A Lenten Study Guide
for use with Rediscovering Values

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The Signs of the Times

Every Lent we are asked to make voluntary sacrifices in remembrance of the One who sacrificed all for us. Our fast reminds us that it is God alone on whom we should depend, not on earthly things. During this season in the church calendar, we also watch the suffering of the crucifixion end in the victory of the cross.

During Lent in 2009, I found myself preaching on all of these topics, especially relating them to the economic crisis. Everywhere I traveled, I met people who had not chosen their own sacrifices that Lent, but rather had sacrifices forced upon them because of lost houses and jobs. I met families who were struggling to trust God as provider in new ways, as they watched retirement accounts disappear and financial security slip away. I spoke at conferences and to congregations who were looking for a reminder that no matter how hard Good Friday is, we know that Easter Sunday is on its way.

It was out of those talks and my time speaking with business leaders around the world that I wrote my book Rediscovering Values: A Guide for Economic and Moral Recovery. This study guide is designed to be read as a companion to the book or used on its own with your small group to reflect both on the scripture themes and the lessons of the economic crisis.

As you read this letter, your family and the ones you love might still be struggling with all of the repercussions of the economic crisis. While economists have deemed the recession officially “over,” the reality is much different for many families. I hope that this guide and my book will provide you with an opportunity for reflection, personal change, and action.

You are joining hundreds of churches, schools, and local groups that are starting book studies and using the book as an educational tool and an opportunity for spiritual enrichment. I’m thrilled to see this book realize its intended purpose—to build and strengthen a spiritual movement. Rediscovering Values provides a unique opportunity to foster dialogue, build bridges, and reach out to church members, co-workers, friends, and neighbors to build a broader and deeper movement for peace, justice, and spiritual renewal. In times of great change, we have a greater need for deepening existing community bonds and reaching out in new ways.

May we all remember the words of the apostle Paul that “suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” May penitential seasons always lead us to the reality of Easter’s hope.

Blessings,

Jim Wallis
Five Easy Steps to Plan and Lead Your Book Group

WHETHER YOU’RE A book club veteran or you’ve never been part of one before, here are five easy ways to make your journey through Lent an enriching and transformative experience for all.

1. DETAILS, DETAILS! Make sure you’ve secured an appropriate location for your discussion. Local churches, homes, or coffeehouses are good places to consider. Decide how many sessions you would like to have and when the dates will be. Our discussion guide contains seven units, but you should feel free to adapt this to the needs of your group. Sessions should be at least an hour, though 90 minutes would allow for more depth. They can be weekly, biweekly, or monthly. Refreshments or a potluck adds to a friendly environment.

2. PUBLICIZE! There are lots of effective and free ways to publicize your event. Start by registering your event on our website so others in your area can search and find it, and so you can communicate with people who sign up. Think about groups you want to reach—local congregations, student groups, community groups, political groups, etc. Write up a short announcement with the details of the discussion group and submit it to local churches to put in their bulletins. Post an announcement on the bulletin board at your public library or other community center. Craft an e-mail with details and a short description and send it to people you know, asking them to forward it to their friends and peers. Post it on appropriate local email lists.

3. PREPARE! It will be helpful to read Rediscovering Values before the first session, if possible. Before each session, think about the sample questions on the following pages. Feel free to modify and add questions as you see fit. Sketch out how much time you want devoted to introductions, discussion, opening and closing prayers, and fellowship. Try hard to honor people’s schedules by starting and ending on time. Consider building time into the program to brainstorm ways participants can take action based upon the conversation.

4. DISCUSS! Moderating a discussion group is an art, not a science. But there are some key things you should remember. In the first session, make sure to give time for introductions. Quickly recap the highlights of the readings at the beginning of each session and start the discussion with one of the
questions. Encourage participation from all members—don’t let one or two people dominate the conversation. Respectful disagreement is a good thing—these are sometimes difficult issues. Try to be supportive of people’s thoughts while seeking common ground. You are not supposed to be an expert on this book, only a facilitator. Remember that most of the questions don’t have clearly defined answers.

5. ACT! Above all, this book is a call to put our faith into action. Our work does not end when we finish the book. The final chapter of Rediscovering Values contains “Twenty Moral Exercises.” These are a great prompt for action. The likelihood is that you and many people in the group are already involved with local and national peace and justice efforts through Sojourners and other groups. Lift up these organizations, and encourage others to get involved!

* Thanks to Augsburg Fortress and Cokesbury publishers for many of these ideas.

SESSION 1
Fasting and Idolatry
Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.

The journey to Easter is not a mournful denial of our humanity. Rather, Lent embraces our humanity—our deepest fears, our doubts, our mistakes and sins, our grief, and our pain. Lent is also about joy, self-discovery, connecting with others, and doing justice. Lent is not morbid church services. It is about being fully human and knowing God’s presence in the crosshairs of blessing and bane. And it is about waiting, waiting in those crosshairs, for resurrection.” —Diana Butler Bass

Excerpt from Rediscovering Values

THE STORY OF how we got here is not one of just a few bad apples at the top, a Wall Street conspiracy, or merely some bad public policy. It is, plain and simple, a story as old as humanity: It is a story of idolatry. We have replaced God with the “invisible hand” of the market, substituted “market value” for “moral values,” and attributed all that was good and right to the
The market has trumped all else and replaced much of the moral space of the society, even questioning the value of having “moral space” where the market does not reach.

Too often, the market has become like an invasive species, devouring everything in its path; this is what idols often do … The market has become our “golden calf,” our idol of ultimate allegiance.

Idolatry comes in a lot of different forms. Today, it is much more subtle than bowing down to a golden calf. It often takes the form of choosing the wrong priorities, trusting in the wrong things, and putting our confidence where it does not belong.

Today, instead of statues, we have hedge funds, mortgage-backed securities, 401(k)s, and mutual funds. We place blind faith in the hope that the stock indexes will just keep rising and real estate prices keep climbing. Market mechanisms were supposed to distribute risk so well that those who were reckless would never see the consequences of their actions. Trust, security, and hope in the future were all as close to us as the nearest financial planner’s office. Life and the world around us could all be explained with just the right market lens. These idols were supposed to make us happy and secure and provide for all our needs. Those who manage them became the leaders to whom we looked, not just for financial leadership, but direction for our entire lives. That is idolatry.


QUESTIONS

In the wilderness, Jesus is tempted by the devil three times. We might reduce these three temptations to the desire for provision, security, and power.

• Are these desires inherently corrupt? When do these desires become temptations for sin?

• How would you define idolatry? Have you seen idolatry of “the market” creep into your own life or the life of the church?

• How does the discipline of fasting help to expose “idols” in our lives?

• What kind of Lenten fast would challenge one of the idols you’ve identified?
SESSION 2
Transformation and Conversion

John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

… Jesus realized something basic: that if a man will lie, he will steal. And if a man will steal, he will kill. So instead of just getting bogged down on one thing, Jesus looked at him and said, ‘Nicodemus, you must be born again.’ In other words, ‘Your whole structure must be changed.’ A nation that will keep people in slavery for 244 years will ‘thingify’ them and make them things. And therefore, they will exploit them and poor people generally economically. And a nation that will exploit economically will have to have foreign investments and everything else, and it will have to use its military might to protect them. All of these problems are tied together. What I’m saying today is that we must go … and say, ‘America, you must be born again!’” —Martin Luther King Jr.

Excerpt from Rediscovering Values

HISTORY TELLS US that when the gap grows between the rich and the poor, when the middle gets increasingly squeezed, and those at the bottom are almost completely forgotten, a crash is about to come. For three decades, we have experienced a socially engineered inequality that is really a sin—of biblical proportions. We have indeed seen class warfare, but this war has been waged by the wealthy and their political allies against the poor and the middle class. The religious teaching of the “preferential option for the poor”—that a commitment to the poor is central to the gospel—has been replaced by deliberate social and political decisions to create a “preferential option for the rich.”

The lesson that we must relearn is that rich and poor alike can be villains and heroes. Those with wealth and those without are capable of both great virtue and vicious vice.

We all need to recognize the signs of sickness in our society as a whole, within our families and friends, and even in ourselves. The beliefs that greed is good, it’s all about me, and I want it now ended up being not only bad for ourselves, but harmful to those around us and disastrous for our
economy. But the story must not end there. This is the time to ask the right questions about what type of people we want to be, what the character of our communities should look like, and the kind of country we could become.

It is not enough for us to identify what went wrong—we need to understand what we can do differently so that we don’t make the same mistakes over and over again. Some of the greatest changes we need to make and lessons we need to learn reside in some of our deepest and oldest values—values that we seem to have forgotten or at least failed to make into the priorities they should be.

—Jim Wallis (p. 82, 90-91, paperback p.80-81, 88-89)

QUESTIONS

Perhaps to be born again means to see with a new sight that is only given with a new birth.

• Where do you see God present in your life?
• What obstacles prevent you from seeing the places that God desires to restore wholeness?
• What “signs of sickness” can you identify in your own life, family, church, or community?
• Are you able to openly confess any areas of mismanagement as it relates to the stewardship of money, time, or talent?

SESSION 3

Faith and Contentment

Exodus 17:1-7

The people quarreled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?”

I urge you to still every motion that is not rooted in the kingdom. Become quiet, hushed, motionless until you are finally centered. Strip away all excess baggage and nonessential trappings until you have come into the stark reality of the kingdom of God. Let go of all distractions until you are driven into the Core.” —Richard J. Foster
Excerpt from *Rediscovering Values*

**THE UNITED STATES**, followed closely by Europe, has led the way in global consumerism, but now the new giant economics of China and India are poised to follow in our steps, creating a huge consuming middle class and adding new members to the club of the superrich. If, after the Great Recession, we return to our “normal” consumer habits, the impact will ultimately be more than the ecosystem of our planet, the ethics of our culture, and the inner life of our spirits can endure. A growing number of people, even some economists, are suggesting that a sustainable economy will be better built on producing things that are really needed (like clean energy, weatherizing millions of homes and businesses, better transportation, etc.) rather than relying on excessive and superfluous consumer items. And a lot of pastors and counselors would agree with this assessment at the spiritual level.

The logic of a consumer society is fundamentally at odds with the teachings of Jesus. The relentless pressure of advertising tells us that “there is never enough” and that you should “worry” constantly about what to eat and drink, what you wear, whether your future is secure, and more. But Jesus said exactly the opposite. They say, “Please worry—all the time!” He says, “Don’t worry!”

The simplification is not a commitment to abject poverty but a change in priorities, a change in attitude. It is, I would argue, a choice to live more fully. Clement of Alexandria, an early church father, said that in the teaching of Jesus, he found, “Not a command to fling away the substance that belongs to him and to part with his riches, but to banish from the soul its opinions about riches, its attachment to them, its excessive desire, its morbid excitement over them, its anxious cares, the thorns of our earthly existence which choke the seed of the true life.” Simplicity in our living is not about having less of life; it is about having more of it. It is about clearing out the barriers that stop us from having it.

—Jim Wallis (p. 110-111, 115-116, paperback p.100-109, 113-114)

**QUESTIONS**

Moses bears the complaints of the “people” and receives the support of the elders who travel with him to the rock.

- How do our communities (e.g. family, friends, church, and neighborhood) support or hinder our reliance on God for our financial provision?
- What would it look like to prayerfully evaluate what is clouding your heart and mind before beginning to get rid of the tangible excess in your life?
- What are both the inward and outward commitments that you, your family, and your community can make to live more simply?
- Do you ever experience a tension between generosity and fiscal responsibility?
SESSION 4
Work and Vocation

_Ephesians 5:8-14_

_For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true._

“The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need to do and (b) that the world needs to have done. ... The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” —Frederick Buechner

**Excerpt from Rediscovering Values**

**WHILE WE NEED** jobs to come back, wages to go up, and benefits to be restored, I would suggest that we need more. I believe we need to focus on the quality of work as well as the quantity of jobs. We need to talk not just about occupation, but vocation. Not just about what fills up our time, but about the things that make our time meaningful. This recession offers us the opportunity to look at the deeper question: work as well as jobs. People need good jobs, but people also need good work.

In our many faith traditions, work is central. We speak of “God’s work” and the need to make that our own. Our greatest religious traditions all teach us that God works. As beings created in his image, we reflect not only on God’s capacity for work, but that work is a primary part of our identity and our reflection of God’s image. The work of our hands is one way of offering worship back to God. And, indeed, we are to see ourselves as co-workers with God, helping to accomplish the purposes of God in the world.

We can’t change the whole world, the country, or even a local community all at once; but we can claim the old idea of the “parish.” That means to take responsibility for where you live, work, learn, or worship—a neighborhood or a community for which we are challenged to help grow, transform, and build a better quality of life.

—Jim Wallis (p. 173-174, 180, paperback p. 172-173, 179)

**QUESTIONS**

We, who were once in darkness, are now able to see the light of Christ. Because of this, we are urged to not only refrain from works of darkness but to expose them.
• How have you seen or not seen the church exposing darkness in the current economic crisis?
• How would you define work and vocation?
• How much of your identity is tied to your work?
• In what ways have you been obedient to God’s call in your life?

SESSION 5
Lament and Compassion

*John 11:32-37*

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

The journey of reconciliation is grounded in a call to see and encounter the rupture of this world so truthfully that we are literally slowed down. We are called to a space where any explanation or action is too easy, too fast, too shallow—a space where the right response can only be a desperate cry directed to God. We are called to learn the anguished cry of lament.” —Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice

**Excerpt from Rediscovering Values**

**BECOMING A FATHER** rather late in life has indeed taught me many things. In fact, many of life’s most important lessons, I would have to say, have come to me by way of finally being a dad. These two boys have become a spiritual anchor for me, and being their dad has been a contemplative discipline that my busy life sorely needs. I began to build my speaking and travel schedule around things like Little League baseball, or even just putting them to bed at night—which I now do most nights. After a while I realized I wasn’t just doing this for them—but also for me. I simply can’t bear not hearing the daily reports about what happened at school or after school or with their friends. And their prayers before going to bed at night (my job) are surely not to be missed. They now help to shape my theology.

Jack’s latest pearl was praying for his mom and dad and brother and cousins and classmates—as usual. Then he and his brother often pray for
“poor people,” but this time Jack added, “And God, there are a lot of poor people, hungry people, and homeless people—any comments or questions? Amen.” Jack is used to an interactive classroom and wanted to know what God thought about there being so many poor people out there!

A few months ago, I could tell that Luke was trying to work out, in his prayer life, what he had heard about almost thirty thousand children dying every day around the world due to hunger and disease. He said, “Dear God, I pray that all those children won’t die again tomorrow … (sigh) but that’s unlikely. So, dear God, I pray … that it will be their best day ever … but that’s stupid. So dear God … help us to stop this from happening.” Sitting there in the dark, with tears running down my face, I could only offer a quiet amen. How could I miss those prayers? —Jim Wallis (p. 169-170, paperback p.167-168)

QUESTIONS

Instead of praying with words, pray by allowing images of the world’s passion to come to mind and, at the end of the week, ask God if there is a specific way you should respond.

• Why do you think Jesus reacts so emotionally even though he is able to raise Lazarus from the dead?

• On Good Friday, why do we grieve and meditate on the suffering of Christ on the cross, even though we know that Christ will rise on Easter?

• Are there specific places in the world experiencing extreme poverty or injustice that move you to compassion?

SESSION 6
Humility and Authority
Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

Humility is the mother of all virtues; purity, charity, and obedience. It is in being humble that our love becomes real, devoted, and ardent. If you are humble nothing will touch you, neither praise nor disgrace, because you know what you are. If you are blamed you will not
be discouraged. If they call you a saint you will not put your-
self on a pedestal.” —Mother Teresa

Excerpt from Rediscovering Values

ROBERT REICH TELLS a story of Yahoo in China that gave me pause. In 2005, Yahoo handed over to the Chinese govern-
ment the names of Chinese dissidents who used Yahoo e-mail accounts to try and hide their identities. As a result, one reporter was sen-
tenced to ten years in prison for sending to foreigners a message he had received from Chinese authorities telling their newspaper to downplay the fifteenth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. Yahoo defend-
ed its actions by saying that they had to play by China’s rules in order to continue their presence in the country and provide the long-term good of opening the country to Western influences.

In an interesting piece of what I would consider moral theology, a Chi-
inese dissident named Liu Xiaobo, who had spent time in a Chinese prison himself, saw it differently. In an open letter to Yahoo’s founder, Jerry Yang, he wrote, “I must tell you that my indignation at and contempt for you and your company are not a bit less than my indignation at and contempt for the communist regime ... Profit makes you dull in morality. Did it ever occur to you that it is a shame for you to be considered a traitor to your customer? ... Your glorious social status is a poor cover for your barren mo-
rality, and your swelling wallet is an indicator of your diminished status as a man.” —Jim Wallis (p. 198-199, paperback p.196-197)

QUESTIONS

Contrast how Paul describes the “mind of Christ” in his letter to the Philip-
pians versus how Liu Xiaobo describes the morality of Yahoo in his letter to CEO Jerry Yang.

• What is the difference between humility and self-effacement?
• Is there a type of authority that is gleaned through humility?
• What would be the practical benefits to you or others if our self-worth was not tied to our net worth?
SESSION 7
Hope and Courage

John 20:11-18

As Mary wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

“You have to draw a distinction between hope and optimism. Vaclav Havel put it well when he said ‘optimism’ is the belief that things are going to turn out as you would like, as opposed to ‘hope,’ which is when you are thoroughly convinced something is moral and right and just and therefore you fight regardless of the consequences. In that sense, I’m full of hope but in no way optimistic. I cannot be an optimist, but I am a prisoner of hope.” —Cornel West

Excerpt from Rediscovering Values

TO SEE MORAL recovery, along with economic recovery, we all must make some changes. Changes deeply rooted in the values we hold must start at home, engage our communities, and transform our society. The economic crisis is not just something that has happened to us, but has happened with us. Many of us enjoyed or celebrated the fruits of it, directly or indirectly; but many others were left out altogether. But together, through our actions and leadership, we can all be part of the healing and change that is now needed.

The changes will include new green technologies, require new kinds of jobs, and take new governmental responsibility, but that won’t be enough. We will also need new habits of the heart, new directions, and new notions of ethics and mutual responsibility. These changes are nothing short of conversions to new ways of thinking and living, which will be, at the same time, personal, spiritual, civic, and political.

Change is now happening at a breathtaking pace. But it’s not enough for the world to be a different place; we also need to understand how it can be a better place. If we have learned anything from this Great Recession, we have learned that greed is not enough. We need nothing less than a rediscovery of values—on Wall Street, Main Street, and Your Street. And with that, we can create a new moral compass for the new economy. It’s up to us.

—Jim Wallis (p. 214-215, paperback p. 212-213)
QUESTIONS

Mary is so filled with confusion, fear, and sadness that it is impossible for her, at first, to recognize Jesus at the tomb. Lent is ultimately a season of hope born through the disorienting passageway of self-sacrifice and self-reflection.

- What risks, which can cause us to fear, are involved in hope?
- Do you agree with Cornel West that there is a distinction between hope and optimism?
- What do you think about being a “prisoner of hope”?
- What are the “green shoots of hope” in your community? How might you help these shoots flourish?

FROM STUDY TO ACTION

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. —Proverbs 31:8-9

WE HOPE THIS Lenten journey will build momentum within your church and community for putting faith into action to promote spiritual renewal, peace, and a just society. Hopefully, the days of reflection and study sessions will leave participants wanting more information, tools, and new opportunities to make positive change for the common good. Through this work to reform the world and allow God’s grace to flow more easily, we hope to strengthen the connections between prayer and social action and between pastoral ministry and prophetic leadership. We want to foster dialogue and community-building on some of the most difficult issues facing our nation and world. Building a faith movement that does justice requires that we find new ways of organizing our congregations and communities. As people of faith stepping out in trust to build a broader, deeper, and more sustainable movement, we never want to leave the question “what can I do?” unanswered.

Below are a few suggestions for how to take concrete and effective action.

1 Brainstorm ideas for further action after each session of the study. Visit the Rediscovering Values web page at www.sojo.net/rediscoveringvalues for suggestions. Keep a list of ideas on how you and your group might translate the commitments raised in the book into practical and attainable action. Keep things small, with manageable steps. Let small steps lead to
big changes. At the end of the sessions, set a time to review and refine a few concrete next steps.

2 Consider extending your Lenten group by reading together another book by Jim Wallis. For a deeper look at faith and politics, we suggest God’s Politics and the companion guide Living God’s Politics as a perfect next step. For learning more about faith, values, and a deepening spirituality, we suggest Jim’s book The Great Awakening. If your church already has an active social action or justice ministry, consider using the study group as a way to revitalize current members and bring new members with fresh energy and ideas into the ministry. Or consider starting a social action or justice ministry within your church. You could start with the members of your Lenten group.

3 Join one of Sojourners’ campaigns for social justice. By uniting together with thousands of other concerned Christians who are making their voices heard through Sojourners, you can make a difference! To learn more about ways to become involved, visit www.sojo.net.

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SojoMail is a free, weekly e-zine delivering the freshest takes on faith and politics from Jim Wallis and friends—including Brian McLaren, Diana Butler Bass, Obery Hendricks, Amy Sullivan, and others. To sign up, go to www.sojo.net/sojomail.

Link to the God’s Politics Blog
Read and comment on daily posts from Jim Wallis and others at the God’s Politics blog. Guest bloggers include Shane Claiborne, Diana Butler Bass, Eugene Cho, Becky Garrison, Gareth Higgins, Mary Nelson, and Gabriel Salguero. To read more, go to www.godspolitics.com.
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