

ENEMIES NO MORE

SESSION 3

Knocking Down the Dividing Walls of Hostility
Denominational

Sharing Life

(20 minutes)

Gather: Greet your fellow Life Group members by name. You are “sharing life together,” so check-in with each other on the happenings of the past week. Welcome any new friends to your Life Group and invite them to introduce themselves and share basic information.

Discuss: Your *Personal* Life Application Challenge this past week was to identify your top three Circles of Influence and any racial or ethnic divisions that may exist within them. Take turns sharing your top three Circles of Influence and any insights or actions steps you took in relation to **racial “dividing walls of hostility.”**

Your *Group* Life Application Challenge was to acquire and begin to read Ed Silvoso’s book, “Prayer Evangelism.” (Regal Books, 2000) Have you been able to secure copies of the book for your Life Group members? How many people in your group have begun reading? Are there any additional insights or highlights related to Prayer Evangelism that you would like to share? You are encouraged to keep reading! This book will be a tremendous blessing to you just as it has been for thousands of Christians around the world.

Your *City-Transformation* Life Application Challenge was to choose from a list of ten practical suggestions of ways to implement Prayer Evangelism in your daily life and begin to knock down **racial “dividing walls of hostility”** in your city, region and nation. Turn back to the list and share at least one opportunity that you have chosen to focus on in your daily life.

All of these suggestions are important for Christians as they commit to being on the front-lines of developing greater unity in the name of Jesus. Be encouraged to know that God will use you to bring transformation, first to your Circles of Influence, and then to the world!

Pray Together: Dear God, thank you for bringing our Life Group back together and for the commitment we share to grow in Christ. Thank you for the opportunity to pray for those in our Circles of Influence this past week. We ask you to bless each person. We speak peace into their lives in the name of Jesus. We especially ask you to break down any *“dividing walls of hostility”* around the issues of race and ethnicity. If there is the need for repentance and reconciliation, give us the wisdom and humility to take the lead. And now we open our hearts to you for today’s study. Come and be our most honored guest. Teach us from your Word. We invite you to be at the center of all that we say and do. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Transformed Thinking

(30 minutes)

Read: The Apostle Paul had high hopes for the young Christian Church in Ephesus. Now remember, these were not large established congregations with expensive buildings, professional staffs and extensive ministries. The Ephesians most often met in homes where they worshiped, prayed, learned about Jesus, and supported and encouraged one another in their new Christian faith. There were no Bibles as yet, so imagine their excitement to receive this letter from their pastor, the great Apostle Paul, who was imprisoned in Rome for being a witness for the Gospel. They were hungry for the truth. Are you?

Paul expresses his high hopes for the Church through one of the most inspirational and beautiful prayers in the Bible. It's found in *Ephesians 3:14-21*. This prayer sets the stage for our theme today. Please read it together as a Life Group and try to sense the passion with which Paul wrote.

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Discuss: What are some of the “hopes” that Paul is lifting up in this magnificent prayer that you would like to see become a reality in your own life? in the Church?

Read: The Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia*, which means an “assembly” like those that might gather in a town square to discuss an important issue. However, among Christians this term came to have a special meaning: **all who believe in Jesus Christ.**

The Christian Church today exists at several levels:

1. **Universal Church** – made up of every believer in Jesus around the world.
2. **Local Church** – made up of groups of believers that form local congregations and ministry organizations.
3. **Denomination** – made up of groups of congregations that work closely together because of shared history and beliefs.

What is the Church meant to be and do? There are many beautiful descriptions of the Church found in the Bible that provide insight. These include the “family of God, the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, the people of God and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.” Christians always remember that the Church is not the building... it’s the people.

But check-out this interaction! Following Peter’s confession, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,”**

Jesus replied, **“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Matthew 16:17-19**

The following quote provides key insights:

Quote:

“From this we can deduce three key characteristics of what the church is meant to be and to do. First, it consists of people, not buildings. Second, it is entrusted with authority to implement God’s will. Third, it is meant to be on the offensive, not the defensive, since Jesus stated that the gates of Hades would not prevail against it, and gates have never attacked anyone. On the contrary, in war, enemy gates are to be stormed.”
(Silvoso, Transformation, p.154)

Discuss: In what ways does our usual understanding of the Church tend to keep us on “defense” rather than “offense”... and focused on local concerns rather than global mission?

Read: The Christian Church today, in all of its various manifestations, is filled with division and conflict. Among the greatest detriments to the effectiveness of the Church are the **denominational “dividing walls of hostility”** that keep even Christians isolated from one another. By one estimate, there are more than 35,000 different denominations in the Christian Church today.

Some of these denominations have been formed down through the centuries to call attention to an aspect of God’s Word or the Christian faith that had been lost or neglected. Their formation was rooted in a call for reform and renewal in the Church. Even so, harm was often done to the Church in the name of righteous intentions.

Lesser motives have often prevailed. Too many denominations have been formed because of sins that include individualism, pride, anger and personal preferences. Often a minor aspect of the faith has become a major point of division. This point of division has then taken root in the form of denominational identity, and often, a “claim to fame” of superiority and truth. As a result there is a separation and “tearing down” of the body of Christ rather than a “building up.”

Denominational divisions and in-fighting make for a very confusing message to an unbelieving world. This is reflected in comments like, “Christians can’t even get long with one another!” or “Why would I want to join a church when all they do is fight!”

Discuss: If you have a denominational background, share it with your group. What were you taught regarding the defining beliefs or practices of your denomination that distinguished it from others?

Are you participating in a denominational expression of the Christian Church today? Based on your experience, what are some of its strengths and weaknesses? How important does this denominational identity seem to be to your local congregation?

Read: As various factions began to develop in the early Christian Church, the Apostle Paul made his boldest statement yet regarding unity. Read these challenging words together:

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Eph. 4:3-6

What is the **“unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace?”** It is the recognition that we are “one” in Christ. Everything else comes in a distant second place when held up against the unity we share as “brothers and sisters” in Christ. Notice that seven times (the biblical number of completeness) the Apostle Paul repeats the word “one.”

- one body
- one Spirit
- one hope
- one Lord
- one faith
- one baptism
- one God and Father

And this is the **“God and Father of all... who is over all... and through all... and in all!”** If ever there was a statement in favor of Christian unity, this is it! Paul is challenging Christians everywhere to keep “first things first!”

Many Christians today believe that God is calling the Church back to its foundations! We are being called to repent of our selfish ways that have placed more importance on our denominational and theological identities than on our common calling in Jesus Christ. By allowing these **denominational “dividing walls of hostility”** to continue to exist, we have compromised our very authority to do battle against the **“spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”** *Eph. 6:12b* Jesus himself declared, **“If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.”** *Mark 3:25*

Discuss: Give examples of how we can “*make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit*” in our local congregations and communities?

Read: Paul continues his teaching by further describing the function and purpose of a unified Church.

“But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it... It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the fullness of Christ. (Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers each play a unique role in training, equipping, commissioning and sending ever believer to be a minister in Jesus’ name. When the whole Church functions together, the result is unity and maturity that leads to kingdom impact.)

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” Eph. 4:7, 11-16 (We are to grow-up so that we can build-up!)

Unity in the body of Christ is always for the purpose of mission to the whole world. However, unity does not mean uniformity! Paul reminds us that God has “custom fit” us by his grace with unique gifts, talents, passions and callings to serve others and contribute to the building-up of the whole people of God. We need each other! This makes unity not only a desirable outcome but a requirement for success!

In *I Corinthians 12:7*, Paul says it this way:

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

Discuss: Take a few moments and identify several of the gifts, talents and passions that God has given you by his Spirit. Then share with your Life Group how you are using one of these gifts to build-up the Church, the whole body of Christ, for the common good.

By the grace of God, I have been given the following gifts, talents or passions:

-
-
-
-

Read: Imagine if only half of the workers showed up at your business or place of employment. Imagine if only a few members of your sports team decided to play hard and give their full effort during the game. Imagine if only one partner in a marriage was committed to the relationship. Imagine if only 20% of your fellow church members did 80% of the work!

Is it any wonder that the Christian Church today is often lethargic and ineffective in its mission of transforming the world? Friends, it's time we got out of the stands and onto the playing field. Jesus wants us to play together like a championship team, because without Christ, those around us are lost and without hope.

Transformation Church Insights:

- Jesus is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.
- The true Church is made up of every believer in Jesus Christ around the world.
- The Church is called by Jesus to be on the offensive, knocking down the **denominational** "*dividing walls of hostility*," even the very gates of hell.
- Unity *in* the body of Christ is to be reflective of our unity *with* Christ.
- Every Christian believer has been uniquely gifted by God for works of service that build up the whole Church and become a witness to the world.

Transformed Living

(40 minutes)

Read: The move of God’s Spirit around the world today is ushering forth a renewal of shared mission and vision in the Church of Jesus Christ that at times looks and sounds like the New Testament book of Acts!

Paradigms are shifting! The Church is breaking-out! New prototypes are being developed all over the world that remind us that the Church was born in an Upper Room in Jerusalem... but it was never meant to stay there. Heart-deep transformation is happening in congregations and corporations, homes and factories, schools and centers of government.

Members of various Christian denominations and faith backgrounds are coming together in unity for the sake of the transformation of their cities and nations. Prayer-based, city-transformation movements are springing up and the Church is waking up! Christians are making Jesus “the main thing” and partnering together for the sake of fulfilling the Great Commission.

Pulpit and marketplace ministers are treating each other as equals and forming strategic alliances to pastor the “church of the city” made up of every believer. A new passion is developing for reaching those who don’t know Jesus. Local congregations are changing their focus from “church growth” to “kingdom growth.” Cooperation is increasing. Competition is decreasing. Unbelievers are noticing! Yes, it is an exciting day for the Church of Jesus Christ!

These are all encouraging signs that the **denominational “dividing walls of hostility”** are coming down. Still, many challenges remain. I believe that in the next generations the impact of denominationalism will continue to diminish, and new levels of unity, like those described above, will continue to increase. There is an urgency in our world today that demands it. Never before has there been such a need for Christians to come together and be the Church that the Apostle Paul envisioned when he wrote his letter to the Ephesians.

Discuss: What are the most significant issues facing the world today? What do you view as the most urgent challenge in your local city or region?

Read: What will it take to break down the **denominational “dividing walls of hostility”** that have often rendered the Church weak and ineffective? I believe that the commitments being made by Transformation Churches around the world today are providing a template for others to follow. Let’s consider them individually:

- 1. Transformation Churches develop transformed followers of Jesus who are being used by God to transform their church, community and world.**

Transformation must be experienced personally. Local congregations must be passionate about the power of God to transform lives through Jesus Christ. This is not trendy psychology or New Age philosophy. Because of the cross and the resurrection, Christians believe in a God who makes all things new... including people!

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” Eph. 4:22-24

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Romans 12:1-2a

Transformation Churches have a “Great Commission consciousness.” They are constantly casting a transformation vision that is personal, touching the individual heart and life, and yet challenging the individual Christian to go beyond mere self-fulfillment.

Discuss: What is one way that you have experienced the transforming power of God in your own life? Tell about the “before” and “after.”

Read:

2. Transformation Churches partner with the “Church of the City” which is made up of all believers in Christ in their geographic area.

The “Church of the City” is a biblical concept that must be recovered if we’re going to break down denominational barriers for the sake of greater unity and witness. For example, Paul wrote his Epistles to “the church of God in Corinth,” “the churches in Galatia,” “the saints in Ephesus,” “all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi.” A “Church of the City” approach opens our eyes to see the whole family of God in our city or region, regardless of congregation or denomination.

Transformation Church pastors will testify that a “Church of the City” vision is almost always born out of shared prayer. The Holy Spirit must capture the hearts of both pulpit and marketplace ministers alike with a burden for the “lost” that leads to a bigger vision of the Church. Again, what is birthed in the Upper Room in prayer, when empowered by the Holy Spirit, can have a powerful impact on the streets out there.

Vision shifts from “church growth” to “growing the kingdom of God.” “Drive-by cursings,” as I have called them, are exchanged for “drive-by blessings,” because now other pastors and congregations are recognized as partners, not competitors.

A “Church of the City” approach is not a substitute for healthy and passionate leadership in the local congregation. It broadens and deepens these commitments. A “Church of the City”

approach is not one that requires ecumenical, doctrinal or organizational agreement. It moves in the Spirit. It's based on relationship, not program. It touches a deeper, more basic level of unity in Christ. It asks, "Can we pray and seek the Lord together around the name of Jesus for the sake of our city?"

<u>Traditional Church</u>	<u>Transformation Church</u>
Maintainence	Mission
Professional Christians	Everyone a Minister
Spiritual Care	Training and Equipping
Individual Conversions	Community Transformation
Inside Programs	Outside Engagement
Congregation Centered	Church of the City
Church Growth	Kingdom Growth
Acts of Charity	Systemic Poverty
Limited Vision	Unlimited Vision

When both pulpit and marketplace community leaders make Jesus the #1 thing, and even demonstrate their commitment publicly, **denominational "dividing walls of hostility"** come down! Satan is struck a blow and the spiritual climate changes. Authority in the Spirit grows. At first, this can be threatening to those raised on the pride of denominationalism. However, with unity comes a blessing. I have found the "Church of the City" approach to be personally liberating as well as contagious to the person in the pew (or the metal folding chair).

Quote:
 "When pastors realize they are called to shepherd the city instead of just one congregation, the question they ask right away is, 'Who else is on board?' Triggered by the realization that they cannot pastor the Lord's flock by themselves, the need for unity in the Church becomes compelling and unavoidable!"
 (Silvoso, Prayer Evangelism, p.159)

Discuss: What part of the “Church of the City” approach feels threatening? What part feels “life giving?” If this vision were “caught” in your city or region, how might it contribute to breaking down denominational barriers?

Read:

3. Transformation Churches train, equip, commission and release their members to be ministers in the marketplace of everyday life.

Denominational identity is often built around notions of “guarding truth” rather than “giving it away.” The local congregation can become a fortress of tradition, both religious and cultural, rather than a “mission outpost” to the community and world. Members can begin to think of ministry as something done primarily within the “four walls” of a church building rather than something done to the “four corners” of the earth.

Transformation Churches recognize that “everyone is a minister” and that the mission field is “out there” in all the places that congregational members live and work and play. On Sundays the Church is “gathered” for worship, study and fellowship. From Monday through Saturday the Church is “scattered” to do the work of God’s kingdom. Therefore, Transformation Church pastors and staffs have come to understand that their primary role is to “train, equip, commission and release their members to be ministers in the marketplace of everyday life.”

This principle is strongly supported in the earlier reading from *Ephesians 4*. Paul teaches that the primary role of “*apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers,*” is “*to prepare God’s people for works of service.*” (vs.11-12) Pulpit and marketplace ministers both have the same calling in Christ, just a different function! The goal for every believer is growth, maturity and impact for the kingdom of God!

Transformation Churches are breaking down age-old divisions between “sacred and secular,” “clergy and laity.” In doing so they are knocking down centuries-old “*dividing walls of hostility*” based on spiritual power and control. Instead they are fostering greater unity in the body of Christ and releasing every member to fulfill their calling and destiny in this world that God loves. As a result, God is birthing a new “kingdom-minded entrepreneurial spirit” in the hearts of his people that will lead to inventions and discoveries that respond to the most pressing challenges of our day.

Quote:

“When the Church finally gets a handle on operating 24/7 all over the place, its priorities will become clear. Leaders from both the marketplace and the pulpit, praying and planning together, will be the norm, not the exception. Pouring resources into joint projects will be standard procedure. And the axiom, ‘It will take the *whole* church to present the *whole* gospel to the *whole* world’ will *just happen*. Let the Church arise!” (Silvoso, Transformation, p.157)

Discuss: Give some examples of the spiritual distinctions made in the past between “clergy and laity,” pastors and people. How have these false distinctions inhibited the mission of the Church? Describe some of the qualities of godly leaders in the Church. Have you become comfortable yet describing yourself as a minister? (It’s time to believe it!)

Read:

- 4. Transformation Churches invest a growing percentage of their resources in mission and ministry beyond their walls with a goal of giving away more than they keep.**

Jesus said, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21* Transformation Churches are characterized by their outward focus. This includes the allocation of financial resources.

Nothing holds the Christian Church in greater bondage than the stronghold of money. Money represents power. Money represents ownership. Money represents self-sufficiency. In many cases, the need for money has kept the Church and its denominations focused inwardly on bricks and mortar, staff and programs rather than outwardly on unity, partnership and mission. Consider the barriers that would fall if every local congregation would symbolically place their financial resources at the foot of the cross for the sake of fulfilling the Great Commission.

Right now, about 90% of every dollar given in church offering plates stays within the congregation. Only 10% goes out to touch the community and world. What if this equation were flipped up-side down? Reverse tithing! Impossible? Then how about making a congregational commitment towards giving away more than we keep? Say, 51%. In fact, Transformation Churches around the world are making this commitment, and in doing so, are breaking through to new levels of generosity and blessing.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul lifted up this word of encouragement from the Macedonian Churches:

“Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.” II Corinthians 8:2-5

Look at the phrases that are underlined for added emphasis. The Macedonians were not wealthy people. It was their joy and love of the Lord that caused them to give beyond their ability. They counted it a privilege to share their resources with others. There arose a spirit of rich generosity!

Transformation Churches around the world are breaking down the **denominational “dividing walls”** of money and power that have held so many of our congregations and denominations in bondage. They are doing it by making a commitment to work towards the day when they give away more than they keep.

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21

Discuss: How can money impact the decisions of congregations and denominations regarding mission? In what ways might the proposal to “give away more than we keep” be a positive witness to unbelievers?

Read:

5. Transformation Churches implement biblical transformation “paradigms and principles” in order to see their cities transformed and the Great Commission fulfilled.

In the Appendix you will find summary charts on the “Five Biblical Paradigms of Nation Transformation” and the “Principles of Prayer Evangelism.” Please turn to them now and briefly review these much-needed changes in the way we “believe, think and act” in the Church today.

Transformation Churches are implementing these biblical “paradigms and principles” of transformation and are experiencing breakthroughs in their local congregations, cities and nations. Members are becoming ministers. Local churches are reaching beyond their walls to touch the needs of their communities and world, and they are doing it in partnership with others. Systemic poverty is being dismantled. People are experiencing the transforming power of the message of Christ through the Church deployed 24/7.

The International Transformation Network (ITN) is bringing together pulpit and marketplace ministers from around the world in strategic partnerships, establishing transformation prototypes and providing inspiration, training and equipping of Transformation Churches and Kingdom Companies. Many of these testimonies are being documented and are available in DVD form as well as online at www.transformourworld.org.

Like the banks of a mighty river, these biblical “paradigms and principles” are helping guide the flow of God’s transforming work in the world today. These river banks are providing definition and direction and are serving as a rallying point for many streams of Christianity to flow together to make the transformation of cities and nations a reality. **Denominational “dividing walls of hostility”** are coming down toward that day when we can declare, “We are Enemies No More!”

Kingdom Vision

5 Paradigms: Transformed Thinking

**The transformation of individuals,
families, churches, cities and nations.**

Prayer Evangelism: Transformed Living

Discuss: Is your local congregation moving in the flow of God's Spirit by partnering with others to see transformation come to your city and nation? In what ways can you encourage your pastors and people to jump in?

Quote:

“When it comes to reaching cities, God will not favor the charismatics or the conservatives or the mainliners. He will use *the* Church, which is made up of many streams. It is fundamental to know at all times that it will take the whole Church to present the whole gospel to the whole city.”
(Silvoso, Prayer Evangelism, p.235)

Transformation Church Insights:

- The move of God's Spirit today is bringing people together all over the world. Denominational barriers are coming down.
- Our effectiveness and impact as the Church will depend on our willingness to break down the **denominational** "*dividing walls of hostility*" that have kept us apart.
- A "Church of the City" vision calls us to partner with others around the name of Jesus for the sake of fulfilling the Great Commission.
- It takes the *whole* Church to present the *whole* Gospel to the *whole* world.
- The Church of Jesus Christ is challenged to jump into the stream of God's Spirit and flow together for the sake of our witness to unbelievers and for the glory of God.

Life Application Challenges

(10 minutes)

Read: Again this week, take a few minutes to read this section as a Life Group and discuss any questions that may need clarification. All three of your Life Application Challenges this week are to be completed throughout the week or at the beginning of Session 4.

Your *Personal* Life Application Challenge this week is to work on the “Memory Verse Challenge” verses for the first three weeks of our Enemies No More Life Group series. Hopefully, you already have a head start on the first two.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Eph. 2:8-10

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...” Eph. 2:14

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Eph. 4:3-6

As you can see again, these are great “life verses” that are well worth the time and effort required to commit them to memory. You may find it helpful to copy them on to sticky notes that you can post on your refrigerator, bathroom mirror, car dashboard, or some other visible location. This will remind you to review them often. You can also review these verses each day as you take time for devotions and prayer. Be encouraged by *Psalm 119:105*, **“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”**

Your *Group* Life Application Challenge is to prepare a card containing notes of encouragement from your Life Group to another Christian congregation in your city or region. Your Life Group Leader will be given the name, address and website of the congregation by the Coordinator of the Enemies No More series.

Write the information down here:

During this coming week, you are encouraged to visit their website and learn all you can about this congregation’s mission and vision, beliefs, programs and ministries. As you do this, take some notes. Respond to the questions below:

- What denomination is represented?
- What beliefs appear to be similar to my local congregation?
What beliefs may be different?

- How can I encourage the members of this congregation through a personal note as part of our Life Group card in a way that breaks down **denominational “dividing walls of hostility?”**

Get creative. Have one of your Life Group members prepare a card that is large and colorful to send or deliver to this neighboring congregation. When you gather next week, you can each write your own words of encouragement on the card and sign it.

The person(s) who will create this card for our Life Group is:

This *Group* Life Application Challenge will be completed at the beginning of the next session. Its purpose is to take a tangible step to express unity in Christ and bring encouragement to another part of the family of God. Have fun!

Your *City-Transformation* Life Application Challenge is to complete reading the book “Prayer Evangelism” by Ed Silvano. As you read, make some notes of ideas for breaking down the **denominational “dividing walls of hostility”** in your city or region.

Prayer Support

(15 minutes)

Every week you will be encouraged to take a few moments to share personal prayer requests within your group. Go ahead and do that now. You may write them down here:

Now, close with a group prayer for these needs and continue to include them in your prayers throughout the week.

Details

(5 minutes)

Finalize any details with your Host/Leader and Life Group members. Remember to share responsibilities, especially refreshments and childcare as needed.

Our next Life Group Session is:

Date:

Location:

Time:

Remember to bring:

Memory Verse Challenge

Ephesians 4:3-6

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

Daily Devotions

Read: You are encouraged to continue cultivating a daily routine of personal Bible study, reflection and prayer. Below you will again find some passages of scripture for each day of the coming week, starting with Day One tomorrow. Read the scripture. Reflect on the questions. Pray as God leads you. Strive for consistency this week.

Day One – II Timothy 4:1-8

What does it mean to “preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season?” Does this refer only to pastors? What are “itching ears” and when do people most often have them? If salvation is a free gift, why does Paul tell Timothy that he is looking forward to a “crown of righteousness?”

Day Two – I Corinthians 3:1-15

How does quarreling and jealousy retard our growth as Christians and keep us from enjoying “solid food?” In what ways are we “God’s fellow workers... God’s field... and God’s building?” Who is the true foundation?

Day Three – Philippians 1:1-11

Why is having “partners in the gospel” so important for success? Why is it easier to start a good work than to complete it? In what ways would you like your “love to abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight?” Reflect on a “fruit of righteousness” in your life?

Day Four – Matthew 23:1-39

Regarding the Pharisees, Jesus told the crowds, “Do what they say but not what they do.” He proceeds to sound a severe warning to them if they do not repent. If Jesus were here in the flesh, what kind of a warning might he give you about your life these days?

Day Five – Revelation 3:14-22

Why is “lukewarm” Christianity the most dangerous kind of all? What part of your life has gotten too comfortable? If Jesus knocked on your door, would you invite him in?

Day Six – Galatians 2:17-21

In what ways do we try to justify ourselves while living in sin? In what way must we “die to the law in order to live for Christ?” vs.19 What does it mean for you to be “crucified with Christ?” vs.20 What does it mean for you to “live for Christ?”

Day Seven – Your Life Group meets today!