

Begin a New Life

Ongoing Support Group

"Topic" Meeting

90 Topics for Sharing & Discussion

1. Keeping the Process Going
How do you keep this process going and working in your life? What kind of maintenance does it require?
2. Spotting Sinfulness in a Physical Habit
Often in this program we are talking about destructive habits that are *spiritual* in nature, like anger, lust, greed, control, etc., and it's easy to see how these things are sins against God. But what if you're working on something more natural—like smoking, drinking, over-eating, biting your nails, etc.? It may not be as easy to see how habits like these are against God. What do you do in order to discover the sinful component in habits like these?
3. Use of the Worksheets
What is your experience of using the worksheets? How do you use them? When do you use them? When do you know it's time to "do" a new set?
4. Review of Worksheets
What is your experience of reviewing old sets of worksheets for an issue you're currently working on? Why do you review old worksheets in a situation like this? What value does reviewing old worksheets hold for you, or what does it accomplish? Also, when do you know that you are "done" with a set of worksheets, such that you're now ready to throw them out?
5. Grief
What is your experience of grief as you go through Step 1 and or Step 2 of this process? What impact does the experience have on you?
6. Best Session
What's the best session that you've ever had using the *BNL* process? Please describe. Or, if you can't think of a "best" session, describe one that was particularly memorable. What made it the "best" (or particularly memorable)? What did you gain from it?
7. Relationship with God
What does having a relationship with god mean to you? How has the *BNL* process impacted that relationship?
8. Relapse

- When a sin that you've repented of using the BNL process actually reoccurs in your life, a) what is your experience of recovering from it? and b) what is your experience of relationship with the Lord as you do so? In what way(s) do you seek to connect or reconnect with the Lord following actual reoccurrence of sin? What role has the reoccurrence of sin (a.k.a. "relapse") played in your life? What lessons have you learned from it? What good has come of it? What words of counsel would you give to someone who has just relapsed?
9. Moving On
How do you know when it's time to move on from working on one particular sin to working on another one? How do you accomplish moving on?
 10. Body Sensations
The human body often acts like radar or an early detection system for spiritual influences that flow into us. What is your experience of body sensations or body awareness relative to your use of the *BNL* process?
 11. Abstinence
What are some of the methods that you use for initially abstaining from sin? As time goes by, do these methods of abstinence change in any way? What gets added? What gets removed? Please explain.
 12. Warning Signs, Trigger Events, Early Detection
Let's say that you've been through the *BNL* process of change for one or another sin in your life; you've gone through the worksheets; you've been to Communion and felt the Lord's presence, help, and power; and you've seen yourself making progress in abstaining from your sin and beginning a new life. And now it is coming back and presenting itself you again. How do you *know* it's returning (i.e., how do you know when it's first trying to creep back into you)? What are the warning signs of its approach? Are there things that can happen which trigger its return? Are you able to tell when you are in a weakened state and therefore more susceptible to its return? Please explain. What do you do when you know you are in a weakened state?
 13. Justice, Mercy, Humility
It is written in the book of Micah: He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? What does this phrase from Old Testament scripture mean to you, or what opens up in you as you listen to it? Also, how does this scripture fit with your experience of the four universal steps of change?
 14. Answers to Prayer
What is your experience of receiving answers to prayer?
 15. Repenting in the Past

- (Note: This is a topic that people need to prepare for in advance.) Remember back to an earlier time in your life and use the worksheets to repent of something that you wanted to repent of then, as though you were that age again. Come to the next meeting ready to report on your experience of doing this.
16. A Happiest Period of Time in Your Life
Look back over your life and zero in on a time when you've felt the happiest. (Don't look for one specific event, rather, for a *period* of time in your life.) What factors contributed to that feeling of happiness?
 17. Your Experience of Using the Quick References to the Ten Commandments
(Note: This is a topic that people need to prepare for in advance.) Go through the process of repentance at home, being sure to use the *Quick References* to the Ten Commandments during Step 2; then come to the meeting prepared to talk about your experience of this.
 18. What You Love about the Process
What do you love about the *BNL* process? Please explain.
 19. Value in the Process
What do you get out of this process? In other words, what has this process *done* for you in the time that you've used it. Alternatively, what does it really *do* for you? Where does it "take you" that you haven't gone before, or what does it accomplish for you that you haven't been able to accomplish before? What does it make possible for you that wasn't possible before? Etc.
 20. Transition from Fear to Fun in Self Examination
What is your experience of transition from being afraid of what you will see during self examination to looking forward to it, feeling delighted by it, and feeling happy for what you see and discover?
 21. Getting to the Root of an Issue
What is your experience of getting to the root of an issue in your life, that is, discovering what the real issue is that you need to be looking at? What process do you go through to get there?
 22. How You See Other People
How has this process impacted the way you view other people?
 23. Mixed Motives
Note: This subject leads into the one that appears next on the list, titled, *Separating from the Past and Moving Forward into Greater States of Goodness and Truth*. Emanuel Swedenborg suggests that love is never 100% pure with any person: we are always acting from a mixture of motivations—some are more or less white, and others are more or less black, making for much of the "gray" that we experience in life. For this topic, you are in-

vited to sample the following paragraphs from the Swedenborg's theological writings, then come to the next meeting ready to discuss your experience of mixed motives in your life.

Mixed Motives

Jacob said to Laban, "I will pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted member of the flock" (Genesis 30:31-33). In this Scripture, "speckled" (or marked and dotted with black and white specks) means good with which evil has been mingled, and "spotted" means truth with which falsity has been mingled. These things serve in the introducing of genuine goods and truths.

But...this needs to be taken a little further. No pure good, or good with which evil is not mingled, exists with anyone. Neither does any pure truth, or truth with which falsity is not mingled, exist with him or her. This is because a person's will is nothing but evil, from which falsity is constantly passing into his understanding; for as is well known, he or she possesses by inheritance the evil that has been accumulated consecutively by his forefathers. From this inheritance he brings out evil into his own actions and makes it his own, adding further evil from himself to the inheritance. But the evils residing with a person are of various kinds. There are evils with which goods cannot be mingled and there are evils with which they can. And the same applies to falsities. If this were not so nobody could ever have been regenerated. The evils and falsities with which goods and truths cannot be mingled are ones that are contrary to love to God and love towards the neighbor - forms of hatred, revenge, and cruelty, and consequent contempt for others in comparison with oneself, and also consequent false persuasions. But the evils and falsities with which goods and truths can be mingled are ones that are not contrary to love to God and love towards the neighbor.

Take for example anyone who loves him- or herself more than others, and because of that love strives to excel others in private life and in public life, to excel them in knowledge and doctrine, and to be promoted to positions of greater importance than others, and also to greater affluence than others. If at the same time he or she acknowledges and adores the Lord, from the heart performs acts of kindness to the neighbor, and from conscience behaves justly and fairly, the evil that belongs to his self-love is such that good and truth can be mingled with it. For this is an evil which belongs to a person as his own and into which he is born by heredity. And to take that away from him suddenly would be to put out the fire of life that burns in him at first. But in the case of someone who loves himself more than others and because of that love despises others in comparison with himself, hates those who do not hold him in esteem and so to speak adore him, and therefore enjoys the feelings of hatred that are present in revenge and cruelty, the evil of that love is such that good and truth cannot be mingled with it because they are contraries.

Take as another example anyone who believes that he or she is pure from sins, and so is cleansed like somebody from whom dirt has been washed

away by means of much water, once he has repented and carried out the prescribed penances, or after he has made his confession and heard the confessor declare him free from sins, or after he has been to the Holy Supper. If he leads a new life, being stirred by an affection for good and truth, that falsity is such that good can be mingled with it. But if he goes on leading a carnal and worldly life as before, it is in that case a falsity with which good cannot be mingled. Also, with anyone who believes that a person is saved by virtue of believing what is good and not of willing it, and yet who does will what is good and therefore does it, that falsity is such that good and truth can be attached to it. But not so if he does not will what is good and therefore does not do it.

Take yet another example. If anyone does not know that a person rises again after death and consequently does not believe in the resurrection, or else if anyone who does know but nevertheless doubts or practically denies it, and yet each one leads a life of truth and goodness, good and truth can be mingled with that falsity also. But if a person leads a life of falsity and evil they cannot be mingled with that same falsity because they are contraries. The falsity destroys the truth, and the evil destroys the good. And still another example. Pretence and shrewdness which have a good end in view, whether the good of the neighbor, or of one's country, or of the Church, constitute prudence. The evils that are mixed up with them can be mingled with good by reason of and for the sake of the end in view. But presence and shrewdness which have an evil end in view do not constitute prudence but trickery and deceit. Good cannot possibly be joined to these, for deceit which goes with an evil end in view brings what is of hell into every single part of a person, sets evil in the middle, and casts good away to the circumferences. This order is the order itself of hell. And so with countless other examples that could be taken. The fact that there are some evils and falsities to which goods and truths can be attached may be seen merely from the consideration that so many different dogmas and teachings exist, many of them totally heretical, and yet subscribing to each one there are people who are saved. The same may also be seen from the consideration that among gentiles outside of the Church there is another Church that is the Lord's, and that those are saved who lead charitable lives, even though falsities exist with them, #2589, 2604. This could by no means be the case if there were no evils with which goods can be mingled, and no falsities with which truths can be mingled. For the evils with which goods are mingled, and the falsities with which truths are mingled, are wonderfully arranged into order by the Lord. For they are not combined with one another, still less are they made into one, but lie adjacent to and touch one another, so that in fact the goods together with the truths occupy the middle, at the central point so to speak, while the evils and falsities occupy positions radiating outwards to the surrounding areas or circumferences. Consequently the evils and falsities receive light from the goods and truths, and are variegated like patches of white and black created by light radiating from the middle or centre. This constitutes heavenly order. These are the things meant in the internal sense by "speckled" and "spotted".

(Secrets of Heaven 3993)

24. Separating from the Past and Moving Forward into Greater States of Goodness and Truth

Note: This subject can follow after the last one on the list, titled, *Mixed Motives*. It also leads into the next one on the list, titled, "*Change Back' Reactions*". For this particular subject, you are invited to read the following paragraphs from the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, then come to the next meeting ready to discuss your experience of separating from things in your past and moving forward into greater states of goodness and truth.

Separating from the Past Moving Forward into Greater States of Goodness and Truth

When someone is being regenerated the Lord maintains him or her in an intermediate kind of good, a good which serves to introduce genuine goods and truths. But once those goods and truths have been introduced, that intermediate good is separated from them. Anyone who knows anything at all about regeneration and about the new person can appreciate that the new person is entirely different from the old, for the new person has an affection for spiritual and celestial matters since these constitute his or her feelings of delight and blessedness, whereas the old person's affections are for worldly and earthly things, and these constitute his feelings of delight and pleasure. The new person's ends in view therefore lie in heaven, whereas the old person's lie in the world. From this it is evident that the new person is entirely different from and unlike the old. So that a person may be led from the state of the old person into that of the new, worldly passions have to be cast aside and heavenly affections assumed. This is effected by countless means known to the Lord alone, many of which the Lord has made known to angels but few if any to a person. Even so, every single one of those means is revealed in the internal sense of the Word. When therefore a person is converted from an old person into a new one, that is, when he or she is regenerated, it does not take place in an instant as some people believe, but over many years. Indeed the process is taking place throughout the person's whole life right to its end. For his or her passions have to be rooted out and heavenly affections implanted, and he has to have a life conferred on him which he did not possess previously, and of which in fact he scarcely had any knowledge previously. Since therefore his states of life have to be changed so drastically he is inevitably maintained for a long time in an intermediate kind of good which partakes both of worldly affections and of heavenly ones. And unless he is maintained in that intermediate good he in no way allows heavenly goods and truths into himself. That intermediate good is meant by 'Laban and his flock' in Genesis 31. But a person is maintained in that good only so long as it serves its particular use. Once it has served it, it is separated. The existence of this intermediate good, and its separation when it has served its use, may be illustrated from the changes of state

which everyone undergoes from early childhood even to old age. It is well known that in each phase of life - early childhood, later childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age - a person's state is different. It is also well known that a person lays aside the state of early childhood and its playthings when he or she passes into the state of later childhood, and that he lays aside the state of later childhood when he passes into that of youth, and this in turn when he passes into the state of adulthood, and that he finally lays this aside when he passes into the state of old age. And if anyone thinks it over he can also recognize that each phase of life has its particular delights. He can recognize that by means of these he is introduced by consecutive stages into those which belong to the next phase and that such delights have served to bring him through to that next phase, till at length he is brought to the delight of intelligence and wisdom in old age. From this it is evident that former things are always left behind when a new state of life is assumed. But this comparison merely serves to make the point that delights are simply means and that they are left behind when a person enters whatever state comes next. When however a person is being regenerated his state is made entirely different from the previous one, towards which the Lord is leading him or her, not by any natural process but by a supernatural one. Nor does anyone reach that state except by the means belonging to regeneration which the Lord alone provides, and so by the intermediate good which has been referred to. And once he has been brought to that state, to the point of his no longer having worldly, earthly, and bodily things as his or her end in view but those of heaven, that intermediate good is separated. Having something as one's end in view means loving it more than anything else. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven* 4063:2-5)

There are good spirits, there are spirits of an intermediate kind, and there are evil spirits. These are linked to a person when he or she is being regenerated, to the end that through them he may be introduced into genuine goods and truths.... But they are the kinds of spirits...who do not accord, except for a time, with the one to be regenerated, and therefore when they have performed their use they are separated. The separation of them is effected in differing ways - the separation of the good spirits in one way, that of the spirits of the intermediate kind in another, and that of the evil spirits in yet another. The separation of the good spirits is effected without their being directly conscious of it, for they know from the Lord's good pleasure that all is well with them wherever they are or to wherever the Lord takes them. But the separation of the spirits of the intermediate kind is effected by many means until they depart in freedom. They are returned to the state of their own good, and consequently to the state of the use they serve and of the end they therefore have in view, so that in that state they may experience the delight and blessing that are their own. But because they have derived pleasure out of their previous connection with the one who is being regenerated they are several times returned to and then released from that connection until they no longer take any delight in staying with him or her and so depart in freedom. Evil spirits too are indeed removed in freedom, but in a kind of freedom which appears to

them to be freedom. They are linked to the person who is being regenerated so that they may introduce negative ideas which have to be dispelled, the intention being that this person may be strengthened all the more in truths and goods. And when he or she starts to be strengthened in these, those spirits take no delight in staying with him or her, only in separation from him. In this way they are separated by a feeling of freedom that accompanies their delight. This is how the separation takes place of spirits present with a person when he is being regenerated, and how as a consequence changes of his state as regards good and truth are brought about. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven* 4110:2)

25. “Change Back Reactions”

Note: This subject can follow after the last one on the list titled, *Separating from the Past and Moving Forward into Greater States of Goodness and Truth*. There is, in psychology, something known as a “Change back reaction” that is common in relationships. One person in a relationship, family system, organization, etc. starts moving in a new direction in life, or starts making personal or spiritual advances; and when he or she does, people who are close to that person may begin to apply different forms of pressure which are (consciously or unconsciously) designed to encourage that person to “return to the fold,” return to the status quo, return to the homeostasis that has been typical in that relationship or group. In short, these “Change back” reactions call a person to “change back” to the way he or she used to be, or to the way things used to be within the group. Change back reactions can range from subtle and unconscious, to sarcastic, to intimidation and yelling, to full blown violence. The human tendency is to start small and then ramp up until the desired response is gained. The topic for the next meeting is your experience of “Change back” reactions—receiving them from others, experiencing them internally within yourself, or issuing them yourself toward other people. In addition, if you will be discussing this topic right after the last one on the list titled, *Separating from the Past and Moving Forward into Greater States of Goodness and Truth*, it may be interesting to see how the phenomenon of “Change back” reactions lines up with the readings you did for that topic.

26. Dreams

People who utilize this process will sometimes have dreams about one or another issue they’re working on using the process. What has been your experience of this? If you have had dreams, what are some of the ways you’ve benefitted from them? Have your dreams been challenging in any way? If so, how?

27. Two Responses to Sin

What is your experience of using the two different responses to sin that this process of change recommends: “I am thinking about this, and I am intending to do it, but because it’s a sin, I’m not going to do it” (the “easier” kind of change) and “I do not want/will this because it is a sin against God”?

28. Close to God
Describe a time when you felt close to God (or a time when you *typically* feel close to God). Under what conditions, circumstances, etc., do you feel this closeness, and what is it like when you experience it? Please describe.
29. Getting Started on the Process
How do you get yourself actually to go through this process of change? What are one or two obstacles or barriers that prevent you from getting started on the process, or that derail you as you go along? How do you “psyche yourself up” for starting into the process, and/or how do you get past these obstacles or barriers?
30. Thinking and Intending as Choices
What is your experience of abstaining from sin on the level of thought or intent (as compared to abstaining from sin in outward behavior alone). What effects has doing this had on your life?
31. How to Be “Free” after Being “in Prison”
What is your experience of staying free from a sin after you've been in prison to it and feel like you've broken out?
32. Music
What is the place of music, etc., in your experience of life change and spiritual transformation?
33. Pattern of Departure
Is there a pattern that you experience as part of any departure from sin? Please explain. A simple example would be: You start working on a sin, and you experience that sin trying to recur every day. But over time it gets less and less.
34. Cycles
For some people the process of change can be cyclical. What is your experience of the cyclical nature of this process; or what is your experience of *any* cycles that you go through as part of the process? For example, you make some real headway on a sin, but then you find yourself needing to cycle back and work on that same sin again. Only this time you're working on it in a new way, or on a new and deeper level.
35. Held in Goodness by the Lord
What is your experience of being “held in goodness and truth” by the Lord as you depart from a sin (see footnote 13 on the worksheet for Step 4.5)?
36. Power of the Lord

- What is your experience of the power of the Lord in your practice of this process? When do you feel it? How do you feel it? What is it like? What is its magnitude? How do you access it? Etc.
37. Your life purpose
What is your life's purpose or direction, and how has this process impacted that sense of purpose?
 38. Making Amends
What is your experience of making amends in relationships? What does making amends mean? How do you do it? What are some of the ways that amends can be made? Offering an apology is one way, but are there ways to help mend a problem or relationship other than by apology? How crucial is saying "I'm sorry" to active life change, spiritual transformation, and the improvement of relationships? Please explain. Another question: How might the making of amends relate to the 4-Step process of life change? Final question: Are there times when making amends or offering an apology might be counterproductive?
 39. Remembering the Lord and Forgetting the Lord
After you've gone through the worksheets, in what way(s) do you experience the Lord's presence, help, and power as you actively abstain from sin and begin a new life? In what way(s) do you call on the Lord's help and power during these times? Are there times when you find yourself *forgetting* to call on the Lord for help and power "in the clutch" or at times when you can use it most? (Please explain.) If so, what do you do to remedy this?
 40. The Lord's Part in the Process
What is your experience of your need for God in this process; also your experience of His part in it?
 41. Dealing with Difficult People
What is your experience of dealing with "difficult" people? Alternatively, what is your experience of dealing with someone in the context of a situation that feels difficult or unchangeable? For example, you don't like the way a person thinks or treats you, and you're pretty sure that he or she isn't going to change. It could be a boss, client, spouse, sibling, mother-in-law, etc., and you don't feel free to just walk away from the situation. Or, you'd really *like* to be connected to this person, but it doesn't feel like you can. There's a thorn in the situation, but you can't get it out. What do you do? Etc.
 42. Highlights of This Process
What are some of the highlights you've experienced using this process of change. Alternatively, what are some of your favorite memories of using it?
 43. Most Powerful

- Which of the four universal steps (or sub-steps) of life change and spiritual transformation do you find the most powerful? What is your experience of that particular step? Please describe.
44. Myth of Scarcity and Myth of Abundance
There is said to be a “myth of scarcity” which says that there’s never enough to go around. There is also said to be a “myth of abundance” which says that having more and more will bring a sense of fullness. Does either one (or both) of these myths show up in how you conduct yourself? Please explain.
 45. Honest with Yourself
What is your experience of being honest with yourself?
 46. Follow your Heart
Here is a statement from the book, *Fireproof*—a Christian book on marriage: “The world says to follow your heart; but if you are not leading your heart, then someone or something else is. The Bible says that ‘the heart is deceitful above all things’ (Jeremiah 17:9) and it will pursue that which feels right at the moment.” Your task is to reflect on these ideas from *Fireproof*. What (if any) validity do they have in your own life? How do you personally experience Jeremiah 17:9? What is your experience of “following your heart”? When has it served you and others well? Has it ever gotten you into trouble? Please explain. What’s the balance?
 47. Guilt
A pang of guilt is something that can be a healthy, motivating force in a human life. On the other hand, feelings of guilt can also become unhealthy, debilitating, and crippling. In other words, guilt can be a helpful behavior modifier, *and* it can become a prison. When do feelings of guilt serve as a healthy motivating force for you? By contrast, does guilt ever become a debilitating force in your life. If so, in what way(s) is this so? Can you identify times when your good actions are driven by guilt as compared to the same deeds driven by free choice and good will? Finally, what are some of the ways that we can *get away* from unhealthy guilt, while at the same time retaining helpful pangs of conscience?
 48. Success
Go online and read *Success* by Ralph Waldo Emerson, then answer one or more of these questions: How do you define success? If you died tomorrow, what would you consider to be one of the main successes in your life? Please explain. If you died tomorrow, what do you think others would say was one main success in your life? Is there anything else you would like to say on this topic?
 49. Guardian Angels
Your task is to read an excerpt from a book titled, *Embraced by the Light* by Betty Eadie. It is an extended description of a near death experience that she had. As part of her description, she talks about “Warring Angels,” a

specialized type of angel similar to guardian angels. After reading Eadie's description, read Emanuel Swedenborg's description of the power of angels in the spiritual world, written in the mid 1700's. After reading these descriptions side by side, discuss the topic of guardian angels. Here are the two readings:

Warring Angels

Excerpted from *Embraced By The Light*, pp. 90-1

by
Betty J. Eadie

"I also understood that there are other types of angels [besides guardian angels], including a type called "Warring Angels". It was shown to me that their purpose is to do battle for us against Satan and his angels. Although we each have protecting, or guardian, spirits to assist us, there are times when the Warring Angels are necessary to protect us, and I understood that they are available to us through prayer. I saw that they are giant men, very muscularly built, with a wonderful countenance about them. They are magnificent spirits. I understood simply by looking at them that to struggle against them would be an act of futility. They were actually dressed like warriors, in headdress and armor, and I saw that they moved more swiftly than other angels. But perhaps what set them apart more than anything was their aura of confidence; they were absolutely sure of their abilities. Nothing evil could daunt them, and they knew it. As they suddenly rushed off on some mission (which was not revealed to me), I was moved but their looks of concern; they understood the importance of their mission, and they knew, and I knew, that they would not return until it was accomplished."

The Power of Angels in the Spiritual World

Excerpted from *Heaven and Hell*, paragraph nos. 229-30

by
Emanuel Swedenborg

"...So great is the power of angels in the spiritual world that if I should make known all that I have witnessed in regard to it, it would exceed belief. Any obstruction there that ought to be removed because it is contrary to divine order the angels cast down or overthrow merely by an effort of the will and a look. Thus I have seen mountains that were occupied by infernal spirits cast down and overthrown, and sometimes shaken from end to end as in earthquakes; also rocks cleft asunder to their bottoms, and the infernal spirits who were upon them swallowed up. I have seen hundreds of thousands of infernal spirits dispersed by angels and cast down.... Numbers are of no avail against them; neither are devices, cunning, or combinations [of these things]; for they see through them all, and disperse them in a moment.

“But it must be understood that the angels have no power whatever from themselves, but that all their power is from the Lord; and that they are powers only so far as they believe and acknowledge this. Whoever of them believes that he or she has power from him- or herself instantly becomes so weak as not to be able to resist even a single evil spirit. for this reason angels ascribe no credit whatever to themselves, and are averse to all praise and glory on account of any thing they do, ascribing all the praise and glory to the Lord.”

50. Making changes
(Note: Need to assign this one ahead of time.) Discuss the nine principles of change that appear on a website titled first30days.com, as these relate to the *Begin a New Life* process.
51. Five Languages of Apology
There's a book titled, *The Five Languages of Apology*, written by the same author who writes *The Five Love Languages*. (See the five languages of apology listed below.) What is your experience of these languages? How or where do you see them reflected in the *BNL* process or your experience of it?
- Expressing regret: “I am sorry.”
 - Accepting responsibility: “I was wrong.”
 - Genuinely repenting: “I won't do it again.”
 - Making restitution: “What can I do to make it right?”
 - Requesting forgiveness: “Will you please forgive me?”
52. Worksheet Review
What is your experience of using the *BNL* worksheets as a form of review—reviewing issues you're currently working on or that you have worked on in the past? In what way(s) do you do this, and what effects does it have?
53. Trust vs. Fear
What does the concept of putting your trust in God/the Lord mean to you, and what is your experience of doing this? Here is an article titled, *Trust vs. Fear*. It includes a number of ideas from the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Your task is to read the article in advance of the next meeting and let them serve as a springboard for sharing and discussion:

Almost all people experience, at one time or another, fear about the future. Are things going to work out? Will we make it? How are we going to handle this?

All of us have also been in states of peace about the future. We know that this peace comes from an inner confidence that things will work out. In such states, the feeling could be described by the words, “We'll figure it out,” “It'll be okay,” “We can handle it.” Those who are wise know that this inner confidence is intertwined with trust—specifically trust in the Lord and His providence.

One of our goals is to work towards trust and extricate ourselves from the negative effects of fear.

Fear: we know some of the reasons we experience it. The first is a lack of understanding, or what we might call “fear of the unknown.” A second reason for being afraid is a lack of trust—lack of trust in others, or lack of trust in the Lord. A third reason for being afraid is the presence of danger.

Concerning fear, we read in the theological writings of Swedenborg: “No one is reformed in a state of fear because fear takes away freedom and reason” (*Divine Providence* no. 138). “Anxiety comes chiefly from...[keeping the] thoughts fixed on one subject” (*Secrets of Heaven* no. 5391). “If a thing is subjected to minute questioning or to doubt and the mind is anxiously fixed on such, ideas supporting this attitude and weighing the mind down are never absent” (*Secrets of Heaven* no. 5386).

Trust is different. We know that it comes, in large part, as a result of our knowledge about the Lord and His power to help. Concerning trust, Swedenborg writes: “Peace is like the dawn on earth, which fills people’s minds with overall delight. At the heart of true peace is trust in the Lord, the trust that He governs all things, and provides all things, and that He leads towards an end that is good. When a person believes these things about Him he or she is at peace, since he then fears nothing, and no anxiety about things to come disturbs her.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 8455:1)

Trust has other facets. There is our God-given ability to reason things out, which Emanuel Swedenborg calls *prudence*. Of this he says, “If you wish to be led by divine providence, use prudence as a servant or assistant who faithfully manages the goods of his lord” (*Divine Providence* no. 210). Finally, trust in the Lord raises us up out of the natural level into the place where the Lord can influence our minds. We read, “It is never possible for fear to invade the internal level of thought. This remains always in a state of freedom” (*Divine Providence* no. 139).

Fear tends to narrow our focus, whereas trust tends to broaden it. Fear tends to shut us down, whereas trust can energize us. Fear jumbles our thoughts, whereas trust breeds creativity. Fear keeps us stuck on the earthly level, whereas trust raises us up into the spiritual realm, where we are free to consider the Lord, and to let some of His light filter into our minds as we face the issues before us with His help.

It is easy to fear at times, and hard to trust, but with focused effort, the Lord can release us from fear, and lead us in His providence in creative and productive directions.

54. Closeness and Connection

What is your personal sense of closeness and connection with the Lord? What is it like? What has it meant to you over the years? How has it

grown? What does it mean to you now? How do you experience it? What causes it to increase or fade? What do you do when it fades? How do you know when it returns?

55. Beginning points

Choose an issue that you're currently working on using the BNL process. See if you can trace back to when this issue started in your life. Consider any circumstances under which it got started or reasons why it may have done so. Now imagine the Lord being with you in that situation. How would you have responded differently, knowing He was there? Visualize yourself responding in this way, then come forward into the present and visualize yourself responding in that way now. Come to the next meeting ready to share your experience of this. (Note: This exercise is not about assigning guilt or blame to yourself as a young person. If your memory takes you back to your childhood or teenage years, remember that minors are not spiritually culpable for their actions. Exodus 30:14 suggests that a "minor" is a person who hasn't yet reached his or her twentieth year.)

56. Thoughts Popping into Your Head

Footnote #8 on the Step 4.1 worksheet reads as follows: "Part of spiritual health is realizing that you can't stop destructive thoughts, images, or impulses from popping into your mind, appearing, or entering. When they do, you are not guilty, responsible, or at fault for the fact that they've shown up in your mind (see Mark 7:14-23 [also Matthew 7:17-23]). The fact that they've shown up simply presents you with options and choices. Instead, you are at fault for sin when you *entertain* these things in your thinking, *nurture* them in intent, or allow them to *go forth* from these places into word or action." What is your experience of unwanted, unpleasant, or ugly thoughts popping into your mind, apparently "out of the blue." What is it like for you to experience this? What is your perspective on the fact that it can occur. How do you deal with these kinds of things when they present themselves to you?

57. Experiencing Quiet and Listening for God's Answers to Prayer

What is your experience of quieting yourself and then listening for answers to prayer? What are some of the ways that you hear or notice those answers? What are some of the things that help quiet you?

58. How the BNL Process Affects Your Relationships

How has the BNL process affected your relationships with others (including friendships, marriage, family, etc.)? Please describe. Here is one particular testimony to this:

"Through the years of practicing the *Begin a New Life* process, I have seen it change my relationships for the better, especially my relationship with my husband. Frequently, what has sent me to the worksheets is a niggling sense that something is amiss in my marriage: Something that I've said, done, or am contemplating isn't quite right. In the process of going through the Steps, my eyes are opened to see that what I've been thinking is important, what I believe matters most, or what I want or think I need,

is against one of the Ten Commandments. It always seems to start with a wrestling match in my mind, as I am *so sure* that where I'm going will make me happy. But there is that niggling feeling (conscience / the Lord) that drives me to look further. Each time I fill out the worksheets, I discover a different way of thinking and a changed vision about the issue I'm dealing with. Each time, I feel my heart open and soften toward my husband, creating a deeper level of love and tenderness towards him. Along with that change, there is also a sense that the Lord is present—not in a vague way, but as a real presence, guiding me to a feeling of peace and resolve. I often think of the *BNL* process as a sleeping policeman. That is what the Jamaicans call their speed bumps. Much like those speed bumps, the *BNL* process helps me pause and be more thoughtful in my words and actions. It helps me in *all* of my relationships, and it frees me to be a more loving wife."

59. Experiences of Victory
Describe any experiences of victory (spiritual, earthly, or both) that you've had using this process?
60. Seeing God's Providence at Work
The Lord's Providence has to do with the many different ways that He leads and guides us by means of His love and wisdom. Often we are not able to see how we are guided ahead of time. Often it's not until "after the fact" that we're able to see the hand of His providence at work. The topic for tonight has to do with seeing the Lord's Providence "after the fact." The first question is, in the last 48 hours, what is one or another way that you've seen God at work in your life? The second question is this: What is one or another way that you've seen the Lord's providence at work over the course of your entire life?
61. Your Greatest Challenge
What is your experience of utilizing the *BNL* process on the greatest challenge (or one of the greatest challenges) in your life?
62. Coveting
Under the Buddhist philosophy, covetous desire is the desire to obtain things that do not satisfy the spirit. From the perspective of Emanuel Swedenborg, coveting has to do with a desire to control people and things in our lives. Swedenborg also suggests that coveting is root of all evils, such that a person who subdues the love of dominating others from selfish love easily subdues all other evils, because this is their chief. What is your experience of coveting—the compulsive urge to control people or things? How do you deal with it?
63. Unconscious Intent
As you go through Step 1, do you discover thoughts, intentions, or elements of self will that seem to be accurate to your experience, but which you weren't consciously aware of before? What has been your experience of this? Another way to ask this question is, What is your experience of *discovery* in columns 2, 3 & 4 of self examination? How do you react, respond, or adjust to what you discover there?

64. Positive Intent
(Note: Need to assign this one ahead of time.) People who use the *BNL* process sometimes find that as they're going through Step 1 (self examination) they discover "positive" thoughts and intentions mixed in with the "negative" ones that they uncover. What is your experience of positive thoughts and intentions during Step 1 of this process, and how do you react to, respond to, or feel about these things? What value do they hold for you in the process? Go through a round of self examination before the next meeting, and see if there are positive thoughts and intentions that come up for you in the mix. Then come to the meeting ready to discuss your experience of this.
65. Image and Likeness of God
What does the concept of being born in the image and likeness of God mean to you? What is your experience of being in this image and likeness?
66. Thankfulness
List three things that the *BNL* process has done for you that you are thankful for. Why are you thankful for each of them? What effect(s) does the *BNL* process have on your experience of thankfulness in your life. What effect(s) has it had, either on your *ability* to be thankful, or on your *experience* of thankfulness?
67. Christmas #1
Answer any of the following:
- What is one piece of this process that you hope will shine brightly in your mind this Christmas season and why?
 - What is one bit of wisdom you pray for this Christmas season and why?
 - What is one thing that you think God sees as a possibility for your life at Christmastime this year?
 - What is the one success that you think the Lord is leading you to at the hands of this process?
 - What is one prayer that the Lord has answered this year?
 - What is one way that you would like to honor the Lord this Christmas season?
68. Christmas #2
Answer any of the following:
- The story of Christmas says that Zacharias and Elizabeth were both righteous before God, "walking in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." What is your experience of living an orderly life?
 - What is one quality that you especially wish for in the coming year, and in what way can you cooperate with the Lord to foster that quality in yourself?
 - "Then Mary said, 'Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her" (Luke

1:38). Mary was affirmative to the words that the angel spoke. An affirmative attitude toward the Lord's Word, toward a life of love, good will, and good action: What is one way that you can carry an affirmative attitude like this into your life this season and in the coming year?

- What are one or two ways that you can be of service to others this season, or in the coming year?
- What are some of the good things that you see happening in other people's lives, and what is one way that you can be an agent of happiness for others this Christmas, or in the coming year?

69. Christmas #3

Answer any of the following:

- Holy fear is something that figures into the Christmas story in several places: when the angel Gabriel appears to Zacharias, when the same angel appears to Mary, and when an angel appears to the Shepherds. Emanuel Swedenborg suggests that holy fear is a fear of doing harm to others, including the Lord. What is one way that holy fear can guide your choices this Christmas season or in the coming year?
- In the story of the shepherds, the shepherds were initially afraid when an angel appeared to them, bringing them good news of the Lord's birth. This is reminiscent of times when we may have experienced a "closer presence" of the Lord in our lives, along with some of the feelings that can be associated with that. What (if any) has been your experience of times when you've felt a closer presence of the Lord. What effect(s) has this had on you?
- Christmas is a time when the Lord can especially touch our hearts with a sense of understanding, care, and compassion for others. What is one way that you can provide care and support to someone closest to you this Christmas season? What is one obstacle that you may need to overcome in order to do this?
- Christmas time is (or can be) a time of transition and moving forward. What is one spiritual transition that you believe will naturally happen as you move through this Christmas season, and what is one transition that you would like to be intentional about? Please explain.
- Being spiritually awake is something that is prized and sought after in many religious cultures. In the story of Christmas, Joseph is one person who was spiritually awake—as evidenced when an angel appeared to him in a dream. What does it mean to you to be spiritually awake, and what is one way that you can be more spiritually wakeful in the coming year?
- What is one way in which the Lord's life and power have sustained you this year? What is one thing you would like to say to Him in response to what He's accomplished in your life this year?
- What is one hope that you have for the new year?

70. Christmas #4

Answer any of the following:

- What is one of the ways in which you have especially seen the Lord at work in your life over the past year?
- Take a moment to reflect on one part of your life, or one issue in your life, that you have cared about very deeply for a long time.
 - Looking back, what are some of the earliest things you learned from parents or teachers that first inspired you in this part of your life?
 - Later, what is one thing that you learned from the Word of God (or other sacred text) that helped you along the way?
 - Describe one good stride that you've made in this part of your life?
- What is one "star" (one truth) that can help guide you, so that you can enjoy a closer presence of the Lord in the coming year?
- As Christmas day approaches, we're reminded of a string of events that happens in us over and over again as part of the process of life change and spiritual transformation: The Lord fights and conquers for us in times of spiritual conflict; He arranges things in our hearts and minds into a good and perfect order; He carries us to the next level of spiritual practice and spiritual existence in our relationships with others; and He touches our hearts and minds with new experiences of peace. What is one thing you can do in the new year to experience such moments of peace?

71. Breaking Physical Habits and Habits of Thinking and Intending

- What has been an experience of breaking a physical habit in your life: What did it take to break it? What helped you along the way? What was your experience of relapse?
- What is your experience of identifying habitual ways of *thinking* and/or *intending*?
- What is your experience of applying the *BNL* process to your ways of thinking and/or intending?

72. The Lord's Mercy

What does the concept of the Lord's *mercy* mean to you? How do you experience it through the *BNL* process? How would you *like* to experience it? Has your sense of the Lord's presence and mercy shifted, changed, or grown through your use of the *BNL* process? Please explain. (Note: Emanuel Swedenborg defines the Lord's mercy as His love grieving for us when He sees we're in misery, and then reaching out to help us in ways that He can.)

73. The Lord Reaching Out

How do you experience the Lord reaching out to help you in your life? How do you experience this when using the *BNL* process?

74. Letting Go

"Letting go" is a phrase that is commonly used in the United States culture today. What do you think people mean by it? What does it mean to

you? What is your experience of “letting go”? How do you do it? What happens to you along the way. What are some of the outcomes that you experience as a result of it?

75. When you Feel Hurt

What is your experience of feeling hurt over things that other people say or do? When you feel hurt, what are some of the typical ways that you tend to respond—either internally or externally to others? What effect(s) do these responses have? What is one pitfall that you seek to avoid working through feelings of hurt, especially in relationship to others? How do you avoid that pitfall? What is one good way that you’ve discovered for working through feelings of hurt to good conclusions? What is one thing you’ve learned about hurt, or about dealing with hurt, that you would like to pass on to others?

76. Prayer for Others

What is your practice and/or your experience of praying for others? What effect(s) does it have on you to pray for others? Here are some readings on the subject by Emanuel Swedenborg, and also a prayer for others modeled by Christ Himself. In addition, note that *The Lord’s Prayer* is, in part, a prayer for others.

Prayer for Others

As regards intercession, the case is this. There is intercession in all love, consequently in all mercy; for mercy is of love. That he or she who loves, or who feels compassion, continually intercedes, can be seen from examples. A husband who loves his wife, wishes her to be kindly received by others, and to be well treated; he does not say this in express terms, but continually thinks it, consequently is in silence continually entreating it, and interceding for her. Parents act in like manner in favor of their children whom they love. In like manner do those also who are in charity for their neighbor; and they who are in friendship for their friends. From all this it can be seen that there is constant intercession in all love. It is the same in respect to the Lord's intercession for the human race, and in especial for those who are in the good and truth of faith; for toward them there is divine, that is, infinite love; and there is divine, that is, infinite mercy. He does not pray the Father for them, and in this way intercede, for this would be to act altogether after a human manner; but He continually excuses, and continually forgives, for He continually feels compassion; and this is done on the part of the Lord Himself, for the Lord and the Father are one (John 14:8-12). (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven* 8573:2)

“Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.” (1 Sam. 12:23)

There are those who pray, not for others, much less for all, but for themselves alone. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Spiritual Experiences* 1850)

“One who pleads is self-abased, as likewise is one who asks another to plead on his behalf.” (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven* 7391)

A model prayer for others:

Lord, keep _____ through Your name,
That he/she/they may be one,
[And] that he may have Your joy fulfilled in himself.

Keep her from the evil one.

Sanctify them by Your truth.

[Help him] believe in You
That he may be one in You,
[That You may be in him,]
[And] that he may be made perfect.

[Help her] know that You have [been] sent, and [that you] have loved her.

I desire that they may be with You where You are, that they may behold Your glory.

Amen.

[I pray that their] faith should not fail.
(John 17, Luke 22:32)

77. Bad Stuff Has to Be Removed before We Can Truly Love

There are two readings for this topic, both by Emanuel Swedenborg: If we do not remove these evils through repentance, we are unable to love our neighbor and even less able to love God, even though the Law and the Prophets, that is, the Word and therefore salvation, hinge on these two commandments [Matthew 22:40]. Repentance becomes effective if we practice it regularly—that is, every time we prepare ourselves to take the Communion of the Holy Supper. Afterward, if we abstain from one sin or another that we have discovered in ourselves, this is enough to make our repentance real. When we reach this point, we are on the pathway to heaven, because we then begin to turn from an earthly person into a spiritual person and to be born anew with the help of the Lord. (*True Christianity* 530)

Many people think that simply believing what the church teaches purifies a person of his or her evils. Others believe that doing good is what purifies; others, that it is knowing, speaking and teaching such matters as have to do with the church; others, that it is reading the Word and books of piety; others, that it is going often to church, hearing sermons, and especially partaking of the Holy Supper; others, that it is renouncing the world and pursuing a life of piety; others, that it is confessing oneself guilty of all sins; and so on. None of these, however, purifies a person at all unless he

or she examines himself, sees his or her sins, acknowledges them, condemns him- or herself on account of them, and repents by desisting from them. Moreover, all of this he must do as though of himself, and yet with an acknowledgment at heart that he does so from the Lord. Before a person does this, the aforementioned undertakings are of no help, being either merit-seeking or hypocritical.... When people's evils have been put away, then the aforementioned undertakings become ones of their love, and they appear to angels in heaven as handsome human beings, and as the angels' partners and comrades. (*Divine Providence* 121)

Question: What is your experience of these concepts and this topic?

78. Positives in the Process.

What are some of the positive things you experience in your life as you go through the different steps, stages, and parts of the *BNL* process?

79. Isolation

What is your experience of withdrawal or isolation. Can withdrawal/isolation be a healthy thing? If so, under what circumstances? A related topic could be going off into the woods to live alone, or going to live in a monastery. Here are some ideas from the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg that speak to this particular question.

A person can be formed for heaven only by means of the world. In the world are the outmost effects in which everyone's affection must be terminated; for unless affection puts itself forth or flows out into actions, which is done in association with others, it is suffocated to such a degree finally that the person has no longer any regard for the neighbor, but only for him- or herself. All this makes clear that a life of charity (good will and good action) towards the neighbor, which is doing what is just and right in every work and in every employment, is what leads to heaven, and not a life of piety apart from charity; and from this it follows that only to the extent that a person is engaged in the employments of life can charity be exercised and the life of charity grow; and this is impossible to the extent that a person separates him- or herself from those employments. (*Heaven and Hell* 360)

There are some who believe that to live the life that leads to heaven, which is called the spiritual life, is difficult, because they have been told that a person must renounce the world, must divest him- or herself of the lusts called the lusts of the body and the flesh, and must live spiritually; and they understand this to mean that they must discard worldly things, which consist chiefly in riches and honors; that they must walk continually in pious meditation on God, salvation, and eternal life; and must spend their life in prayers and in reading the Word and pious books. Such is their idea of renouncing the world, and living in the spirit and not in the flesh. But this is not at all true. In fact, that those who renounce the world and live in the spirit in this manner acquire a sorrowful life that is not receptive of heavenly joy, since everyone's life continues the same after death. On the contrary, to receive the life of heaven a person must live in the world and engage in its business and employments, and by means of a

moral and civil life there receive the spiritual life. In no other way can the spiritual life be formed in a person, or his or her spirit prepared for heaven; for to live an internal life and not at the same time an external life is like dwelling in a house that has no foundation, that gradually sinks or becomes cracked and rent asunder, or totters till it falls. (*Heaven and Hell* 528)

Mere thinking admits no one into heaven; it must be accompanied by willing and doing what is good (*Secrets of Heaven* 2401, 3459).

80. Guilt and Shame

What is your experience of guilt and shame? When are either of these things healthy (productive) and when are they unhealthy (unproductive or even hurtful)? How do you know when either of them is healthy, and when it is unhealthy? Please explain. Here are some dictionary definitions of guilt and shame, followed by three paragraphs from Emanuel Swedenborg on infernal spirits who love to remind people of their past mistakes and then accuse and condemn them on account of them. Here are the definitions and paragraphs:

Guilt:

The act or state of having done a wrong or committed an offense. A painful feeling of self-reproach resulting from a belief that one has done something wrong or immoral.

Shame:

A painful feeling of having lost the respect of others because of improper behavior, incompetence, etc. of oneself or another.

Spiritual conflict (also known as “temptation”) is nothing other than conflicts between infernal spirits and angels who reside with a person. Infernal spirits activate all the dishonorable things the person has done or even thought which have been with him or her since early childhood, thus both evils and falsities; and in so doing, the spirits condemn him or her, for nothing gives them greater delight. Indeed the very delight of their lives consists in doing just that. (*Secrets of Heaven* 741)

There are infernal spirits who, during times of temptation, activate a person's falsities and evils, as has been stated. Indeed they draw out of his or her memory whatever he or she has thought and carried out since early childhood. Evil spirits can do this so cleverly and wickedly as to defy description. But the angels who are with him or her draw out his goods and truths, and in this way defend him. This conflict is what the person feels and perceives in him- or herself and is what causes the sting of conscience. (*Secrets of Heaven* 751)

It has been stated already that spiritual temptation when it takes place in someone is a conflict between infernal spirits and angels residing with him or her, and that he ordinarily feels that conflict in his conscience. As

regards such conflict it should be recognized in addition that the angels are protecting a person constantly and are warding off the evils that infernal spirits direct against him or her. They protect even the falsities and the evils with a person, for they are fully aware of where the person's falsities and evils come from—from infernal spirits. A person in no sense produces any falsity and evil from him- or herself. Instead it is the evil spirits residing with him who produce them, and as they do so they also convince him that these originate in himself. Such is the nature of their wickedness. (*Secrets of Heaven* 761)

81. Forgiveness

What does the concept of forgiveness of sin mean to you? What do you do so that a sin may be forgiven by the Lord? What does forgiving someone *else* mean to you, and what is your experience of doing that? How do you personally forgive someone else who has wronged you? What does the phrase, "Forgive and forget" mean to you? In your experience, what part does forgetting play in forgiving? What might it mean to forgive *yourself*? How can you do that? The word *forgive* comes from the Latin "Per-donare, "to give thoroughly". In what way does the Lord "give thoroughly" when He forgives a sin? In what way are *you* giving thoroughly (or in what way are you *required* to give thoroughly) when you forgive someone else, or when you forgive yourself?

82. Isolation

What is your experience of isolation (isolating from others)? When do you tend to isolate—under what circumstances? John Gottman says that isolation in marriage has to do with a married couple's failure to support each other's hopes and aspirations, and to build a sense of purpose into their lives together. He says that this causes isolation and loneliness in marriage. How might these ideas apply to other relationships besides marriages? What are some solutions to the above?

83. Love

Read and discuss the following paragraph from Emanuel Swedenborg on the topic of love. Here are some questions for after you've read the paragraph: What is your experience of any of the things mentioned in this paragraph? What does the concept of a "joining of minds" mean to you, and how do you seek it in relationships? What is your experience of companionship and togetherness that are part of love. What are one or two things that you do to help these things return to a relationship when they seem to have gone out of it? What does "harmony" in a relationships mean to you? How do you seek to harmonize with others? What is one way that you personally seek to support the goodness and truth in someone else? The reading below says that love is the Divine flowing in and arranging things into order. What does this mean to you? How can you allow it to happen in a particular relationship that you care about? What do you suppose is the relationship of compassion or mercy to the existence of love between two people? (Mercy is defined by Emanuel Swedenborg as

love grieving for someone who we see is in misery, and reaching out to help him or her in ways that we can.)

Love is a spiritual joining together, since it is a joining together of two people's minds, that is, of their thought and will. From this it is evident that regarded essentially love is something purely spiritual, the natural counterpart of which is the delight that comes with companionship and that kind of togetherness. [Because love is a spiritual thing, it] cannot have its origin in anything other than genuine divine love, which is received from the Lord. This means that love is the Divine flowing [in and arranging things between two people so that they] may exist in the harmony of heaven. What's more, heavenly love does good to another for the sake of the good which resides with that other person and which he or she receives from the Lord, consequently for the sake of the Lord Himself, the source of that goodness. (*Secrets of Heaven* 5807)

84. One Sentence Repentance

(Note: Need to assign this one ahead of time.) During the week prior to the meeting, go through the process of repentance for an issue in your life using a *Full Version* of the worksheets. Do so quickly, reading all the paragraphs and leading questions, but allowing yourself only one or two sentences of writing in each open space. (Note: This exercise emphasizes speed, simplicity, and completeness all at the same time.) Do this any number of times in the week for one particular issue you're working on. Come to the meeting ready to discuss your experience.

85. Mercy and Compassion

Here is some information followed by some questions:

- Mercy is defined by Emanuel Swedenborg as the Lord's love grieving for us when He sees us in misery, and then reaching out to help us in ways that He can.
- *Mercy* is defined in the dictionary as...
 - A refraining from harming
 - Compassion
 - A disposition to forgive, pity, or be kind
 - Kind or compassionate treatment; relief of suffering
 - It connotes kindness and sympathy to those in distress
- *Compassion* is defined in the dictionary as sorrow for the sufferings or trouble of others, accompanied by an urge to help; deep sympathy; pity
- Here are a couple of concepts from the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg:
 - By charity is meant love toward the neighbor and compassion, for anyone who loves his or her neighbor as himself also has as much compassion for him in his suffering as he does for himself in his own. (*Secrets of Heaven* 351)
 - When people who are perceptive have feelings of compassion they know that they are being alerted by the Lord to offer help. (*Secrets of Heaven* 6737)

- In the Word, the Lord's 'mercy' has reference to His love towards those who lack good but nevertheless desire it, and His 'compassion' to His love towards those who have no knowledge of truth but nevertheless desire it. (*Secrets of Heaven* 9182.7)
- Questions around mercy and compassion could include your personal experience of it, especially within the *BNL* process; mercy/compassion toward others and also toward self; appropriate balance between mercy and truth (or mercy and “righteous” judgment)—how can we show mercy/compassion in appropriate ways toward someone who is behaving badly, doing what's wrong, is a public offender, especially if the person refuses to behave differently, etc.?

86. Daily Step 1

Practice Step 1 (and *only* Step 1) daily for a week. Come to the meeting ready to discuss your experience of this and the impact it has on you. Your self examination doesn't have to be real thorough. The idea is just to experience daily self examination. Be sure to make entries in each of the four columns of the Step 1 worksheet each day.

87. Little by Little I Will Drive Them Out

The process of spiritual transformation (a.k.a. spiritual rebirth or regeneration) isn't something that is hurried. It happens gradually over the course of our lives. Your assignment is to read the following paragraphs from the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, and come to the meeting ready to discuss your experience of them.

The Scripture, “Little by little I will drive them out from before you” means a removal effected gradually according to order. ...When we undergo spiritual rebirth (or “regeneration”), which is accomplished by the implantation of spiritual truth and good, and at the same time by the removal of falsity and evil, the rebirth is not hurried but takes place slowly. The reason for this is that all the things we have thought, intended, or done since early childhood have entered into the composition of our life. They have also formed themselves into a network which is such that one cannot be moved without all of them together being moved. From this it is evident that the evils and falsities with us cannot be removed suddenly from where they are. They can be removed only in the measure that forms of goodness and truths in their proper order have been implanted more deeply within us; for heaven with us removes hell. If the removal were done suddenly we would pass out, for the whole network of things, every single one, would be thrown into confusion and deprive us of our life. The fact, then, is that spiritual rebirth, or the implantation of the life of heaven with us, begins when we are young children and continues right on to the final phase of our life in the world, and it continues in the other life for evermore... In addition, and this is a secret, our regeneration in the world is merely the foundation for the unending perfection of our life. What's more, since humankind knows scarcely anything at all about these things, many have thought that the life of hell with us can be changed to the life of heaven with us in an instant, by mercy. But in actual fact mercy

lies in the whole act of regeneration; and none of us undergo spiritual rebirth apart from those who receive the Lord's mercy in faith and life while they are in the world, in keeping with the Lord's words in John: "As many as received Him, to them He gave power to be sons of God, to those believing in His name, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).
(*Secrets of Heaven* 9336.1,3; 9334.2)

88. Hope

(Note: Need to assign this one ahead of time.) Read the following, hopeful paragraphs from the writings of Swedenborg. Come to the next meeting ready to discuss them.

Recognition of sin effects nothing until a person examines the actions of his or her life, and sees whether he has secretly or openly done any such thing. Until then, there is nothing but knowledge, and what is said in churches is mere sound going in at the left ear and out at the right, and finally it becomes a mere matter of thought and something devout in the breathing, and with many merely imaginative and chimerical. But it is quite the reverse if a person, according to what he or she recognizes as sin, examines him- or herself, discovers something in himself, says to himself, "This evil is a sin," and from fear of eternal punishment abstains from it. Then what has been said in churches in the way of instruction and devotion is first received by both ears, is communicated to the heart, and from a pagan the person becomes a Christian. (*True Christianity* 525)

If at recurring seasons there is active repentance, as often, for instance, as a person prepares for the communion of the Holy Supper, and if he or she afterward abstains from one or another sin which he then discovers in him- or herself, this is sufficient to make repentance real; and when he is in that he is on the way to heaven, for he then from being earthly begins to be spiritual, and to be born anew from the Lord. (*True Christianity* 530)

If after [the scrutiny of self examination a person determines that he or she will not will to do [the evils he has discovered in himself], because they are sins, he truly and interiorly repents; and still more when these evils are delightful to him, and he is free to do them, and yet resists and abstains. He or she who practices this repeatedly, perceives the delights of evil, when they return, as not delightful, and finally he condemns them to hell. This is what is meant by these words of the Lord: 'Whoever desires to find his soul will lose it; and whoever would lose his soul for My sake will find it' (Matt. 10:39). He or she who puts away the evils of his or her will by such repentance is like one who in due time plucks up the tares sown in his field by the devil, so that the seed implanted by the Lord God the Savior finds a clear soil and grows to a harvest (Matt. 13:24-30). (*True Christianity* 532)

There is no need for a person to enumerate his or her sins before the Lord.... He or she need not enumerate them, because he has searched

them out and seen them in himself, and consequently they are present to the Lord because they are present to himself. Moreover, the Lord led him to search them out, disclosed them, and inspired grief for them, and together with this an effort to refrain from them and begin a new life. Those who do not examine themselves are like the dry bones in the valley; but after they have examined themselves, they are like these same bones when the Lord Jehovah had laid sinews upon them, caused flesh to come upon them, covered them with skin, and put breath in them, and they lived (Ezek. 37:1-14). (*True Christianity* , 539, 534)

Who cannot understand that he or she who does not examine and see his or her sins remains in them? For every evil is delightful to a person from birth; it is delightful to him to take revenge, to commit adultery, to defraud, to blaspheme, and especially to exercise control (or domination) from self-love; and does not this delight prevent your seeing these sins? With anyone who actively repents it is different. His or her evils, such as he has recognized and acknowledged, he calls sins, and therefore begins to shun them and turn away from them; and finally to feel their delight to be not delightful. And so far as this is done he sees and loves good, and at length feels the delight of good, which is the delight of the angels of heaven. In a word, so far as anyone puts the devil behind him or her, he is accepted by the Lord, and is taught, led, withheld from evil, and kept in good by Him; and this is the way, and the only way, from hell to heaven. (*True Christianity* 567:6)

...A person first starts to live when that which in the world he or she believes to constitute the whole of life perishes.... ...The life which he now receives is, in comparison with the life he had previously, beyond words and boundless.... (*Secrets of Heaven* 3175:4)

When a person is being regenerated, he or she becomes completely different from before and is made new. Once he has been regenerated therefore he is called one who has been born again and created anew. At that point a person's face and speech remain the same, but not so his or her mind. His mind is [now] open towards heaven, and love to the Lord and goodwill towards the neighbor, together with faith, reside in it. When he lays aside the body his spirit is seen, and it is then a visible form of love and goodwill that possesses beauty beyond description. From this it may become clear what a regenerate person is, that is, one born again or created anew: he or she is one who is altogether different from before, and who is new. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3212)

89. When Bad Things Happen

For this topic, a book report was given on a book titled, "The Shack". The ensuing discussion ended up focusing on the question of when bad things happen to good people. So an additional evening was dedicated to this topic, with one participant of the group doing a follow-up book report on the book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Rabbi Harold

Kushner, Natick. Here is an outline the person provided for that second meeting:

When Bad Things Happen to Good People by Rabbi Harold Kushner, Natick, MA. Copyright 1981, 148 pp.

Teachings about God that he does not agree with:

- God is a parent figure and has control to always make us happy—wishful thinking/ childish.
- God punishes people for their sins.
- God puts us to the test so that we discover how strong & faithful we are.

All of these theories assume that God is the cause of our suffering. Maybe suffering happens for a reason other than “The Will of God”. Perhaps God doesn’t decide which of us will suffer, but that he does stand ready to help us cope by giving us endless love.

Perhaps we are asking the wrong question: “How could God let this happen?” Kushner postulates that God cannot always arrange only good things to happen, that He is not necessarily all-powerful but He IS all good. He further states God may not be able to control all chaos and evil.

Some excerpts:

- “ From that perspective, there ought to be a sense of relief in coming to the conclusion that God is not doing this (bad thing) to us. If God is a God of justice and not of power, then He can still be on our side when bad things happen to us. He can know that we are good and honest people who deserve better. Our misfortunes are none of His doing, and so we can turn to Him for help. We will turn to God, not to be judged or forgiven, not to be rewarded or punished, but to be strengthened and comforted.”
- “We can be angry at what has happened to us without feeling that we are angry at God. ...Instead of feeling that we are opposed to God, we can feel that our indignation is God’s anger at unfairness working through us, that when we cry out, we are still on God’s side, and He is still on ours.”

Talking points:

- Difference between an All-Powerful God and a God who is Good and always loving
- God does not “control” every single aspect of every life, and there is a randomness to life on earth that sometimes results in unjust situations or happenings
- Acts of God vs. Acts of Nature—Nature is morally blind—God is not. God stands for justice, fairness and compassion. Nature does not.
- Man has free will and God will not intervene in every single instance of wrongdoing. We are used to this approach- much like “paternalism” - that we will be taken care of forever by our parents, as opposed to

- facing tough challenges as a mature adult.
- Could it be that God is not responsible for “bad” things and doesn’t cause them to happen?
 - The question becomes not “Why is this happening to me?” but “I am hurting and I can rely on God to help me & give me comfort and His love”.

90. Serving Others

What are one or two ways that you see this process helping you be of useful service to others around you—giving of yourself to them, helping them “become something,” helping to promote their happiness, etc.?