

Begin a New Life

Six-Week Program for Small Groups

Week 5 Group Meeting

An Easier Kind of Change

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.

7:00 PM Opening activities

1. Opening prayer
2. Readings

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matt. 11:28-30)

Active repentance is extremely difficult to practice, for a number of reasons.... Therefore, here is an easier kind of repentance: 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 am intending to do it, but because it is 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. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, paragraph no. 535)

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.

Continued....

4. Group business
 - a. Talk about the final meeting coming up next week:
 - 1) Day, date, time, and location.
 - 2) There will be two main parts to the meeting:
 - a) A review of where we've been over the past 6 weeks.
 - b) Holy Communion—a unique, symbolic ritual of life change and spiritual transformation.
 - (1) People who do not wish to take part in this communion with God will be free to observe the ritual or depart from the meeting before it happens.
 - 3) The meeting will be 15 minutes longer than normal due to the added ritual.
 - b. Make an ongoing *BNL* support group available:
 - 1) After the last meeting of the 6-week program, people will have an opportunity to join an ongoing *BNL* support group—either in person or online via free video/audio conferencing.
 - 2) The group is for sharing and support around the *BNL* process.
 - 3) Day, time, frequency, and location.
 - c. Any other announcements or group decisions that need to be made.
5. Task for this meeting
 - a. Read the entire task that was assigned for this meeting out loud, or select up to seven group members to take turns reading it. Here it is:

An Easier Kind of Change

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.

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

Your task for this past week had 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.

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 (to be read out loud)
 - 1) Use a new set of worksheets and go through all four steps of the *BNL* process for the sin you're working on.
 - 2) Come to the final meeting prepared for the following:
 - a) A final time of sharing on the *BNL* process.
 - b) Holy Communion—a unique, symbolic ritual of life change and spiritual transformation.
 - c) Closure for the six-week program.
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.

Continued...

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

1. As you went through the past week, were you able to distinguish between the sin you're currently abstaining from using the full *BNL* process and *other* forms of evil that may have come knocking at the door of your heart and mind? Please explain.
2. What was your experience of additional forms of evil trying to worm their way into your mind? How often did they present themselves? Under what circumstances? How did these things impact you?
3. How effective was the easier kind of change at staving off additional forms of evil? Please explain.
4. Were there times when the easier kind of change was *more* effective and times when it was *less* effective? If so, was there anything that made the difference?
5. What did you do when you noticed the easier kind of change being *less* effective, and what effect(s) did this have?
6. Some people have feelings of discomfort around using the word "sin." At times when you were considering doing something evil, and forming an intention to do it, and you used the easier kind of change to avoid doing it, did you try using substitute words for the word "sin"? For example, instead of the words "because it's a sin," did you try words like, "because it's harmful," "because it's destructive," "because it's bad," etc.? What effect did it have to use *substitute* words? What do you conclude from this?
7. You now have *two basic responses* to sin in your life—one of which applies to the sin you're currently abstaining from using the full *BNL* process, and the other of which applies to *additional* forms of evil that come knocking at the door of your heart and mind. These two responses are as follows:
 - "I do not want this (or "I do not will this") because it's a sin against God" (the response that is used at the end of the full *BNL* process).
 - "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" (the easier kind of change).These two statements are quite similar. You might wonder, "If the final words that I say at the end of full *BNL* process are so similar to the *easier* kind of change, why bother going through the full, four-step approach in the first place? Why not use the easier kind of change exclusively, and skip all the extra work?" With these questions in mind, what is your experience of the four-step approach to sin as compared to the easier kind of change? What does each one uniquely accomplish in your life, or do they both accomplish the very same thing? Please explain.
8. What was your experience of using the two responses to sin *together*—side by side—in your spiritual work?
9. During the past week, were there times when an "additional" form of evil presented itself to your heart and mind, and you actually gave in to that evil and acted it out? If you did, did it occur to you to say the words of the easier kind of change *after* you'd acted out the evil? If so, what effect(s) did it have to use the easier kind of change "after the fact"? What do you conclude from this?