

Begin a New Life

Group Meeting #4 Begin a New Life

Meeting Outline

Note: For a full description of how this meeting runs, go to the *Begin a New Life* website (www.BeginaNewLife.info), the page titled, *Six-Week Program for Small Groups*, and view the pdf titled, *General Description of Meetings*.

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.

Quiet music can be played while people arrive and during the first two opening activities—*Opening Prayer and Readings*.

7:00 p.m. 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* 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 thought.
- b. No cross talk or conversation.
- c. Acknowledge each person's contribution with brief words of "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. 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. Reading of the task for this week

Read (out loud) the task that was assigned for this meeting. Here it is:

Step 4: *Begin a New Life*

- 1) Do *one* of the following:
 - a) Use a new set of worksheets and go through all four steps of the *BNL* process relative to the sin you've chosen to work on.
 - b) Review the Step 1, Step 2, and Step 3 worksheets that you filled out at the seminar-workshop, then go through a set of Step 4 worksheets relative to the sin you've been working on.
- 2) Come to the group meeting ready to describe your experience of practicing Step 4 of the process—*Begin a New Life*.

Cont.

7:20 Group sharing

1. People talk about 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 questions that can elicit further sharing (see below following the meeting outline). Your job as group leader is to listen to the sharing that is going on, and decide which of the questions is an appropriate "next step" in *Group Sharing*. Then you pose that question at an appropriate time. (Note: Some of the questions may have already been answered in the initial sharing.) This continues as needed until the end of *Group Sharing*.

8:05 Closure

1. Task for the next meeting
 - a. Read the assignment for the next meeting out loud, and answer any questions about it (see the assignment sheet below titled, *An Easier Kind of Change*).
 - b. Hand out copies of the assignment sheet for people to take home.
2. Closing thoughts
 - a. One closing thought per person.
 - b. No cross talk or conversation.
 - c. Acknowledge each person's contribution with brief words of "Thank you" before moving on to the next person.
 - d. Groups larger than eight are broken into groups of four to eight.
3. 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.

8:15 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 (if any) did it hold? Please explain.
2. During **Step 3** of this 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? If so, in what way?

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

3. What was your experience of abstaining from your sin? Was it an easy thing to do? difficult? somewhere in between? Please explain.
4. What does the word "abstain" mean to you, relative to the sin you're working on? How successful were you at doing this? Please explain.
5. Were there times this 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. After you returned to your daily work or routine, how did you access that help and power in the moment when you needed it? How well did that work? Please explain.

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

7. Any time you abstain from sin, it creates room for the Lord to breathe new life into you. This new life can first be felt as an inclination, and even a desire, to do what is good. What did you do (in Step 4.2) to invite that inclination and desire to enter? What effect(s) did this have? Please explain.
8. What were one or two of the good things that you felt inclined to do, and even a desire to do, as part of a new life? What was it like to have these things show up at the doorstep of your heart and mind?
9. Briefly describe one experience you had of living a new life this week?

Cont.

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

10. In Step 4.3, you are encouraged to “do all of this as if you were doing it on your own.” What do these words mean to you? What was your experience of doing this part of the process? What value (if any) did it hold? Please explain.
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 invested enough in the final outcome? Please describe.
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 invested enough in the final outcome? Please describe.
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? Please explain.
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* of life change and spiritual transformation “as if you were doing it on your own” mean to you? What value (if any) does it hold in the overall process? Please explain.

Break point

Question related to Step 4.4—*Do This Once or Twice a Year When You are about to Take Part in Holy Communion:*

15. Step 4.4 of the process involves taking part in a unique 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? Has it had noticeable effects on you? Please explain.

Questions related to Step 4.5—*Afterward, When the Sin for Which You Are at Fault Recurs, Say to Yourself, “I Do Not Want/Will This Because It is a Sin against God:”*

16. Step 4.5 happens when the sin you're abstaining from *recurs*. What has been your experience of sin “recurring”? how does it do so? when does it do so? under what circumstances? Please explain. Is there a particular situation or event that triggers its recurrence? 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 is a sin against God”? What happens when you say these words and take this stance? Please explain.

18. Step 4.5 invites you to give a particular reason *why* you don't want/will the sin you're abstaining from. The reason is "because it is a sin against God." What happens inside of you when you state this as your reason?
19. Take a minute and brainstorm different reasons why you (or anyone) might avoid doing something hurtful, 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 is 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 proclaiming with one voice, 'We do not want/will this because it is a sin against God.'" What value (if any) did this hold for you? What effect(s) did it have on you? What value did it hold? Please explain.

An Easier Kind of Change

(Assignment for Week 5)

By now (week 4 of this program) you have gone through the full process of active life change and spiritual transformation for one particular sin in your life. But in addition to that 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 find 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 hurtful or destructive thoughts and intentions as they first enter your mind, stopping them in their tracks before they do any damage. 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 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.¹

Having this easy method of change at your disposal 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 the section of the *Sourcebook* which talks about this easier kind of change (see the *Begin a New Life* website under *Program Materials*, the *Sourcebook* page, *Section C* of the *Sourcebook*).
- Next, do *exactly* what this easier kind of change suggests. Any time you are considering doing something hurtful, damaging, or destructive (evil)—*different* from the one sin you're currently abstaining from using the 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 say-ing these words to yourself over and over again—even when they don't 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 assignment 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