

FAITH beyond BELIEF

SESSION 4

Sharing Life (20 minutes)

Gather: Welcome your Life Group partners. As you gather, each take time to write your note of thanks, encouragement, prayer and blessing to your chosen community leader or organization on the card that has been prepared. You may have decided to send or deliver a card to more than one person or group. Complete this *Group Life Application Challenge* project together.

Discuss: Review your *Personal Life Application Challenges* from the past week related to Principle #1 of Prayer Evangelism: **“Bless: Speak peace to people and systems in your sphere of influence.”** Your challenges were to:

1. Intentionally “bless and speak peace” wherever you go.
2. Pray with someone from one of your “top three” Circles of Influence who you sense really needs the peace of God.
3. Be a peacemaker by asking forgiveness and making peace with someone from one of your “top three” Circles of Influence.

Please respond to any of the following questions. Read them together first.

- Did you complete all three challenges? Which of them was the most difficult and why?
- Did you experience any changes in your attitude towards people and places as you were intentional about “blessing and speaking peace” wherever you went? Describe.
- What was it like to pray with someone individually? How did they respond? Did they welcome your prayer of blessing and peace?
- Were you able to ask someone for forgiveness? Describe the situation without using names. What was the response?
- In what ways did you sense the Holy Spirit guiding you this past week as you applied Principle #1 of Prayer Evangelism in the marketplace of daily living?

Also, follow-up together on the second part of your *Group Life Application Challenge*. Take a moment to discuss the name and situation of a family or families that you have identified as ones that you could reach out to as a Life Group. Which aspect of “systemic poverty” appears to be most affecting them right now? Refer back to your notes from the previous session as needed. If you have been prompted to consider reaching out to several families, talk it through as a group and arrive at a consensus. You will come back to this discussion at the end of today’s session.

Name _____ Need _____

Name _____ Need _____

Name _____ Need _____

(Did you take the *Faith Beyond Belief* Optional Challenge to “prayer walk” your neighborhood or another part of your city? What did you do? What happened?)

Pray Together: Thank you, heavenly Father, for the courage and strength provided to each of our Life Group members to “bless and speak peace” to others this past week. Thank you for stretching us beyond our comfort zones to pray with someone and ask forgiveness of someone. We ask you to continue to change the spiritual climate in every area of our city and region so that they radiate the glory and presence of Christ. Pierce through the darkness and open people’s hearts to receive Christ. We welcome you again to preside at this meeting and by the power of your Holy Spirit to be at work transforming us. We desire to be your servants in transforming the world. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Transformed Thinking

(30 minutes)

“Marketplace Ministry

Read: This week’s theme focuses on Transformation Paradigm #3

“Every Christian is a minister, and labor is worship.”

Have you noticed? Every one of the “5 Biblical Paradigms of Nation Transformation” takes the Church of Jesus Christ out into the community, into the marketplace of daily life. Christianity was never meant to be contained within the four walls of the local congregation. We are a missionary Church. The most dynamic word in the Great Commission is the word, **“Go!”**

When many of us **“Go,”** we **“go to work.”** The workplace is one of our primary Circles of Influence. Today, more than ever before, the Church is recovering a recurring theme in the scriptures that “every Christian is a minister, and labor is worship.” Christians are intentionally bringing God’s power and presence into their workplace. They are enthusiastically declaring, “My work is my ministry!” As a result, the marketplace is being transformed!

Equally exciting is the fact that in Transformation Churches around the world, “pulpit ministers” are coming to see that “marketplace ministry” is not a threat to the church, but a natural and necessary expression of the fullness of the “body of Christ.” Old barriers are coming down between “clergy and laity,” “sacred and secular.” Transformation Churches are making it a priority to train, equip, commission and release their members to be ministers in the marketplace of everyday life.

Discuss: What percentage of Christians in your local congregation do you think understand that their calling is to be a minister 24/7? In your view, why have we tended to separate our work from what we consider sacred?

Read: In his book, “Transformation,” Ed Silvano describes “four lethal misconceptions” that have been perpetuated down through Church history. (Summary of pp.67-68) They all represent non-biblical views. Thankfully, they are being countered today by a recovery of the biblical “paradigms and principles” that are a part of this Faith Beyond Belief series. The four misconceptions are:

- **There is a God-ordained division between clergy and laity.** Those who want to really serve the Lord must quit their “day job” and go into “full-time ministry.”
- **The church is designed to operate primarily inside a building, often referred to as the sanctuary, and mostly on Sundays.** Those who are truly faithful will give more of their time, talent and resources to the ministries that happen within the local congregation.

- **Marketplace ministers are not as spiritual as pulpit ministers, mostly because they hold a job in the marketplace.** The marketplace is corrupted by sin so that work that is done there can never be as holy or pleasing to God as work that is done within the local congregation.
- **The primary role of Christians in the marketplace is to make money to fund the vision of those in the pulpit.** This money is tainted but it can be redeemed when it is given to the local congregation or other worthy Christian ministries.

Discuss: Which of these four misconceptions has had the greatest impact on you?

Read: Approximately 500 years ago, Martin Luther described what is called the “Priesthood of All Believers” as he taught from *I Peter 2:4-5, 9*:

“As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

As a “redeemed, reconciled, and reclaimed” child of God, you are chosen to be a “living stone” in the spiritual house that is made up of all believers around the world. Every stone is equally important although each stone holds a different place and serves a different function.

You have been given a mission – to declare the praises of him who *“called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”* Certainly it’s a good thing to declare these praises during Sunday morning worship among our fellow believers.

However, transformation increases exponentially when these same praises are declared from Monday through Saturday to a world that has yet to hear the Good News. We declare these praises through our work and the testimony of our daily lives when we come to understand our calling as “ministers in the marketplace.”

Discuss: Contrast the difference between a local church characterized by “dead stones” and one made up of “living stones.” What is the difference in the spiritual climate? What is the difference in attitude towards the world?

Quote:

“God destined us to be His ministers. Today the word “minister” is associated exclusively with religious, liturgical matters. But a minister is simply someone who looks after, cares for, or tends to, something or someone. A waiter, a doctor, a lawyer or a taxi driver is a minister, because through the services they render, they minister to people’s needs. By carrying out God-given assignments, humans minister to Him and to those who benefit from such tasks, including the earth itself.”
(Silvoso, Transformation, p.99)

Read: Just like those “living stones,” pulpit and marketplace ministers have the same calling to serve Christ, just different functions. Paul describes this relationship in *Ephesians 4:11-13*:

“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 whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

The role of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers is ultimately to equip every Christian for “works of service.” Do we really believe that this service occurs only within the walls of the local congregation? Of course not! These “works of service” are performed every day of the week as marketplace ministers bring their faith to work.

By allowing God to transform our thinking about ministry, the whole Church is coming alive. The people of God are being released to be used by the Spirit to transform their Circles of Influence, even cities and nations. The goal is unity and maturity in the whole “body of Christ.” It takes the whole church to reach the whole city!

Discuss: What are some ways that pulpit and marketplace ministers could partner together more effectively in your local congregation? In your city or region?

Read: When we understand that we have been sent to serve in the “vineyard” of the marketplace with the authority of the Master, our daily work becomes fertile ground for transformation. It even becomes an expression of worship! Let the testimony of God’s Word transform your thinking and confirm in your heart that **“Every Christian is a minister, and labor is worship.”** Underline some phrases that especially inspire you to offer your work as worship.

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts – to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.’ Exodus 31:1-5 (The Spirit of God enables exceptional craftsmanship.)

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” Colossians 3:23-24 (Imagine how both our attitude and the excellence of our work would change if we took the Apostle Paul’s admonition to heart and did our work as a service offered to the Lord.)

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability.”

Matthew 25:14-15 (Each of us is given “talents” from the Lord. The one who is rewarded and considered faithful is the one who does something with them.)

“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.”

Romans 12:1 (Worship is a lifestyle that involves everything that we are and have - Sunday morning is the kick-off celebration for worship that continues in our lives throughout the week.)

“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:16 (Our good works cause others to praise the Lord.)

“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

I Peter 2:12 (Our “good work” is an important part of our testimony.)

Discuss: Some common elements of worship in local congregations today include confession and forgiveness, praise and thanksgiving, Word and Sacrament, tithes and offerings, meditation and prayers. Describe how these same elements could be expressed through one’s daily work and creatively incorporated into a lifestyle of marketplace ministry so that our work truly becomes worship.

Quote:

“In the same manner that a pastor would never envision church ministry without worship, when Christians in the marketplace realize that they are ministers, worship is incorporated into their work routine in the most natural form.” (Silvoso, Transformation, p.103)

Summary:

- The “paradigms and principles” all propel the church out into the marketplace of daily living.
- Several lethal misconceptions have perpetuated a separation between clergy and laity, sacred and secular. These must be ended in order for the Church to fulfill its mission.
- Every believer is called to be a minister, and like “living stones,” is being built into a spiritual house that glorifies God.
- Pulpit and marketplace ministers have the same calling to serve the Lord and must partner more effectively in order for transformation to come to cities and nations.
- Labor is worship when our work is done in service to the Lord.

Transformed Living

(30 minutes)

“Fellowship and Build Relationships”

Read: Let’s move again from the “big picture” biblical paradigm shifts that are needed for sustained transformation in churches, cities and nations, to the practical implementation represented by a lifestyle of Prayer Evangelism. The four key steps as taught by Jesus in *Luke 10*, 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*)

In this session we will focus on Principle #2 and the importance of building relationships with those outside the kingdom of God. In *Luke 10:7-8*, Jesus says,

“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. When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you.”

Discuss: What makes for a good house guest? Describe a good guest you have had in your home... and one that was not so good. What was the difference?

Read: By establishing a relationship with pre-Christians, we gain the opportunity to demonstrate unconditional love by accepting them just as they are instead of how we wish they would be. Jesus showed kindness and respect to people from all walks of life, many who were way outside the boundaries of religious and cultural acceptance. Jesus was called a friend of sinners. By building relationships with those who may not know Christ in our Circles of Influence, we are communicating that we too are a “friend who can be trusted.”

In our *Luke 10:7-8* passage, Jesus gives several important directions for developing this kind of relationship:

- *“Stay in that house... do not move around.”* Strong relationships take time, effort, patience and persistence. Consider the time and effort that you give to relationships with your Christian friends. Are you investing similarly in the lives of non-Christian friends?
- *“Eat and drink whatever they give you... eat what is set before you.”* Good relationships require both giving and receiving. When you receive a meal, a gift, or a kindness from an unbeliever, you demonstrate that you value their friendship and

that fellowship is a two-way street. Of course, invite that person to your home as well or find another creative way to demonstrate that you care.

- ***“When you enter a town and are welcomed...”*** Be a good guest. A good guest is attentive to the host, engaged and involved in the concerns of the household or family, appreciative and thankful for the hospitality being extended.

In today’s world, these directions may apply more readily to relationships being developed through a workplace team, a neighborhood picnic, parents of a youth sports team, a community organization, a local charity or a company golf outing. The point is to look for opportunities to build bridges into the lives of those who don’t yet know Christ or have been turned-off by traditional evangelism.

Discuss: Tell about a person who built a relationship with you prior to your becoming a Christian or someone that impacted you as a newer believer. How did they demonstrate the unconditional love of Christ?

Read: What does the Bible say about building relationships with those outside the kingdom of God? Underline all the people and groups that we are to love.

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments...are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” Romans 13:8-10
(Love of neighbor, church or unchurch, is the supreme commandment.)

“Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” Hebrews 13:1-3 (God has surprises in store for those who open their lives to strangers.)

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” James 1:27 (Those with true faith always advocate for the weak and vulnerable in society... and even those with “orphaned spirits.”)

“We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.” I John 4:19-21 (Our relationship with Christ is vertical... directed to God, and horizontal... directed to others. These two aspects of faith must always go together.)

Discuss: Who are named in these verses among the people and groups that we are to love? What do you notice about them? What is one debt that we can never repay? Why? Why is building relationships with those outside the kingdom of God so important to reaching Jesus' goal of "saving everything that is lost?"

Summary:

- Building relationships with pre-Christians starts by simply loving them with the unconditional love of God.
- Building relationships with those that don't yet know the Lord requires time and is a two-way street of giving and receiving.
- We don't have to "fix" people in order to be their friend.
- Trust must be established before our words and witness will be accepted.
- This principle of building relationships with those outside the kingdom of God will move us beyond our religious comfort zone. It requires Faith Beyond Belief.
- Becoming "other centered" leads to Transformed Living.

Life Application Challenges

(20 minutes)

Read: Your *Personal* Life Application Challenge this week is to intentionally seek to build relationships by initiating conversations with three different people in your Circles of Influence that you don't know that well yet.

You may think in advance about who these people might be but also pray that the Holy Spirit will lead you. Let the conversations happen naturally but be conscious of asking the kinds of questions that will help you get to know someone better. Questions may include (phrased more naturally and appropriate to the situation): "What is your name? Where do you live? Who is a part of your family? What do you do for work? Where do you enjoy traveling? What are your favorite sports, hobbies or ways of spending your time?"

Remember that building friendships is a two-way street. Don't just bombard the person with one question after another. Respond to questions yourself. Be authentic and revealing and help the person get to know you too. You will find that as you reach-out to people you don't know that well, and trust the Lord to lead you, your confidence will grow. Just be yourself and let the love of Christ shine through!

As these conversations take place during this coming week, record the name of the person here along with some of the things you learn about them. This will help you remember these details for further relationship building in the future.

Conversation #1 – Name _____

Conversation #2 – Name _____

Conversation #3 – Name _____

Pause now. Pair up with someone in your Life Group. Pretend that you are just getting to know them and "role play" a conversation utilizing the questions mentioned above. Each take a turn. This will help you prepare to initiate these three new conversations this week with people from your Circles of Influence. Take five minutes each for this exercise.

Your *Group Life Application Challenge* is to plan a Life Group fellowship event that can reach-out to and include the family or families that you identified earlier that are dealing with some aspect of “systemic poverty” i.e. spiritual, relational, motivational or material.

The sky is the limit. Get creative. What might be a fun and easy event that would allow you to develop relationships with this family or the families that you have chosen? A cook-out? A games night with the kids included? A special event already going on at church or in the community? A sporting event? Pick something that will make them feel welcome and not out of place.

Talk it through as a Life Group and see if you can come up with a date to “go for it” with minimal effort within the next 7 - 10 days. Of course, this will require checking with the family or families and being certain that they can attend the event. If they are coming from one of your personal Circles of Influence, hopefully you have already been praying for them, speaking peace and blessing them, and building a relationship with them. This may well be one of the three conversations you will initiate during the week as described earlier. You will be the lead person to make the first contact for your Life Group and extend the invitation.

Brainstorm fellowship event ideas right now as a group: _____

Group Choice: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

Who will ask the family or families to come to the fellowship event? How will it be confirmed with the whole Life Group? _____

Who will coordinate other event details for your Life Group? _____

Your *Faith Beyond Belief* Optional Challenge this week is to intentionally reach-out and build a stronger relationship with someone in your neighborhood, workplace, city or region. Ideas may include:

- Take someone new from your workplace out to lunch and spend some time getting to know them.
- Make a phone call to someone just to say, “How are you doing? I was thinking about you today.”
- Stop by a business you patronize and introduce yourself to the owner. If it’s appropriate, ask them how you could pray for their business.
- Call your child’s teacher and tell them how much you appreciate them.
- Invite one of your neighbors over for a cup of coffee just to hear about their recent vacation or newest grandchild.
- Send an email to a community leader congratulating them on a recent accomplishment.

Prayer Support

(15 minutes)

Take a few moments to bring updates, share answered prayers as well as new prayer requests within your group. Write them down here:

Now, close with a prayer for these needs and agree to pray for each other throughout the week.

Details

(5 minutes)

Finalize any details with the Host/Leader and Life Group.

Our next Life Group Session is:

Date:

Location:

Time:

Remember to bring:

Daily Devotions

Read: How are you doing with your Daily Devotions? Are you setting aside a regular time each day, or squeezing them in when you can? Don't give up! 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. These passages build on the lesson you have just completed. Read the scripture. Reflect on the questions. Pray as God leads you. Enjoy this special time with the Lord!

Day One – John 1:35-51

How did relationships form between Jesus and his disciples? Who might you invite to “come and see” Jesus in a new way? Have the heavens opened for you lately? What has God shown you?

Day Two – Romans 12:9-16

Which qualities described here do you consider most important in building strong relationships with others? What are several of your favorite ways of practicing hospitality? Why do real friends both rejoice and mourn with one another?

Day Three – I John 4:7-12

In what ways does God's love compel us to love one another? Which verse parallels John 3:16? Reflect on ways that God's love is becoming more complete in you?

Day Four – John 15:1-17

Describe some ways that you are seeking to stay connected to Christ like a vine and branches. Why does Jesus want you to “bear much fruit” as his disciple? How does building relationships with non-believers require that you “lay down your life?”

Day Five – I Corinthians 11:23-34

What does the Lord's Supper teach you about fellowship and building relationships with others? How does “recognizing the body of the Lord” contribute to building up the Church?

Day Six – Ephesians 5:21-33

Why is mutual submission “out of reverence for Christ” so important in a happy, healthy marriage? In what ways are you trying to “feed and care” for your spouse? How does this passage relate to other relationships? The whole Church?

Day Seven – Your Life Group meets again! Yahoo!