

ROOTED AND OPEN

Grounding Your Community In Core Beliefs, Branching Out Into The Unknown

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Description

Our core theological convictions should not be walls that prevent engagement with our neighbors. Instead, they can provide a blueprint for change and engagement across differences. This lesson will help a team of ministry leaders identify their core theological convictions and imagine how they can hold them loosely to allow for creative change in their shifting context. The lesson is divided into two parts.

- *Part 1 - Rooted: Grounding Your Community in Core Beliefs*
This part will help your team identify the theological claims and components of the biblical narrative that are most important to you.
- *Part 2 - Open: Branching Out Into the Unknown*
This part will help your team begin thinking about how those most important theological claims and components of the biblical narrative might help you think creatively about ministry.

We recommend that you look over this lesson plan and decide if it would work better for your group to experience the whole thing in one session or two.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to articulate their core theological beliefs.
2. Participants will be able to identify their most important elements of the biblical narrative.
3. Participants will be able to utilize these core theological beliefs and elements of the biblical narrative to help them think theologically about how they might proclaim good news into the lives of their neighbors.

Facilitation tips:

- Ideas for engaging your people in these materials could include: incorporating exercises into a retreat type gathering, a longer half day gathering, or broken up over 2-3 different 90-120 minute meetings.
- If you are using this lesson plan over several separate meetings, consider having your group watch the video clips in between meetings.
- We encourage groups to plan time to reconvene after they've taken some initial action steps in their ministry related to their core theological convictions. Reflect together: How would we describe where we saw, tasted, felt, heard good news? Did we learn anything new, about our congregation, our context, God?
- The activities described here are not intended as a one and done type of activity. We hope you can find elements of these exercises that can ground your discernment as you face challenges, questions or opportunities.

Lesson Plan

INTRODUCTION

Give everyone a chance to introduce themselves, then introduce the theme of this lesson and the learning outcomes.

Intro Video - [youtube.com/watch?v=wNwMy6CtQW8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNwMy6CtQW8)

1. Introduce the video
 - a. This is a video of Jeremy Myers, a professor at Augsburg University in Minneapolis, explaining why it is important for us to understand our core theological convictions and be able to use them to think theologically about our ministry.
2. Play the video (about 10 minutes)
3. Process the video
 - a. What did you hear that was confusing? Interesting? Inspiring?
 - b. Why do you think it is important for us to do this work of learning to think theologically about our ministry together?

PART 1: ROOTED

Grounding Your Community in Core Beliefs

1. Large group exploration on core theological convictions - Use [mentimeter.com](https://www.mentimeter.com) to create a survey with three separate questions that will generate three separate word clouds.
 - a. Who is God? - In the survey, ask your participants to list as many characteristics of God as they can in 30 seconds.
 - i. After the word cloud has been generated, ask your group to reflect on what we notice.
 - What stands out?
 - What surprises you?
 - What isn't surprising?
 - ii. Take a picture/ screenshot of the word cloud.
 - b. How does God work in the world? - Create another word cloud by asking your group to list as many words as they can in 30 seconds that describe how God works in the world or what God does within the world.
 - i. After the word cloud has been generated, ask your group to reflect on what they notice.

- What stands out?
 - What surprises you?
 - What isn't surprising?
 - ii. Take a picture/ screenshot of the word cloud.
 - c. How does God relate to humans? - Create another word cloud by asking participants to list as many words as they can in 30 seconds that describe the relationship between God and humans and/ or the role humans play within creation.
 - i. After the word cloud has been generated, ask your group to reflect on what they notice.
 - What stands out?
 - What surprises you?
 - What isn't surprising?
 - ii. Take a picture/ screenshot of the word cloud.
2. Small group exploration on core biblical narrative components - You are now going to make some connections between the word clouds and the biblical narrative.
- a. Assign participants to at least three different small groups of no more than 5 people..
 - i. Assign each group a different word cloud or have each group choose a word cloud they want to work with - Who is God? How does God work in the world? How does God relate to humans?
 - ii. Have each group look over their word cloud together and brainstorm a list of parables, verses, and other components of the biblical narrative that inform and support the theological claims that emerge from their word cloud.
 - b. Come back together as a large group and ask each group to share what they came up with. Make one list of all the elements of the biblical narrative.
3. Discuss as a large group.
- i. What are we noticing?
 - ii. Are there common themes showing up?
 - iii. What seems to be the most important theological claims and elements of the biblical narrative for our group?
 - iv. Why are these things so important to us?
 - v. Do our ministry practices align with these theological claims and elements of the biblical narrative? How? Or where are they missing?

PART 2: OPEN

Branching Out Into the Unknown

1. Introduce Part 2 - Read the following to your group.
 - a. Now that we've identified some of our core theological convictions, it's time to put them to work and do theology.
 - b. In this section we will explore what it means to think theologically. We will come to understand gospel and good news in a particular way. And we will make use of our core theological convictions to help us discover new ways to proclaim good news in our community.

2. What is theology and what is gospel?
 - a. Below you will find 3 blocks of quotes from theologian Douglas John Hall.¹ Share these with your group. You can print them off or project them onto a screen. And then have each one read outloud to the group.
 - b. Before you read them, tell your group they will help you understand what it means to think theologically and to proclaim the gospel.
 - c. After each quote, pause to let the group name what they learned from that quote.

“Theology is what occurs when the Christian community knows itself to be living **between text and context**...Theology is that ongoing activity of the whole church that aims at **clarifying what ‘gospel’ must mean here and now** . . . That is to say, theology **helps the church discover gospel.**”

Gospel, or good news, is good “because it challenges and displaces bad news. Gospel addresses us at the place where we are overwhelmed by an awareness . . . of what is wrong with the world and with ourselves in it. It is good news because it **engages, takes on and does battle with the bad news**, offering another alternative, another vision of what could be, another way into the future.”

“If it is going to articulate gospel...the Christian community must so expose itself to the specifics of its socio-historical context that it will find itself driven back to its sources with new and urgent questions. And if it persists in asking these questions of its biblical and doctrinal sources, it will . . . be permitted to hear a responsive Word that really addresses and engages its context. That Word will be gospel. It will always have to be heard anew. What was gospel yesterday will not necessarily be gospel today, and what is gospel in that place . . . will not necessarily be gospel for this place . . .”

¹All quotations are from Hall, Douglas John. "WHAT IS THEOLOGY?" *CrossCurrents* 53, no. 2 (2003): 171-84.

- d. Discuss as a group
 - i. What stands out as important to you from these quotes?
 - ii. What surprises you?
 - iii. How do these quotes connect to the theme of being rooted and open?
3. Examples of Rooted and Open - You have been given access to several video clips. Each video illustrates how a congregation has *rooted* themselves in their core texts and theological convictions, and how that *opened* them to live into the ministry/work God was calling them towards. Preview the videos so you know which ones you'd like to use. Feel free to share any or all of these with your group when you meet. You can also ask them to view the videos beforehand to save time.
- a. Videos Include partners of Augsburg University's Riverside Innovation Hub:
 - Ryana Holt at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Minneapolis
 - Pr. Liesl Spitz at St. Timothy Lutheran Church, St. Paul
 - Marie Paige at Church of All Nations, Columbia Heights
 - Steve Richards at St. Lukes & St. James Episcopal Church, Minneapolis
 - Pr. Jeffrey Shulz at Bethany Lutheran, Minneapolis
 - b. After showing the videos to your group, discuss these questions.
 - i. How is this an example of being rooted and open?
 - ii. What do you hear as bad news and good news, or gospel, in this story?
 - iii. What questions do these stories spark for you?
4. Discovering Gospel Between Text and Context
- a. Instructions: The following questions will help your group think theologically about your ministry by imagining who God might be calling you to be and what God might be calling you to do in this time, in your place. Our call is to participate in God's resurrection by proclaiming good news. Sometimes this means we will see resurrection already happening in our communities and then join in it. At other times, we will see the absence of resurrection and, therefore seek to proclaim it. Discuss these questions as a group:
 - b. KNOW YOUR CONTEXT: Create two lists as a group. One list will include all the ways in which your team sees your congregation's neighbors and your neighborhood struggling. A second list will include all the ways in which your team sees your congregation's neighbors and neighborhood thriving.
 - c. KNOW YOUR TEXT: Look at work your group did earlier to identify the theological claims and elements of the biblical narrative that are most important to your congregation. Where in these theological roots do you start to find things that might connect with how you see your neighbors struggling and/ or thriving? Something that might offer "another alternative, another vision of what could be, another way into the future."

- d. **DISCOVERING GOSPEL IN BETWEEN TEXT AND CONTEXT:** Discuss this question as a team and brainstorm some ideas. Given what we know about our context and our text, how is God calling us to participate in good news in our neighborhood? What would good news look like, sound like, feel like, taste like in this place?
- i. **PLANNING THE WORK:** Keep discussing as a team.
 - ii. What would it look like for our congregation to participate in that good news?
 - iii. Who else needs to be a part of this conversation from within and beyond our congregation?
 - iv. What are some doable next steps your group can take to branch out and be a part of the good news you've named?
 - v. When will your group reconvene to reflect on what you're learning as you take some of these next steps?

CLOSING

End your time together in prayer

1. Lamenting the heartache that might have surfaced during this lesson.
2. Celebrating the gratitude that might have surfaced during this lesson.
3. Asking for perseverance in the call that might have surfaced during this lesson.



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