

Begin a New Life

Six-Week Program for Small Groups

Week 6 Group Meeting

Wrap-Up, Communion with God, & Closure

Leader Guide

Meeting notes:

1. This outline combines a group meeting, a ritual for communing with God, and closure for the *BNL Six-Week Program*. For these reasons it will be 15 minutes longer than normal.
2. 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*.
(Note: The one piece of this meeting that is *not* covered in the description is the ritual for communing with God, which happens at 7:45 in this outline. How to conduct this ritual is spelled out in the outline.)
3. There are three resources at the end of this outline. They are:
 - a. A handout titled, *Quotations from the BNL Worksheets*. This will be used in the meeting. The group leader may wish to make copies for participants in advance.
 - b. A materials list and set-up instructions for the meeting.
 - c. A recipe for making unleavened bread (for use in the communion ritual).

7:00 PM Opening activities

1. Handouts
 - a. Give a handout to each person as he or she enters the meeting.
2. Opening prayer
3. Opening readings

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance." And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees." (Matthew 3:1, 5-8, 10)

Having a concept of sin does nothing for us unless we examine the actions we have taken in our lives and see whether we have either openly or secretly done any such thing. Before we take this action, everything about sin is just an idea to us; what the preacher says about it is only a sound that comes in our left ear, goes out our right ear, and is gone. Eventually it becomes a subject relegated to vague thoughts and mumbled words in worship, and for many it comes to seem like something imagi-

nary and mythical. Something completely different occurs, however, if we examine ourselves in the light of our concepts of what is sinful, discover some such thing in ourselves, say to ourselves, "This evil is sinful," and then abstain from it. Then for the first time we receive the instructive and eloquent preaching in church in both of our ears, take it to heart, and [are turned from an earthly person into a spiritual one]. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, paragraph no. 525)

Active life change ("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)

Whenever we actively repent, the evils that we recognize and acknowledge we call sins. We therefore begin to abstain and turn away from them. Eventually we begin to feel the pleasure of those evils as unpleasant. The more this happens, the more we see and love what is good, and eventually even feel delight in it, which is the delight that the angels in heaven feel. Briefly put, the more we put the Devil behind us, the more we are adopted by the Lord and are taught, led, held back from what is evil, and kept in what is good by Him. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, paragraph no. 567.6)

4. Check-in
 - a. (It is recommended that *Check-in* be skipped due to the length of this meeting.)
5. Group business
 - a. Any announcements or group decisions that need to be made.
 - b. Remind people that they have the opportunity to join an ongoing *BNL* support group—either in person or online via free video/audio conferencing.
 - c. Announce the day(s), time, and location for ongoing meetings.
6. Overview of the evening
 - a. Let people know what will happen in this meeting:
 - 1) A reading of the task that was assigned for this meeting.
 - 2) Group sharing.
 - 3) Communion with God.
 - 4) Closure.
7. Task for this 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.
 - 1) Holy Communion—a unique, symbolic ritual of life change and spiritual transformation.
 - 2) Closure for the six-week program.

7:15 Group sharing

1. The group leader poses each of the following questions in turn. He or she invites as many responses as time allows for each question to be asked and answered.
 - a. What was your experience of the full *BNL* process this week?
 - b. What is one part of the process that has been particularly helpful to you over the past six weeks? Please explain.
 - c. Choose *one* of the inspirational quotations that appear on the *BNL* worksheets (see handout)—one that has been particularly meaningful to you. Why do you like that particular quotation? What value has it held for you?

7:45 Communion with God

1. The *Communion with God* ritual includes the following features, some of which are optional:
2. (Note: The group leader can use the following list to prepare for the ritual in advance of the retreat, and also to instruct people in what will happen during this part of the meeting.)
 - a. The group leader will take part in the ritual along with everyone else.
 - b. There will be an opening song sung by the participants.
 - c. There will be an opening reading which describes the ritual and the positive effects it can have.
 - d. The participants will light individual tea lights and place them on or around the table at the center of the group or front of the room.
 - e. There will be a short, quiet piece of meditative music played or performed—a time for personal reflection, silent prayer, and final preparation for communing with God.
 - f. There will be a reading from the Bible—an account of the first communion of its kind.
 - g. Everyone will be invited to kneel for the duration of the communion.
 - 1) Those who can't kneel for the entire time will remain seated.
 - h. An opening prayer will be offered by the group leader, a participant, or different people in the form of an additive prayer. (An additive prayer is one in which each person adds a sentence or two to what others have said before them, and it ends when the group leader says "Amen.")
 - i. The participants will receive the communion bread, then the wine and/or its alternative, from the group leader, and pass them from person to person. Each person will eat and drink.
 - 1) Note: Some groups will prefer to use *leavened* bread and/or a non-alcoholic alternative to wine. If both wine and a non-alcoholic alternative are used, they will be passed together.
 - 2) Note: A simple recipe for making unleavened bread is included at the end of this leader guide.
 - j. A closing prayer will be offered by the group leader, a participant, or different people in the form of an additive prayer.
 - k. The group leader and participants will say *Lord's Prayer* together.
 - l. Those who have been kneeling will rise and take their seats.
 - m. There will be a closing song sung by the participants.
3. Opening song
 - a. An opening song is sung by the participants.

4. Opening reading
 - a. The group leader does the following reading aloud, as a reminder of what the ritual is about and the positive effects it can have:

“Holy Communion” is a unique, symbolic ritual of life change and spiritual transformation. It invites you to come before the Lord as the author of life and source of love, and to present yourself for entrance into a new and heavenly state of heart, mind, and life. It’s a time for humbly submitting yourself to the Lord—putting your heart in his hands, committing your way to his purposes, and opening up your life as a temple in which he may dwell.

The ritual of Holy Communion includes eating unleavened bread and drinking a bit of wine. (Note: Some faith traditions use *leavened* bread and / or non alcoholic alternatives to wine.) The bread and wine are elements from nature, which correspond to goodness and truth from the Lord. Because of this correspondence, eating the bread and drinking the wine are powerful symbols for taking these spiritual realities into your life, absorbing them into your being, and making them your own—as you actively abstain from sin, begin a new life, and live it. In addition, the breakdown and function of the bread and wine in your body serve as an actual, physiological foundation on which the Lord’s inflowing goodness and truth rest. When all of these things happen together, they allow you to enjoy a complete and perfect connection with the Lord—soul, mind, and body. This in turn seals and strengthens the spiritual realities of love and faithfulness within you, as you go forward from this communion and continue living these steps of life change. You are not alone in this process. The Lord is with you, and the Lord will be in you.
5. Candle lighting, meditation, and silent prayer
 - a. There is a candle on a table at the center of the group or front of the room.
 - b. The leader lights the candle.
 - c. A *short* piece of meditative music is played or performed. This is a time for personal reflection, silent prayer, and final preparation for communing with God.
 - d. People signal when they’re ready to proceed by placing their hands, palms up, in their laps.
6. Placement of tea lights
 - a. Each chair has a tea light under it.
 - b. The leader invites people to light their tea lights from the main candle and place them on or around the table.
 - c. As the meditative music continues, the leader invites people to close their eyes and imagine that they themselves *are* the tea light they’ve lit. Imagine all the other tea lights around them being a host of angel allies, or a group of good-hearted people, gathered around them in their spiritual walk with God.
7. Reading from the Bible
 - a. The group leader does the following reading aloud—an account of the first communion of its kind:

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?" And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a person will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. And wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"'" Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us." So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover. In the evening He came with the twelve. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many." (Mark 14:12-17, 22-24)

8. Communion ritual
 - a. The ritual for communing with God now takes place. It includes the following features, some of which are optional:
 - b. Everyone is invited to kneel (for the duration of the communion).
 - 1) Those who can't kneel for the entire time remain seated.
 - c. An opening prayer is offered by the group leader, a participant, or different people in the form of an additive prayer.
 - d. People receive the communion bread, then the wine and/or its alternative, from the group leader, and pass them from person to person. Each person eats and drinks.
 - e. A closing prayer is offered by the group leader, a participant, or different people in the form of an additive prayer.
 - f. Everyone says the *Lord's Prayer* together.
 - g. Those who have been kneeling rise and take their seats.
9. Closing music or song
 - a. A closing piece of music is played or performed, or the attendees sing a closing song.
10. Departure
 - a. (It is recommended that *Closing Comments* be skipped for this meeting, due to its length, and that participants be invited to depart the meeting at this point.)

8:15 End time

Begin a New Life

Quotations from the BNL Worksheets

Step 1: Examine Yourself

- Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Ps. 139:23-24)

A Prayer from the Heart:

- Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Ps. 51:10)
- The prayer is to be a request that the Lord have mercy on us, give us the power to resist the evils we've repented of, and provide us an inclination and desire to do what is good. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, paragraph no. 539)

Step 2: Recognize and Acknowledge Your Sin

- Indeed I have sinned.... (Joshua 7:20)
- Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son. (Luke 15:21)
- The tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." (Luke 18:13)
- The confession is to be that we see, recognize, and admit to our evils, and that we are discovering that we are miserable sinners. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, paragraph no. 539)

Step 3: Pray to the Lord

- With God all things are possible. (Matthew 19:26)
- The smallest amount of divine power is enough, every time it is called on, to tame instantly the entire devil's gang, even if it consisted of millions. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Charity*, paragraph no. 203)
- People who believe in God say to themselves, "With God's help I will conquer this." And they pray for it and obtain it. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, paragraph no. 8626)
- Ask, and it will be given to you. (Matthew 7:7)

Step 4: Begin a New Life

- Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. (Matthew 3:10)
- If after self-examination we decide that we do not want an evil, because it is a sin, then we are practicing a repentance that is true and deep. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, paragraph no. 532)
- When we see something evil in ourselves that we love and desire, and we know what sin is, we can, if we beg for the Lord's help, stop willing it. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Divine Providence*, paragraph no. 278)
- Then I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 11:19)

Materials & Set-Up

1. Equipment for playing recorded music (if needed)
2. A selection of recorded music (if needed)
3. Guitar or other form of musical accompaniment
4. Guitar stand (if needed)
5. Music stand (if needed)
6. Chairs set in a circle or semicircle
7. A coffee table in the center of the circle or at the front of the room
8. A single candle on the coffee table
9. A method for lighting the candle
10. Handout: "Quotations from the *BNL Worksheets*"
11. Song sheets for any songs that will be sung
12. One tea light under each chair
13. Plate, wine glass, water glass, and/or individual cups for the ritual
14. Unleavened bread and wine
15. A non alcoholic alternative to wine (if desired)
16. Conference call or video/audio conferencing arranged ahead of time for any people conferencing in
17. Conference phone or computer

Unleavened Bread

Recipe

- 1 cup unbleached, sifted flour
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 5 teaspoons water

Mix thoroughly to form non-sticky dough for rolling. (Note: If the dough is too dry and doesn't hold together, add tiny amounts of water until it does. Too *much* water will make the final product dense and hard.)

Roll between wax paper (to 3/16-inch thickness) and cut in circles using a water or wine glass like a cookie cutter.

Bake at 350° F for 18 to 20 minutes until golden.