

Sierra Leadership Network Curriculum: Month 1, Year 2

Participation in the Sierra Leadership Network (SLN) is a process of adult learning. It is the responsibility of the participant to do their assignments and seek out the necessary accountability. It is the responsibility of the participant to schedule time with their mentor, not the other way around. Here is a checklist of this month's exercises and space for comments. All useful generated materials should be placed in your Sierra Leadership Network binder. The mentor will look over the exercises and be given opportunity to add their own comments. Be sure you take your binder to the quarterly meetings at Granite Springs Church to also be available to the SLN directors.

Month 1, Year

Date Completed

____/____/____ OT Prophetic Books: [Estimated time: _____]
Mentor Comments:

____/____/____ OT Prophets Biblical Interpretation Exercise:
Mentor Comments [Estimated time: _____]

____/____/____ Calling Exercise: [Estimated time: _____]
Mentor Comments

Participant Signature

Mentor Signature

OT Prophetic Books

1. Grab your favorite study Bible and take some time to acquaint yourself with the OT prophetic books from Isaiah to Malachi. Here are some tips:
 - a. Find a timeline of this period. The NIV study Bible has a good one. Notice when these prophets ministered and what other things were happening in the world at that time.
 - b. Read the book introductions for each of these prophetic books and peruse the outlines given.
 - c. When something looks familiar or interesting, take some time to turn to that passage and read a while. Get a sense for the book, how it speaks, what it is talking about. Take some time to read some of the shorter books. Many of us are familiar with passages from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and Jonah, but there are many interesting things in the other books.
2. What were the main political phases in Israel and Judah's history during the ministry of these prophets? We often speak of "pre-exilic", "exilic", and "post-exilic" prophets or prophecies. What do these terms mean? What were the dates for the fall of the northern and southern kingdoms? Who did they fall to? What happened to the people? If you want more background historical material and some archeological information you might want to check out John Bright's [History of Israel](#) which you can find in public libraries and some church libraries.
3. Try to divide the prophet books into the categories of "pre-exilic", "exilic", and "post-exilic". What difficulties did you run into? If you do some searching through commentaries, etc. you will see that the book of Isaiah presents a problem for some. Instead of worrying about questions of authorship, etc., try to focus not on the men, but whether a particular prophesy you are studying seems to be targeting the pre-exilic, exilic, or post-exilic community.
4. In your perusing, what would you say was the main message of the pre-exilic prophets? What were they warning about? What were the charges they were bringing against Israel? Cite some examples of prophecies clearly given to pre-exilic Israel or Judah. What kinds of themes are repeated in these prophecies.
5. What was the main message given to the exilic community? Cite some examples of prophecies directed towards exilic communities. What kinds of themes are repeated in these prophecies.
6. What was the main message given to the post-exilic community? Cite some examples of prophecies directed towards the exilic community. What kinds of themes are repeated in these prophecies.
7. Write up your findings and share them with your mentor. Also post them on the e-mail group for others to enjoy or learn from.

OT Prophetic Teaching or Preaching

1. Outside of Advent and Handel's Messiah we don't tend to reach back into the OT prophetic books that often for materials for preaching and teaching. That is a shame, because some of the most amazing passages in the Bible are found in these books. Isaiah's poetry is in many ways unparalleled, and images, metaphors, and stories from Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Jonah, Amos, and Hosea speak as powerfully today as they ever had. Part of the struggle in using this stuff in church today is that we need some orientation to understand it in a helpful way today. The point of this assignment will be to challenge you to use something from these books to put together a sermon, small group study or lesson of some kind from these books. OT Prophesies aren't just for Advent anymore. :)
2. The previous assignment was designed to get you to think about the historical context of these prophecies in order to better understand how they can speak to our context. I like to think of all three periods, pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic as periods "in-between". During the time of Moses as conveyed in the Pentateuch God was personally and dramatically saving and preserving his people in the midst of extra-ordinary circumstances: calling Abraham out of Ur to be a great nation, rescuing the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt, forming them into a nation devoted to him by giving them life in a place where life isn't supposed to be possible. Later we see the debacle after Joshua and finally the promises coming true in David and Solomon where the children of Israel finally realize the glory she had been waiting for with God being enthroned on Mt. Zion in his holy temple, and living with his people now secure in the land flowing with milk and honey. As you've read in the books, things have not gone well since Solomon's death. The nation is divided and the old temptations re-surface to live the way the rest of the world lives. Idols are pagan tools to secure prosperity and security, not merely a sin of religious brand promiscuity. Their idolatry is naturally joined with the abuse of the weak and the poor in the land. Israel and Judah simply become like the other nations, the articulated desire when years before they asked Samuel for a king to rule over them. Now they are going to get what they asked for in spades, with a succession of kings who will abuse them, take advantage of them, and forget the LORD who they had promised to serve.
3. The prophet books really speak to three experiences of what it means to live in the gray areas:
 - a. In the pre-exilic period the prophets will warn Israel that God won't tolerate his name to be connected with the common worldliness, injustice and malice they are displaying. If they don't turn back, God will destroy them and they will get what they've been asking for all along, to be like the other nations. There is clear warning to wake up, re-focus, and realize what God is asking for and to be obedient to him.
 - b. In the exilic period God's Word comes with greater comfort, that their exile will not last forever, but God will call them back and will fulfill what he has promised all along.
 - c. In the post-exilic period, when the people are disappointed by the fact that they have once again returned to the land but it has not lived up to their expectations. They are in fact still waiting, waiting for the coming of one who will fully realize what God has promised.

4. All of this of course leads us to the fulfilment of what all of these books were pointing to: the Branch, the Servant of the Lord, the new Davidic Shepherd, the culmination and perfection of what Israel herself was intended to be, the Messiah, the Christ. This is an area where doctrinal and exegetical traditions will matter, because to a certain degree at this point we part company with our dispensational brothers and sisters. We believe the following regarding this OT prophesy:
 - a. Much of the promised redemption is only found in Christ himself, initially realized at his first coming, and then fully realized in his second coming for those who follow him.
 - b. The prophecies are “heard” in different ways depending on where you are in terms of redemptive history. A listener in the time of the prophets looks to the future for the salvation of ethnic Israel and will imagine that salvation in the terms of their day. We now “hear” the prophesy, ourselves to a degree standing in the position of new-Israel, no longer as geographically, ethnically limited national entity but as its partial fulfillment in the New Testament community. In Jesus God’s covenant breaks out of its predominantly bloodline designation and finds Abraham’s children coming from every nation, people, and tribe. We see a phase of the OT prophetic fulfilment in Jesus, but still we wait for the full redemption to take place.
 - c. The dispensational community in North America has tended to reject identifying the New Testament church as the new referent for OT prophesy, instead constructing an end times scenario by which OT prophecies STILL refer EXCLUSIVELY to an ethnic, political entity identified as Israel. The Reformed community, which long predates the dispensational movement of the 19th and 20th centuries rejects this teaching, instead holding to the historic Christian position that much of this OT prophesy finds its initial fulfilment in the NT church, as Peter did in his sermon at Pentecost.
5. Now we can see how these books are beneficial for the church today
 - a. We still need to be called to examine our hearts for idolatry, to be reminded that God cares for the poor and our love for him is seen in our love for each other, and that we all need to live in covenant faithfulness.
 - b. We see understand Jesus more fully through the perspective of the fulfillment of this prophesy. If you try to understand the Gospel accounts without the OT background you will likely skew what Jesus was trying to community. We can preach the fulfillment of OT prophesy in Jesus and then see how Jesus directs it through himself and into the final consummation that we still await.
 - c. Like the post-exilic community we need to be encouraged that the partial fulfillments we experience today are still just pointers, symbols and foretastes of what is to come.
6. Now for your assignment. Write a sermon, study, or lesson based on a passage in one of the books from Isaiah to Malachi. Use it in your ministry context. Have it evaluated by your mentor and reflect on the experience.

Calling Exercise:

Frederich Buechner once commented that calling is “the place where your deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.” Write a reflective paper (one to five pages) on the world's deep need as you feel it and how God is forming a deep gladness in you to meet it. In this paper tell the story of your personal journey, your testimony, and why you believe God is calling you to leadership in His church. It may be the case that your sense of calling is at this time by not means clear or specific. That's fine. Discovering our vocation is a life long journey for many. Simply reflect on what God has showed you this far and what you are learning about his gifts in you.

For those of you who have already completed one year in the SLN, this will be your second time doing this exercise. This time incorporate what this last year has taught you about your calling.