

# MANNA AND MERCY



## LEADER GUIDE FOR ADULT STUDY IN A CONGREGATION

Welcome to an adult Bible Study using the book *Manna and Mercy* by Dan Erlander.

You are about to open an amazing resource. *Manna and Mercy* is in a word, a brilliant book! A graphic novel way ahead of its time, *Manna and Mercy* utilizes both clever, dynamic artwork and profound prose to tell the story of the Bible in a condensed form.

One can easily get a lot out of *Manna and Mercy* by just looking at the pictures and reading the captions, but the words of the text are equally worth noticing and pondering. One of my favorite passages is from the Nativity section, where Erlander writes, *Mary placed the little baby in a feedbox. Angels sang. Animals smiled. The trees clapped their hands, and all creation rejoiced. Lowly shepherds, informed by angels, came and found the child in the feedbox.*

*God smiled. In this baby the creator of the universe was present—with creation, with the poor one of the poor, good news to the poor!*

As a writer I appreciate how difficult it can be to sustain themes throughout a work, but Dan Erlander does just that in *Manna and Mercy*. Of course he has a good precedent—the themes of God’s people appear again and again throughout scripture. Themes of exile and return, sharing and becoming selfish, trusting and wandering away. Erlander reads the Bible with a well-tuned ear for God’s justice message, and traces that thread throughout Old and New Testaments, highlighting the “big deals” who demand their own power and the “cosmic koinonia” for which God continues to hope.

By the time you finish studying *Manna and Mercy*, the Bible will make more sense to you. You will notice how the Wilderness School of the Exodus people connects to the Wilderness School that Jesus encountered at the start of his ministry. You will witness how the cycle of God’s people falling apart, yet maintaining a remnant of faithfulness, repeats itself again and again and again. You will see that the end of the story (never the end of course) circles back to God’s love from the very beginning of the story.

Dan Erlander always makes sure that God is the main character in *Manna and Mercy*. That focus proves so refreshing. As we read chapter after chapter, we witness God’s vision, God’s challenges, and God’s perseverance. In the first chapter of *Manna and Mercy*, we read about the journey with God upon which we are about to embark: *It’s a long story—a story of friendship, passion, promise, disappointment, hope, and self-giving love. It is a story of God mending the universe.* Focusing for six weeks on God’s actions brings us closer to the history and heart of our faith.

So go for it! Open *Manna and Mercy*, and invite your faith community to pursue the two main goals of the book—1) that we learn the Bible stories and 2) that we contextualize the stories for our daily faith lives.

### **How to Proceed?**

How do we begin to study a book that is a boiled down, albeit brilliant, compilation of the Bible? *Manna and Mercy* is deceptively simple, so figuring out how to use it can also look easier than it is. How to start? What to lift up? How to divide up the book? I arbitrarily made those decisions to give you a place to start. I field-tested this *Manna and Mercy* Bible Study for six weeks during a Lenten Sunday morning adult class at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Seattle, Washington. Dan Erlander is a member of Immanuel Lutheran and he participated in the study, so this study has his imprimatur!

## How to divide up the Manna and Mercy book

We divided up *Manna and Mercy* into six sections, but you can extend or shorten it to fit your time frame. We used our six weeks to focus on:

- 1) Creation and Exodus
- 2) Wilderness School
- 3) Kings, Prophets, and Exile
- 4) Jesus' Life
- 5) Jesus' Resurrection and the Early Church
- 6) God's Vision

*Manna and Mercy* is densely filled with the stories of the Bible. In six weeks, we had to pick and choose what we lifted up, and we had to leave out many, many stories. I hope you are inspired by the stories and themes that we picked out, and the activities we used, to be creative about using *Manna and Mercy* in your own ways. The most important thing is to dive into this resource that will spark your spiritual knowledge and commitment.

### The shape of each class:

- 1) ***Tell the story.*** In a way *Manna and Mercy* is like a great picture book for us to hear and see. We have created slide shows and scripts of Dan's pictures and words for you to use as you tell the basic story of God and God's people each week.
- 2) ***Explore the themes.*** Learning happens in many ways, including listening and action. We included opportunities in this study for groups to discuss big issues from *Manna and Mercy*, and to play with some of the themes in the book. In order to unfold more of the theology of *Manna and Mercy*, we turned to a great teacher to help us, **Alan Storey**. He is a pastor/theologian from South Africa who loves this book, and has made short teaching lessons that flesh out and contextualize the ideas raised in *Manna and Mercy*. All the Alan Storey videos are available at the web site, [MannaandMercy.org](http://MannaandMercy.org).
- 3) ***We developed ongoing symbols to tie the weeks of the study together.*** I read a [children's study guide for Manna and Mercy](#), and I really like one of the ideas they used. The teacher hung up a **clothesline**, and each week the class added a few of Dan Erlander's pictures from that part of the study. We borrowed the clothesline idea in our class, and it was great! The clothesline provided a focal point at the front of the room. It showed how the Manna and Mercy story grew with each week. It gave us a chance to demonstrate how themes in the New Testament tied back to themes in the Old Testament. Finally, the clothesline allowed us to add our own stories to God's bigger story, as we literally clothes-pinned up our writing pages in between Dan's pictures, particularly our church stories from Session 5.

Within an hour-long class, you can review the previous week to set a context, show a brief slide show of the section of the Bible on which you are focusing, explore the themes from that section in two or three ways, including discussion, interaction, and video learning, and wrap up with a summary and prayer.

### **Everyone should have a book of their own!**

Of course, before the study begins, everyone should get a copy of *Manna and Mercy*. You can order them at <http://mannaandmercy.org/order-stuff.html>. Ideally, participants adult study will have read the chapters in the book *before* class. We did not always find that to be true, and it's not absolutely necessary, but the material will of course prove richer if the participants read and study the book on their own, as well.

Dan Erlander does a great job of including the Biblical references throughout *Manna and Mercy*. We were always sure to have Bibles available to class participants, for further reference and to remind people that we were actually studying our holy book.

May God bless and keep you as you embark on this delightful, life-changing study. *Manna and Mercy* opens the Bible for us, and invites us into discipleship. Where better but in community to practice that call!

Pastor Mary Lindberg  
Seattle, Washington

# Session 1: Beginnings – Chapters 1 and 2

## Materials for this class

Paper, pens, pyramid handout, video link, slide show and script

## (Optional) Clothesline

If you want to use the Clothesline idea each week (see introduction), here's what you need to do:

- Purchase a clothesline and clothespin (twine will do).
- Make copies of the Power Point pictures for each week. You can color them before you display them to add a little more zip.
- Each week before class or doing the introduction, add the Manna and Mercy pictures from the week before to review the class progress so far.

Week by week the clothesline fills with Manna and Mercy pictures as you make your way through the Bible. It provides a focal point in the classroom, a monitor of your progress, and an excellent way to display Dan Erlander's amazing artwork.

You can add other pieces to the clothesline in addition to the Manna and Mercy artwork, in order to help demonstrate the concepts raised in the book. For example:

- Class participants could color in the block letters of MERCY as you talked about Jesus's lessons of mercy. Add those letters MERCY to the clothesline.
- Cut lengths of yarn, and use them to demonstrate how Old and New Testaments themes are tied together. For example, the first Wilderness School reminds us of the Wilderness School during The Exile, as well as Jesus' Wilderness School in the desert as he began his ministry. Attach the ends of the yarn with a paperclip to the bottoms each of the pictures that are tied together.
- During Session 5, if you write about churches from your past and the lessons those churches taught us about God and Manna-and-Mercy living: Clothes-pin your statement pages in between the Manna and Mercy artwork on the clothesline to demonstrate how our stories are part of God's larger story and intertwined with the stories of God's people.

## Setup

Before class, make sure you can project the Week 1 slide show and view the Alan Storey video. Preview both of these resources.

## Introduction

*Manna and Mercy* is a Bible study of...the whole Bible! As Dan Erlander says in the introduction, “May I remind you of the audacity of this project?” Dan took on this huge task of creating *Manna and Mercy* for two reasons:

1. To tell the stories of the Bible with images and words.
2. To use the stories as catalysts for new, transformative ways of thinking in our time. The Bible stories are not meant to be a pair of shoes to admire and keep in your closet. Dan Erlander wants us to use these “shoes.”

How in the world did Dan proceed to get the whole Bible into a Bible study?

Call for 6-8 volunteers to stand in a line across the front of the room. They represent the Bible. Invite the volunteers to squeeze closer to each other, demonstrating that *Manna and Mercy* condenses the Bible. Repeat this step a couple times, and show the thickness of a Bible, vs the thickness of *Manna and Mercy*. Note that everyone in the line is still there, even if they are closer. *Manna and Mercy* didn't get rid of a part of the Bible. As the volunteers squeeze ever closer, someone will be forced to move forward. As *Manna and Mercy* continued to condense the Bible, some main themes stood out. We will explore the themes as we study *Manna and Mercy*.

## Tell the Story

Show slides and read script for *Manna and Mercy* chapters 1 and 2 (see script below).

## Explore the Themes

### A Good Beginning

Chapter 1 of *Manna and Mercy* is called *Beginnings*. How do you begin something? We can figure that out with a writing exercise. Take a blank sheet of paper, and ask participants to write for exactly two

minutes. Participants receive no prompt, merely a paper and pencil. Participants then turn the paper over and write for exactly two minutes, beginning with the prompt “in the beginning.” Which writing exercise was easier? Why? God gave us the prompt-“in the beginning.” We didn’t create something out of nothing; God did.

### The Big Deals/Hierarchy

Show the Alan Storey video clip: <http://www.mannaandmercy.org/audio-video/alan-storey-video-clips/Video-11.html> or order the full set of videos on DVD from <http://www.mannaandmercy.org>.

*Summary:* God has called us into authentic partnership. God has chosen to need us, to be dependent on us to fulfill the dream of mending our world. When we choose not to love, society takes on a structure of domination. People begin to think of themselves as “big deals”, standing on top of others.

In the book of Exodus, we find a leader (Pharaoh) who is fearful of people and forgetful of God – and he designs a structure of domination. A fear-full leader is a love-less leader. A leader who forgets God wants to be treated as a god, worshipped like God, who thinks they are god. An oppressive system rests on exploited people at the bottom. Religion often ordains this system and the military protects it.

Using the example of a pyramid, if you own a car, a computer, a house with an indoor bathroom, you are in the top 5 or 10% of the pyramid of the world. If you eat 3 meals a day, it means you are wealthy. We need to realize where we are on this pyramid in relation to the world. If we want to journey anywhere, we need to first know where we are. We need to be honest about where we are on the economic pyramid. Salvation, liberation, redemption is not “good news” for everyone. If slaves go free, what will Pharaoh think of that? The status quo is skewed on behalf of the privileged. So proclamation of good news for the poor, release to the captives, and manna and mercy for all, is not good news for those who have a stake in this pyramid.

Sin (love-lessness, justice-lessness, no gentleness, ...) is never private. Sin is personal but always has public or political ramifications because it impacts the way society is structured. Because sin has a social impact,

there is no such thing as personal, private salvation. We cannot privatize God's word. Every decision we make impacts on everybody.

## **Building Pyramids**

Once upon a time God was vexed with a nation called Egypt. In this nation a big deal Pharaoh was on top. In the middle were various big deals and ordinary citizens. On the bottom were the slaves who lived under heavy oppression. The Pharaoh depended upon the priests and the military to keep the whole system going and to maintain the status quo.

Throughout *Manna and Mercy*, Dan Erlander illustrated the concept of hierarchies with pyramids. Small groups study the first pyramid of the *Manna and Mercy* on page 4 (see handout). Note the levels and proportions of people in each tier. Participants then turn over their handout to the side with the blank pyramid, and draw their impressions of modern pyramid-systems of government, family, or social strata (*use empty pyramid attached*)

## **Summary**

In session one...

- We demonstrated how *Manna and Mercy* condenses the Bible
- We heard the stories of creation and exodus
- We used a writing exercise to consider how you begin something
- We created pyramids to demonstrate the world's hierarchies

## **Closing Prayer**

In the midst of a vast universe of stars and galaxies there exists a little speck called Planet Earth. God loves the whole universe and God loves Planet Earth. The Creator loves everything on this planet, including a very mysterious thing called Life. God of Creation, we give you thanks for bringing us to this place to consider your creation and salvation. Lead us through your stories, and into your ways. Amen



## Session 1: Beginnings

### Script and Images for Slideshow

You can find the PowerPoint slides at:

[http://mannaandmercy.org/adult\\_study\\_powerpoints.html](http://mannaandmercy.org/adult_study_powerpoints.html)

(Several good readers could be selected to read the following text as the slides are shown)



1. In the midst of a vast universe of stars and galaxies there exists a little speck called Planet Earth. God loves Planet Earth. And everything on this planet, including a very mysterious thing called Life! We cannot explain life. It does things like breathe, reproduce, eat, change, grow, and finally die to nourish other life.

#### **TOV! IT'S TOV, VERY TOV!**

[Tov means "good" in Hebrew]

2. God once created a special being called "human." These partner creatures enjoyed God and helped the Creator take care of the beautiful garden called Earth. God smiled. All had enough, and the partner creatures loved God and helped God. God looked at Earth and said...Tov!



3. God's celebration was disrupted when the earth creatures decided they could find joy in ways other than living as partners with God. Humans decided to become big deals. How did humans know if they were big deals? They knew by bossing other humans around, by piling up stuff, and by dominating nature.



4. God groaned. Planet Earth groaned. God thought about destroying Planet Earth or at least snuffing out the humans. But God, in passionate love, decided on another way. The Bible tells the story of God's new way. It is a story of friendship, passion, promise, disappointment, hope and self-giving love. It is a story of God mending the universe.

## Session 1 Supplemental Materials



5. Once upon a time God was vexed with a nation called Egypt. In this nation a big deal Pharaoh was on top and slaves were on the bottom. The slaves, moaning under the brutal oppression, cried out to God. God heard their cry and recruited a reluctant man named Moses, a relative of the slaves, to help with a liberation.



6. Moses led the slaves out of Egypt to the east. The Pharaoh chased them and trapped them at the shore of the Sea of Reeds. The

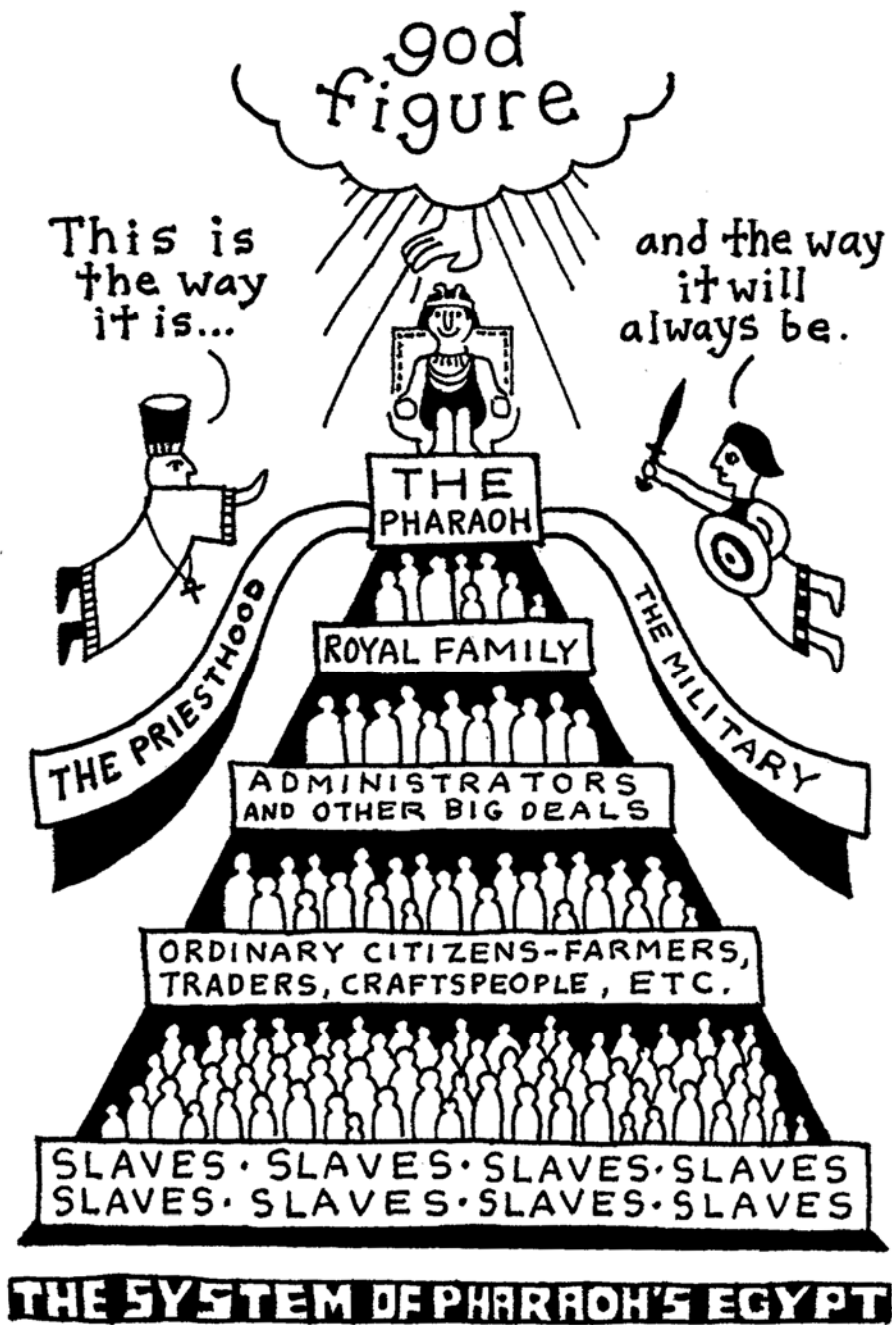
liberator God blew on the water, and the former slaves walked across on dry ground. The army of Pharaoh pursued but got stuck in the mud. The people were now free! They sang a song of liberation: Yahweh is our strength and our song, and Yahweh has become our salvation.



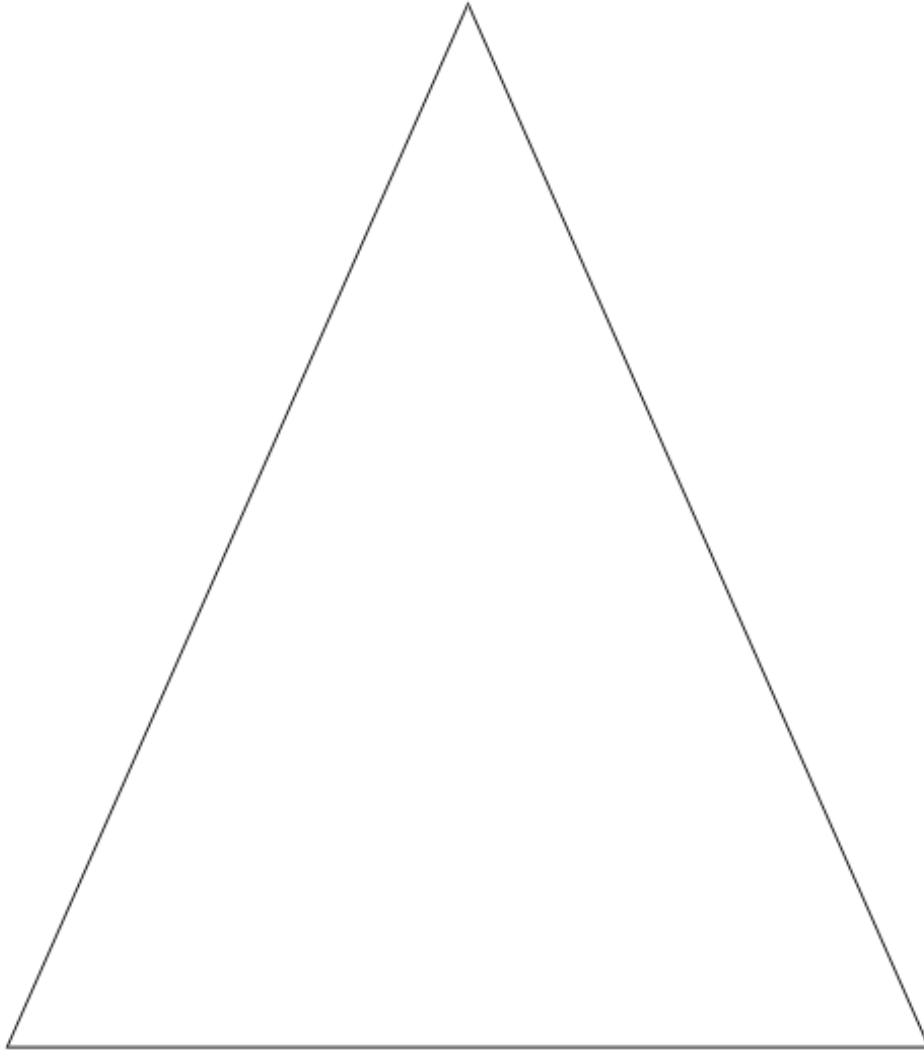
7. Yahweh thought and thought, "Now that I have birthed a people, what shall I do with them?" Yahweh thought of a wonderful plan:

1. I will tenderly raise my people to live as partners with me.
2. My people will teach other nations how to live.
3. Other nations will become partners with me and spread my ways.

God went to work on the plan. The first step was to lead the people into the wilderness. This precarious wilderness land would become God's classroom, the place where the people would learn how to live.



Draw a modern-day pyramid system



## Session 2: Wilderness School - Chapters 3-5

### Materials for this class

Paper, pens, Manna Game handout, video link, slide show and script

### Setup

Before class, make sure you can project the Session 2 slide show and view the Alan Storey video. Preview both of these resources. Contact a musician who can play their instrument during the Closing Prayer.

### Introduction

Optional: Have your musician pick and lead a verse or two of a hymn that ties into the theme of manna, sufficiency or bread sharing.

What did you remember during the week from Session 1?

Welcome to Wilderness School, where God's people went because God loves experiential education. God's people escaped Pharaoh's Egypt and are preparing to enter the promised land. According to theologian Alan Storey we need a place of transition between oppression and promise. God's people spent 40 years wandering and learning in wilderness school. Why 40? Numerology is always symbolic in the Bible. 40 days and 40 nights; 40 days in the wilderness for Jesus. We also know that there are 40 weeks of pregnancy. God is birthing a people, teaching them how to live as effective partners so they can fulfill God's dream to mend the universe. In Wilderness School, God's people learn about manna living, i.e., what is enough. They also receive God's covenant, and learn about Sabbath.

### Tell the Story

Show the slideshow and read the script for *Manna and Mercy* chapters 3-5 (see script below).

### Explore the Themes

#### Manna/Enough

Review the Manna Lessons from Wilderness School

- 1) don't take more than we need;
- 2) what we have belongs to God;

3) everybody gets enough

Play the Manna Game. Everyone receives a piece of manna (crackers) and table groups follow a list of instructions about what to do with their manna. (Distribute one instruction sheet to each table, and assign a group leader to lead the table through the steps).

1. The person whose birthday falls earliest in the year should give their manna to the person whose birthday falls latest in the year
2. The shortest person should give their manna to the tallest.
3. Everyone should pass their manna two persons to the right.
4. People born west of the Mississippi should take the manna of the people born east of the Mississippi.
5. The person with the most pets should give their manna to the person with the least pets.
6. Give half of your table's manna to a table with more men than women and the other half to a table that needs your manna.
7. All tables redistribute their manna so everyone has an equal amount.
8. Participants discuss how they felt as givers and receivers and what they noticed during the Manna Game

The leader might want to continue the conversation, talking about when people experience Manna sharing and when they don't. Feel free to include personal examples (e.g. sharing and equity at school and work), church examples (the sharing bread of bread at communion, freely giving away our money at the offering time, etc), and larger examples in society (health care, hunger and food policy, the growing gaps between rich and poor, etc).

### Covenant

View Alan Storey video clip: *The Law as Gift*. Encourage participants to write down a couple Alan Storey reflections from the video clip (for example: "enjoy being enjoyed" or "never forget that you were a slave.")

<http://www.mannaandmercy.org/audio-video/alan-storey-video-clips/Video-13.html>

Summary of clip: A liberated people has to decide how we are going to live. We want to make rules and laws so we don't go back into the

previous oppression. The Ten Commandments served as a Bill of Rights for the new constitution. The first command is really a reminder that God has set us free so these “commandments” are lived in response to that gift of grace/liberation. We don’t keep commandments to make us free or to make God love us – we keep them in response to God’s love. The *Sabbath* is a time to enjoy being enjoyed (by God). Sabbath means rest and remember. It is not just a day but a principle we should remember every day. All creation (the environment) needs a Sabbath as well to be rejuvenated. Every 50 years (Jubilee Year) we need to redistribute wealth/land so there isn’t such a large gap between those who have more and those with less. Jesus longs for this economy to be realized. When you forget this Sabbath principle, you re-enter bondage – this time Babylon rather than Egypt; you self-destruct.

Group members share the reflections they jotted down and talk about which of Alan’s points they will remember and why.

### Summary

During Session 2:

- We introduced the idea of Wilderness School, where God’s people learned God’s ways of living.
- We explored the topic of manna living and “enough.”
- We learned about and discussed various aspects of God’s covenant.
- We closed with a taste of God’s gift of Sabbath.

### Closing Prayer

#### Sabbath

God gave us Sabbath as a way to measure “enough.” Invite a musician to play a hymn on the piano for several minutes while the group simply rests in quiet prayer and allows the music be a gift.

What will you take away?

## Session 2: Wilderness School (Chapters 3-5) Script for Slideshow

You can find the PowerPoint slides at:

[http://mannaandmercy.org/adult\\_study\\_powerpoints.html](http://mannaandmercy.org/adult_study_powerpoints.html)

(Several good readers could be selected to read the following text while the slides are shown)



1. God waited and waited for the first teachable moment in wilderness school. That moment came when the people grumbled about food. Yahweh responded by showering them

with some edible substance called “what is it?” or “Manna.” By receiving manna each day, the people learned: We can trust God for daily bread. God gives enough—not too much, not too little.



2. But some of the people decided to hard manna into big piles. The manna they hoarded grew maggots. They learned God’s next lesson: Hoarding stinks!



3. Yahweh had one more lesson to share about manna in wilderness school. No manna fell on the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath. The people

could eat manna from the day before, which did not rot. Humans did not have to work on Sabbath. Sabbath is a beautiful gift of God which makes it possible to rest.



4. God promised to give the wilderness people land, but he worried that they would go back to Pharaoh’s ways with big deals and little deals, rich and poor. Yahweh came up with a plan: I will bind myself to this people in covenant partnership.





5. What a day it was when the covenant-making ceremony took place at a mountain called Sinai! On that special day God gave the people a covenant word that showed them how to live on their land. The people received God's gift and called it Torah. The covenant gift taught people about practical things—like farming, animal care, sharing, balance, and Sabbath.



6. After many years in wilderness school, and after failing many exams, God's partner people were ready for graduation. The graduation ceremony took

place at the boundary, on the east side of the Jordan. Moses delivered a powerful commencement address. He pleaded with the people to remember God's love and the lessons Yahweh had taught them. Moses sang a beautiful song of praise, then climbed Mt Nebo and died there.

Joshua, Moses' successor, led the people over the Jordan River and into the promised land. Those were good days—not perfect, but good days. The manna people lived on the land of their inheritance in simplicity and equality.



7. The partner people loved to tell stories about their ancestors, especially Mother Sarah and Father Abraham. The partner people cried out, "That story is about us! We are the children of Sarah and Abraham!. Our purpose is to bring a blessing to all the nations."

## Play the Manna Game

*Each Table Leader should have this sheet in order to walk your group through the exercise.*

*Everyone receives a piece of manna (crackers) and table groups follow a list of instructions about what to do with their manna.*

1. The person whose birthday falls earliest in the year should give their manna to the person whose birthday falls latest in the year
2. The shortest person should give their manna to the tallest.
3. Everyone should pass their manna two persons to the right.
4. People born west of the Mississippi should take the manna of the people born east of the Mississippi.
5. The person with the most pets should give their manna to the person with the least pets.
6. Give half of your table's manna to a table with more men than women and the other half to a table that needs your manna.
7. All tables redistribute their manna so everyone has an equal amount.
8. Participants discuss how they felt as givers and receivers and what they noticed during the Manna Game.

# Session 3: Kings, Prophets, and Exile - Chapters 6-9

## Materials for this class

Paper, pens, Session 3 handout, video link, slide show and script, white board and markers, hymnal, Bibles

## Setup

Before class, make sure you can project the Week 3 slide show and view the Alan Storey video. Preview both of these resources. Make copies of the hymn and the Session 3 handout.

## Introduction

*Optional:* Have your musician pick and lead a verse or two of a hymn that ties into the theme of *exile*.

What did you remember from last week during the week?

Highlight the large size of this section of the Bible. Invite participants to find the same section in their Bibles. This next section is a large, middle chunk of the Bible that is less familiar to them than the beginning and later sections.

This section of the Bible encompasses a wide swath of time and place. A repeating cycle emerges as God's people continue to move and change:

1. God's faithful people "get it." They worship God and live a manna life
2. God's people get nervous and greedy and wander away from God
3. A small remnant (remainder) of God's people return to God, and God delivers them to live a manna life once more

During this period in the Bible, God's dream of a mended universe falls apart for all but a small "remnant" group of believers. They remain faithful, and God uses them to advance the dream of a manna society.

## Tell the Story

Show slides and read script for Manna and Mercy chapters 6-9 (see script below).

## Explore the Themes

### Exile

Direct class participants to gather their materials, stand up, and go sit at another table. Each person should then write for 2 minutes about what happens to them when someone tells them to move. They then share their writing with one other person.

### Prophecy

From the midst of the people who remained faithful, God raised up special preachers called prophets. They had names like Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Through the prophets words and dramatic actions God pleaded with the people “Come back to me! Come back to your mission, to your calling, to the lessons you learned in the wilderness. Come back to the joyful manna life.”

Alan Storey Video <http://www.mannaandmercy.org/audio-video/alan-storey-video-clips/Video-19.html>

*Summary.* Prophets are like architects who look at an open lot and can envision new homes or buildings in that space – something grand and beautiful. They are hoping you will “buy into” that vision/plan. Prophets are architects who are calling us to buy into God’s dream of the future now.

### Storytelling

During the days of the Kings, Yahweh spirited some of the remnant people to write down old stories—stories about creation, Abraham and Sarah, the liberation from Egypt, the wilderness covenant ceremony, the promise to David, and the words of the prophets. When the stories were written down, God breathed a sigh of relief. If everyone left the covenant, a future generation might read the holy words and return to the way of righteousness and mercy—to the manna life.

Brainstorm a list of Bible stories from the Old Testament—Creation, Noah’s Ark, the Exodus, etc. Write the list on a white board. Study participants work in partners to retell one of the OT stories. They can use the Bible if they need help with story details.

### Summary

- We considered some stories and themes of the large, middle section of the Bible—exile, prophets, and storytelling.
- We practiced “exile” in a small way, and noted our feelings about the experience.
- We learned more about prophets, with the help of Alan Storey.
- We became the storytellers God called us to be, so that we would remember God’s way of righteous and mercy.

*What do you take away with you from this section of Manna and Mercy?*

### Closing Prayer

(optional: also add the singing of a hymn verse that relates to Isaiah 60)

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and God’s glory will appear over you. Amen

## Session 4: Kings, Prophets and Exile (Chapters 6-9)

### Script for Slideshow

You can find the PowerPoint slides at:

[http://mannaandmercy.org/adult\\_study\\_powerpoints.html](http://mannaandmercy.org/adult_study_powerpoints.html)

(Several good readers could be selected to read the following text while the slides are shown)



1. During the days of early Israel, God's partner people lived in relative equality. But neighboring people kept bothering, pestering stealing

and attacking them. The situation led to a heated debate between people who wanted a king and people who didn't want a king. The pro-king majority wanted a king like other nations. The minority feared that with a king they would be like the Egypt of their slavery. The two sides agreed to try a new possibility—a faithful people led by a faithful king.

Saul was the first king—he worked out fine. Then King David was even better. Then things turned bad. King Solomon found glory in his 700 wives and 300 concubines, his riches and his collection of apes baboons.

Yahweh wept—Israel had become like Pharaoh's Egypt.

*(optional): Put this spoken refrain on a board so that people can respond after each slide:*

*Round and round the story goes, through it all God's mercy flows.*



2. Solomon died. God's partner people divided into two rival nations, each with its own king. The south was Judah; the north was Israel. The people of both Judah and Israel left their liberator God, and worshiped their manna piles and the gods of their neighbors. The old vision faded. Except for a small remnant, nobody loved Yahweh

with heart and soul and strength. Few longed to live as a manna people, a Sabbath people. Yahweh wept, and all creation wept. Round and round the story goes, through it all God's mercy flows.



3. All hope was not lost. A small remnant still remembered God's covenant promise and longed for mercy. From their midst, God raised up special preachers called the prophets. Through their words and dramatic actions, God pleaded with the people "Come back to me, come back to the lessons of manna and mercy that you learned in wilderness school." The prophets told the people that their stupidity would lead to ruin. The big deals tried to silence the prophets.

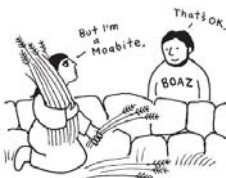
But the prophets were right. The Assyrians destroyed Israel, and the Babylonians destroyed Judah. God's people were led away from their homes in chains. By the waters of Babylon the people wept. They hung up their harps because they could not sing Yahweh's song in a strange land.

Round and round the story goes, through it all God's mercy flows.



4. God's passionate love burned for the exile people. God wanted to repeat the exodus and set the people free. When the Persians defeated the Babylonians, the liberator God saw an opportunity for the second "great exodus." A remnant of the exiles went home. Yahweh dared to dream that now this people would become a light to the nations. The exiles danced and laughed and sang on the highway from Babylon to Jerusalem. Their homecoming was bittersweet. Houses, farms, and the temple lay in ruins. The people felt like they had entered a new wilderness. Yahweh started a school—where there's a wilderness, there's a school.

And the main lesson in this wilderness school? Mercy. Round and round the story goes, through it all God's mercy flows.



5. Inspired by their teachers, the partner people worked hard to restore their devastated land.

### Session 3: Kings, Prophets and Exile – Supplemental Materials

They fervently worshiped Yahweh. Elated at first, it was not long before God began to worry. Something started to happen which upset the one who loves all people. The leaders of the beloved people decided that Israelites had to be completely separated from foreigners if they were to live as God's special people. Marriages were broken; families were torn apart. Yahweh cried with those whose lives were shattered. The partner people had chosen a narrow form of righteousness. They had forgotten about mercy.

God rejoiced because a small remnant refused to go along with the popular point of view. Through this minority Yahweh spoke to the whole people in the form of simple and beautiful stories, like the story of Ruth. Through these stories, the small minority proclaimed:

God loves all people and wants everyone included in the realm of mercy.

**Round and round the story goes, through it all God's mercy flows.**



6. The postexilic community lived in relative independence under Persian rule. Great change came when the Macedonians defeated the Persians. During the Great Persecution, God's faithful survived by telling faith stories to encourage one another, like *Daniel in the Lion's Den*. After a century of manna living, the priests became big deals and exploited the poor. A remnant of the partner people realized they had no power, no control over the future. Their only hope was to cry out to God in their helplessness, as the slaves had cried out in Egypt.

**Round and round the story goes, through it all God's mercy flows.**



## Session 4: God's Surprise - Chapters 10-12

### Materials for this class

Paper, pens, Session 4 handouts, video link, slide show and script, white board and markers, hymnal, Bibles, props for acting out Bible stories (such as baskets, fake food, tablecloths, goldfish crackers)

### Setup

Before class, make sure you can project the Week 4 slide show and view the Alan Storey video. Preview both of these resources. Make copies of the hymn and the Session 4 handout. Arrange for a musician to accompany the hymn. Be sure the props are ready.

### Introduction

Optional: Have your musician pick and lead a verse or two of a hymn that ties into the theme of *new creation, or following the way of Jesus*.

What insights from last Sunday did you remember during the week?

This week we begin by showing connections between old and new testaments—creation in the Old Testament becomes the New Creation in Jesus; wilderness school begins anew for Jesus in the wilderness and his disciples during their 3-year adventure with Jesus; power structures with new names still attempt to thwart God's vision of equality, and new prophets retell the stories of God's visions, like they did in the old testament.

Once we place the new testament in context, we turn to God's surprise—Jesus. In all he taught and in all he did, Jesus proclaimed the reign of God as a place of abundant manna and abundant mercy for all. Jesus proclaimed that the new reality, the reign of God, is filled with blessed people who are poor, merciful, pure in heart, hungry, weeping, and persecuted. Everybody, absolutely everybody, is included in the embrace of God. God is with us, the collective us. Therefore we are held in God's compassion, and God leads us to share that compassion with others as disciples.

This week will we focus on 3 themes: God is with us; manna and mercy at the table; and the cost of discipleship.

## **Tell the Story:**

Read the script and show the slideshow for Manna and Mercy chapters 10-12 (see script below).

## **Explore the Themes**

### **Immanuel – God Is With Us**

Instead of a dramatic Red Sea type of event to save the people and restore the universe, Yahweh found a young woman among the poor. She loved God and yearned for the day when God would liberate her people and restore the manna society. Her name was Mary. The Spirit of God breathed into Mary as the Spirit had breathed into the watery depths to bring forth the first creation. There with Mary, God formed a new creation, Immanuel. God with us!

Divide the group into smaller groups of 2-3 persons. Equip each group with a camera or camera phone. Send groups out into the church building to photograph signs they see that God is with us. Maybe they see those signs in the traditional word and sacrament symbols in the sanctuary. Maybe they will photograph food in the freezer for the food bank. Encourage participants to be creative and talk to one another and ask them to come back in 10 minutes. When they return, encourage them to move around the room and share their photos. After the whole group re-gathers, ask what they discovered on their quest for signs that God is with us.

### **Manna and Mercy Stories**

The New Testament piles up story after story about Jesus—his words and actions. The gospels are simultaneously intimate stories about Jesus' daily life and an epic tale of salvation.

Often the stories of Jesus and food bring together the themes of manna and mercy. In this activity, groups join together to tell the larger group one of the Jesus stories of manna and mercy.

Deliver handouts to each table with the following instructions:

*Table Questions for Jesus and Mercy stories*

*Read your assigned story in the Bible.*

*Decide how you want to tell the story.  
Find props that help you tell the story.  
Be sure to tell about how you see Manna and Mercy in your story.*

*Tempted Luke 4:1-13*

*The Wedding Banquet Matthew 22:1-10*

*Banquet with Simon Luke 7:36-50*

*Mary and Martha Luke 10:38-42*

*Wedding at Cana John 2:1-11*

*Jesus Feeds 5000 John 6:1-14*

*Last Supper John 13:1-20*

Give groups 5-10 minutes to prepare to teach the class their story. They can use the available props and Bibles to prepare. After preps, give each group a chance to tell their story, highlighting its manna and mercy aspects.

OR

If you perceive this story-telling activity to be too threatening for your group, you might simply invite people to close their eyes for a few moments, to sit in silence for awhile, and from their collective memories, recall significant Gospel pictures of Jesus and manna and mercy.

After a time of silence, the leader might start the sharing out loud a Gospel picture by saying "I see Jesus at the wedding at Cana" ...and invite others to call out what are for them significant snapshots of Jesus and manna and mercy.

The leader can instruct people to "Begin each memory with the simple words 'I see Jesus'.... And then follow with your Gospel picture."

After all have had a chance to share, you might simply close this part by saying "Thanks be to God, who has met us in Jesus. Amen."

**Mercy for All – Jesus's Vision**

View the Alan Storey video <http://www.mannaandmercy.org/audio-video/alan-storey-video-clips/Video-32.html>

*Summary.* Jesus spoke about mercy for all and that got on the nerves of the religious establishment. God's mercy is a *gift* for everyone. So much religion stresses who deserves it and who doesn't, who is in and

who is out. Religious fundamentalists often try to determine who God has “blessed” and who God punishes and think only what they believe is right. “Evangelism” sometimes tries to get everyone to think the same way. Do we want others to do that to us? Didn’t Jesus teach us “to do unto others what we would have them do unto us?” Religious fundamentalism is often the oil on the fires of so much conflict around the globe. Fundamentalism reduces discipleship to just believing certain things. Jesus tells us that God loves every single person *regardless* of what we believe. To commit my life to Jesus is to allow Jesus to determine and shape my understanding of God. God loves to forgive everyone and have them become holy partners with God to mend this world. Jesus is explicit that we are to love our enemies because God’s mercy is so broad; God wants even our enemies to be God’s partners. To *believe* means to give our hearts to that expansive and inclusive mercy.

After viewing the video, small groups can discuss these questions:

- Why do we flunk Mercy in Wilderness School?
- What messages did you grow up with regarding God’s mercy?
- How do each of us keep from becoming fundamentalist about our views?

*To commit my life to Jesus is to allow Jesus to determine and shape my understanding of God. Tell of a time this happened in your life.*

### Summary

- We heard stories from *Manna and Mercy* about Jesus, who was God’s surprise.
- We looked at gospel themes that appear in *Manna and Mercy*, specifically: Immanuel (God is with us), manna and mercy table stories in the New Testament, and mercy for everyone.
- We spent time learning to know one another in our community, and sharing our faith.

### Closing Prayer

Read The Magnificat together (or alternatively sing a version that your musician might lead)

*Luke 1:47-55*

*My soul magnifies the Lord*

*And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior  
For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all  
Generations will call me blessed;  
For the Mighty One has done  
Great things for me,  
And holy is his name  
His mercy is for those who fear him  
From generation to generation  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
He has scattered the proud in the  
Thoughts of their hearts  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones  
And lifted up the lowly  
He has filled the hungry with good things  
And sent the rich away empty  
He has helped his servant Israel  
In remembrance of his mercy,  
According to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
To Abraham and to his descendants forever.*

## Session 4: God's Surprise (Chapters 10-12) Script for Slideshow

You can find the PowerPoint slides at:

[http://mannaandmercy.org/adult\\_study\\_powerpoints.html](http://mannaandmercy.org/adult_study_powerpoints.html)

(Several good readers could be selected to read the following text while the slides are shown)



1. In a land of injustice and division the poor cried out to God. They pleaded with God to send a ruler who would liberate them and establish a manna society which would never end.



2. Yahweh heard the cry of all who were oppressed. This time God moved in a way that surprised every creation. God found a young woman named Mary among the poor. In Mary, God formed a new creation—Immanuel. God with us!



3. Mary gave birth while she and Joseph, her fiancé, were lodged in a stable. She held

her newborn in her arms and repeated the song she had sung when the child was conceived.



4. Jesus grew in years and the oppression of the Pharaoh's-Egypt society increased. One day Jesus went into the Jordan River and was baptized by the fiery prophet John the Baptist. Through this water passage, Yahweh anointed Jesus to serve as God's liberator-messiah.

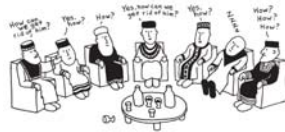
After Jesus's baptism, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove.



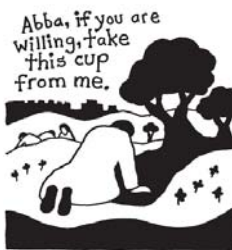
5. Empowered by God's Spirit and a life of continuous prayer, Jesus went from town to town teaching and preaching with great authority. In all that he said and did he announced the good news of the reign of God.



6. Jesus proclaimed that the reign of God is filled with blessed people who are poor, merciful, pure in heart, hungry, weeping, and persecuted. Everybody, absolutely everybody, is included in the embrace of God. Jesus' ministry was indeed "good news to the poor." He called the people back to the lessons learned in wilderness school. Jesus came to restore manna society.



7. The big deals were severely threatened by Jesus. They were afraid Jesus would either succeed in establishing a society based on his ideas. The big deals decided it was time to act to get rid of Jesus.



8. The big deal religious leaders and the Roman rulers collaborated to arrest and condemn Jesus, because he represented the dangerous reign of love and mercy and shalom. They sentenced him to death by crucifixion.

## Table Questions for Jesus and Mercy stories

- Read your assigned story in the Bible.
- Decide how you want to tell the story.
- Find props that help you tell the story.
- Be sure to tell about how you see manna and mercy in your story.

*Tempted Luke 4:1-13*

*The Wedding Banquet Matthew 22:1-10*

*Banquet with Simon Luke 7:36-50*

*Mary and Martha Luke 10:38-42*

*Wedding at Cana John 2:1-11*

*Jesus Feeds 5000 John 6:1-14*

*Last Supper John 13:1-20*

Take 5-10 minutes to prepare to teach the whole class your story, highlighting its manna and mercy aspects. You can use any available props and Bibles to prepare.



# Session 5: A New Church – Chapters 13-14

## Materials for this class

Paper, pens, Session 5 handout, video link, slide show and script, white board and markers, hymnal, Bibles

## Setup

Before class, make sure you can project the Session 5 slide show and view the Macedonia Project and African church video clips. Preview both of these resources. Make copies of the Session 5 handout.

## Introduction

We begin this week with Jesus' death – a death that brought old life to some and new life to others. Jesus didn't play the trumpet on Easter morning; he stole in on the road as a mysterious stranger. Often we stop here. We recognize Jesus, but don't want to hear his plan.

But Jesus is very clear – Your mission, should you choose it...

- Tell the nations of God's plan and dream
- Tell God's story of suffering
- Invite people to repent and receive forgiveness
- Preach about a Contrast Society

Many people did listen to Jesus's plan. They carried through with God's vision, and thousands of people were baptized. For a big job, you need a Big Wind. The Big Wind arrived in the story of Pentecost. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, God's Pentecost people came alive: they praised, immersed, prayed, shared, proclaimed.

This morning we look back to the stories of resurrection, Pentecost and the early church. Then we fast-forward to the present, as we consider:

- How have particular congregations shaped our faith?
- How does a modern day church use its scant resources to help others?
- How are our churches fulfilling the mission plans that Jesus laid out?

## Tell the Story

Read the script and show the slideshow for Manna and Mercy chapters 13 and 14 (see script below).

## Explore the Themes

### Crucifixion and Resurrection

View the Alan Storey video <http://mannaandmercy.org/audio-video/alan-storey-video-clips/Video-38.html>.

Alan Storey claims the resurrection shows that the world is really the way Jesus said it is: love, gentleness, justice are the most powerful forces – and that means evil has already been defeated. The world's "no" has been overcome by God's "yes". We are to trust in the victory of God's dream: shalom.

After viewing the video clip, ask people about their reaction to this understanding of crucifixion and resurrection. How is it different from what they have learned previously (e.g. *Jesus died for my sins so that I could go to heaven when I die*).

### We are the Church

Distribute pens and blank sheets of paper, and invite participants to write for 3-4 minutes about a congregation from their past that they remember. How was God at work in that church? How did that particular congregation shape their faith? Participants share their writing in small groups, and hang their completed pages among the pictures from Manna and Mercy to demonstrate that we are all part of God's larger story.

### Generosity for All – The Macedonia Story

St. Paul was not only concerned that believers live the manna life as congregations. He was also deeply concerned that Christians throughout the ancient world create a global community of faith. The big test came when the Christians in Palestine (mostly Jewish) did not have enough to eat because of a famine. At the same time the Christians in Asia Minor and Macedonia (mostly Gentile) had more than enough. Paul was elated when he delivered a generous offering from the Macedonian believers at to the church in

Jerusalem. He took this as a sign that the whole church on earth was living as a manna society.

View the following video clip about a modern day Macedonia tale:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNfTOj8R8Vs>

Yahweh rejoiced with a partner people had emerged from the sacrificial death and the glorious resurrection of Jesus. Watch this video that demonstrates what happens when God's people learn to work together?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BuR769wAXs8>

### **Mission Talk Handout**

Give people time either in the large group or in small groups to grapple with some of the following questions:

- Why do churches with the least sometimes give the most?
- What inhibits churches from working together?
- How is your congregation demonstrating God's dream of abundant mercy for all and abundant manna for all?
- Where do we see the Pentecost winds of the spirit blowing around the world today?
- The early followers of Jesus shunned the immoral and hedonistic ways of the Empire. They refused to participate in events which were contrary to the Spirit and teaching of Jesus. How do we live counter-culturally today and what would that cost us?
- Post-resurrection, Jesus made his mission clear:
  - Tell the nations of God's plan and dream
  - Tell God's story of suffering
  - Invite people to repent and receive forgiveness
  - Preach about a Contrast Society

How is your congregation fulfilling Jesus' mission statement?

### **Summary**

This week we joined God's partner people just after Jesus' resurrection, and followed them through the Pentecost infusion of the Holy Spirit. We glimpsed the early church, with its mission goals and ongoing challenges. We met St. Paul, and heard stories

of churches past and present that made a difference for others by practicing a manna and mercy way of life.

### **Closing Prayer**

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Amen

## Session 5: A New Church (Chapters 13-14)

### Script for Slideshow

You can find the PowerPoint slides at:

[http://mannaandmercy.org/adult\\_study\\_powerpoints.html](http://mannaandmercy.org/adult_study_powerpoints.html)

(Several good readers could be selected to read the following text while the slides are shown)



1. We begin with a death, which brought old life to some and new life to others. Joseph of Arimathea buried the body of Jesus in a tomb and sealed the tomb with a large rock. The big deals laughed and congratulated each other. Now things were back to normal. The vote was in. No to the life and teachings of Jesus. Not to Jesus' world of manna and mercy for all.

One vote had not been counted. Yahweh entered the tomb and cried YES. God cried YES to Jesus and to Jesus' life of manna for all and mercy for all. God called, "Get up, Emmanuel!"



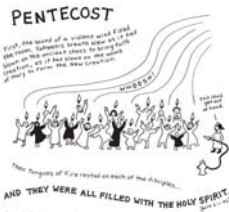
JESUS AND  
HIS  
TROUBLEMAKING  
GO MERRILY  
ON!

2. All creation shouted for joy. God wept for joy and then danced with the angels around the cosmos. Life had conquered death.



3. The Risen One appeared. He didn't play the trumpet on Easter. Instead he stole in. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained the scriptures to his bereft disciples. They did not recognize him, however, until he broke the bread in their home. Jesus kept his promise. He was present in the breaking of bread.

Jesus told the disciples of their clear mission. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is tell nation of God's plan; tell God's story of suffering; invite others to repent and receive forgiveness. Preach manna and mercy.



4. But how to carry out this huge ministry expectation? The empowerment came on the Jewish feast call Pentecost. Yahweh’s breath blew as it had to bring forth creation.

After the Pentecost experience, the disciples went forth and told God’s story. Thousands of Jewish people from all the over the Roman Empire and beyond believed their message and were baptized.



5. God’s partner people needed one more form of liberation. The believers, who were Jewish, were convinced that a Gentile had to become a cultural Jew in order to become part of the risen community. In other words, a Gentile believer had to follow Jewish rules about ritual cleansing, food eating, and circumcision. Yahweh’s Holy Spirit used a variety of methods to liberate them from this way thinking.

A miracle happened. The Jewish Christians got it. Now Jews and Gentiles, former enemies, gathered at the same table, their oneness being in Christ.

The partner people had their ups and downs. There were saints and sinners at the same time. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit molded them into a contrast society, a community which reflected the gracious reign of God in a Pharaoh’s-Egypt world.

When the risen people failed to live as a contrast society, God raised up teachers and preachers to call them back. By now they should have had a PhD in wilderness school.



6. One group did not share the joy of God. The big deals were extremely upset. Just when they thought things were back to normal, this Jesus movement was spreading all over the Roman Empire.

When the big deals ordered them to stop living as Jesus’ manna people, Jesus’ followers refused. When punishment came, the believers responded with a form of power which the rulers did not understand—the power of forgiveness, mercy and love.



7. While Jesus' community resisted the violent attacks from the outside, they also faced an inside threat—Accommodation—the process of slowly adopting the ways of the world.

The Holy Spirit called Paul, a rabbi, to teach the people about staying true to manna living and sharing. The big test came when the Christians in Palestine (mostly Jewish) did not have enough to eat because of a famine. At the same time the Christians in Macedonia (mostly Gentile) had more than enough. Paul pleaded with the Gentile Christians to release their excess manna.

Paul was elated when he delivered a generous offering to the believers at Jerusalem. The whole church on earth was living as a manna society. Yahweh was glad. The sharing of Yahweh's meal was a living drama of God's dream for the world.



8. Apostles, evangelists, and missionaries went all over the ancient world spreading the gospel of healing and wholeness which God offered to everyone.

## Mission Talk Handout

Discuss the following questions:

1. Why do churches with the least sometimes give the most?
2. What inhibits churches from working together?
3. How is your congregation demonstrating God's dream of abundant mercy for all and abundant manna for all?
4. Where do you see the Pentecost winds of the spirit blowing around the world today?
5. The early followers of Jesus shunned the immoral and hedonistic ways of the Empire. They refused to participate in events which were contrary to the Spirit and teaching of Jesus. How do we live counter-culturally today and what would that cost us?
6. Post-resurrection, Jesus made his mission clear:
  - Tell the nations of God's plan and dream
  - Tell God's story of suffering
  - Invite people to repent and receive forgiveness
  - Preach about a Contrast SocietyHow is your congregation fulfilling Jesus' mission statement?



## Session 6: God's Dream - Chapters 15-16

### Materials for this class

Paper, pens, Session 6 handout, video links for Revelation and Jeopardy, slide show and script, Bibles

### Setup

Before class, make sure you can project the Session 6 slide show and view the Barbara Rossing video

([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n\\_O3axPvnMQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_O3axPvnMQ)). Preview both of these resources, as well as the Jeopardy review game

(<http://scratch.mit.edu/projects/clindberg/3234932>).

Make copies of the Session 6 handout.

### Introduction:

Yahweh was pleased because a family of people on Planet Earth was learning the way of manna and mercy. Love was binding believers together in community, and love was binding communities together. Yahweh called teachers and preachers, prophets and seers, and some poets and clowns to proclaim the good news of Cosmic Koinonia.

The final two chapters of *Manna and Mercy* begin with the good news of God's partner people understanding the purpose of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to be the mending of the universe. And even though more persecution follows soon thereafter, we close the book (and the study) with more visions of what God had in mind from the very beginning. Indeed, the final chapter of *Manna and Mercy* begins with the same words that opened Chapter 1: In the midst of a vast universe there exists a little speck called Planet Earth. God loves the whole universe, and God loves Planet Earth. By the time when we read these words in Chapter 16, after journeying through the *Manna and Mercy* study, we have a much deeper sense of what God and God's partner people experienced over the course of their history together.

Begin this final class by asking participants what they think they will remember from *Manna and Mercy* a year from now. What themes have already reframed their lives? The title, *Manna and Mercy*, provides us with a measure to take away from the study and practice in our everyday lives. Ask participants what parts of their lives they've noticed

to be defined by manna or mercy. Hopefully they've connected the threads that run through the book—justice, koinonia, forgiveness, trust—with the threads that run through faith in daily life.

## Tell the Story

Read the script and show the slideshow for *Manna and Mercy* chapters 10-12 (see script below).

## Explore the Themes

### The Order of Death vs. The Order of Life

Direct participants to turn to Chapter 16 on pages 75-77. These three final pages include reflections worth reading again and again. Divide the group into pairs, and invite each pair to look at the chart on the bottom of page 75, The Order of Death vs The Order of Life, and note how this chart defines baptized living. Take turns in your larger group reading the underlined sentences on pages 76-77. These statements form a powerful creed proclaiming what we believe about God's promises. Ask participants which statements particularly speak to them, and which they would share with new believers.

**Optional:** View the Alan Storey video <http://mannaandmercy.org/audio-video/alan-storey-video-clips/Video-44.html> where Alan describes a version of Manna and Mercy's "Order of Death" as a military/market-driven train moving from life to death. Discuss the questions it raises about whether church leaders should be "cheerleaders," "chaplains" or "conspirators."

### Endings to Beginnings

We have noted that *Manna and Mercy* circles back to the beginning of creation as it wraps up with God's enduring promise to mend the universe and weave the entire cosmos into a wonderful unity called Shalom. Sounds rather broad, doesn't it?! Throughout all the chapters, *Manna and Mercy* demonstrated that Yahweh cared about all the people in the universe, as well as each person. Each of our stories witnesses to Christ's resurrection. Our endings usher in new beginnings and our little deaths lead to new life. One of the key messages of the book of Revelation is that trusting in God can lead us to a new beginning. Ask participants to write for 3 minutes about this question: *When did an*

*ending turn out to be a beginning in your life?* Participants can share their words, but should also feel free to refrain from sharing.

### Revelation

Invite participants to share a question they have about the book of Revelation. Rather than try to answer all the questions, pass out this quick fact sheet and share the video clip introducing Dr. Barbara Rossing's study of Revelation (a church could follow up the *Manna and Mercy* study with Rossing's excellent video Bible Study.)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n\\_O3axPvnMQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_O3axPvnMQ)

### Jeopardy Review

Play a *Manna and Mercy* review game. This fun Jeopardy game engages participants in remembering what they learned about the Bible during the past six weeks. You can play the game in a large group, or divide into teams.

<http://scratch.mit.edu/projects/clindberg/3234932>

### Summary

- We paid attention to the closing pages of *Manna and Mercy*, where we find a beautiful summary of God's promises.
- We noted the way that *Manna and Mercy* circles back to creation in its final chapter, and wrote about a time when an ending led to a new beginning in our lives.
- We scratched the surface of the book Revelation, noting 10 facts that may debunk some myths about the book. We pointed toward an expert who teaches a study of Revelation.
- We reviewed our *Manna and Mercy* study using a special Jeopardy game.

### Closing Prayer

From Revelation 21: "See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them as their God; they will be God's peoples, and God will be with them; God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." Amen

## Session 6: God's Dream (Chapters 15-16) Script for Slideshow

You can find the PowerPoint slides at:

[http://mannaandmercy.org/adult\\_study\\_powerpoints.html](http://mannaandmercy.org/adult_study_powerpoints.html)

(Several good readers could be selected to read the following text while the slides are shown)

### COSMIC KOINONIA!



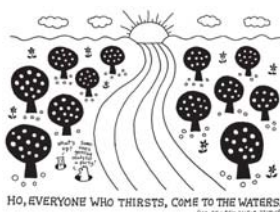
1. Yahweh was pleased because a family of people on Planet Earth was learning the way of manna and mercy. Love was binding communities together in one great body of Christ on earth. Yahweh called teachers and preachers, prophets and seers, and some poets and clowns, to proclaim the good news of Cosmic Koinonia.



2. But trouble was brewing. The big deals of the Roman Empire felt threatened when God's people pledged loyalty to Jesus, rather than Caesar. Christians became subject to severe persecution.



3. Yahweh came up with a wonderful idea to encourage faithfulness during times of persecution. God sent strange and awesome visions to a dreamer whose name was John. John wrote down his visions and sent his writings to Christian congregations. The visions of John called Christians to keep the faith and endure to the end.



4. Day by day, God added to the number of believers. The nations were coming to the waters, coming home to God. Yahweh thought about the story—the long story of friendship, passion, promise, hope, disappointment, heartbreak, forgiveness, death and resurrection—and Yahweh smiled and dreamed again of the new creation. Then God made a promise. God said, “I will never give

up until my dream comes true. I will never give up.”



5. In the midst of yearning for God’s future, joy abounds—a joy which no power in heaven or earth can silence. We rejoice in these truths:

- We are not alone. God is with us.
  - The story of God goes on.
  - Everything and everyone has dignity.
  - Hope is certain. Shalom will come.
  - Grace abounds. The new creation come as an unconditional gift.
- God calls all of us to be partners in creation and justice.
  - Everyone is invited to God’s mended universe.



6. Holy, holy, holy is God, the Almighty: who was and is to come. Heaven and earth are full of God’s glory. Hosanna in the highest... Alleluia to God and to the Lamb be all praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever.

Amen.

## Ten Quick Facts about the Book of Revelation

1. The book of Revelation came about in this way: The Creator sent strange and awesome visions to a dreamer who was imprisoned on an island called Patmos. The dreamer, whose name was John, wrote the visions down and sent his writings to Christian congregations. His dreams made absolutely no sense to the big deals. To the oppressed believers, however, the dreams were a word of hope and trust.
2. The focus in Revelation is not on the end-time, but rather on faithfulness in the present.
3. The book is not called Revelations, it's called Revelation.
4. The text of Revelation was not actually written with us in mind. Even if it's timeless, the text was written for a particular audience suffering persecution.
5. The author of Revelation is not the John who wrote the fourth Gospel.
6. The language of Revelation works like poetry. Each piece is separate, and yet they all intertwine.
7. Revelation has two purposes: First, to call Christians to be faithful through persecutions and second, to remind Christians that we can't serve two lords.
8. Political and social dimensions abound in Revelation.
9. All language in Revelation is non-literal.
10. Nearly two-thirds of the language in Revelation clearly alludes to the Old Testament.