a coda in Dr. Bridges’ outline of the Gospel of Luke (see the bold headings on pages 69, 73-74).

3. Lead the group to review these additional passages that deal with the theme of Jesus’ eating and drinking with all kinds of people. Invite response to such questions as these as each passage is read: (1) What does this passage show about Jesus and how he related to people? (2) What does this passage suggest about our relationships to people? (3) What does this passage show us about who would be on Jesus’ guest list for fellowship with him? (4) How would Jesus’ guest list be different from ours—in practice?

- a. Luke 14:7-11
- b. Luke 14:12-14
- c. Luke 14:15-24
- d. Luke 15:11-24
- e. Luke 16:19-31
- f. Luke 22:14-15
- g. Luke 24:41-42

4. Lead the group to consider the characteristics of the community who assisted in shaping Luke’s Gospel and would have been its first readers. Summarize the picture Dr. Bridges paints beginning in the last paragraph of page 76. Review the picture again and ask the group to listen for ideas about these questions:

- To what extent is our own culture like and unlike this picture?
- How important are class distinctions to us? to our church?
- Is whom we invite to our meals and social events an indication of the real answers to these questions?
- How does who actually comes indicate communication of who's actually invited?

5. Point out that not long ago in the community in which the group now lives it likely would have been considered wrong to sit down and eat with certain people. In fact, in many communities there were laws prohibiting people of different races from sitting down and eating together in a public place. Do you know of circumstances today in which eating with, or others socializing with, someone would be interpreted as not the right thing to do? (Recall the furor about the handshake of Rabin and Arafat?)

6. Note Dr. Bridges' discussion on page 78 of three "layers of cultural confusion" that "existed in the community of Luke's Gospel." Refer to the three areas of concern—race, the role of women, and social status. Ask: How does concern about these areas show itself in our own day? in our personal lives? in our community? in our church? What does the Gospel of Luke suggest we should do about these areas of concern?

7. Ask the group to reflect on ways of describing Luke's portrait of Jesus, then Matthew's, then Mark's. What words, images, even colors are evoked by each portrait? What does each portrait suggest about this question: Who is Jesus?

For next session: Read chapter 4, "The Portrait of Jesus in John" and John 1—12.

Session Eight

The Portrait of Jesus in John—Part One

Overview: This study session focuses on chapter 4, "The Portrait of Jesus in John" and deals mainly with John 1—12.

Learning Activities

NOTES

1. Recall from the previous session the words, images, and/or colors evoked by the portrait of Jesus in Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Then note that John provides yet another unique portrait. The Gospel of John paints its portrait of Jesus with different events and with similar events treated differently than do the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

2. Form small groups of three to five people each and ask them to scan assigned portions of the Gospel of John to identify incidents and emphases in John that are not in the other Gospels. For example, one group could scan John 1—12, and another could scan John 13—21. (If fewer than six people are present, you could use this same activity with the entire group and extend the time accordingly.) After about nine minutes, reassemble the groups and receive reports. List differences on chalkboard or a flip chart if possible. (Here are some obvious things groups might find that are different in the Gospel of John:
 - a. A prologue in John that is more philosophical and that sets the stage for the remainder of the Gospel (1:1-18)
 - b. Wedding at Cana (2:1-11)
 - c. Cleansing of the Temple early in Jesus' ministry, not at the end (2:13-22)
 - d. Nicodemus' visit to Jesus by night (3:1-16)
 - e. Several journeys to Jerusalem instead of just one, as indicated by John's mention of three Passovers (2:13; 6:4; 11:55)
 - f. Raising of Lazarus (11:1-53)
 - g. Jesus' washing the disciples' feet (13:1-20)
 - h. Different order of events
 - i. Miracles are called signs.
 - j. Jesus' different teaching style—long discourses, no parables
 - k. No birth narrative
 - l. No baptism by John the Baptist
 - m. No account of Jesus' temptation experience
 - n. No account of transfiguration
 - o. No passage on coming destruction of Temple and end of the age)

3. Ask what the differences between the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and the Gospel of John suggest about the historical nature of the Gospel of John in contrast to the historical nature of the Synoptic Gospels. Then inquire about how the group responds to Dr. Bridges' sentence on page 86: "The uniqueness of John's portrait does not make it less

reliable.” (Note that with John as with all of the Gospels the measure of reliability is realizing the power of its message for its audience rather than determining which Gospel has the most historical details correct. Each of the Gospels has a theological purpose that takes precedence over attention to historical detail. To accomplish its purpose, each of the Gospels varies in the events it includes, when these events are included, and the details of the events. Each Gospel has its own authenticity.)

4. Lead the class to consider the message of John’s Gospel. Note that on page 83 Dr. Bridges identifies the “official portrait title” in a key verse—John 1:12. She then states the title in these brief words—“Jesus saves.” Ask:

- How do you resonate with the words “Jesus saves” as a summary of the message of the Gospel of John?
- What other words come to mind to describe Jesus in the portrait depicted in this verse?

5. Refer to John 1:4. Explain that a major way in which John suggests that “Jesus saves” is to describe Jesus as the Light and then to consider what the Light does to people who let the Light illumine them. Guide the class to read these passages of Scripture about both of these ideas—Jesus as the Light; people who are illuminated by the Light. Invite various people to read the passages while others listen for how the Light was received.

a. Prologue

- (1) 1:4-5
- (2) 1:6-8
- (3) 1:9-11

b. Portraits of people changed by the light

- (1) Two disciples of John—1:35-40
- (2) Peter—1:40-42
- (3) Philip—1:43-44
- (4) Nathanael—1:45-51
- (5) Nicodemus—John 3:1-10
- (6) Samaritan woman—John 4:7-30
- (7) Man born blind—John 9
- (8) Around Lazarus’ resuscitation—11:9-10
- (9) Martha—11:21

6. Guide the class to put this theme of people changed by the Light together with the words “Jesus Saves”? What memories do these thoughts bring to you? From page 88, share Dr. Bridges’ memories. Guide discussion by using questions like these:

- What similar memories do you have?

- How current are these memories and ideas? Do they need to be updated?
- How do you respond when you see “John 3:16” displayed at an athletic event or “Ye must be born again” displayed by the roadside?
- What does Jesus really save people from and to these days?
- What do you think it means to be “saved”?
- What has been your experience? What memories do you have of time(s) you felt “saved”?
- How can we help the next generation experience the Light and the reality behind John’s theme, “Jesus saves”?

For next session: Read John 13—21.

Session Nine

The Portrait of Jesus in John—Part Two

Overview: This study session focuses on chapter 4, “The Portrait of Jesus in John” and deals mainly with John 13—21.

Learning Activities

1. Refer to this question from *The Church’s Portraits of Jesus*, page 96: “How do you describe Light?” To answer that question, ask for suggestions on the functions light serves. (Banishes darkness, reveals, brings out color and beauty, is a necessary ingredient for growth, brightens spirits, etc.) Then note that as the first half of John has portrayed Light by Jesus’ effect on people, the second half portrays Light by the teachings and actions of Jesus, the Light of the World. Ask the class to watch for what we learn about this Light by studying Jesus’ words and deeds in John 13—21.
2. Guide participants to consider first Jesus’ teaching about the light in John 12:35-36. Ask: What do these verses teach about the Light? (Limited opportunity to respond; response means becoming children of Light—people who originate from the Light and have the characteristics of light)
3. Explain that John 13—16 records Jesus’ “farewell discourse,” his final words to his disciples before the crucifixion. Ask someone to read aloud John 13:1-20. Encourage the group to listen for words that describe Jesus’ act. (Humility, service) Ask:

- What acts today provide similar examples of humility?
 - What are some examples of people who demonstrate such humility and service today?
 - Why don't we see more examples?
 - How can we practice this virtue of humble service in a world that values and rewards assertiveness and domination—in the world of sports, the world of work, and perhaps even in the world of the church?
4. Note next the theme of love in John 14:15,23; 15:9 and especially 15:17. Use questions like these to guide discussion:
- What difficulties would the disciples have had in following this word of Jesus and actually loving one another?
 - Considering that Jesus' way of demonstrating love meant dying, what's the meaning of love for us?
 - What's the hardest thing about loving other people?
5. Review briefly Dr. Bridges' thoughts on pages 97-98 of the Light's overcoming Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial, and the crucifixion itself.
6. Review and respond to Dr. Bridges' points on pages 100-102 about the community related to the Gospel of John, that it was (1) diverse theologically, (2) egalitarian in acceptance of people, including women, and (3) insistent on making exclusive claims for Christ. On point (2), be sure to share Dr. Bridges' story on pages 103-105 of her own realization of her call to preach and of the part the Gospel of John played in her life. Invite discussion of how participants respond to each of these points.
- On being able to be united in spite of diverse theology: What are the dangers of theological diversity? What are the benefits? What needs to happen in a church for believers to be able to maintain unity along with a healthy level of theological diversity?
 - On accepting people, including women:
- a. Ask the group to brainstorm at least ten answers to this question: What actions does a church need to take to help women and girls feel that God does not relegate them to second-class citizenship in the kingdom of God? (Brainstorming means generating as many ideas as possible, without evaluating them. The goal is to arrive at a number of potentially creative ideas.) After this process, discuss the ideas.
- b. Summarize the discussion on page 101 of *The Church's Portraits of Jesus* about the differing approaches to women's

roles in the Gospel of John and in 1 Timothy. Suggest that one explanation for these differing approaches is that as with the Gospels, all other New Testament writings are related to specific circumstances and have their own purposes.

- On John's exclusive claims for Christ: Summarize the information on page 102 about this point. Note that the community of faith associated with John's Gospel was certain of its allegiance.

7. Suggest that participants consider their relation to the Light and whether and how it has shined upon them. Ask them to reflect on this question: Because of what the Gospel of John teaches about the Light, what changes would be made in individuals and in the church if we allowed the Light to enlighten all the dark corners of our lives?

8. For next week's session, encourage participants to read "Who is Jesus Christ, Anyway?" in *The Church's Portraits of Jesus* and to reflect on how each of the Gospel writers helps to answer that question.

For next session: Read "Who Is Jesus Christ, Anyway?" in *The Church's Portraits of Jesus*.

Session Ten

Who Is Jesus Christ, Anyway?

Overview: This study session focuses on the "Conclusion" in *The Church's Portraits of Jesus*.

Learning Activities

1. If you or one of the participants has access to art depicting the visual images of Jesus similar to the references on page 112, showing it to the group could help in answering the question, "Who is Jesus Christ, anyway?"
2. Point out that the question, "Who is Jesus Christ, anyway?" can be academic, historical, or oriented only to study of the ancient texts of the four Gospels. The question becomes profoundly meaningful, however, when it becomes personal. Recall that the overarching agenda for the study was to help them discover and *find personal meaning* in what each Gospel's

portrait of Jesus looked like, especially the unique coloring each Gospel brings to its portrait. Engage the group in discussion by asking, How has this study helped you with the agenda we set at the beginning of the study?

3. Use these questions to guide discussion of the unique portrait each Gospel paints of Jesus:

- a. How does each of the four Gospels provide its own unique answer to this question: Who is Jesus? What words or images come to mind? (List on a chalkboard or flip chart the responses for each Gospel—Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John.)
- b. Refer to Dr. Bridges' summary on page 113, paragraph 2 ("In order to understand each Gospel"). Ask whether participants would add, delete, or alter any of the summaries.
- c. Which Gospel seems to speak most pointedly to your experience? Why?
- d. If we had only one Gospel, which would you like it to be—Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John? Why?

4. Ask this question to guide discussion of the importance of having all four of the gospels: How much would we miss if Matthew were missing? if Mark were missing? Luke? John? Note the quote on page 113 in paragraph 1 ("The picture offered by each of the Gospels is a distinctive one")

5. If your group consists of six people or more, form groups of three to five people each to discuss these questions related to one's personal image of Jesus. Encourage each person in the group to respond.

- Why does a person's image of Jesus matter?
- What portrait of Jesus would you paint?

6. After each group has considered both questions, reassemble the groups. Ask for further sharing of ideas about these two questions.

7. Conclude with this quote from the last paragraph on page 115: "You are the one who now must decide the colors and the shape, the position of the head, and the angle of the chin. You must determine the shades of light and the surrounding context. Paint Jesus as Friend, Savior, God. The images are many, just paint. As you paint, God's Spirit will reveal the presence of Christ to you. Who is this Jesus Christ, anyway?" Then read again the quote from Albert Schweitzer at the beginning of the book. Pray that each person will "learn in their own experience Who He is."

Dr. Ross West, the writer of this *Leader's Guide*, is the author of *Go to Work and Take Your Faith Too!* (Smyth & Helwys), *How to Be Happier in the Job You Sometimes Can't Stand* (Broadman and Holman), and many curriculum materials for adult study groups. He is President of Positive Difference Communications and Coordinator of Christian Education Resources. He's also an adjunct instructor at Shorter College for courses in Introduction to the Bible, Christian Education, and Church Administration. He lives in Rome, Georgia, where he is a member of First Baptist Church.

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