

FAITH beyond BELIEF

SESSION 2

Sharing Life (20 minutes)

Gather: Re-introduce yourselves as you gather. Welcome any new members to your Life Group and invite them to introduce themselves and share basic information. Add names to your roster and group email as necessary.

Discuss: Your *Personal* Life Application Challenge for the past week was to establish the discipline of daily devotions. How did you do? Did you complete all six daily readings and take time for reflection and prayer? If not, what got in your way? What time of the day worked best for you? Did you have your devotional time alone or with someone else? How did God speak to you? What will be the benefit of continuing this daily discipline?

Your *Group* Life Application Challenge included getting to know each other's names. Why are names so important? You are encouraged to keep working at it by adding the names of your Life Group member's children to your memory as well.

(Did you take the *Faith Beyond Belief* Optional Challenge? You will be so blessed to read Ed Silvano's book, "Transformation," during the course of this Life Group series. It will inspire and encourage you even more.

Pray Together: Dear God, Thank you for bringing our Life Group back together today. Thank you for the opportunity to grow together as brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank you for your Word which is the firm foundation upon which we are committed to build our lives. Thank you for the gift of prayer and the opportunity to communicate with you about every aspect of our lives. Please come and preside among us now. Guide us by the power of your Holy Spirit that we might continue to be transformed and used as instruments of transformation in the world around us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Transformed Thinking

(30 minutes)

“Discipling Nations”

Read: During this Faith Beyond Belief series we will be considering “5 Biblical Paradigms of Nation Transformation.” They will be the topic of each Sunday sermon and will be reviewed as part of the Transformed Thinking section of each Life Group session.

These paradigms are taught by Ed Silviso in his book, “Transformation” (Regal Books, 2007). The “5 Biblical Paradigms of Nation Transformation” that we will be considering are:

1. The Great Commission is about discipling nations, not just individuals.
2. The marketplace (the heart of the nation) has already been redeemed by Jesus and now must be reclaimed by His followers.
3. Every Christian is a minister, and labor is worship.
4. Our primary call is to take the kingdom of God to where the kingdom of darkness is entrenched in order for Jesus to build His Church.
5. The premier social indicator that transformation has taken place is the elimination of systemic poverty.

These five paradigms represent biblical themes found throughout the Bible that have been ignored, misunderstood or misapplied by the Church. They represent necessary “paradigm shifts” that must take place in us and in the Church in order for sustained transformation to take place in our world.

A “paradigm” is a framework for understanding the world. A “paradigm shift” takes place when we are led to “believe, think and act” in a new way. It’s like putting on a pair of glasses that helps us see the world through God’s eyes. These five biblical paradigms are helping the Christian Church develop a “worldview” that is necessary to bring transformation to every part of this world that God loves.

John 3:16-17 is considered by many to be the most famous passage in the Bible:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

Discuss: What “view of the world” is described in these verses? In what ways did Jesus’ life, death and resurrection lead to a “paradigm shift” in the world of religion 2,000 years ago?

Read: Approximately 1500 years after the time of Christ, the Christian Church was challenged to move beyond religious teaching and return to the central truth of God’s Word. Passages like *Ephesians 2:8-9* led to reformation and renewal:

“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.”

Discuss: How did the rediscovery of this biblical truth cause a “paradigm shift” in the way people approached their relationship with God?

Read: The Great Commission represents Jesus’ “marching orders” for the Church and for every disciple. Let’s look closely at his words from *Matthew 28:18-20*:

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

Discuss: Who gave the Great Commission? Is the Great Commission for every Christian? What action steps are included in the Great Commission? What “power” and “comfort” are given to help us accomplish it?

Read: In the Great Commission Jesus tells us to **“Go!”** The Gospel of God’s love in Jesus Christ is not only Good News for individuals. It’s Good News for the whole world and everything in it! The meaning of this big **“Go”** is “as you go through life... as you live your life.” There is no “on” and “off” switch when it comes to our Christian witness. Wherever we go and whatever we do, we are sent in Jesus’ name! The Great Commission not only challenges us to **“Go,”** it also tells us **“how to go.”**

First, we **“baptize”** in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This implies everything we have traditionally associated with evangelism; including bringing people into the family of God through the proclamation of the Gospel and a response of faith in Jesus Christ. While there are various teachings on baptism within the Christian Church, baptism is always associated with forgiveness, belonging, the promise of salvation and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is not about a ceremony. It’s about a relationship.

Second, we **“teach”** everything that Jesus taught. This implies ongoing biblical instruction and real-life application to help new believers grow into transformed followers of Christ. When this process of growth takes place, the Great Commission becomes cyclical. In other words, transformed followers continue to “go” and “grow” and reach others. This is God’s plan to expand the Christian Church and reach the whole world.

Discuss: What might happen in your nation if every Christian disciple began to apply the full meaning of **“Go, Baptize, and Teach?”**

Read: The heart of the Great Commission tells us *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...” Matthew 28:19a* The Greek word for nations is “ethnos.” It is the word from which we get words like “ethnicity.” It means “people groups,” which form cultures and nations. Nations are made up of every aspect of society including business, education and government. If we embrace the fullest meaning of Jesus’ words, our understanding of the Great Commission will move beyond just “saving souls” to consider what it means to “disciple nations.” Therefore, this week’s theme focuses on Transformation Paradigm #1:

“The Great Commission is about discipling nations, not just individuals.”

Discuss: Describe some aspects of your nation that need to be transformed. How does Transformation Paradigm #1 broaden your thinking about the Great Commission?

Quote:

“The expression ‘discipling nations’ is at first hard to grasp, but basically it means teaching a nation what Jesus taught us for the purpose of causing it to embrace the goodness of God and to reflect the character of Christ.”
(Silvoso, Transformation, p.123)

Read: Is there evidence that nations can be discipled? Note the early biblical evidence of the wide-spread impact of the Great Commission:

“You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching...” Acts 5:28 (A city is reached by Peter and the Apostles.)

“This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the Word of the Lord.” Acts 19:10 (A large region is reached through the ministry of Paul.)

“So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.” Romans 15:19b (Paul had saturated those areas from Jerusalem to Italy with the full Gospel.)

“But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain.” Romans 15:23-24a (Paul sets his sites on another nation.)

“The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it... the glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.” Revelation 21:24, 26 (The end-times procession includes nations.)

Read: How can I begin to disciple my nation? In *Acts 1:8*, Jesus broke it down into an action plan that starts first in your own city, then your region, then your nation and then to the nations of the world. He said,

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Discuss: Write down your personal application of these instructions:

My Jerusalem (city) is:

My Judea (region) is:

My Samaria (nation) is:

My “ends of the earth” is:

Share several responses in your group.

In the next section, we will see that we can begin to fulfill the Great Commission even as we reach out to those within our “Circles of Influence.” How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time!

Quote:

“To disciple someone means to turn that person into a follower of the teachings you espouse. In the case of a nation, it means to impact its life so that it will conform to a set of specific values and develop a corresponding behavior.... the issue is not whether a nation can be disciplined, because it happens all the time and it will continue to happen. The question is, can a nation be impacted in such a way that it will become a disciple of Jesus? Can His teachings impregnate its people and its institutions so that the nation will reflect the character of Christ?” (Silvoso, Transformation, p.42)

Summary:

- A “Paradigm Shift” represents a change in the way we view our world... and a corresponding change in the way we “believe, think and act.”
- The Great Commission is given to every believer by Jesus.
- We are told to “Go, Baptize and Teach” with the power and presence of Christ.
- There is biblical evidence for the discipling of nations.
- A disciplined nation will reflect the character and values of Christ.
- One day the glory and honor of disciplined nations will parade before the Lord!

Transformed Living

(30 minutes)

“Prayer Evangelism and You”

Read: The evidence of transformation can be seen by others when our faith and core beliefs become a part of our everyday lifestyle. Just as the “5 Paradigms” will lead to **Transformed Thinking**, the “Principles of Prayer Evangelism” will lead to **Transformed Living**. The principles of Prayer Evangelism are taught by Ed Silvano in his book, “Prayer Evangelism” (Regal Books, 2000).

Discipling nations can sound overwhelming, but what if you could learn to disciple your family, school, workplace or neighborhood? Prayer Evangelism provides a biblical and relational approach to evangelism and discipleship that every Christian can implement as a daily lifestyle.

If you are like so many Christians today, the words “prayer” and “evangelism” may fill you with apprehension and fear. Yes, many Christians are concerned that they won’t have the right words to pray, will say the wrong thing when trying to reach-out to others, or will come across as self-righteous and religious, or even worse, obnoxious and judgmental.

Discuss: Describe a fearful or negative experience that you may have had with either prayer or evangelism? What are some of the reasons that Christians can turn people off?

Read: In the past, prayer has usually been viewed as a good step of preparation before “going out to evangelize.” As you learn the principles of Prayer Evangelism you will discover that prayer and evangelism go hand-in-hand. In this biblical model, we don’t “go out” to evangelize. We recognize that we are witnesses “wherever we go!” An “evangel” is “one who brings Good News.” So, evangelism isn’t a job to be done but a lifestyle to be lived.

The “Principles of Prayer Evangelism” that you will learn and practice during the weeks ahead will not only alleviate your fears, they will help you see that when prayer and evangelism are combined, God gives extraordinary results. Prayer has the potential to change the “spiritual climate” in your city, literally turning the hearts of the people toward God.

Discuss: How would you describe the “spiritual climate” in your city or geographic area? Is it characterized by the presence of God? Is there an openness to discussions of faith in schools, businesses and government? Are the churches perceived as “alive and active” in the affairs of your city? Is there evidence of answered prayer? Do drugs, gangs, violence and corruption create an atmosphere of fear and control in your city? Are you aware of false religions, witchcraft, and other competing spiritual influences?

Read: The transformation of our cities and nations begins when Christians claim their spiritual authority in Christ and pray together in unity. The Apostle Paul describes the spiritual battle in *Ephesians 6:12*:

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

In *verse 13* he tells us how to win!

“Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”

The “full armor of God” is described in terms of truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. But then in *verse 18* he says,

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayer and requests. With this in mind be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

Prayer is our most powerful weapon in the Spirit! And the greater the level of unity within the whole family of God, the more powerful are our prayers to change the “spiritual climate” in our cities.

In *Psalms 133* King David declares, *“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity... for there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forever more.”*

In *John 17:23* Jesus prays to his heavenly Father for unity among both believers and those yet to believe *“to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”*

In the Lord’s Prayer, *Matthew 6:10*, Jesus teaches us to pray for the same victory on earth that has already been won in heaven. *“... your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”*

That’s why prayer and evangelism must always go together. We must win the “air war” before we send in the “ground troops.” We must declare together in unity, “Satan, you are not welcome here!” By doing battle first in the spiritual realm, we will see the “spiritual climate” change and the gates opened to the transformation of our cities and nations in the physical realm. That’s why Prayer Evangelism starts by **“talking to God about our neighbors before we talk to our neighbors about God.”**

Discuss: Why is it so important that prayer and evangelism are connected together? Why do you think that it pleases God when “brothers and sisters” pray together in unity?

Read: The primary Bible text for Prayer Evangelism is *Luke 10:1-9*. Read it together as a Life Group.

“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. ² He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. ³ Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. ⁴ Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

⁵ When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ ⁶ If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not it will return to you. ⁷ Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. ⁸ When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God is near you.’”

Discuss: (verses 1-4) How many disciples were sent? Why two-by-two? What was their mission? Were they going to friendly territory? Why do you think the Lord was so emphatic about the harvest being plentiful in those “towns and places?” How were they to travel? Why? In what ways is the “harvest plentiful” today?

Read: (verses 5-9) There are four key steps to Prayer Evangelism. They are interconnected, and to be most effective, must be applied in the order that they are given as we reach-out to others. They are:

1. **Bless:** speak peace to people and systems in your sphere of influence. (vs. 5-6)
2. **Fellowship:** build relationships with those outside the kingdom of God. (vs. 7-8)
3. **Minister:** respond to their felt needs in the name of Jesus. (vs. 9a)
4. **Proclaim:** announce that the kingdom of God has come near and is available to them through Jesus Christ. (vs. 9b)

The failure of many of our Christian evangelistic efforts today is that we begin with the fourth step, telling the Good News of Christ, without having established any relationship, credibility or trust with those we are trying to reach. As a result, the message of Christ is often misunderstood or rejected and we may appear to be unnatural and insensitive.

Quote:

“Preaching the truth without love is like giving someone a good kiss when you have bad breath. No matter how good your kiss is, all the recipient will remember is your bad breath!” (Silvoso, Prayer Evangelism, p.40)

Discuss: Why is a loving approach to Christian witness so important? It is stated that the steps of Prayer Evangelism are interconnected - they progressively relate to one another. Why might this be important in how the message of Christ is ultimately received?

If the Great Commission of Matthew 28 is the big “**GO**,” in what way is **Luke 10** the little “**go?**” In other words, how do Jesus’ instructions in **Luke 10** help us prepare for the big assignment of the Great Commission?

Read: Your **Circles of Influence** are those places where God has you most connected in relationship or activities with others right now. Examples may include: family, church group, community organization, sports team or hobby, extended family, service organization, co-workers, classmates, neighborhood association, etc. Some of these groups may only include a few people. Others may be quite sizeable. They all represent natural “connecting points” for implementing a lifestyle of Prayer Evangelism.

Think about your existing Circles of Influence. Start by identifying as many as you can. Then prioritize your top 3 Circles of Influence in terms of their importance in your life and write down the first names of some of the people in these groups.

My current Circles of Influence are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

My top three Circles of Influence are:

1.
Names:
2.
Names:
3.
Names:

Discuss: Briefly share your top 3 Circles of Influence with those in your Life Group (not the individual names).

Summary:

- Prayer Evangelism is not a program. It's a lifestyle.
- We must win the battle in the heavens before we can win it on the ground.
- Prayer Evangelism is not about bringing people into the kingdom of God. It's about taking the kingdom of God to them. (More to come!)
- If the Paradigms of Nation Transformation are "macro," the Principles of Prayer Evangelism are "micro."
- The steps of Prayer Evangelism can be naturally implemented by every believer within their unique Circles of Influence.

Life Application Challenges

(20 minutes)

Read: Your *Personal* Life Application Challenge is to intentionally pray for the people in your top three Circles of Influence by name every day during the coming week. Make a list of these names that you can post on your nightstand, bathroom mirror, refrigerator, car dash board, computer screen or some other visible location to remind you of this personal commitment to pray.

We will learn more about the biblical concepts of “blessing and speaking peace” during the next session. However, based on what you already understand, “pray in the Spirit” for your Circles of Influence during the coming week. These individuals and groups don’t need to know that you are praying for them yet. Just pray for them each day.

Your *Group* Life Application Challenge is to also pray in this same way for each person in your Life Group. You will discover that your Life Group will become another important Circle of Influence. The relationships you will establish with one another have the potential to be life-transforming. So, commit to praying for one another by name each day. You’ll be amazed at what God will do in your life and in the lives of your Life Group partners.

Your *Faith Beyond Belief* Optional Challenge this week is to expand your prayer list to include:

- pastors and churches in your city or region
- community leaders in your city, region, state/province or nation

Prayer Support

(15 minutes)

Take a few moments to bring updates, share answered prayers and new prayer requests within your group. 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)

Take a moment to confirm arrangements and share responsibilities for your next meeting.

Our next Life Group Session is:

Date:

Location:

Time:

Remember to bring:

Daily Devotions

Read: You are encouraged to build on your devotional discipline from Week One. Ask the Lord to help you overcome obstacles that may have kept you from cultivating a daily routine of 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. Be blessed!

Day One – I Corinthians 1:18-31

What “paradigm shift” is described in these verses? Is it still needed today? Why is “Christ crucified” a message for every person? For every nation? What evidence is there in this text that you are included in God’s plan of transformation?

Day Two – II Timothy 3:14-17

How have the scriptures helped make you more wise? Are you willing to believe verses 16 and 17 as truth for your life... and claim their promises as you share in this Faith Beyond Belief series?

Day Three – Matthew 7:24-29

What pressures have been beating against you lately? Does your foundation feel like rock or sand? Why is it important to not only hear Jesus’ words but put them into practice?

Day Four – James 5:13-20

When you encounter trouble, is your first reaction to worry or to pray? Why do we pray “in the name of the Lord?” Why is there a special blessing when believers pray together in unity? How could your prayers be more powerful and effective?

Day Five – Matthew 11:25-30

Why does God take “good pleasure” in revealing spiritual truth to those with child-like faith? What part of your life feels “weary and burdened” right now? How can you respond to Jesus’ invitation to “come to him, learn from him, and find rest in him?”

Day Six – Matthew 6:25-34

Reflect on the magnificent ways that God cares for His creation. On what basis does Jesus say, “Do not worry?” How might you “seek first his kingdom and His righteousness” for every aspect of your life today?

Day Seven – Your Life Group meets again!

