

Pre-Trip Session 3: Transform



Purpose of this Session

Volunteers will explore a story written by ASP's founder Tex Evans to learn more about how we can Be the Light in our communities by taking the time to demonstrate love in personal and meaningful ways and by stepping outside of our comfort zones to help where we can. We will explore how these steps in the pursuit of light can cause transformation in ourselves and our communities.

What You'll Need for this Session

- Open wall space
- Sticky notes
- Writing utensils
- projection
- Multiple printed copies of the story "Why Brother Gentry Whistled" attached at the bottom of this document (enough for each person to read themselves or one for each group to be able to read aloud)



Denotes the Power Point slides that coincide with each section

This session is planned for 60-90 minutes but could run longer for a larger group.

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Welcome, Introductions and Opening Prayer

10 minutes

As you use this session, you will be getting closer to your departure date! Welcome your volunteers and share how many days are left until you are leaving for ASP; share any vital details about your route and how far you will travel and any fun details about stops you may make along the way. If you have your county assignment and know your home base for your week of service, share the information that ASP provided and a few fun facts about your county, what towns you are near to, and the facility where you will be staying.

God of faithfulness,

Thank you for the time you have provided us to learn and grow together. Thank you for already guiding us into stewardship, committing to sharing our time and energy in this service. Bless us as we week to learn how we can do so even further.

Be a light in us. Use our hands for good and to be a blessing to others.

Amen.

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Why Brother Gentry Whistled

25 minutes

This story was written fifty years ago by ASP's founder Tex Evans, recounting an experience in which he learned what it means to demonstrate love in little ways that will mean something awfully special to the person you are loving. Our theme this year is about learning how to show love through shining as lights in a dark world. "Why Brother Gentry Whistled" is about showing love through whistling.

Take a few minutes to either have everyone read the story or have someone read it out loud to the group.

Discussion Questions:

- Initial thoughts. What did you think of this story?
- What is something small someone has done for you that made you feel loved?
- What is something small you've done for someone else to make them feel loved?
- Can you recall a time when you heard God "whistling," reminding you that you are loved and cared for and never alone?
- What can you do to "whistle" for the people you are extending love to through service during your upcoming ASP trip? (Remember! We're a relationship ministry with a little construction on the side.)



Getting Outside Your Comfort Zone

(20 minutes)



During your trip with ASP, you are likely going to get to experience many new things and may be asked to step outside of your comfort zone. You will be in a new town, sleeping in an unfamiliar space, doing construction work for a family you don't know. The beautiful thing about these trips is that they are a chance to stretch and grow and maybe even experience great transformation! Let's take a bit of time to discuss what it means to get outside of our comfort zones and to plan ahead how we may be lights in a new place trying new things.

Discussion Questions:

- Can you recall a time when you had to get outside your comfort zone? How did you feel about it? How did it go?
- Can you recall a time when your church/organization has had to get outside your collective comfort zone as a group? How did it go?
- Service trips of any kind often take us into a new culture where we may not be accustomed to the language, traditions, or values—even when your trip is within the United States! Are there any ways that you expect a week in Appalachia may push you outside your comfort zone? How can you make sure you are respectful of the families and communities you are serving?
- Even though it is healthy to push ourselves to try new things, it is important to remember to rest so we don't burn ourselves out. What kind of activities do you take comfort in? How can you make sure you get the rest and recuperation you need during your week with ASP?
- What kind of things can you do to “whistle” or be a “light” when you are outside of your comfort zone?

Spiritual Activity

(15 minutes)

Our theme verse for 2025 reminds us to let our lights shine before others, and one of the pretty cool things about that is that we get to play the role of both the “lights” and the “others” in this command. Today, you get to take the time to express gratitude for the people who have let their light shine for you. Take a pen, pencil, or whatever writing utensils you have, and use sticky notes to write down the names of as many people as you can who have been lights in your life, then put the sticky notes up on the wall.

Take time to do the activity

Look at how many amazing people have contributed to this wall full of lights you've created! Take a moment to give thanks to God for them and the people who have shared their joy, hope, and spark with you.



Wrap Up and Sending Prayer

5 minutes

Gather everyone's attention back and go over any last announcements, such as deadlines, fundraising updates, and/or further meeting dates. When you are ready, close with a prayer.

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answer, half-truths, and superficial relationships so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may wish for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

Amen.



Why Brother Gentry Whistled

Glenn “Tex” Evans

1975

When I was a student in university I had a student charge, a beautiful little Methodist church in a quiet community and I had the privilege of living in the parsonage while my sweet wife and I took care of that little church. We had three delightful years there, and any other preacher will understand that no church is ever quite as magnificent and grand and remarkable as one's first church.

Now this church had very few people, but those it did have were indescribable in their kindness and friendliness and helpfulness to one another and to their neighbors and to this preacher and his wife.

And one other thing in that church which was due for special mention and recognition was the teacher for our adult Sunday school class, a Baptist saint name T.T. Gentry! He was a retired school teacher from Oklahoma and was in love with life. I am sure that the children who had him for a teacher found themselves blessed in more ways than one can count.

Brother Gentry loved the soil and the creatures of the forest—birds and bees and rabbits and squirrels—almost as much as he loved people. One of his choice loves was poetry!

Brother Gentry could quote poetry by the hour. Most of his poetry was from English poets and the early American poets, of course! His favorite poet was Longfellow. He could quote Longfellow for a while but after getting around to certain beautiful, moving passages, Brother Gentry could no go on. His emotions would get the best of him. When he would catch a vision from one of Longfellow's poems, such as “A voice fell, like a falling star, [said] Excelsior!” Brother Gentry just could not control his tears because of the beauty and power of the poetry.

All this I say just to indicate the kind of man he was.

One day, I was talking with another fellow up the street and he said to me, “Tex, did you ever go up to see Brother Gentry in the daytime?” When I assured him that I had, he said to me, “Well, did you ever notice that he has apple trees, and bee hives, and a rose garden, and a vegetable garden, and a regular flower garden?” When I assured him that I had noticed that, he had another question, “Well, did you ever notice that no matter what he's doing, whether he is in the rose garden or taking care of his bees, or working with his apple trees—no matter what—he is always whistling?” I allowed that I had noticed Brother Gentry did whistle!

Then, my friend reminded me that he didn't even whistle a tune. He just very loudly whistled with a sure steady whistle changing from one pitch to another so as to give some variety, I suppose,

to the exercise. Then he had another question for me. “Now, do you know why he whistles?” When I admitted that I did not, as a matter of fact, know any reason for his whistling, he had a suggestion for me. “Well, the next time you are over there, and he is whistling, you look on the front porch and you will see why Brother Gentry whistles.”

Now, I could hardly wait! On Tuesday I came home as early as I could from the university, parked my car, and told my wife that I had to go up and see Brother Gentry about something. And I did!

I went walking briskly down the little street toward his home, and before I got right up to his house, I could hear him in his rose garden whistling away in his slow, firm tone, changing the pitch from this to that as he constantly whistled. When I walked up, Brother Gentry looked at me, paused, raised his hand, and said, “Come on over, and I'll give you a rose!” He had on rather rough gloves. He had some little snippers in his hand and was trimming some of his roses. I walked up close to Brother Gentry, paid him brief courtesy, and asked him how he was getting along and quickly looked toward the front porch.

There on the front porch sat Mrs. Gentry. She was in a wheelchair, and she was blind! Brother Gentry was whistling for Mrs. Gentry! He wanted her to know that he was there. He wanted her to know that she was not alone. He wanted her to know that he was mindful of her and that he would not leave her, that he was available, that he would come to her.

Now I went home from that meeting having been enriched immeasurably. I had seen something entirely beautiful and lovely and true. And, I said to myself, “God is like that. He knows about us, he is concerned for us. He is aware of his children, he will not leave them. Our Father will not desert his children. Our Father will come to us!”

I will now make any long application of this beautiful truth, I will just comment that I am constantly astonished at the folk who are so caught up with complaining and whining and fear and doubt and worry—and they have been within walking distance of the Christian faith all their lives! They ought to be right in touch with immeasurable sources of love and light, with meaning and power and hope. In these brief words I would just like to remind the reader that you are not alone. You are loved. Our Father knows. Our Father cares.

Our Father will not go away and leave us. We will not be deserted. He will come to us.

So, as we begin any new day we might very well say, “Well, this may be a pretty rough day but I can at least count on this: our Father is whistling all the time!”

