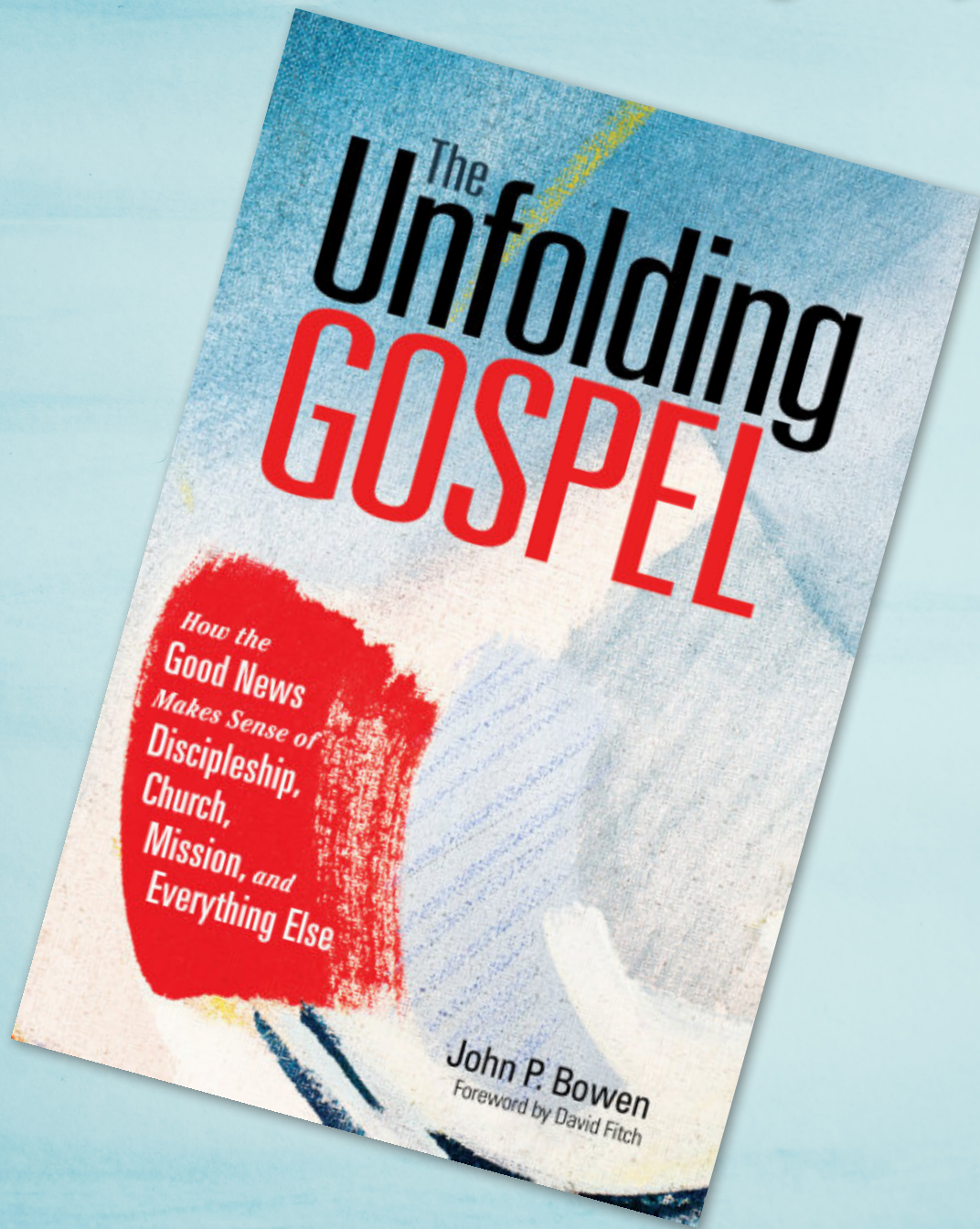
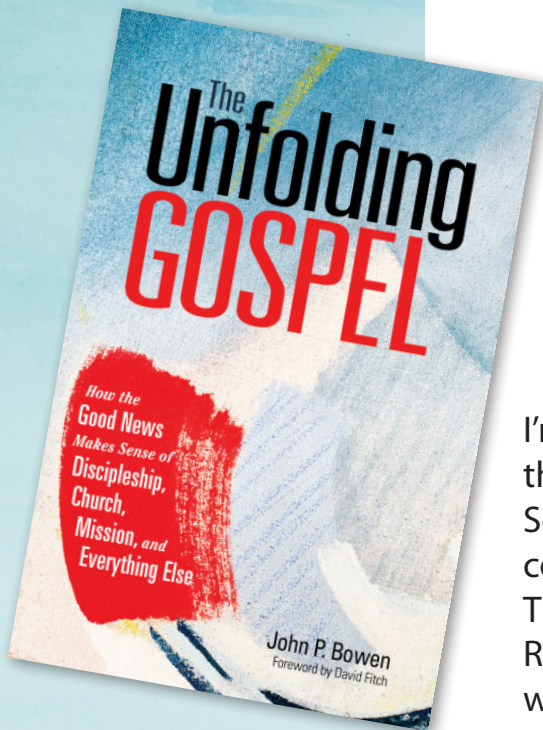


A LENTEN STUDY GUIDE

for use with *The Unfolding Gospel*



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA



**A Lenten
Study Guide
for use with
*The
Unfolding Gospel***

I'm delighted to commend three books from three homegrown authors for our Lenten Book Series in 2023. The wisdom and witness contained in the writings of Dr. John Bowen, The Reverend Canon Martha Tatarinic, and The Reverend Michael Coren will be a blessing to all who turn their pages and will help us be the face and hands of Christ more authentically and more faithfully.

Dr. John Bowen's *The Unfolding Gospel* (Fortress Press, 2021) explores what "the gospel" is and how it informs—or should inform—our understanding of mission, church, culture, and leadership.

With the warmth and clarity of a seasoned teacher of evangelism, John provides the knowledge and inspiration about how to live and share the gospel that individuals and congregations seeking to be more missional.

Blessings on this Lenten journey.
Sincerely,

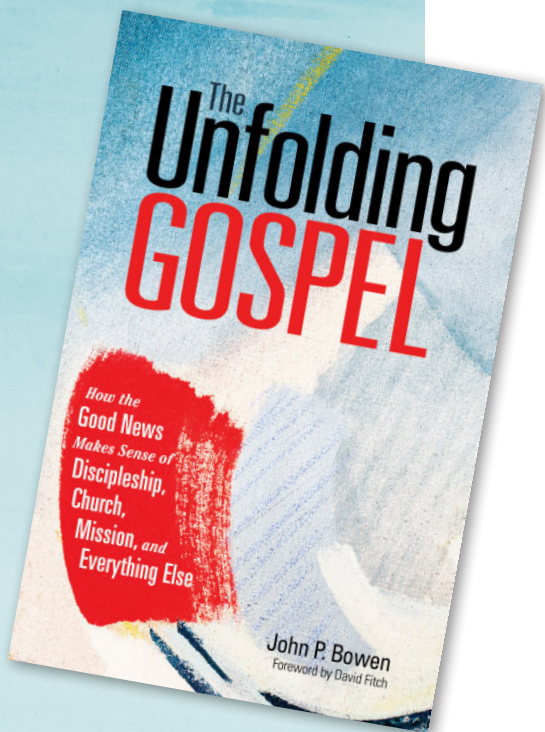
Susan Niagara

The Right Reverend Susan J.A. Bell
Bishop of Niagara



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA





**A Lenten
Study Guide**
for use with
***The
Unfolding Gospel***

A Lenten Study Guide
written by the author
Dr. John Bowen

READING OUTLINE

Week 1 – Chapters 1-3

Week 2 – Chapters 4-6

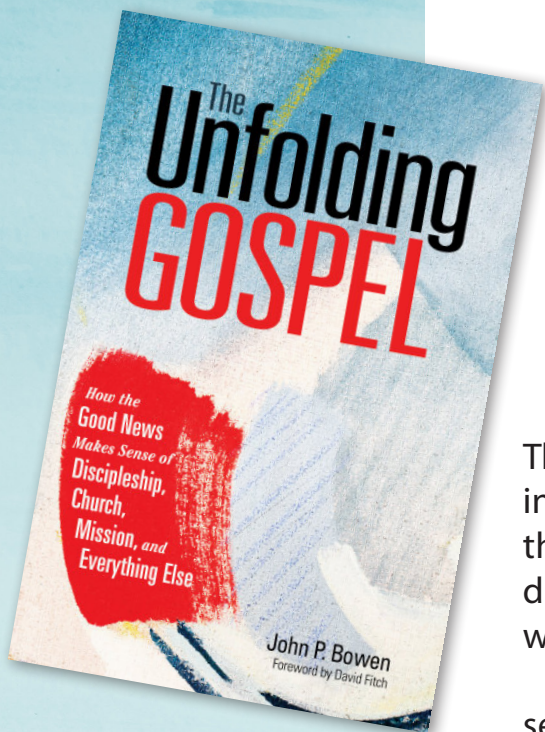
Week 3 – Chapters 7-9

Week 4 – Chapters 10-12



**ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA**





**A Lenten
Study Guide**
for use with
**The
Unfolding Gospel**

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

There are twelve chapters in *the Unfolding Gospel* including the introduction and conclusion. For the purposes of group study, please feel free to divide the book into the sections that you think would work best for you for your group.

You may like to start each discussion session with a brief version of the Ignatian examen. After a few moments of silence, you would ask people to consider their response to a specific chapter under two headings, consolidation and desolation.

Consolation: Were there any points in this chapter where you were encouraged, touched, or joyful? What might God be saying to you through those? How might God be asking you to respond in thought, word, or deed?

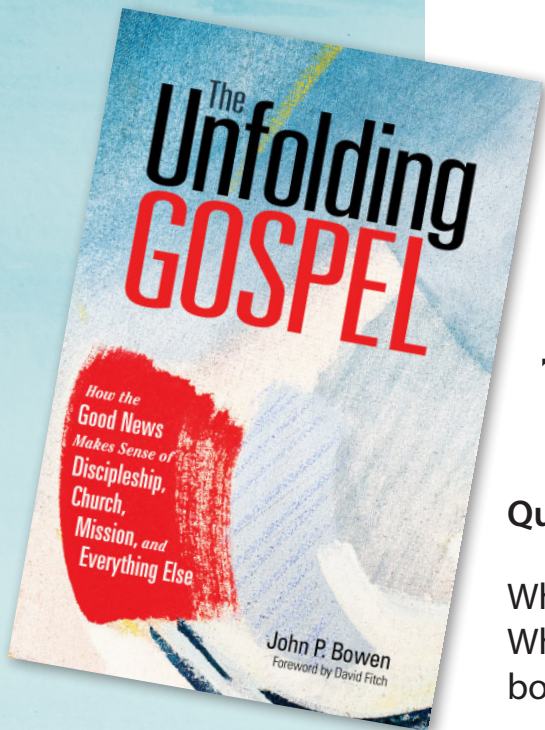
Desolation: Were there any points in this chapter where you were troubled, sad, or angry? What might God be saying to you through that? How might God be asking you to respond in thought, word, or deed?

This may occupy your whole discussion time, which is fine. If you still need specific questions on each chapter, however, here are some suggestions!



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA





**A Lenten
Study Guide**
for use with
**The
Unfolding Gospel**

**INTRODUCTION:
THE KIND YOU REALLY NEED TO
READ**

Questions

Why does John say, “you really need to read this”?
What difference does it make to how you read the
book?

As John describes where he is coming from, are
there things about him that encourage you to
read the book? Are there things he says that make
you nervous or suspicious?

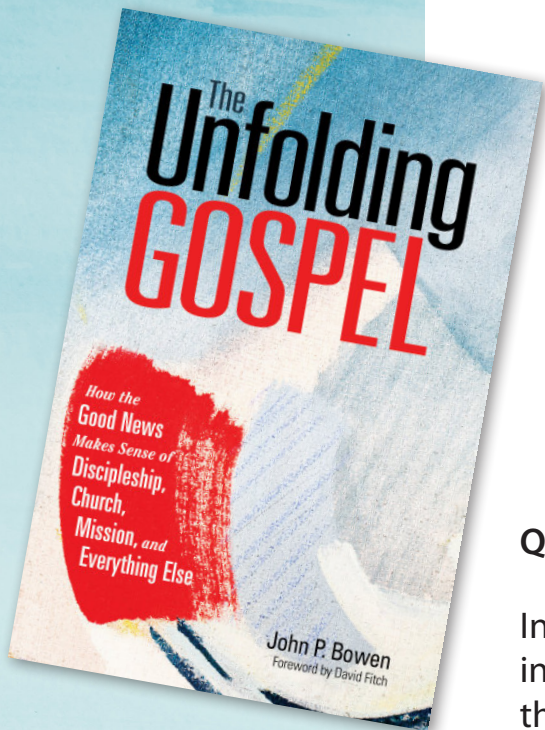
What are hoping for in reading this book?
Are there things you hope to learn? Are there
subjects you hope won't be raised?

As John has described the influences on him and
the writing of this book, what are some of the
background influences of yours that will impact
what you get out of the book (e.g., your age, your
ethnicity, how long you have been in your church,
whether you are lay or ordained)?



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA





**A Lenten
Study Guide
for use with
*The
Unfolding Gospel***

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL? COMPLEXITY AND SIMPLICITY

Questions

In what ways has Christian faith been Good News in your life? Can you see ways in which those things connect you to God's work in Christ to "make all things new"?

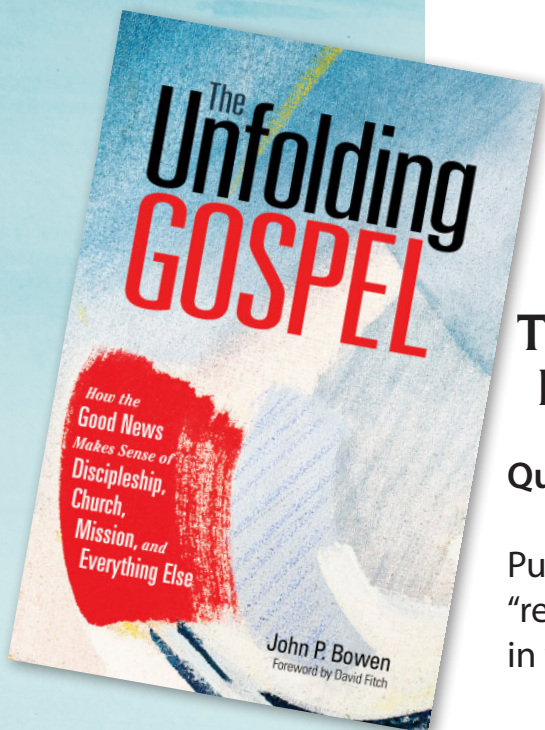
What are some ways Christian faith has been Good News around the world?

Has Christian faith ever been bad news in your life? If you are able, talk about it. What are some ways Christian faith has been bad news for people around the world? How can those who are still Christians respond to those things?



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA





**A Lenten
Study Guide**
for use with
**The
Unfolding Gospel**

THE GOSPEL, CONVERSION, AND BAPTISM: A THREE-FOLD KNOT

Questions

Put into your own words how John explains “repent and believe” (p. 31-35). Can you see ways in which that works in your own life?

What do you think of John’s idea of baptism as the way you register in the school of Jesus (p. 40-42)? What other ways of thinking about baptism are meaningful to you?

John tells of someone who responded angrily to a sermon about discipleship by saying, “I am not a disciple. I am a member” (p. 44). What do you think they meant by that distinction? Why were they angry?

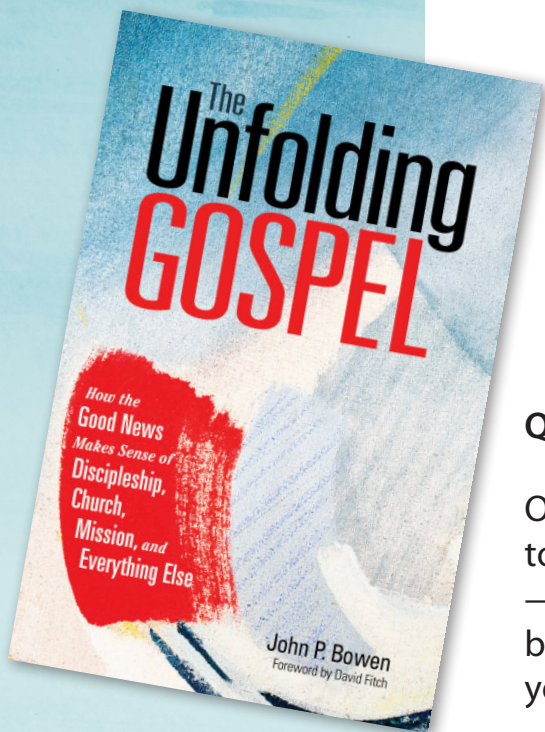
How might you view “going to church” differently if you thought of it as the gathering of the apprentices of Jesus? Would you do or say anything different?

If you were writing a school report on your progress in the school of Jesus, what would you say?



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA





**A Lenten
Study Guide**
for use with
**The
Unfolding Gospel**

THE GOSPEL AND DISCIPLESHIP: THREE TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Questions

Of the three things John mentions as being ways to grow in discipleship in this chapter—community, the Bible, and prayer—which has been your strongest area of growth? Which does your church do best?

Whatever your personal answer, most Anglicans will say “community.” How do you explain that? What are the strengths and weaknesses of a church that majors in community?

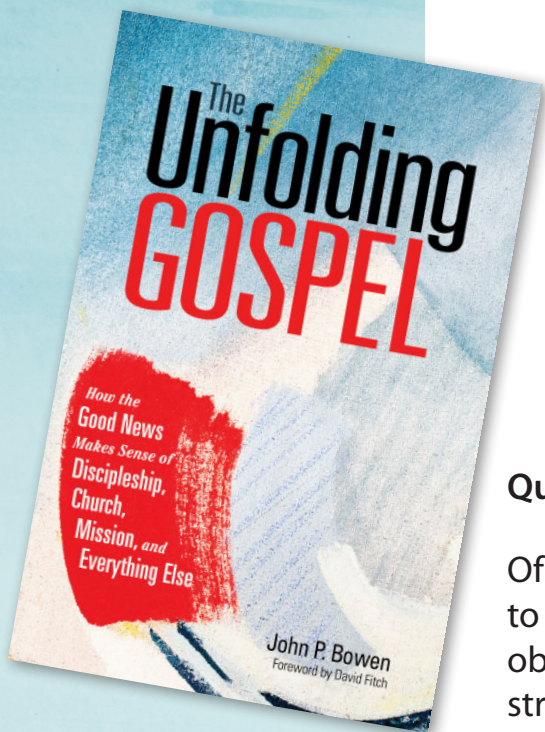
Of those three things (community, the Bible, and prayer), what is the area where you need most help in order to grow? What can you do to find help in that area?

Whatever your personal answer, most Anglicans will say they are weakest in their knowledge of the Bible. How do you explain that? What are the dangers for a church where people do not know the Bible (see p. 50-53 for some clues)?



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA





**A Lenten
Study Guide**
for use with
**The
Unfolding Gospel**

THE GOSPEL AND DISCIPLESHIP: THREE MORE—PLUS ONE

Questions

Of the three things John mentions as being ways to grow in discipleship in this chapter—Eucharist, obedience, and the cross—which has been the strongest area of growth in your life and your church's life?

Whatever your personal answer, most Anglicans will say "Eucharist." How do you explain that? What are the strengths and the weaknesses of a church that relies on Eucharist for making disciples?

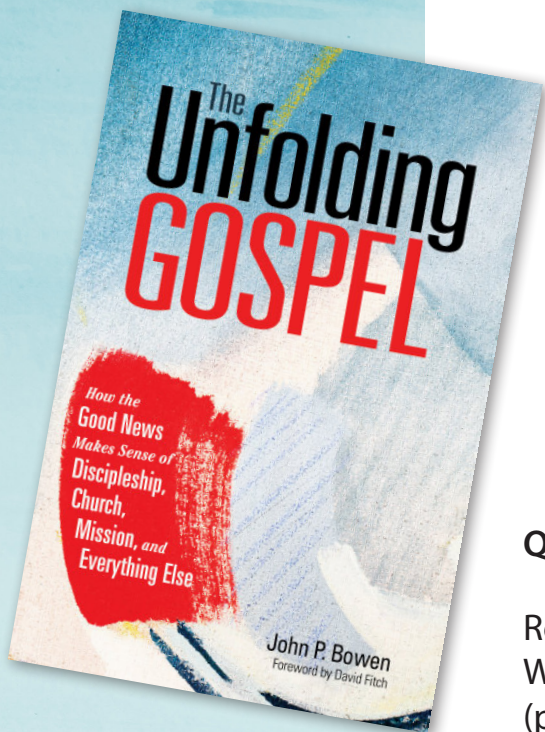
Can you think of times when you have deliberately chosen to obey Jesus when you could have done the opposite? If you are able, tell the story of what happened. Can you think of times when your choices as a Christian have meant a cross? If you are able, tell the story of what happened.

The "extra" resource for discipleship John mentions is the Holy Spirit (p. 68-69). Would you say you have experienced the Holy Spirit at work in your life? If you can, describe how.



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA





**A Lenten
Study Guide**
for use with
**The
Unfolding Gospel**

THE GOSPEL AND THE CHURCH: BACK TO BASICS

Questions

Review the items that George Lings and Andrew Walls suggest are the essentials of church (p. 79-85). Are there any things you think are missing from that list?

What was your best experience of church ever? How might that experience relate to the church being a place of Good News?

What was your worst experience of church ever? How did the church fail to be a place of Good News for you?

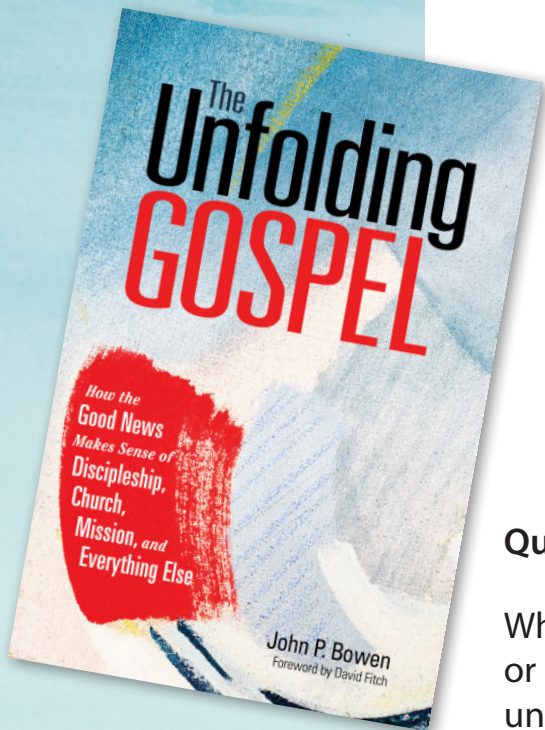
If you are still involved in church, what keeps you going? What is the Good News you find there?

As you reflect on your own congregation, do you detect any ways in which it is in the same danger that spelled the end for Kodak (p. 72)?



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA





**A Lenten
Study Guide
for use with
The
Unfolding Gospel**

THE GOSPEL AND EVANGELISM: CAN IT BE REDEEMED?

Questions

What images do you have of evangelism, positive or negative? How has this chapter affected your understanding of it, or your feelings about it?

Who first told you about Christian faith—parents, priests, Sunday school teachers? How does it affect your feelings about evangelism if you consider that they were evangelists to you?

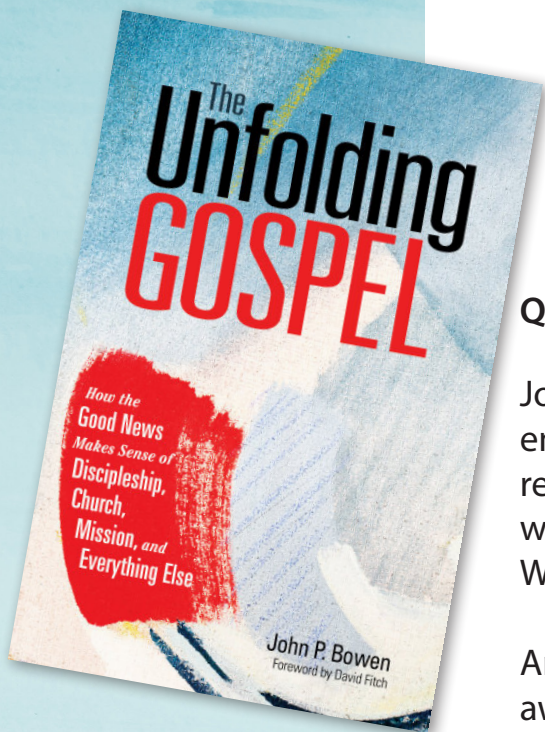
In the triangle diagram on page 100, where do you see your gifts being used? Where might God be wanting to stretch you in the practice of evangelism?

Who are the people in your life who are in need of hearing and experiencing Good News? Can you begin by praying they will experience and hear it?



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA





THE GOSPEL AND CULTURE: CREATED, DAMAGED, RESTORED

Questions

John describes churches which are too ready to embrace cultural change, and churches which resist cultural change unnecessarily. Where would you put yourself on that spectrum? Where would you put your church?

Are there points in a typical week when you are aware that as a Christian, you see, think, or do things differently from secular people around you? Should there be such times? Why or why not?

Every group has its own culture, its own way of doing things. What are some things that are perfectly normal to you that a visitor to your church might find strange? (One exercise if you have time is to look at a page of the Eucharistic service or a hymn in the hymnbook, and notice words or phrases that would be unfamiliar to a new person. There are lots! How would you explain them to a newcomer?)

How did you respond to the view of heaven offered in this chapter (p. 113-115)? How might it affect your life and work to see it this way?

A Lenten Study Guide

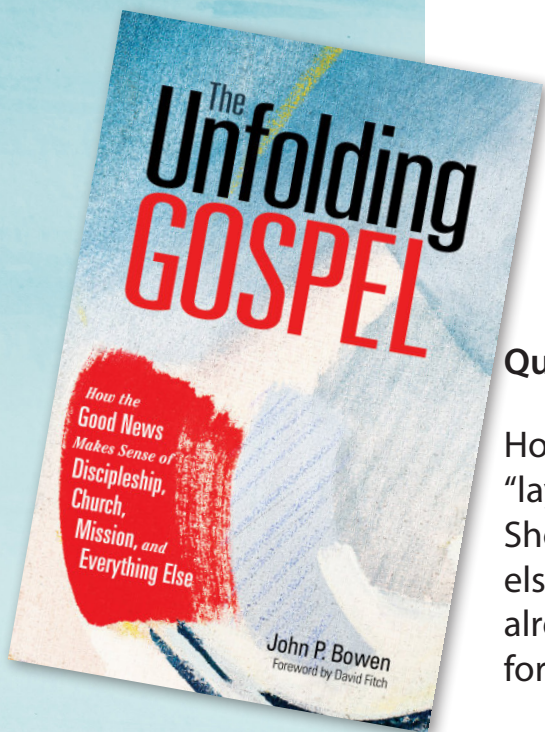
for use with

The Unfolding Gospel



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA





**A Lenten
Study Guide**
for use with
**The
Unfolding Gospel**

THE GOSPEL AND INHERITED CHURCH: MOVING TO MISSIONAL

Questions

How did you respond to what John said about “laying down your life” as a church (p. 125-127)? Shock, sadness, anger, excitement? Something else? Are there ways in which you have done this already—given of your time, talent, and treasure for those presently outside the church?

What are some things in the life of your church that you need to keep “on a open palm before Jesus” and which would be difficult to give up?

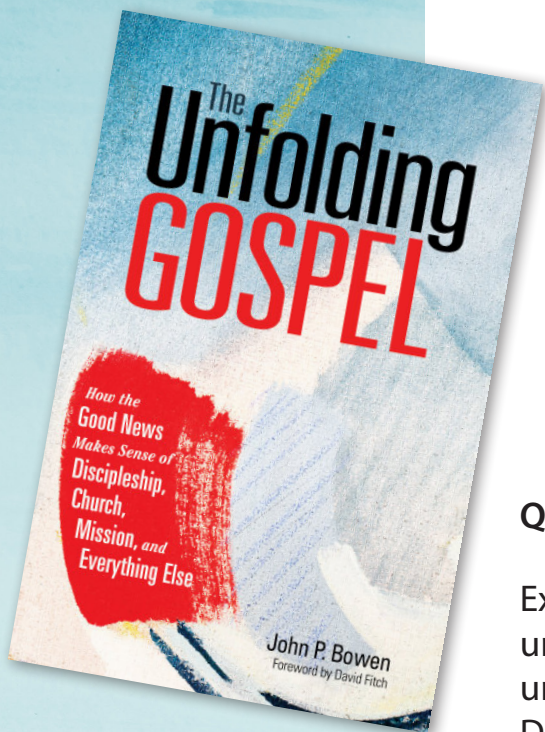
Which of the six things John suggests as being key to transforming an “inherited church” (p. 127-137) struck you? What would be an easy one to begin with? What would be the most challenging one? What would be a good first step?

John tells the story of Margaret and her ministry of knitting (p. 130-131). What abilities or interests can you think of that people in your congregation have—or that you have!—and that might be considered “secular” and irrelevant to the Christian life or church involvement? How might these be relevant to God’s work outside the church walls?



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA





**A Lenten
Study Guide**
for use with
**The
Unfolding Gospel**

THE GOSPEL AND CHURCH PLANTING: TWO MODELS

Questions

Explain in your own words how John thinks an understanding of the Gospel leads to understanding the need for church planting. Do you agree?

When was your church started, and why? Do you consider that the reasons were good ones, in light of this chapter?

Can you explain in your own words the difference between the old and the new approaches to church planting? Why does John think the newer one is better? Do you agree?

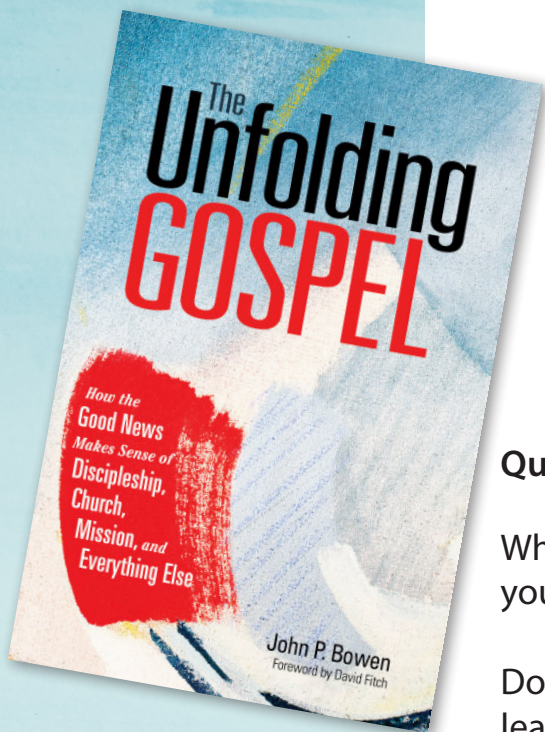
Discuss the story of St Clair (p. 150-155). What attracts you about the story? What worries you? What can we learn from it?

Would you have an interest in being part of a new church? Why or why not?



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA





**A Lenten
Study Guide
for use with
*The Unfolding
Gospel***

THE GOSPEL AND LEADERSHIP: THE MANY AND THE FEW

Questions

What gifts are you aware of that has God given you for ministry? How do you use them?

Do you agree with John's statement that we all lead in the areas in which we are gifted (p. 161)? Why or why not?

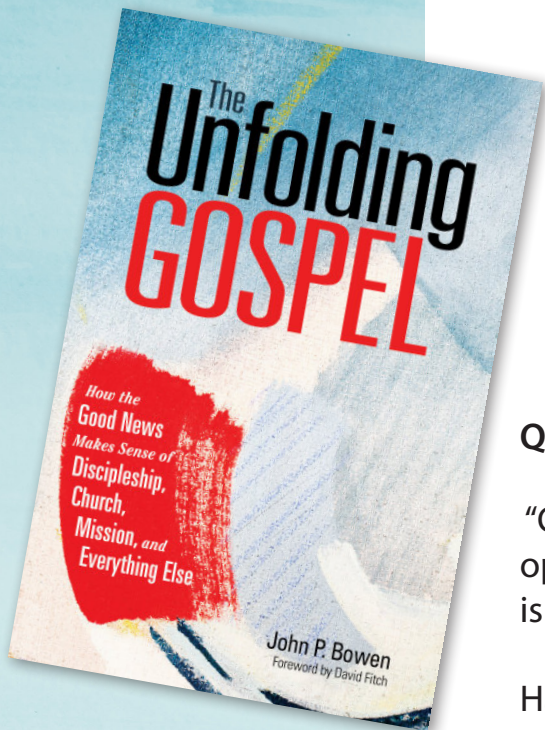
If you know one another in the group well enough, tell one another what gifts you see and appreciate in each person. Are you surprised by what you hear about yourself, or is it what you would have expected?

Of the five kinds of leadership John describes (p. 166-176), can you think of leaders you know or know of in each category, either in your own church or in another? Which kind of leader would you say is most needed in our churches?



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA





**A Lenten
Study Guide
for use with
*The Unfolding
Gospel***

CONCLUSION: THE GOSPEL AND NEW BEGINNINGS

Questions

“Change” and “tradition” are often seen as opposites. Did you agree with John that “change is an integral part of our tradition” (p. 180)?

Have you seen times when tradition and change seemed to pull in opposite directions? Can you tell the group about it? How were those things resolved—if at all?

In the tension between being faithful to the past and being open to the future, which do you find yourself more comfortable with—the old or the new? Give examples of where you have seen that in yourself.

What does it mean to you to say that Aslan “is not safe—but he’s good”? What risks might Jesus be inviting you to take where you would have to trust that God really is good?



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA

