This study guide is designed for local church leaders and members who want to come together as a group to process the stories found in Paul Nixon’s book *We Refused to Lead a Dying Church*, published by Pilgrim Press.

This book is a sequel to the book *I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church*. It is recommended that at least some of the group members read both books before beginning this group study. Those who have read the earlier work will be able to relate it to the conversation.

However, everyone can participate in the study by reading *We Refused to Lead a Dying Church*. Copies of both books may be purchased through virtually any on-line bookseller.

The material in this study guide can be used in one, three or six sessions.

**A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR**

By choosing to study *We Refused to Lead a Dying Church* with your leaders, you are living out a choice to be a healthy and vital congregation. This book is composed of stories of churches across America that have refused to die. They have made choices to live. It is my hope that these stories will inspire and teach you in some very practical ways. The stories often speak in ways that no author needs to elaborate. For some of your folks, the chance to connect the dots between the stories and draw their own conclusions will make this a
more powerful experience than simply reading some expert with strong opinions.

As you work through the book together, I encourage you to do the following:

- **Be intentional as you pray together about your church and your community.** Invite God’s presence into your heads and hearts not just for a time, but continually pray.

- **Agree with one another up front that you will each listen to others’ ideas and not dismiss them too quickly.** Great ideas move across denominational lines. Make a group covenant to be open-minded about the ideas in the book and the ideas of your group members.

- **Select someone(s) to serve as a note-taker for the entire study.** This can be a different person for each session or the same person for all of the sessions. We don’t want great ideas to be lost!

- **Use these stories as a way to inform your planning process for the future of your congregation.** Rather than try new things immediately, spend time in prayer and planning so that when your congregation does live out its choices, good planning has happened. Again, take good notes! You may wish to work with me directly or with one of the consultants associated with the Epicenter Group in a strategic planning process upon the conclusion of this study.
• Send me an email and let me know what happened as a result of this study. I am always looking for more great stories of churches that choose to live and not die!

  Blessings on your journey!

  Paul Nixon
  Washington DC
  epicentergroup.dc@gmail.com

YOUR CHOICE OF FORMATS
First decide how many sessions you plan to use with your group as you process the book.

  Here are three possible options for your group study:

  • **One session** – This would be a retreat format where all six modules are covered in one setting. Feel free to abbreviate certain parts of the module in order to fit your use of time. Think about adding worship and playtime into your retreat schedule so that the study can have maximum impact on the group members.

  • **Three sessions** – This first session would include module one (which includes an introduction) and module two. The second session would include modules three and four. The third and final session would include modules five and six (which includes a wrap-up). Count on one hour and 30 minutes for each session.
• **Six sessions** – This would mean covering one module per session. Each session will require about one hour.

Again, it would be most helpful if at least some participants have read both *I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church* and *We Refused to Lead a Dying Church*. However, everyone can participate in the study by reading *We Refused to Lead a Dying Church*.

In all cases, we recommend distributing the books to the group participants in advance of the first session. If you choose the retreat format, the participants will need to read the entire book and make notes before the retreat. If you choose the three-session or six-session format, the group members will read a certain portion of the book prior to each session.

---

**MODULE 1**

*Group reading before the first session: pages 1-34.*

Prior to the first session, place the six key choices of diverse healthy congregations on a sheet of flip chart paper and place on the wall so that everyone can see the list. Make handouts of these six choices for each participant. They can keep the list inside their book as they read the
stories of churches that made new choices. The six choices of diverse healthy congregations are:

- Choosing life over death
- Choosing community over isolation
- Choosing fun over drudgery
- Choosing bold over mild
- Choosing frontier over fortress
- Choosing now rather than later

**Get to Know Each Other:**

No matter which format you use, it is important that group members know one another. Worshipping together and serving on committees together gives us some knowledge of each other. In a group study, it is important that they begin to get to know one another on an even deeper level.

If there are more than ten people in the study, share the following around tables with 2-3 persons, not as a large group:

- How is it that you became a part of this study group? What opportunities do you expect to see as a result of this study?
- What’s important to you about your church and why do you care?
- What’s important to you about your community and why do you care?
Scriptural Focus:
Read Matthew 28:16-20. Invite the group members to respond to these questions:

- What had real meaning for you from the Scripture that was just read?
- What surprised you?
- What challenged you?

Note: If you are using a retreat format or a six-session format, you will need to condense the sessions. No session should exceed 90 minutes and often 60 minutes is plenty of time. If you find it genuinely difficult to bring session one to a close, that may mean your group members need more time. Don’t be afraid to talk to the group about extending the length of the study. (Just make sure everyone agrees to lengthen each session by a certain amount of time.) Important learning and sharing will be taking place that impacts the future of your church and community.

Processing Ideas and Experience:
First, review (or introduce) the six key choices of diverse healthy congregations. If everyone in the group has read the book *I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church*, this will be a review. If not everyone has read this book, the leader will need to read it ahead of time in order to introduce the six choices in a concise manner. Give each group member a copy of the six choices of diverse healthy congregations handout. Explain to the group that it will be helpful in future reading to keep this list handy. Prior to the session have a separate piece of flip chart paper with each
of the six choices written at the top. Place all six papers on the wall for recording of information.

Now have your group divide into groups of 2-3 persons. Ask everyone to reflect upon the three stories they read prior to this session: The Renewed Tall Steeple Church, The Good News Church and The Reborn Church. As they talk with each other, have them identify which of these six choices each congregation made. In these stories, some churches might have chosen to live out their calling by making only one of these six choices. Other stories will reflect multiple choices a congregation made. Ask them to record their responses for future sharing. Give several minutes for the small groups to work together.

Once the individual groups come back into the larger group, ask each group to report on what choices his/her group discovered. Have a person with a marker record on each piece of paper under the name of the choice, which church that group believes made that choice. Go around the room until every small group has reported out to the larger group and their answers are recorded on the flip chart paper for everyone to see.

Now as a large group answer these questions:

- Which of these three churches seem like your church in certain ways?
- What choice or choices do you see would be helpful for your congregation to make based on your reading of these stories?
• Can you come to a consensus about which choice or choices would be the most helpful for your congregation to make in the next six months? List the top one or two choices on a separate sheet of flip chart paper titled “Our Choices.” You will keep adding to this list during every session.

Closing Prayer:
Ask a group member to lead the closing prayer giving thanks for the churches whose stories you are reading. Ask God to continue to open the hearts and minds of the group members as they seek God’s will for their congregation.

MODULE 2
Group reading before the second session: pages 35-70.

Get to know each other:
Have group members share an experience or event that they considered to be a “God moment”. It could be something from the past week or a lasting reminder of God’s presence in their lives.

Scriptural Focus:
Read Luke Matthew 5:1-12. Have a couple of people read this passage from two different translations. This passage is the opening to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is teaching his followers about the characteristics they are to display inwardly and outwardly. These are
ways of living that God blesses. What are you hearing from Jesus that relates to the way in which your church cares for its community? What do you want to see your church do more for its community?

**Processing Ideas and Experience:**
Briefly refer to your group’s lists that were recorded on the flip chart paper last session. Ask if anyone feels that after reflecting for a week something needs to be changed on the lists.

Now have your group divide into groups of 2-3 persons. Ask everyone to reflect upon the three stories they read prior to this session: *The Vital Merger Church, The Turnaround Church* and *The Great Commission Church*. As they talk with each other, have them identify which of these six choices each congregation made. In these stories, some churches might have chosen to live out their calling by making only one of these six choices. Other stories will reflect multiple choices a congregation made. Ask them to record their responses for future sharing. Give several minutes for the small groups to work together.

Once the individual groups come back into the larger group, ask each group to report on what choices his/her group discovered. Have a person with a marker record on each piece of paper under the name of the choice, which church that group believes made that choice. Go around the room until every small group has reported out to the larger group and their answers are recorded on the flip chart paper for everyone to see.
Now as a large group answer these questions:

- If you had to pick which story relates the most to your church, which one would it be?
- What choice or choices do you see would be helpful for your congregation to make based on your reading of these stories?
- Can you come to a consensus about which choice or choices would be the most helpful for your congregation to make in the next six months? List the top one or two choices on the separate sheet of flip chart paper titled “Our Choices.” You will keep adding to this list during every session.

**Closing Prayer:**

Ask a group member to pray for your study group as the members continue to discern how God is directing them.

---

**MODULE 3**

*Group reading before the third session: pages 71-98.*

**Get to Know Each Other:**

Have group members share the ways in which they see God blessing your church. What opportunities is God giving your church to be a blessing to your community?

**Scriptural Focus:**
Read Luke 9: 46-48 and Luke 18:15-17. Have the youngest person in your group read the Luke 9 passage aloud. Then have the oldest person in your group read the Luke 18 passage aloud. Prior to these verses Jesus has predicted his death. Once the disciples hear this news, they begin thinking like power brokers. They argue over who is the greatest in the Kingdom of God. Jesus is clear: whoever welcomes a child on his behalf, welcomes him. Jesus turns the disciples' thinking upside down: “Whoever is the least among you is the greatest.” As you think about your community, who do you consider to be the “least among you?” What is your church doing to reach out to the “least among you?”

**Processing Ideas and Experience:**
Briefly refer to your group’s lists that were recorded on the flip chart paper last session. Ask if anyone feels that after reflecting for a week something needs to be changed on the lists.

Now have your group divide up into groups of 2-3 persons. Ask everyone to reflect upon the three stories they read prior to this session: *The Let’s Roll Up Our Sleeves Church, The Progressive Alternative Church,* and *The Excellent Remnant Church.* As they talk with each other, have them identify which of these six choices each congregation made. In these stories, some churches might have chosen to live out their calling by making only one of these six choices. Other stories will reflect multiple choices a congregation made. Ask them to record their responses for future sharing. Give several minutes for the small groups to work together.
Once the individual groups come back into the larger group, ask each group to report on what choices his/her group discovered. Have a person with a marker record on each piece of paper under the name of the choice which church that group believes made that choice. Go around the room until every small group has reported out to the larger group and their answers are recorded on the flip chart paper for everyone to see.

Now as a large group answer these questions:

- Which of these three churches sound more like your church?
- What choice or choices do you see would be helpful for your congregation to make based on your reading of these stories?
- Can you come to a consensus about which choice or choices would be the most helpful for your congregation to make in the next six months? List the top one or two choices on the separate sheet of flip chart paper titled “Our Choices.” You will keep adding to this list during every session.

**Closing Prayer:** Ask a member of your group to pray for those “least among us.” Listen to how God responds to this prayer as you continue this study together.
Get to Know Each Other:
Have group members share something from the church’s past that they feel is worth holding onto. How has God led you in the past?

Scriptural Focus:
Luke 10:25-37. This passage is Jesus’ answer to the question: Who is my neighbor? As you hear this passage read aloud, what images come into your mind as you reflect on his answer to this question? What do you want to see your church do more of to reach out to your neighbors?

Processing Experiences and Ideas:
Briefly refer to your group’s lists that were recorded on the flip chart paper last session. Ask if anyone feels that after reflecting for a week something needs to be changed on the lists.

Now have your group divide up into groups of 2-3 persons. Ask everyone to reflect upon the three stories they read prior to this session: The Church Where Everybody Gets a Hug, The You Can’t Out Give God Church, and The Community Center Church. As they talk with each other, have them identify which of these six choices each congregation made. In these stories, some churches might have chosen to live out their calling by making only one of these six choices. Other stories will reflect multiple choices a congregation made. Ask them to record their
responses for future sharing. Give several minutes for the small groups to work together.

Once the individual groups come back into the larger group, ask each group to report on what choices his/her group discovered. Have a person with a marker record on each piece of paper under the name of the choice, which church that group believes made that choice. Go around the room until every small group has reported out to the larger group and their answers are recorded on the flip chart paper for everyone to see.

Now as a large group answer these questions:

- Which of these three churches studied today sound more like your church?
- What choice or choices do you see would be helpful for your congregation to make based on your reading of these stories?
- Can you come to a consensus about which choice or choices would be the most helpful for your congregation to make in the next six months? List the top one or two choices on the separate sheet of flip chart paper titled “Our Choices.” You will keep adding to this list during every session.

**Closing Prayer:** Ask a member of the group to pray about your neighborhoods and the persons who live in them.
MODULE 5

Group reading before the fifth session: pages 126-156.

Get to Know Each Other:
Have group members describe what your church and community would look like five years from now if you choose to live and not die. Ten years from now?

Scriptural Focus:
Read John 4:1-30. Notice how the spiritual rebirth of this Samaritan woman at the well led to the spiritual rebirth of the entire community. How have you seen the spiritual rebirth of individuals impacting your entire church’s spiritual well being? It may be that you have to think back to be able to answer this question. How long has it been that your church experienced a spiritual “rebirth?”

Processing Experiences and Ideas:
Briefly refer to your group’s lists that were recorded on the flip chart paper last session. Ask if anyone feels that after reflecting for a week something needs to be changed on the lists.

Now have your group divide up into groups of 2-3 persons. Ask everyone to reflect upon the three stories they read prior to this session: The Pentecost Church, The Church Without Walls, and The Re-imagined Church. As they talk with each other, have them identify which of these six choices each congregation made. In these stories,
some churches might have chosen to live out their calling by making only one of these six choices. Other stories will reflect multiple choices a congregation made. Ask them to record their responses for future sharing. Give several minutes for the small groups to work together.

Once the individual groups come back into the larger group, ask each group to report on what choices his/her group discovered. Have a person with a marker record on each piece of paper under the name of the choice, which church that group believes made that choice. Go around the room until every small group has reported out to the larger group and their answers are recorded on the flip chart paper for everyone to see.

Now as a large group answer these questions:

- Which of these three churches sound more like your church?
- What choice or choices do you see would be helpful for your congregation to make based on your reading of these stories?
- Can you come to a consensus about which choice or choices would be the most helpful for your congregation to make in the next six months? List the top one or two choices on the separate sheet of flip chart paper titled “Our Choices.” (Add to list each session.)

Closing Prayer:

Have a group member lead a prayer giving thanks for the opportunity to “dream dreams and see visions” for the future of your congregation.
MODULE 6

*Group reading before the sixth session: pages 157-175.*

**Get to Know Each Other:**
Spend this time in your last session to share with one another what it has meant to each of them to be in the study group.

**Scriptural Focus:**
Read Acts 2:42-47. Discuss the characteristics of the early church described in this passage. What did they experience? What did they do?

**Processing Experiences and Ideas:**
Briefly refer to your group’s lists that were recorded on the flip chart paper last session. Ask if anyone feels that after reflecting for a week something needs to be changed on the lists.

Now have your group divide up into groups of 2-3 persons. Ask everyone to reflect upon the final chapter they read prior to this session. What part of the conversation did you resonate with? What did you learn from this conversation? What’s emerging here for you? What new connections are you making?

Now as a large group look at the list of “Our Choices.” Reflect upon the list that has been developed by the group over the six sessions.

- Which choice or choices does your church urgently need to make?
• What do you believe needs to happen next?
• Who is ready to be a part of a planning team for the future?

**Closing Prayer:**
Have a group member begin a prayer for your church and the choices that will be made soon. Allow everyone to voice his or her prayers. You conclude the prayer with words of hope and thanksgiving.

This concludes the study. May God richly bless your work together over these six sessions. And may your church come alive as you share God’s love and grace with others!