

Begin a New Life

Six-Week Program for Small Groups

Week 4 Group Meeting

Step 4: Begin a New Life

Leader Guide

Meeting notes:

1. For a full description of how to run this meeting, go to the *Begin a New Life* website (www.BeginaNewLife.info) ⇒ *Group Activities* ⇒ *Six-Week Small Groups*. Scroll down and click on the *Overview of Weekly Meetings*.
2. This outline is an example of a one-hour meeting that starts at 7:00 PM. Groups that want more time for *Group Sharing* can lengthen that part of the meeting and adjust the meeting's end time accordingly.
3. **Note: Step 4 of this process has five parts—Step 4.1 through 4.5. It also has a fair number of questions associated with it (see below at the end of the meeting outline). Accordingly, your group may wish to cover Step 4 in two meetings rather than one, lengthening this series from six weeks to seven. A logical break point comes after Step 4.3. This break point is noted and highlighted within the list of questions.**

7:00 PM Opening activities

1. Opening prayer
2. Readings
Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for people to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron; running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing—life forever. (Psalm 133:1-3)

Repentance becomes effective if we practice it regularly—that is, every time we prepare ourselves to take part in Holy Communion. 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. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, paragraph no. 530)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10)

This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his or her friends. (John 15:12-13)

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:30-31)

All religion has to do with life, and the life of religion is to do that which is good. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Doctrine of Life*, paragraph no. 1)

Then I will give them one heart, and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 11:19)

3. Check-in
 - a. One highlight from each person's day or week, or one opening comment.
 - b. No cross talk or conversation during this part of the meeting.
 - c. Acknowledge each person's contribution with the words, "Thank you," before moving on to the next person.
 - d. Groups larger than eight are broken into groups of four to eight.
4. Group business
 - a. Any announcements or group decisions that need to be made.
5. Introductory comment (to be read out loud):

In the third step of this process of life change and spiritual transformation, you prayed to the Lord for help and power in resisting the sin you're working on. You've now come to the fourth and final step, which is *Begin a New Life*. Beginning a new life means doing something new, different, and better, inspired by the Lord. But before you can actually begin this new and better way of life, you will need actively to abstain from the sin that you prayed about in Step 3. How can you genuinely do something new, different, and better in your life if the *old* way of life remains entrenched? For this reason, abstaining from the sin you've discovered in yourself is the *first part* of the new life you now begin. Another way to say this is that *part* of any new life that you begin is *not living* the old life you've been living up until now.
6. Task for this meeting (to be read out loud)

Step 4: Begin a New Life

 - a. Do *one* of the following:
 - 1) Using a new set of worksheets, go through all four steps of the *BNL* process for the issue you're working on.
 - 2) Review the Step 1, Step 2, and Step 3 worksheets you've filled in so far, then go through a set of Step 4 worksheets for the issue you're working on.
 - b. Come to the next meeting ready to share your experience of Step 4 of the *BNL* process —*Begin a New Life*.

7:15 Group sharing

1. People share their experience of doing the task. Sharing is initiated by the question, "What was your experience of doing the task for this week?"
2. Note: In the event that sharing lags, there is a set of additional questions that can help. It appears at the end of this meeting outline. As group leader, you can listen

during *Group Sharing*, decide which questions you think would be useful for the group, and ask them when appropriate. (Note: Some of the questions may have already been answered during initial sharing.) Continue in this way as needed until *Group Sharing* is over.

7:45 Closure

1. Task for the next meeting
 - a. Hand out copies of the task for the next meeting (see assignment sheet at the end of this outline, titled, *An Easier Kind of Change*).
 - b. Read the entire assignment sheet out loud, or select up to seven group members to take turns reading.
2. Leader for the next meeting
 - a. If the group will have multiple leaders, decide who will lead the next meeting.
3. Closing comments
 - a. One closing comment per person.
 - b. No cross talk or conversation during this part of the meeting.
 - c. Acknowledge each person's contribution with the words, "Thank you," before moving on to the next person.
 - d. Groups larger than eight are broken into groups of four to eight.
4. The Lord's Prayer
 - a. The group stands, holds hands, and says *The Lord's Prayer* together. Those who prefer to listen may do so.

8:00 End time

Additional Questions for Sharing

Opening questions:

1. The first activity on the Step 4.1 worksheet includes *visualization / mental rehearsal / mental practice*. What was your experience of visualizing different parts of Step 4 before putting them into actual practice? What value did it hold?
2. During **Step 3** of the *BNL* process you asked and even begged the Lord for help and power in resisting your sin. At the beginning of Step 4, you actively abstained from that sin. Did you experience the Lord's help and power when doing so? Please explain.

Questions related to Step 4.1—*Stop Doing It*:

3. What was your experience of abstaining from your sin? Was it easy to do? difficult? somewhere in between? Please explain.
4. What does the word "abstain" mean to you? How successful were you at "abstaining" from your sin? Please explain.
5. Were there times in the week when you slipped back into your sin? If so, what impact did this have on you—emotionally or otherwise? What did you do to recover from your slip?
6. During **Step 3** of this process you asked and even begged the Lord for help and power in resisting your sin. How did you access this help and power during the week at times when you needed it? What impact did it have on helping you abstain from your sin?

Questions related to Step 4.2—*Live a New Life*:

7. Any time you abstain from a sin, it creates room for the Lord to breathe new life into you. This new life can first be felt as an inclination and/or desire to do what is good. Was there anything you did in Step 4.2 to court that inclination and desire, become aware of them, and/or let them in? Please explain.
8. What were some of the things you did that were new, different, and better in your life as part of Step 4.2? What was it like to have these things show up as ideas/possibilities at the doorstep of your heart and mind?
9. Briefly describe one experience you had of living a new life this week?

Continued....

Questions related to Step 4.3—*All of This is to Be Done as if You Were Doing It on Your Own*:

10. Step 4.3 says, “All of this (Steps 1-4 of the process) is to be done as if you were doing it on your own.” What do these words mean to you? What was your experience of this part of the process? What value did it hold?
11. In the work of resisting and abstaining from your sin, how do you know when you’re functioning too much from *yourself* and not enough from *the Lord*? Going the other way, is there ever a time when you rely on the Lord for help, and yet you yourself are not fully invested in the final outcome? What happens at those times?
12. Same questions about **living a new life**: When you are living a new life, how do you know when you’re functioning too much from *yourself* and not enough from *the Lord*? Going the other way, is there ever a time when you rely on the Lord for help in living the new life, and yet you yourself are not fully invested in the final outcome? What happens at those times?
13. At times when you notice yourself functioning more from yourself than from the Lord, what do you do to restore the balance? What effect(s) does this have?
14. Step 4.3 says, “All of this (Steps 1-4 of the process) is to be done as if you were doing it on your own.” What does the idea of going through this *entire process* “as if you were doing it on your own” mean to you? What value might there be in doing the *entire process* this way?

Break point

Question related to Step 4.4—*Do This Once or Twice a Year in Preparation for Holy Communion*:

15. Step 4.4 of the process involves taking part in a unique, symbolic ritual of life change known as *Holy Communion*. Have you taken part in this type of communion before? If so, what has been your experience of it? What effect(s) has it had on you?

Questions related to Step 4.5—*Afterward, When the Sin You’re Responsible for Recurs, Say to Yourself, “I Do Not Want/Will This Because It’s a Sin against God”*:

16. Step 4.5 is a step that you take when the sin you’re abstaining from *recurs*. What has been your experience of your sin “recurring”? *How* does it recur? *When* does it recur—under what circumstances? Are there specific events or occurrences that trigger its return? Please explain.
17. When the sin you’re abstaining from recurs, what is your experience of saying, “I do not want this (or alternatively, “I do not *will* this”) because it’s a sin against God”? What happens when you say these words and take this stand?
18. As part of Step 4.5 there’s a specific *reason* that you give for why you no longer want or will the sin you’re abstaining from. The reason is “because it’s a sin

against God.” What is your experience of functioning for this reason? What goes on inside of you when you state this as your reason? What insights or reactions do you have?

19. Take a minute and brainstorm different reasons why you (or anyone) might avoid doing something harmful, destructive, or sinful in life. What is the difference between all of these reasons and the one that is prescribed in this process—*because it’s a sin against God*? In other words, what is it like to act from this particular reason as compared to any of the others?
20. The last part of the activity on the Step 4.5 worksheet invites you to “imagine a host of angels or a group of good-hearted people gathered around you, all declaring with one voice, ‘We do not want/will this because it’s a sin against God.’” What happened when you stood in that gathering, joined that chorus, and uttered those words? What effect(s) did this have on you? What value did it hold?

An Easier Kind of Change

(Task for Week 5)

By now (week 4 of this program) you have gone through the full *BNL* process of active life change and spiritual transformation for one particular sin in your life. But in addition to this one sin, you may experience any number of additional evils that come knocking at the door of your heart or mind in a day or week's time, trying to worm their way into your life.

There is a quick and effective way to address any of these additional evils that come your way. It's a kind of change that is *easier* than the full, four-step process, and which helps you head off any harmful or destructive thoughts and intentions as they first enter your mind, stopping them in their tracks and not letting them enter any further. This "easier kind of change" is as follows:

When we are considering doing something evil, and are forming an intention to do it, we say to ourselves, "I am thinking about this, and I'm intending to do it, but because it's a sin, I'm not going to do it." Doing this counteracts the enticement that hell is injecting into us and keeps it from making further inroads.¹

Having this easy method of change at your fingertips means that any of these *additional* evils that present themselves to you need not go unnoticed or unaddressed in your outward life. At the same time, you'll be able to stay focused on the one primary sin you're abstaining from using the full process of change.

Your task for this week has three parts:

- First, read Section C of the Sourcebook—the section that talks about this easier kind of change (www.BeginaNewLife.info ⇒ *Sourcebook*).
- Next, do *exactly* what this easier kind of change suggests: Any time you're considering doing something harmful or destructive ("evil"), *different* from the one sin you're currently abstaining from using the full, four-step process, say the above words to yourself, and *mean* them. Notice the effects that this has on your inner world, and how quickly and fully these effects are felt. (In addition, you may benefit from rehearsing these words over and over again—even at times when they don't necessarily apply—until they become ingrained in your thinking and memory. Otherwise, you may easily forget this valuable tool for life change and spiritual health.)
- The third part of the task is to come to the next meeting ready to share your experience of this easier kind of change.

¹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, paragraph no. 535