

Begin a New Life

Group Meeting #6 Wrap-up, Communion with God, & Closure

Meeting Outline

Note: This outline combines a group meeting, communion with God, and closure for the *BNL Six-Week Program*.

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

7:00 p.m. Opening activities

1. Opening prayer
2. 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!" For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord;
Make His paths straight.'"

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. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn." (Matthew 3:1-3, 5-8, 10-12)

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 imaginary 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 [turn from an earthly person into a spiritual one]. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity* 525)

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)

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* 567.6)

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.
 - b. Remind people that they have the option to join an ongoing support group based on the *BNL* process.
 - c. Announce the day(s), time, and location for ongoing meetings.
5. Overview of the evening
 - a. Give people a general picture of what will happen in this meeting:
 - 1) Reading of the task that was assigned for this meeting.
 - 2) Group sharing.
 - 3) Communion with God.
 - 4) Closure.
6. Reading of the task for this meeting
 - a. Read (out loud) the task that was assigned for this meeting. Here it is:
 - 1) Use a new set of worksheets and go through all four steps of the *BNL* process relative to the sin you've been working on.
 - 2) Come to the final meeting prepared for the following:
 - a) A final time of sharing and discussion.
 - b) Communion with God.
 - c) Closure.

7:20 Group sharing

1. Questions for sharing (the leader poses each of these questions in turn):
 - 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 quotations that appear at the bottom of the worksheets—one that has been particularly meaningful and inspiring to you. Why do you like that particular quotation? What value has it held for you? Please explain.
 - 1) See the end of this outline for a one-page list of the quotations.
 - 2) Note to the leader: You may wish to have the list available as a handout for the group.

7:45 Communion with God

1. The *BNL Communion with God* includes the following, with a number of items being optional. (Note: The group leader may wish to use this list to give people a picture of what will happen in this part of the meeting.)
 - a. The group leader will take part in the communion along with everyone else.
 - b. There will be an opening piece of music played or presented, or an opening song sung by the attendees.
 - c. There will be a quiet piece of music that is played—a time for personal reflection, silent prayer, and final preparation for communing with God.
 - d. We will light individual tea lights and place them on or around the table at the center of the group / front of the room.
 - e. There will be an inspirational reading.
 - f. The communion will happen.
 - g. During the communion, unleavened bread will be passed from person to person, then some wine.
 - 1) *Note: People for whom the drinking of wine may compromise their health, well-being, and/or usefulness may drink water instead—a correspondent approximation to wine. Either that or another correspondent alternative. This alternative will be passed at the same time as the wine.*
 - h. There will be a closing song sung by the attendees.
2. Opening music or song
 - a. An opening piece of music is played or performed, or an opening song is sung by the attendees.
3. Candle lighting, meditation, and silent prayer
 - a. There is a candle on the table at the center of the group or front of the room.
 - b. The leader lights that candle.
 - c. A piece of meditative music is begun.
 - d. There is time for personal reflection, prayer, and final preparation for the communion.
 - e. People signal when they're ready to proceed by positioning their hands palms up in their laps.
4. Placement of tea lights
 - a. Each chair has a tea light under it.
 - b. Invite people to light their tea lights (off the main candle) and place them on or around the table.
 - c. As the meditative music continues, invite the people to close their eyes and imagine themselves actually *being* 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 work.

5. Reading
 - a. Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His 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)

6. Communion
 - a. *Communion with God* now takes place. It includes the following, with some of the items being optional:
 - b. Attendees kneel (for the duration of the communion).
 - 1) *Note: Those who can't kneel for the entire time remain seated.*
 - c. A prayer appropriate to communion with God is offered by the group leader, a group member, or different members of the group taking turns.
 - d. People pass unleavened bread* from person to person, then wine. Each person eats and drinks.
 - 1) *Note: People for whom the drinking of wine may compromise their health, well-being, and/or usefulness may drink water instead—a correspondent approximation to wine. Either that or another correspondent alternative.*
 - e. A closing prayer is offered by a group member or facilitator, or by different members of the group taking turns.
 - f. The *Lord's Prayer* is said by the attendees (still kneeling).
 - g. The attendees take their seats.

7. Closing music or song
 - a. A closing piece of music is played or performed, or a closing song is sung by the attendees.

8:15 Closure

1. 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.

8:30 End time

Quiet music can be played as people socialize and depart.

*Unleavened Bread

BNL Communion with God includes (among other things) eating unleavened bread and drinking wine. Here is a simple recipe for making unleavened bread:

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

Mix thoroughly to form a 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.

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* 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 acknowledge our evils, and that we are discovering that we are miserable sinners. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity* 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 crew, even if it consisted of millions. (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Charity* 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* 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* 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* 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
2. A selection of recorded music as 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 communion with God
14. Unleavened bread and wine
15. Water or other correspondent alternative to wine
16. Conference call arranged ahead of time for any people phoning in
17. Conference phone