



Where Was God on September 11? Seeds of Faith and Hope

A study guide for congregations

Cynthia Hockman-Chupp

Before September 11, 2001, what was your experience with war? My generation was in diapers during the Vietnam War. My mom was just an infant during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Even for those who remember WWII, the war was distant. No television. No instant messaging on computer networks. No attack on North American soil.

Then came September 11. New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania. As passenger jets became missiles, things we had

Cynthia Hockman-Chupp, Canby, Oregon, currently home schools two of her three children. She says she “loves to write curriculum” and extends thanks to the adult class at Zion Mennonite Church, Hubbard, Oregon, who tested parts of this leader’s guide material.

Photo in guide adapted from Jim Bishop.

assumed about our lives suddenly changed. Or did they?

The message of Jesus on September 10 was still the same on September 12. Jesus’ message remains true today. But just what is that message? What does it mean to us in light of the events of September 11?

This six-week lesson plan is designed to guide a Sunday school class or small group through a short study of the book, *Where Was God on September 11? Seeds of Faith and Hope* (Herald Press, 2002). As you read, you will discuss topics stirred up by the events of September 11.

The discussions will take you to the heart of Christian faith. Emotions may be raw. You may witness anger, fear, sorrow, or disbelief. Some stu-

dents may be reluctant to share inner thoughts and feelings, especially if they hold a minority opinion. As a leader, your job is to create a safe environment. When a lesson asks you to put students into small groups, limit group size to three to five people. The intimate group size will feel less intimidating, helping the reluctant to feel less vulnerable than they would in front of a large group.

Use a variety of learning styles in class. Educational research tells us that there is “not just one ‘best’ way of learning, and not all smart people learn the same way. The lecture is right for Julie but small-group discussion allows Steve to learn more effectively. When we teach to our students’ learning styles, they learn more quickly and carryover into real life is greater. Learning-style information can be a tool that God can use to help us better do the important job he has assigned” (Good Ground Writers Manual, Marlene LeFever, p. 35). For

more on learning styles see the pages that follow and one the www at <http://www.csrnet.org/csrnet/articles/student-learning-styles.html>.

We pray that you will use these lessons to learn, to challenge, and to seek God’s will.

A six-week study
Plan to use this study
guide for six sessions. Writer
Cynthia Hockman-Chupp,
who tested the process and
information in her congrega-
tion, notes that it is a
“heavy, heavy topic. Six
weeks are enough.” •

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Applying what we know

Student learning styles

By Dennis W. Mills, Ph.D.

You and I receive new information every day that we live. Understanding how we naturally take in and process that information will go a long way toward making us lifelong learners. Helping our students understand how they naturally take in and process information will go a long way toward making them lifelong learners.

There are many approaches to individual learning styles. One of the most effective models for use in learning comes from the research of Anthon F. Gregorc and Kathleen A. Butler. The Gregorc model provides an organized way to consider how the mind works.

There are two perceptual qualities: concrete and abstract.

Concrete:

This quality enables you to register information directly through your five senses: sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing. When you are using your concrete ability, you are dealing with the obvious, the “here and now.” You are not looking for hidden meanings, or making relationships between ideas or concepts. “It is what it is.”

Abstract:

This quality allows you to visualize, to conceive ideas, to understand or believe that which you cannot actually see. When you are using your abstract quality, you are using your intuition, your imagination, and you are looking beyond what is to the more subtle implications. “It is not always what it seems.”

Although all people have both concrete and abstract perceptual abilities to some extent, each person is usually comfortable using one more than the other. The person whose natural strength is the concrete, for example, may communicate in a direct, literal, no-nonsense manner. The person whose natural strength is the abstract may use more subtle ways to get a point across.

There are two ordering abilities in Gregorc’s model:

Sequential:

Allows your mind to organize information in a linear, step-by-step manner. When using your sequential ability,

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Lesson 1

Introducing the topic

Early class preparation

Read the preface and first chapter of *Where Was God on September 11?*

Materials needed

- Pencils and papers
- Graffiti paper (described in “Hearing One Another”)
- Thin highlighters or colored markers; choose one article from chapter one to read aloud at the conclusion of class time.



1. Sharing our stories

Invite students to recall their experiences on September 11: “Where were you? What was your initial reaction? Who did you know that was personally affected?”

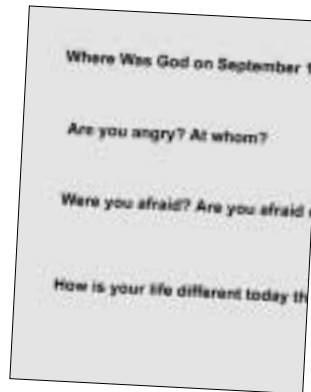
Distribute pencils and papers. Ask students to take three to four minutes to answer, “What are you thinking and struggling with related to the events since September 11? What issues are you facing?”

2. Reflecting on our stories

If you wish, invite students to share their responses in small groups (5 or fewer.) Otherwise, collect the papers and look them over before your next session. Use student concerns to guide your preparation in the coming weeks. If a volunteer is willing to compile a typed list of responses (without contributor’s names), the class will find it helpful to see what others are thinking and feeling.

3. Hearing one another

Prior to class time, prepare graffiti paper: On the top of several 12x18” papers, using black ink, write a topic for study. Write several questions about this topic on each paper:



Topic 1: Where Was God on September 11? Our emotions.

Suggested questions:

Are you angry? At whom?

Were you afraid? Are you afraid now?

How is your life different today than it was on September 10?

Topic 2: God and country

Suggested questions:

Should we fly the flag?

(To p. 7)

Learning styles

Continued from p. 4

ty, you are following a logical train of thought, a traditional approach to dealing with information. You may also prefer to have a plan and to follow it, rather than relying on impulse.

Random:

Lets your mind organize information by chunks, and in no particular order. When you are using your random ability, you may often be able to skip steps in a procedure and still produce the desired result. You may even start in the middle, or at the end, and work backwards. You may also prefer your life to be more impulsive, or spur of the moment, than planned.

Again, both ordering abilities are present in each person, but usually a pattern emerges for using one over the other more comfortably. (See chart for the four combinations of the strongest perceptual and ordering ability in each individual.)

4 combinations of perception and ordering

CS-Concrete Sequential

AS-Abstract Sequential

AR-Abstract Random

CR-Concrete Random

No one is a "pure" style—CS, AR, AS or CR. Each of us has a unique combination of natural strengths and abilities. By learning some of the common characteristics of each of the four combinations

used by Gregorc, we can recognize and value what our students do best. We can help them to improve in areas that are least used and understood.

It is my hope that by understanding your students' learning styles, you will be better able to adapt your teaching styles and strategies to meet their needs. It is not as important to figure out what a person is as it is to recognize how and why a person is doing something.

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If you don't fly the flag, how do you answer questions of neighbors who do?

Do you say the Pledge of Allegiance? Why or why not?

How can we communicate our church history of pacifism to our children?

Topic 3: Terror, anger, and forgiveness

Suggested questions:

Can Christians forgive terrorists?

Is repentance necessary for forgiveness?

What responsibility do we have to understand Islam, holy war, and the roots of terrorism?

Topic 4: An international kingdom

Suggested questions:

Does God's kingdom have borders?

Should Christians fight?

How are we challenged to consider repenting of the "American way of life"?

Topic 5: The things that make for peace

Suggested questions:

Can we love our enemies?

Does war make peace?

Does revenge bring justice?

Do we as a peace church have a responsibility to communicate our beliefs with neighbors? Our nation?

How should a peace church respond to terrorism?

Divide the class into small groups with three to five students in each group. Give each group a colored pen (a different color for each group) and one of the topic sheets. Say, "Read over the questions on your topic sheet. As you discuss, have one person jot down questions and comments that your group raises regarding these topics. After a few minutes (5-7, depending on time available), you will pass your topic to the next group. You will be able to see the comments and questions from other groups as each sheet is passed through all the groups."

4. Conversing with the text

Give groups a chance to read over each of the graffiti sheets. What do you notice? Are there surprises?

Concluding the lesson

Read aloud one short selection from chapter one.

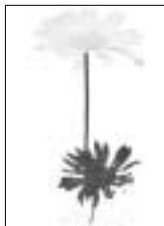
Assign chapter two, "Jesus and the Way of Peace." Ask students to think about Jesus' message of peace this week: "WWJD, or 'What Would Jesus Do?' in response to the events of September 11?"

Conclude by reading Psalm 46 (included at the beginning of the book) or singing "Lord, Let Us Now Depart in Peace" (Hymnal, 428) or "Go Now in Peace" (Hymnal, 428).

Lord, let us now depart in peace, who in thy name are gathered here.

Disclose the brightness of thy face, and be forever near. Amen.

Go now in peace, may the love of God surround you everywhere you may go.



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Chapter 2

Jesus and the Way of Peace

Early class preparation

Read the second chapter of Where Was God on September 11?

Materials needed:

- Pencils and papers
- Pacifist scale
- Large papers (approx. 12x18")
- Thin colored markers



1. Sharing our stories

Distribute papers and pencils. Say, "Define what pacifism means to you." After a few minutes, ask students to pair up and share their definitions.

2. Reflecting on our stories

On the chalkboard or on a large piece of paper write, "Pacifism: the principled rejection of all bloodshed in obedience to Jesus' teachings of nonresistant love" (from "Three Views of the Church and War," A. James Reimer, chap. 4, p. 120). Hand out "pacifism scales," one per person.

(Prepare these prior to class by making a line across a sheet of paper with "I am a pacifist" on one end and "I am not a pacifist" on the other end. Photocopy enough for the entire class.)

Tell students that based on the definition on the chalkboard they are to: "Put a 1 on the line for your position on the scale before

September 11.” Pause. “Put a 2 on the line for your position immediately following September 11.” Pause. “Put a 3 on the line for your position at this moment.” Ask students to set their scales aside for a moment.

Ask students to partner up again. Although they don’t need to share their scales with a partner, they may want to use them for personal reference as they discuss with a partner: “Has your position fluctuated? Why or why not?”

3. Hearing the text

Read “How Strong Is Love?” by Linda Gehman Peachey.

4. Conversing with the text

Divide students into small groups (3-5 students/group). Give each group a 12x18” paper and ask them to write the following Scripture references across the top of the page: Matthew 5:9, 38-48; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:8-15.

Ask the groups to look up the Scriptures and discuss, “What do these Scriptures mean to you in light of September 11?” Ask each group to take notes on their findings as they read and discuss.

If time allows, ask a representative from each group to share findings with the class.

Concluding the lesson

Remind the class that in today’s lesson, Linda Gehman Peachey writes that Gandhi told his followers “that if their embrace of nonviolence made them feel weaker rather than stronger, it would be better for them to take up arms. Nonviolence is not for the weak but for those who are strong.”

Ask students to take out their pacifism scales again. Say, “Put a 4 on the line for your position at this moment.”

Distribute papers and pencils and ask students, “What have the events of September 11 taught you about yourself?” After a few minutes, ask for volunteers to respond or pair up students to share.

As a class reflect on the following:

How can you creatively respond to wrong? How can you stand with the disenfranchised? With the poor? The outcast?

Put feet to your faith:

Ask students to write down one way in which they will stand with someone this week who is disenfranchised, poor, or outcast. Have students pair up and pray about their commitments for this week.

After brainstorming, return to a large circle, with group members still sitting next to one another. Tell students that, regardless of personal opinions, they are going to take their group assigned perspective as their own for the next several minutes. Invite the group to a discussion on “Revenge, Justice, or Forgiveness,” with the group’s role playing a particular viewpoint. Allow five to eight minutes for role-play.

Debrief. What did you learn about the various viewpoints? How did it weaken or strengthen your own personal viewpoint?

3. Hearing the text

Read aloud “Fire from Heaven: Jesus and Terrorism” by Titus Peachey.

4. Conversing with the text

Discuss:

*Is repentance necessary for forgiveness?

*How do the cursing psalms speak to us today? Read Psalm 137. Of Psalm 137, biblical scholar Walter Brueggeman, writes, “Perhaps this psalm will be understood and valued among us only if we experience some concrete brutalization” (Message of the Psalms, p. 77).

*What “fire from heaven”—such as anger, animosity, or desire for revenge—do we carry in our own hearts?

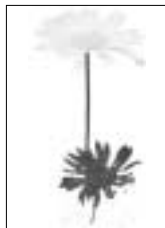
*How can we use the events of September 11 to reflect on our own self-righteousness, sin, and need for repentance?

Concluding the lesson

Consider a “fire from heaven” that burns in your life today. Be in prayer this week, asking God to show you ways to extinguish these flames. If time allows, ask students to write their “fire” on a slip of paper and burn them outside in a small ceremony.

Read the last paragraph prayer from “Choking on Ashes,” by Kevin Clarke:

“Lord, we call out for justice. Grant us justice not revenge. Lord, we have terrible power within our reach; grant us the strength to wield our power with wisdom, with mercy. Help us to comprehend what seems incomprehensible. Lord, we do not want to see another day like September 11, nor do we wish to condemn our children to relive it; allow us the grace to be the generation to break this cycle of violence, this history of hate. Let us not leave it to our sons and daughters to confront again that awful spectacle of dust and debris and choking ash.”



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Chapter 4

Will Violence Bring Peace?

Early class preparation: read the fourth chapter of *Where Was God on September 11?*

Materials needed

- papers and pencils
- signs (“violence” and “do nothing”)
- post-it notes, colored markers



1. Sharing our stories

Distribute papers and pencils. Say, “When you first heard about the events of September 11, what did you think the United States should ‘do’ in response?” After a few minutes, ask students to pair up and share.

2. Reflecting on our stories

As a class discuss: “How did your list of acceptable United States responses change in subsequent weeks and months?”

3. Hearing the text

Read “Following Jesus in the Face of Terror,” by J. Denny Weaver.

Discuss questions from the text on why such hatred against the United States exists:

*Is it relevant that the United States, with some 4 percent of the world’s population, consumes about 40 percent of the world’s resources?

*Does our support of the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territory contribute toward hostility?

*What do these issues mean for us, personally?

4. Conversing with the text

For many, there seem to be only two possible responses to September 11: do nothing or do something = violence. Yet so much territory lies in between.

In the classroom post two signs at opposite ends of one classroom wall: “violence,” and “do nothing.” Break into small groups (3-5 people). Give each small group a pad of post-it notes and a colored marker (different color for each group). Ask the groups to brainstorm ideas for possible responses to September 11. Place the post-it notes

between the two signs. After 10 minutes, ask each group to report on their ideas. (They can easily find their own notes by following one pen color.)

When all have reported, continue with small-group discussion: “Which of these ideas are ones in which Christians might participate?” Ask each group to pick one or two ideas that fit these criteria and brainstorm ways in which your community could get involved in this effort.

Most groups will include “prayer” on a post-it. If your group does not, add it yourself and comment on its importance before people leave today.

Note: If students have expressed interest in the history of the church and war, direct them to A. James Reimer’s article in chapter 4, p. 120, “Three Views of the Church and War.” Of special note, “In the church’s first two hundred years, its official teachings urged Christians not to join the military.” What significance does this have for us today?

Concluding the lesson

Put feet to your faith:

Distribute papers and pencils again. Ask each person to answer, “What can I do this week in response to the violence of September 11?”

Conclude by singing or reading the words of “Be Thou My Vision” (Hymnal, 545) or “Take Up Your Cross” (Hymnal, 536).

Lastly, read Hymnal, 764:

Leader: Go in love,

People: for love alone endures.

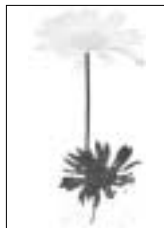
Leader: Go in peace,

People: for it is the gift of God.

Leader: Go in safety,

People: for we cannot go where God is not.

As early preparation for next week, ask students to read chapters 5 and 6. Encourage students to write a letter of response—as an exercise. How do we respond to our Christian brothers and sisters in other parts of the world who regularly experience suffering and oppression?



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Chapters 5 and 6

Voices from Our Global Family

Citizens of Two Kingdoms.

Early class preparation:

Read the fifth and sixth chapters of *Where Was God* on September 11?

Materials needed:

- Recording of “God Bless America,” papers and pencils



1. Sharing our stories

Distribute papers and pencils and say, “As you listen to this recording, jot down any emotions, thoughts, and feelings you have related to the events of September 11.”

Note: this exercise has a bigger impact if you don’t reveal the title song ahead of time. Play a recording of “God Bless America.”

2. Reflecting on our stories

Form small groups (3-5 students/group). Share reflections on “God Bless America.”

3. Hearing the text

Read Donald Kraybill’s article, “Which God Blesses

America?” (chap. 6, p. 158).

4. Conversing with the text

Invite students to write a response to the text: “Does this article change your feelings about the song?”

Give students a few minutes to share reflections in their small groups.

For further discussion:

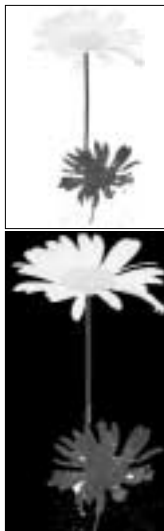
In what aspects of our national identity do we see evidence of a tribal god?

Concluding the lesson

Ask, “What do you hope the song communicates?” Invite each small group to write a one-sentence response.

Active alternative: Invite each group to mold one person into a sculpture of what they hope the song communicates.

Conclude by reading or singing David E. Ortman’s “God Bless ...” (chap. 6, p. 161) together.



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Chapter 7

Another Way of Responding

Early class preparation: read the seventh chapter of *Where Was God on September 11?*

Materials needed:

- chalkboard/chalk or newsprint/markers

1. Sharing our stories

As a class, brainstorm as many words and phrases as you can to describe Bin Laden and the men who committed the terrorist acts on September 11. After a few minutes, ask students to brainstorm the words and phrases that Bin Laden and his followers might use to describe United States government leaders.

2. Reflecting on our stories

How are the two lists similar? What descriptions remind you of sound bites from the evening news? How can changing our view of these men help us to invent alternate responses?

3. Hearing the text

Read “The Challenge of Terror,” by John Paul Lederach. (chap. 7, p. 180).

4. Conversing with the text

Discuss:

What steps can we take in order to avoid “creating the environment that sustains and reproduces the very virus we wish to prevent”?

Look at the three suggestions Lederach writes at the end of the article. What do these mean for us personally? How can we work in our communities to “develop quality relationships with whole regions, peoples, and worldviews”?

Concluding the lesson

In “Peacemakers Need to Listen, Too,” (chap. 7, p. 181) Karl Shelly writes, “But to stay silent now is to keep our light under a bushel basket” (Matt. 5:14-15). Do you agree? How are we called to “witness for God’s peace”?

Take some time today to reflect on this study. Spend some time discussing the following:

- What new insights have we gained?
- What new questions has the study brought to mind?
- What steps can we take to answer these questions?
- Which activities and/or discussions were especially meaningful? Why?

Conclude with a reading from the end of Shelly's article:

"We must find a path that is neither self-righteous sloganeering nor immobilized listening. That path, I believe, includes speaking words of lament and comfort as the psalmist did. It includes sharing the prophetic vision that God has given us through Jesus—a vision of loving enemies, seeking justice, casting out

hatred, and standing with victims wherever they are.

"We are to speak this vision boldly, knowing that it holds little currency among the dominant opinion-makers in our country. We are to speak this vision sensitively, being aware of the concerns of those who disagree. We are to speak this vision confidently, assured that goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, and life is stronger than death."

The ultimate
weakness of
violence is that it
is a descending
spiral, begetting
the very thing it
seeks to
destroy ..."

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

