

FAITH beyond BELIEF

SESSION 6

Sharing Life (20 minutes)

Gather: Greet and check-in with your Life Group partners.

Discuss: Review your *Personal Life Application Challenge* from the past week related to Principle #3 of Prayer Evangelism, “**Minister: Respond to their felt needs in the name of Jesus.**” Your challenge was to go deeper by intentionally responding to a “felt need” of at least one of the three people with whom you’ve been building a relationship from your Circles of Influence. You were also to record the highlights of your experience.

Find a partner in your Life Group and take turns telling briefly about **one** of your three experiences. Then ask each other a couple of follow-up questions from the list below. Before you pair up, read the questions first.

- Who was the person to whom you reached out? Were they one of the three people with whom you were building a relationship? Someone new?
- How did you learn about their “felt need?”
- What was the reaction of the person when you offered to help meet their need?
- What did you do to respond to their need? How much effort did it require?
- Were you able to pray for the “felt need” with the person?
- Have you or the other person been able to see God at work answering your prayers?
- How did responding to this person’s “felt need” help strengthen your relationship with them? Has it created any opportunities yet to share more about the love of God and what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?
- What might be your next steps in reaching out to this person?
- In what ways did you sense the Holy Spirit guiding you this past week as you applied Principle #3 of Prayer Evangelism within your Circles of Influence?

Your *Group Life Application Challenge* was to respond as a Life Group to at least one significant “felt need” of the family or families with whom you’ve been building relationships. If you have completed this group challenge, review its impact together using the same list of questions from above.

If this group project is still a “work in progress,” take stock of where you are at and discuss your next steps. _____

Your *Faith Beyond Belief* Optional Challenge this week was to respond to a “felt need” in your city or region. Did you take the challenge? What did you do? What happened?

Pray Together: Dear Lord, thanks for the privilege of gathering once again with these friends and partners in transformation. Thanks for giving us your courage and grace to “minister and respond to felt needs” this past week. We ask that you would continue to provide miraculously for the needs of the individuals and families that you have placed on our hearts. We offer ourselves to be your “hands and feet” to those around us every day. Help these steps of Prayer Evangelism become a lifestyle that will transform the very way we believe, think and act. Please guide us now as we continue to learn and grow as your disciples. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Transformed Thinking

(30 minutes)

“Systemic Poverty”

Read: This week’s theme focuses on Transformation Paradigm #5:

“The premier social indicator that transformation has taken place is the elimination of systemic poverty.”

One of the great giants of darkness in our world today is poverty and the systems of poverty that perpetuate it. In order for transformation to truly impact cities and nations, the Church of Jesus Christ must rise up “in the power of the Spirit” and put an end to this manifestation of evil.

Listen to what Jesus announces in his first public statement. After his baptism and temptation in the wilderness he returns to Galilee and his home town of Nazareth “in the power of the Spirit.” He goes to the synagogue as was his custom. As he stands up to read, the scroll of Isaiah is handed to him. Unrolling it, he turns to *Isaiah 61* and reads these words:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Luke 4:18-19

Then Jesus rolls up the scroll and sits down. With everyone’s eyes pinned on him, he makes this amazing statement.

“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Luke 4:21

Did you catch the significance? Of all the Old Testament prophecies that Jesus could have chosen to introduce his life and ministry, he chooses one that announces Good News to the poor. This theme continues everywhere he goes. Jesus is the one who will do what no politician or program can do by bringing Good News to the poor, transformation from the bondage of poverty into abundance and true freedom. As disciples of Christ, we are now called to carry this message! Thus, our 5th Paradigm of Nation Transformation is: **“The premier social indicator that transformation has taken place is the elimination of systemic poverty.”**

“Social indicator” means that there will be visible evidence of this transformation in society. “Systemic poverty” means the “root causes” that keep people in poverty.

Discuss: What are the effects of poverty that we see in our world today? Where is this “giant” holding a grip in your city or region?

Read: Why must the Church of Jesus Christ respond to the issue of poverty in our world? First, because Jesus came to bring Good News to the poor. Second, because there is no greater “felt need” in our world today. And third, because this problem is so large that it can only be solved with God.

This was the witness of the early Church and it was like a magnet that drew people into the kingdom of God.

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”
Acts 2:44-46

From the very beginning of the early Church, we see “systemic poverty” being dismantled. The rich and the poor, “all the believers,” shared what they had together. They did so not only with their fellow Christians but with “*anyone as he had need.*” This resulted in the favor of “all the people” and led to many more being saved.

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.”
Acts 4:32-35

Unity in the early Church opened their eyes to see one another’s needs. It allowed them to hold their possessions lightly and give generously. It led to an outpouring of grace and provision so that “*there were no needy persons among them.*”

From these passages alone we can draw two very important conclusions about the reality of a transformed world. First, because we live in a sinful and broken world there will always be “**people with needs.**” But second, because of Jesus Christ and his Church, we can believe and work for the day when there will be “**no needy persons among us.**” The end of “systemic poverty” will therefore be a visible sign of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. This is the vision of Paradigm #5 and it is solidly rooted in scripture.

Discuss: What can the Christian Church of today learn about poverty from the response of the early church? Where have we come up short?

Read: One of the greatest misconceptions about poverty in our world is that poverty is primarily material in nature. In fact, many of us, including Christians, experience various kinds of poverty. Until we come to recognize that we are all poor in different ways, and that there is much we can learn from each other, we will never be motivated to tackle the issues of “systemic poverty.”

In his book, “Transformation,” Ed Silvano provides a definition of poverty based on a key phrase in the Lord’s Prayer. The words are, **“Give us today our daily bread.” Matthew 6:11** Poverty may therefore be defined as “lacking our daily bread” and “systemic poverty” as the “structures that perpetuate this lack of provision.” On this basis, we can identify four kinds of poverty that at one time or another afflict us all. (summary of pp.117-118)

1. **Spiritual poverty** afflicts those who don’t know that God is their father. They are not able to pray, **“Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name.” Matthew 6:9b** They are spiritual orphans. They believe that they are all alone, that God has judged or abandoned them, and that no one loves them. When trouble comes, they have no spiritual resources to draw upon.
2. **Relational poverty** encompasses those whose focus is on themselves at the expense of the community of which they are a part. They may have great wealth but still suffer from a lack of close relationships with family, friends and associates. Or, it can be a type of relational poverty born of true loneliness in the world. They are lacking the **“us”** and the **“our”** of **“Give us today our daily bread.” Matthew 6:11**
3. **Motivational poverty** is a state of hopelessness that engulfs those who have no adequate way, or means, or the confidence to tackle tomorrow’s challenges. **“Daily Bread”** is exactly that. It’s an ongoing occurrence. When people come under the grip of poverty, even when there is bread today, they have no hope that they will be able to provide for their needs tomorrow. This leads to anxiety, fear, insecurity and sometimes even greed.
4. **Material poverty** is the most obvious manifestation of poverty because it involves lacking the resources necessary to sustain life. In this context, **“Daily Bread”** may include food, water, clothing, housing and other essential resources. Material poverty always compromises people’s ability to focus on a spiritual life, relationships and motivation, because when you are hungry, you can’t think of anything else.

Discuss: How have you seen these four aspects of poverty manifest themselves in people’s lives? As the Lord leads, share which of these aspects of poverty has touched your life in the past or is still affecting you today? Describe how it feels? How does it help to understand poverty from this broader perspective?

Quote:

“The point is this: Poverty is not only the lack of something but also the fear of lacking something. One reason that poor people are kept poor is because those who control the marketplace live in emotional and spiritual poverty themselves, even though they are materially rich. Enough is never enough for them, and the resulting fear causes moral paucity. The result is that the rich get richer, through hoarding, but not happier or more fulfilled, and the poor are enchained to hopelessness. As a result, the future of the nation is mortgaged because its main assets – its people – have been bridled.” (Silvoso, Transformation, p.120)

Read: How can the Church of Jesus Christ be used by God to bring transformation to the issue of poverty in our world? It will require both a “personal response” and a “prophetic response.” When Jesus claimed for himself the words of Isaiah, *“The Spirit of the Lord has appointed me to preach good news to the poor,” (Luke 4:18a)* he was claiming a word for each of us who would one day become his followers. It is a word about our “personal response” to poverty. We can:

- recognize that we all experience different aspects of spiritual, relational, motivational and material poverty.
- choose to be “salt and light” to a dark and hurting world.
- respond to the “felt needs” of those around us and demonstrate the love of Jesus.

When Jesus declared, *“He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,” (Luke 4:18b-19)* he was claiming our “prophetic response” as a whole church to “systemic poverty.” We can:

- challenge the barriers and systems that keep people in poverty.
- choose to bring the kingdom of God to those places where the kingdom of darkness is entrenched.
- stand united in the Church to take on this giant of “systemic poverty.”

So, we will respond to “people’s needs,” but we will also work for the day when there will be “no needy persons among us.”

Discuss: How is God prompting you with both a “personal response” and a “prophetic response” towards the issue of poverty?

Read: One response to Paradigm #5 today is a movement by “Kingdom Companies” and “Transformation Churches” towards giving away 51% or more of their income to help alleviate “systemic poverty.” In doing so, these companies and churches are making a statement about their desire to make God the senior partner in their finances.

They are responding to *Matthew 6:21* where Jesus says, “*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*”

They are not only responding to “felt needs,” but they are addressing root issues like corruption and greed that have kept people in poverty for generations. They are connecting people and resources to transformation ministries that are impacting nations around the world. Their goal is to “give out” more than they keep for themselves, while truly becoming “Good News to the poor.”

Discuss: What would have to change for a company or a local congregation to give away 51% of their net profits or offerings? What might the benefits be of making such a commitment?

Quote:

“Systemic poverty is different from personal poverty in that it is something that most people are born into and their fate is dictated and controlled by it. Those who are not born into it are targets to be brought into it. That is why it must be eliminated – because it reflects a scheme that is diabolical in design and evil in its implementation. It deprives masses of people of their daily bread by stealing the fruit of their labor and keeping them in social misery.” (Silvoso, Transformation, p.116)

Summary:

- Poverty is perhaps the most visible manifestation of the “kingdom of darkness” in our world.
- Jesus announced “Good News” for the poor, meaning more than a daily hand-out, but freedom from the system of poverty that holds people in bondage.
- The early church was characterized by the fact that there were “no needy persons among them.”
- To end “systemic poverty” we must address the spiritual, relational, motivational and material aspects of poverty.
- Ending “systemic poverty” is not about programs but about Christians knowing who they are in Christ and becoming “salt and light” to a dark and hurting world.
- Perhaps the greatest testimony to the world that Jesus is “Good News” will be the elimination of “systemic poverty.” It will be the premier social indicator that transformation has taken place and that God’s kingdom has come.

Transformed Living

(30 minutes)

“Proclaim the Good News”

Read: Jesus taught the Principles of Prayer Evangelism to his disciples as he sent them out two-by-two. You have also been sent out in Jesus’ name. You carry with you the power and authority of the resurrected Christ. As you implement his teaching from *Luke 10* you will be the “hands and feet” of Jesus bringing Good News to the poor, whatever the need, whatever the spiritual condition. Let’s review:

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 #4** and the opportunity that we will have to proclaim the message of the Gospel, announcing that the kingdom of God has come near and is available to every person through Jesus Christ.

In *Luke 10:9b*, Jesus says, “*Tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near you.’*”

Discuss: How has the kingdom of God come near you? Turn to another person in your Life Group and share an experience you have had recently when you knew that the power and presence of God was at work in your life?

Read: You will remember that the kingdom of God refers to three things:

1. God’s Sovereignty!
2. The reality of Christ’s presence in the world and in us!
3. Future glory!

Take turns reading these verses out loud while underlining key words that further describe the meaning of the kingdom of God. If a verse really speaks to you... put a ✓ next to it.

“...Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.’”
Mark 1:14b-15 (The kingdom of God comes near in the person of Jesus Christ.)

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” *Matthew 6:33* (To seek the kingdom is to put Jesus first above all others.)

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’ Matthew 19:14 (The kingdom of God is received with child-like faith.)

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.” Luke 12:32 (The kingdom of God is a free gift.)

“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 1:13 (To enter the kingdom of God is to be brought from darkness to light.)

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Romans 14:17 (The kingdom of God is not about religion and rules but a relationship with a living Savior that fills us with the Spirit.)

“But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” Acts 8:12 (The Good News of the kingdom of God welcomes people into the family of God.)

“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.” Matthew 4:23 (The Good News of the kingdom includes the miracle-working power of God.)

(Jesus said) ***“‘Follow me.’ But the man replied, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ Still another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family.’ Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.’” Luke 9:59-62*** (The kingdom of God requires our full commitment as disciples.)

(Jesus said), ***“And the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Matthew 24:14*** (The gospel of the kingdom of God is a testimony to the nations and his disciples get to deliver it.)

Discuss: Of the verses you checked, which one speaks to you the most? Why? How might it speak to someone else needing to know that “God has come near?”

Read: There is great significance in Jesus' instructions:

“Tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near you.’” Luke 10:9b

Please notice that it is not your assignment to “bring somebody into the kingdom of God” or convince them that they are a sinner. Only God can transform a life. Your role is to demonstrate through both words and deeds that the kingdom of God has “come near” to them. In contemporary language you are declaring, “God is here! He loves you! Jesus is the way to know God personally.” As we come to understand this truth it will change the way we approach evangelism.

Too many traditional evangelism strategies are devoid of personal relationship, and in effect, require that we convince the person that they are sinful and going to Hell apart from the saving grace of Jesus Christ. This approach can feel coercive and unloving to the person on the receiving end.

Besides, Jesus declares that this “convincing” is the work of the Holy Spirit. In *John 16:7-11* he says:

“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer: and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”

This is Good News! We don't have to clean the fish before we catch them! As we apply the principles of Prayer Evangelism, our goal is to bring the love and presence of God to our new friends in such a personal and powerful way that a spiritual hunger rises up in them to know more.

They will have already seen and experienced God's love because we have shown it to them through our prayers, friendship and response to their needs. We will have shown them what the love of Jesus is all about.

When the Holy Spirit opens the door for proclamation to take place, in spiritual terms, we just step aside and say, **“Let me introduce you to my friend, Jesus.”** That's when our personal testimony of faith in Jesus Christ and the transformation he brings will be eagerly received.

Discuss: How do the principles of Prayer Evangelism differ from other approaches to evangelism that you have seen or experienced? Why is it so important that we connect prayer with every step of this process? In your view, what is the difference between evangelism when it is viewed as a program versus making Prayer Evangelism a lifestyle?

Quote:

“Once we have completed the first three steps – blessing, fellowship and taking care of their needs – leading our neighbors to the Lord becomes as easy as angling a whale in a swimming pool. You cannot miss because you have given them peace, which is what unbelievers lack the most; you have provided them with the most protective, healing fellowship they have ever enjoyed; and you have offered prayers for needs they feel very deeply and have not been able to meet on their own. Now it is very natural for them to ask, ‘Tell me, who is this God who loves me?’”
(Silvoso, Prayer Evangelism, p.47)

Summary:

- Prayer Evangelism represents a practical way for each person to implement the “5 Biblical Paradigms of Nation Transformation” within their own spheres of influence.
- The kingdom of God “comes near” as we experience the presence, power and unconditional love of Jesus in our lives.
- The key to Prayer Evangelism is that we first demonstrate the love of God, and then when it is experienced, give the credit where it belongs.

Life Application Challenges

(20 minutes)

Read: Your *Personal* Life Application Challenge this week comes in four parts:

1. You are to strengthen the key relationships that you have been developing within your Circles of Influence. Continue to pray. Continue to bless and speak peace. Continue to fellowship and deepen your relationships. Continue to respond to felt needs. Prayer Evangelism is a process, not a program. Be patient, loving and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you.
2. You are to write out a two-minute version of your personal testimony... your faith story. This will help prepare you to proclaim in your own words, ***“the kingdom of God has come near you.”*** It is important that every Christian can articulate what a relationship with Jesus Christ means to them. Some basic questions to consider as you write your testimony are:
 - What was going on in your life before you met Jesus?
 - How did you come to know and experience Jesus’ love and forgiveness?
 - What changed in your life when you put your trust in Christ?
 - What difference does being a follower of Jesus make today?
3. You are to find a friend, family member, or fellow Life Group member with whom you can practice sharing your testimony after you have written it out. This is to help you refine it, become confident in sharing your faith story and flexible in applying it appropriately and effectively in different situations.
4. You are to be open to sharing your testimony with any of the individuals or families with whom you have been implementing the principles of Prayer Evangelism. God will open the door when the time is right. You must be faithful and obedient to walk through it.

Your *Group Life Application Challenge* this week is to take these personal challenges and apply them to the family or families that you have been impacting as a Life Group.

There can be a tendency to pray, bless and speak peace, build relationships and respond to felt needs, and yet be reluctant to proclaim, ***“The kingdom of God has come near you.”*** The fear of rejection can rise up within us. We may be waiting for the “perfect moment” to share... and it never comes. Or we may wonder if we need to know the person longer or do more before they will truly be ready to receive the good news of the Gospel.

This is where we can trust that the Holy Spirit has been at work changing the spiritual climate from one of resistance to openness in those we have been befriending. We can claim the promise of ***II Peter 3:9*** which says,

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

So, be humble in how you present yourself, but be bold in the Lord as you share your testimony and invite others to trust in Christ.

Your *Faith Beyond Belief* Optional Challenge this week is to engage in a deeper way with the issues of “systemic poverty” in your city and region. Ideas for exploration of this issue may include:

- Help assemble a team of community leaders to begin to look at the issues of “systemic poverty” in your city or region.
- Meet with your pastor or a team of people to do a review of your church outreach programs. Ask, “Which of them responds to ‘felt needs’ and which of them is attempting to deal with ‘systemic’ issues related to poverty.” Is there a balance? Is any adjustment required to respond more effectively?
- Begin a discussion at your church or workplace about becoming a Transformation Church or Kingdom Company that has a goal of giving away more than it keeps. (Of course, this is just one aspect of the full meaning of these terms.)

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: Continue your Daily Devotions this week. Is God blessing you through this quiet time each day? Do you feel rushed and pressured to get them in, or are you growing in your appreciation of this time of reading, reflection and prayer? Below you will 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. Enjoy! This is about your relationship with Jesus!

Day One – John 14:1-7

In what way is trust in God the antidote for a troubled heart? Have you come to believe that Jesus is “the way and the truth and the life?” What are the implications of such a statement for your personal life? For your witness to others?

Day Two – Luke 10:17-24

On the basis of what authority did the disciples “trample on Satan?” Why was Jesus so full of joy over their discovery? How might this same revelation change your approach to life? Why do these promises give cause for hope of ending the bondage of “systemic poverty?”

Day Three – I Corinthians 1:4-9

Who do you especially thank God for in your life today? What spiritual gift has God been activating in your life recently? Reflect on how your fellowship with Jesus has been growing deeper?

Day Four – John 20:30-31

What part of Jesus’ life and teaching would you especially like to ask him about? What do Jesus’ “miraculous signs” reveal about him? What do you most enjoy sharing about “life in his name?”

Day Five – Romans 1:8-17

How have you been encouraged in your faith during this Faith Beyond Belief series? How have you been able to encourage others in your Life Group? In the Community? Have you become “more eager” to share the Good News? What are some of the blessings that come when you live by faith?

Day Six – Revelation 21:1-6

Reflect on the promises of eternal transformation that will take place at the second coming of Jesus. What does it mean to you to know that from “beginning to end” you serve a God who says, “I am making everything new.” What is he making new in you? In your family? In your church or community?

Day Seven – It’s that time! Enjoy meeting with your Life Group today!

