

FOREWORD BY JIMMY CARTER



REVIVING FAITH & POLITICS IN A
POST-RELIGIOUS RIGHT AMERICA

JIM WALLIS

AUTHOR OF THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING *GOD'S POLITICS*

The Great Awakening

A READING GUIDE

SOJOURNERS

3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010

www.sojo.net

A LETTER FROM JIM WALLIS

Thank you for reading my newest book, *The Great Awakening*. I hope it inspires you to also host and lead a readers group where you can explore the book's provocative questions with others. If you do, you will join hundreds of churches, schools, and local groups that are starting book studies and using *The Great Awakening* as an educational and organizing tool. I'm thrilled to see this book realize its intended purpose—to build and strengthen a movement that can apply faith to social justice in ways that we might have never imagined just a few short years ago. Spiritual power is being harnessed to address the greatest social challenges that we face today.

This book is both an observation and a call regarding what may be the next great awakening—one that is occurring in our own time. As I travel the country, I can see and feel new things happening—I find a revival of faith that is directly leading to new calls and commitments for social justice. This rebirth and renewal of faith is being applied directly to the moral and biblical scandal of poverty around the globe and here at home, to the crises of environmental degradation and climate change that pose a threat to God's creation, and to the multiple assaults on human life and dignity that shame our world.

Ironically, despite the fact that in recent decades the Religious Right has given “faith in politics” a bad name, faith is now understood by many to be a powerful force for progressive social change. Though religion had come to be seen by many as the problem, faith may indeed be making a comeback as the catalyst that could provide the tipping point in finding solutions to the biggest and most significant moral and social crises of our world today.

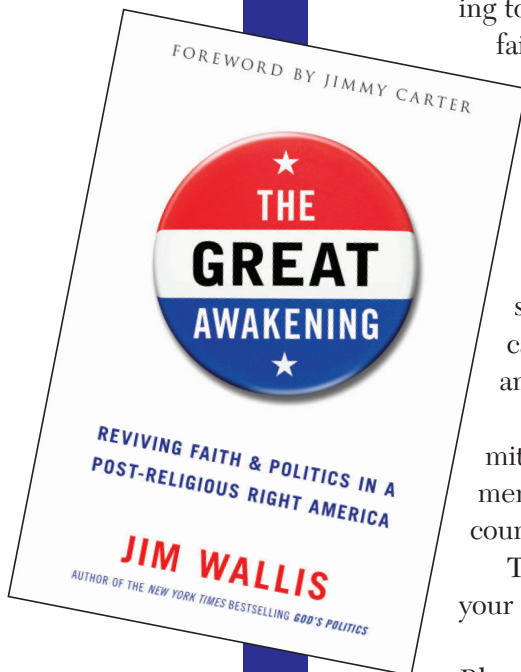
As you read and discuss *The Great Awakening*, think and pray about the commitments at the conclusion of each chapter. How can you apply those commitments to your individual life, your family, your church, your community, and our country?

Thank you for picking up the book, reading it with others, and taking to heart your role as a person of faith and integrity. I hope this guide will be helpful to you.

Blessings,



Jim Wallis



SOJOURNERS

3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010 • www.soj.net

FIVE EASY STEPS

to Plan and Lead Your Book Group

Whether you're a book club veteran or have never been part of one before, here are five ways to make your discussions of *The Great Awakening* 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 six units, but 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.

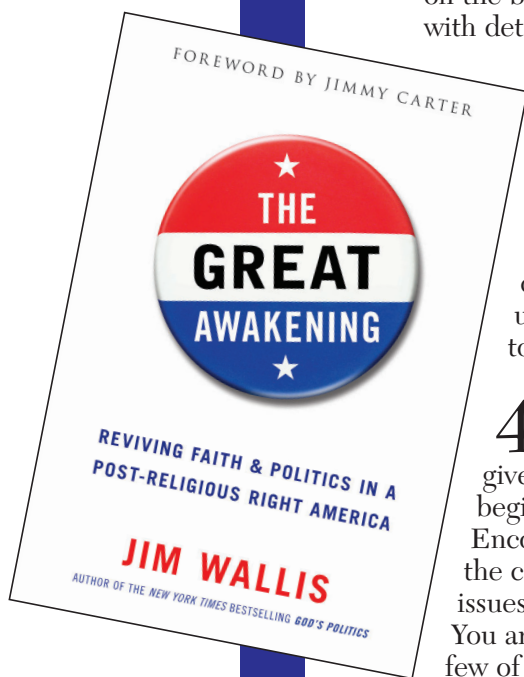
2. Publicize: There are lots of effective and free ways to publicize your event. Think about groups you want to reach—local congregations, student groups, community groups, etc. Write up a short announcement with the details of the discussion group and submit it to local churches to put in their bulletins. 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 e-mail listservs.

3. Prepare: It will be helpful to read the chapters from *The Great Awakening* before each session. Think about the sample questions on the following pages and modify and add questions as you see fit. Sketch out how much time you want devoted to introductions, discussion, opening and closing prayer or meditation, 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 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 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 few of the questions have clearly defined answers.

5. Act: Above all, this book is a call to put faith into action for a better world. The work does not end when we finish reading the book. 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. For specific ideas, refer to the "From Study to Action" section on page 9.

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



SESSION I

Introduction: Something is Happening / 1

Chapter 1. Revival Time: When Faith Changes Politics / 11

In the United States and around the world, spiritual revival has led to dramatic social change. We may be approaching a new “revival” of faith, one that opens the door for real solutions that transcend partisan politics and lead the way to concrete victories for social justice.

1. Why does faith empower social change? Where have you seen this happen?
2. Do you think the current political debate is addressing the critical issues in the U.S. and the world? Based on your experience in your community, what are the most critical social and political issues? How would you define the extremes of the debate, and how is the “middle ground” defined? Which argument advances the common good?

Chapter 2. Changes in the Air: The New Agenda / 31

Dramatic new developments in the religious community and political atmosphere could be setting the stage for genuine revival. It is time for personal faith with a commitment to justice, and a time for movements seeking social change to recover or find their motivating faith and values.

1. Do you agree that the political and social agenda of the Religious Right is being replaced with a Jesus-centered gospel perspective, especially among pastors and students?
2. In your community, is Christianity identified primarily with the Religious Right or has that changed? Do people of faith in your community identify as the “Religious Left”? Are these identities sufficient? What are some of the nuances and complexities around these labels?
3. What should be the relationship of Christians to political parties? How have allegiances to particular political parties or candidates been tied to faith or religious beliefs in your family or family history?

SESSION 2

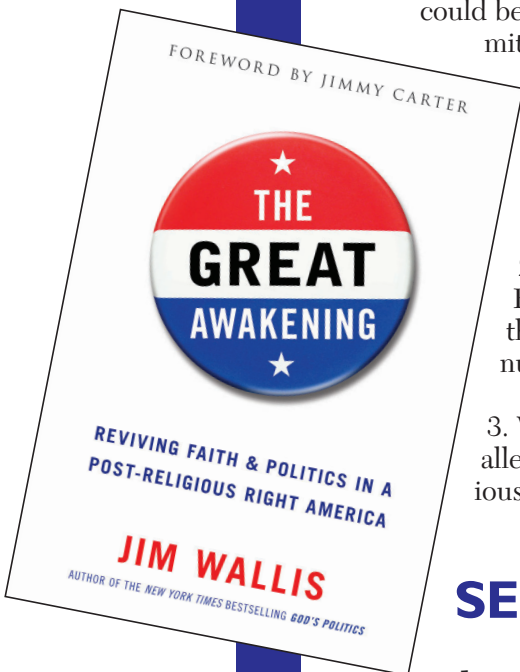
Chapter 3. How to Change the World, And Why: Rules of Engagement / 53

There are compelling reasons to take faith into the public arena—and there are also dangers in doing so. This chapter examines theological foundations for why and how faith is supposed to change the world, and fundamental “rules of engagement” for involvement in politics from the motivation of faith.

1. Why should people of faith, particularly from the Judeo-Christian tradition, engage in a witness to the world? How do we keep that witness from becoming compromised and used for narrowly partisan or ideological agendas?
2. Do these “rules of engagement” resonate with your experience? Are there others you would add?

SOJOURNERS

3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010 • www.soho.net



Chapter 4. The Moral Center: Politics for the Common Good / 79

There are moral choices and challenges beneath our political debates. The common good as a political agenda could provide both a vision and spirituality for the public engagement of faith. It requires a movement that is socially conservative, economically populist, and strongly antiwar. People of faith are reclaiming a space where these are no longer mutually exclusive commitments.

1. Catholic ethicist John Rawls defines the common good as “certain general conditions that are ... equally to everyone’s advantage.” What are the essential elements needed to re-establish the common good to provide a moral center for our political life today?
2. To be conservative means to “preserve a tradition.” To be radical mean to be “rooted in a tradition” that gives one a consistent perspective on the world. What is gained when these two words—conservative and radical—are used together, as in “conservative radical”? What is lost in this melding?

SESSION 3

Chapter 5. Inclusion and Opportunity: The Welcome Table / 103

Who is left out and left behind is always a religious and moral question. In the Hebrew scriptures, the health of a society was measured by how it cared for its weakest and most vulnerable members, and prosperity was to be shared by all. Jesus proclaimed a gospel that was “good news to the poor.” Most of the biblical insights about overcoming poverty have to do with inclusion, bringing all people to a table of equals.

1. Do you agree that three basic steps to resolve the issue of poverty are having compassion for those in poverty, calling for social justice, and building a movement of solidarity and community?
2. What could your congregation do to be “good news to the poor” in your community and to make reducing poverty a central commitment in public policy? Is your church a place where “the poor” can come to worship?
3. How can your church or local ministry gain a reputation for being *in solidarity with* the poorest, most disenfranchised, or most vulnerable in your neighborhood, town, or city?

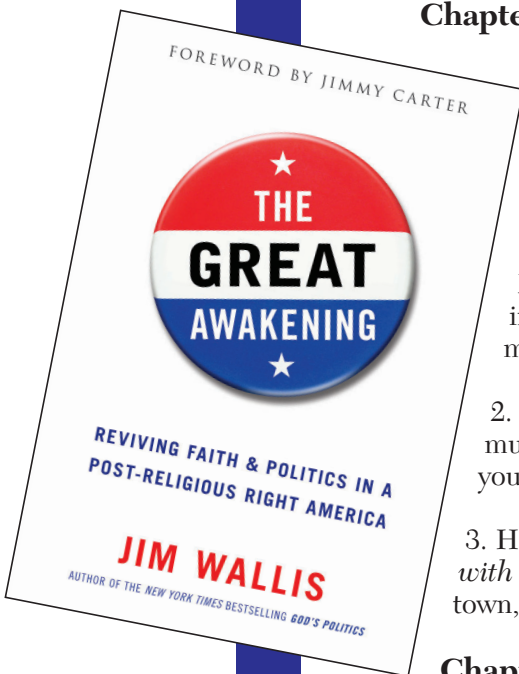
Chapter 6. Stewardship and Renewal: The Earth Is the Lord’s / 135

Our earth and the fragile atmosphere that surrounds it are God’s good creation. Yet our environment is in jeopardy as global warming continues unchecked and our air and water are polluted. Global warming and environmental protection are moral imperatives for a new generation committed to “creation care.” Energy conservation and less dependence on fossil fuels are commitments that could dramatically change our future, from the renewal of our lifestyles to the moral redemption of our foreign policies.

1. How can we remember and reclaim the biblical narrative of God’s creation and our responsibility as good stewards of that creation?
2. What commitments could you, your family, and your congregation make to live more simply, use significantly less resources, and take action on behalf of the environment?

SOJOURNERS

3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010 • www.soj.net



SESSION 4

Chapter 7. Equality and Diversity: The Race to Unity / 157

The biblical narrative suggests that God has strong opinions on the subjects we call diversity, equality, and our historic divisions of race, class, and gender. Our country is challenged by the unrepentant sins of slavery and racism, the deeply embedded inequality between women and men, and the new reality of an increasingly multiethnic and religiously pluralistic society. We need to change how we think and feel about people, and change how people are treated through societal structures, laws, and policies.

1. Should there be formal public apologies by governments and religious institutions for their historical complicity in the American slave economy? Should these institutions take any actions concerning the way they continue to benefit from the legacy of that economy? Should reparations or restitution for slavery be paid? What kind of policy would be most appropriate?
2. How can Christians contribute to an open and honest discussion about immigration? What should be the initial priority in a Christian conversation on immigration: security or hospitality? Or is that a false dichotomy?

3. Do you think sexism still exists at a personal or institutional level? What evidence do you find for your answer? Are there opportunities at your church for women to address the whole congregation about their experiences as women? What could your church do to advocate, institutionalize, and protect the leadership roles of women?

4. How can each of us in our own lives show respect for the human dignity of all people created in the image of God? Are there some groups of people in whom you find it difficult to see the image of God? Do you see their perceived sin before you see their inherent human dignity? What practice might you take up to help you change?

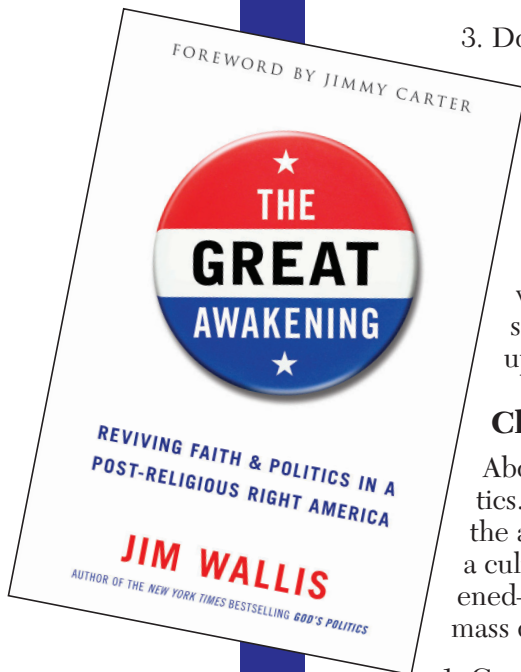
Chapter 8. Life and Dignity: Critical Choices / 189

Abortion remains one of the most volatile and emotional issues in American politics. A new common-ground approach could practically and substantially reduce the abortion rate while protecting the rights of women. A consistent ethic of life—a culture of life—also must be applied to every area in which human life is threatened—including human trafficking, hate crimes, genocide, torture, war, weapons of mass destruction, and capital punishment.

1. Could a serious proposal to reduce abortions be the common ground that brings the majority moderate “pro-life” and “pro-choice” supporters together?
2. How would a “consistent ethic of life” applied to human trafficking, hate crimes, genocide, torture, war, weapons of mass destruction, and capital punishment, as well as abortion, change public policy?

Chapter 9. Family and Community: The False Choice / 217

“Family” in the Bible was not the nuclear family model predominant in the mid-20th century United States. It was an extended kinship group that included blood relatives as well as friends, workers, and those who were lost. In the New Testament, Jesus directly challenges the definition of “family.” For us to genuinely engage biblical values today around the issue of family, we must begin again to think in much broader communal terms than we usually do in our culture. A culture that promotes strong



and healthy families is necessary to raising children with strong values, and the sources for the breakdown of family and community in our society must be addressed. But we need solutions, not scapegoating.

1. How do you define “family”? What is the purpose of a family—spiritually, psychologically, economically? What is your “ideal” family and where did that “ideal” come from? Should the definition of what makes a family be generated by law or by religion or by common experience?
2. Name three to five steps the federal government could do to take pressures off families and promote stronger families, neighborhoods, and local communities.

SESSION 5

Chapter 10. Nonviolent Realism: Resolving Our Conflicts / 235

In Iraq, the cost and consequences of a disastrous war are also moral issues that the United States, as the responsible party, must address. The only moral and practical course now is to change U.S. policy and to extricate U.S. forces from Iraq with the least possible damage to everyone involved. But the deeper questions include how to confront the real threats of terrorism without resorting to endless and counterproductive warmaking and how to address the root causes of despair that creates easy recruits for horrendous violence. Theologically and practically, how do we take the problem of evil seriously without falling into evil ourselves, and without forgetting the moral connection between ends and means?

1. How would you define current U.S. foreign policy? What changes would you like to see that would strengthen America’s security and moral standing in the world?
2. Discuss the difference between pacifism, just war, and “nonviolent realism.” Why do so many Christians turn to Romans 13 to justify compliance with American militarism?
3. Does your church or community teach interpersonal conflict resolution skills for couples or families? Is there a community-level conflict resolution seminar that teaches how to de-escalate arguments or disagreements?

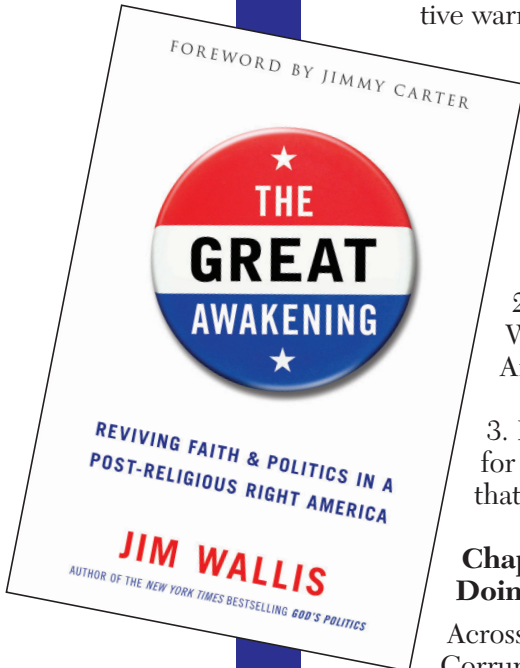
Chapter 11. Integrity and Accountability: Doing the Right Thing and the Question of Leadership / 267

Across the political spectrum, the desire for integrity in our government is growing. Corruption in government—the way that money and power distort our political decision-making and even our electoral processes—violates basic principles of democracy and erodes social trust. We must restore virtue to our government and re-infuse integrity into the democratic system. Leadership in all areas of society must address the temptations to greed, infidelity, and the power of dominance.

1. If we want public and religious leaders and elected officials to adhere to basic moral principles, how do we make those standards clear, hold our leaders accountable, provide leaders the support they need to adhere to the standards, and carry out just consequences when leaders fail to comply?
2. What are the virtues associated with a “servant leader”? Do men and women exhibit “servant leadership qualities” in similar or different ways? How does this model teach a deeper faithfulness as well as produce effective outcomes?

SOJOURNERS

3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010 • www.soj.net



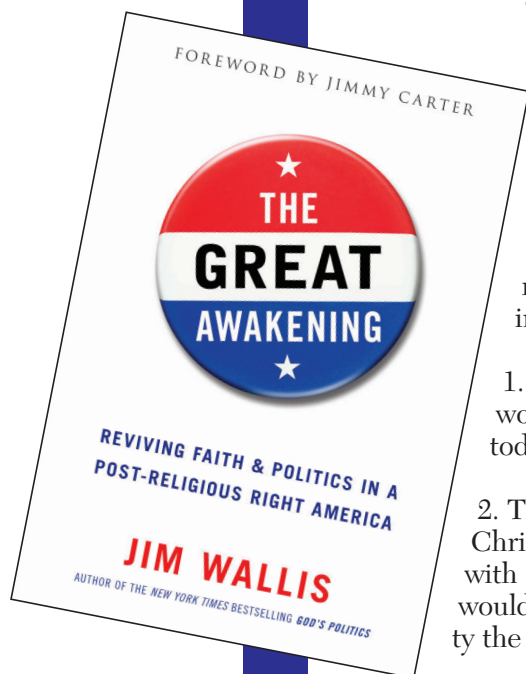
SESSION 6

Chapter 12. What's Acceptable, What's Possible: Notes to the Next Generation / 283

A younger generation is emerging into leadership in many areas of our society, with a fresh hope that change is really possible, that individuals and communities can make a difference, that people of faith have done big things before and will do them again. We need to dare to dream big dreams, to tell Americans it is okay to have ideals and work toward cultural and political transformation.

1. What would be needed to ignite or re-ignite the fire of your moral imagination? How can older people mentor the under-30 generation? How can younger people help heal the disillusionment of the over-30 generations?
2. What moral contradiction can you no longer live with? What will it take to resolve the moral contradiction? Addressing moral contradictions may lead to a more just society; what does it do for our spiritual lives?

Epilogue: Red Letter Christians and Justice Revivals: Coming to a City Near You / 299



What would Christians be like if we mostly focused on the “red stuff” in the gospels—the things that Jesus said? A group calling itself the Red Letter Christians is exploring that idea. The written word, as well as spoken words, can be vehicles for spiritual and social change. Imagine linking the tradition of Billy Graham with the tradition of Martin Luther King Jr. Imagine disillusioned believers coming back to faith after many years of alienation. Imagine a revival of faith that doesn’t result in sectarian warfare but rather leads to respectful dialogue between our diverse religious communities and a new interfaith collaboration to overcome the social crises that confront us all.

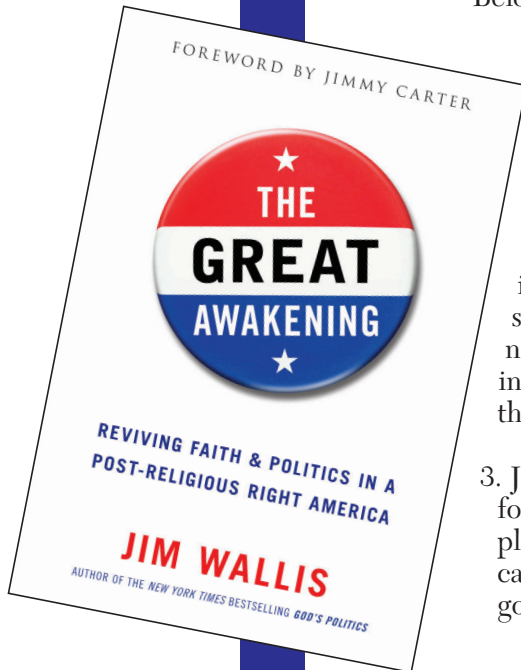
1. How can your church or faith community study more deeply the “red letter” words of Jesus and think creatively about how to put that message into action today?
2. The concept of “revivals” is particularly associated with British and American Christian evangelicalism. What would attract you about a spiritually rooted revival with a social justice vision? In your own faith or denominational tradition, where would you find spiritual renewal and reinvigoration to give you and your community the strength and vision to act for justice?

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 reading *The Great Awakening* will build momentum and interest within your church and community around putting faith into action to promote peace, justice, and spiritual renewal. Hopefully, the sessions will leave participants wanting more information, tools, and new opportunities to make positive change for the common good. Through this work to build up God's new creation, we hope to strengthen the connection 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 progressive faith movement 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. 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. Either start or further integrate study, prayer, and action into a church ministry. 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 *The Great Awakening* study group.
3. Join Sojourners' Vote Out Poverty campaign. We can answer Jesus' call to care for the "least of these" by demanding that candidates go on the record with real plans for reducing poverty in the U.S. and around the world. By joining this campaign you pledge to hold candidates accountable to advancing the common good of our nation and the world. Visit www.sojo.net/campaign.

SOJOURNERS

3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010 • www.sojo.net

More from Sojourners: www.sojo.net

SUBSCRIBE TO SOJOURNERS MAGAZINE

Sign-up today for *Sojourners* magazine at www.sojo.net/magazine. Get the latest perspectives from Jim Wallis, author of *The Great Awakening* and editor-in-chief of *Sojourners* magazine. Each issue of *Sojourners* brings you the wisdom of our almost 40 years of engagement in social transformation from a Christian perspective. You'll get commentary on current events, special issues on themes such as trade justice and the environment, as well as Bible study, reviews and humor.

SIGN-UP FOR SOJOMAIL

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, Tony Campolo, 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 GodsPolitics.com blog. Guest bloggers include Shane Claiborne, Becky Garrison, Brian McLaren, Gareth Higgins, Mary Nelson, and Gabriel Salguero. To read more, go to www.godspolitics.org.

JOIN THE FAITH & JUSTICE CHURCHES NETWORK

Faith & Justice Churches is a network for church leaders seeking resources and support for putting faith into social action in local congregations. Join the network and receive a monthly newsletter, get listed in our searchable directory of churches, and find out about teaching and preaching resources. Visit www.faithandjustice.net.

FIND SERMON HELPS & DISCUSSION GUIDES ON HOT TOPICS

Sojourners specializes in publishing materials for your small group, Bible study, and worship service. Take a look at "Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource based on the Revised Common Lectionary, which is available 24/7 to help pastors and church leaders write creative sermons on social justice. Check out "Sojourners On the Issues," our downloadable, ready-to-use PDF discussion guides, on topics including immigration, the environment, poverty, the global economy, human trafficking, and more. For more information, visit www.sojo.net/resources.

SOJOURNERS

3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010 • www.sojo.net