

ENEMIES NO MORE

SESSION 6

Knocking Down the Dividing Walls of Hostility
Societal

Sharing Life

(20 minutes)

Gather: Welcome one another to Session 6 of Enemies No More. Take a few minutes to enjoy a cup of coffee or refreshments and touch base on the past week.

Discuss: Your *personal* Life Application Challenge for this past week was to initiate at least one meaningful conversation of five minutes or more with someone who is not of your generation. Please turn back to your notes on page 96 in Session 5 and share some highlights with one another. Who did you talk to? How did it go? What did you learn?

Then, conclude by considering the following question: If we each personally stretched to make cross-generational conversations a regular part of our experience, how would this contribute to breaking down **generational “dividing walls of hostility?”**

Your *Group* Life Application Challenge was to plan a fun event for your Life Group.

Has this event taken place yet or is it still in the planning stages? If it has already happened, take a moment to ask, “Did we have fun? Did we get to know each other better? Would we like to do something together again? What might be another good idea or two for a fun event? Is our Life Group developing deep and meaningful relationships that reflect the spirit of family?”

If your fun event has not yet taken place, are there any further details you need to lock down?

Your *City-Transformation* Life Application Challenge was to strategically implement the principles of Prayer Evangelism in your home?

Again, turn back to your notes on page 97 of Session 5 if you would like. Talk about what you did to **“speak peace and blessing, build relationships, respond to needs and proclaim the Good News of Jesus.”**

How were your words or actions received? Did you share with your family why you were doing these things? Did they notice? What part of this Prayer Evangelism strategy would you particularly like to keep implementing with your family? Were there any blessings that came back to you because of it?

Pray Together: Dear heavenly Father, we praise you for this day and for another opportunity to meet together. We thank you that our Life Group is growing together in Christian love and friendship. May you continue to be at work in us to help us knock down any walls that may still divide us. Help us continue to develop a lifestyle of Prayer Evangelism both within our families and as we reach-out to those around us. We ask for special wisdom and Holy Spirit insight for our session today as we consider **societal** “*dividing walls of hostility.*” Open our hearts to see every person as you see them and to reach-out to others with the love of Christ. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Transformed Thinking

(30 minutes)

Read: Slavery represents one of the most painful and striking examples of the depravity of the human soul. The thought that any human being can “own” another ought to be repulsive to any civil society or believing person. And yet, the “*dividing walls of hostility*” previously discussed in our Enemies No More series have all contributed to the long history of slavery. Because society has allowed such strident divisions to continue to exist in our world based on race, gender, age and even denomination, it has not been a stretch to further devalue and demonize human beings as slaves. Even today, in the “dark alleys” of society, human trafficking is on the increase.

In Bible times, slavery was a common and accepted practice. In both Roman and Greek cultures, most slaves had no legal rights and were treated as commodities in the world of business and commerce. Slaves were bought and sold like animals or tools. When older slaves got sick, they were not fed. A master could kill a slave for little or no reason with the only penalty being the loss of his investment. In some cases, even members of his own family could be sold into slavery if they didn’t meet with his approval.

The Bible does not specifically condemn slavery within its culture; however, the Law of Moses put in place many safeguards against abuse. Here is one such section of scripture from *Exodus 21:26-27*.

“If a man hits a manservant or maidservant in the eye and destroys it, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the eye. And if he knocks out the tooth of a manservant or maidservant, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the tooth.”

Hebrew slaves had the right to go free after seven years, with some conditions. Whole families that had been slaves were released during the Year of Jubilee which came every fifty years.

In light of these common cultural practices, the Apostle Paul and the young Christian community in Ephesus were faced with some challenging choices. You see, many of the Gentiles who were coming to Christ were slave owners themselves. As they received Paul’s letter they must have wondered, “What counsel will he provide on this issue?” Paul’s response might surprise you, as it probably did them.

In *Ephesians 6:5-9*, Paul continues to break “old paradigms” with the “new revelation” he was receiving from the Holy Spirit. Read this scripture out loud as a Life Group:

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave

or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.”

What is Paul’s counsel to slaves that had become Christians?

*“**Slaves, obey your earthly masters...**”* - this involved offering respect, sincerity, obedience and wholehearted service.

What is Paul’s counsel to masters who had become Christians?

*“**And masters, treat your slaves in the same way.**”* - they were to treat their slaves with these same qualities, and especially, they were not to threaten them.

What did Paul suggest as the motivation for both masters and slaves to treat each other this way?

*“**...there is no favoritism with him.**”* (God) - they were to treat one another like equals before the Lord and be a witness to others.

Now pause for a moment and take a look at what Paul just did here. Without ever standing up in the town square and denouncing slavery as evil, dehumanizing and contrary to God’s will, he effectively cut the legs out from under it with his inspired teaching and personal recommendations.

In fact, what Paul is describing here is no less than the “mutual submission” of masters and slaves in the same way that he just finished teaching it to husbands and wives, parents and children. Can you imagine how radical this was! I’m guessing there were some heated discussions around Christian dinner tables in Ephesus, perhaps with the servants within earshot!

Discuss: What impact would Paul’s teaching on “masters and slaves” have had on the social “*dividing walls of hostility*” in his day?

Read: Should we be surprised at Paul’s teaching? The theme of unity and equality before God for every person pervades his letters throughout the New Testament.

*“**You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”**
Galatians 3:26-28*

*“**There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.**”*
Romans 3:22b-24

“As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ Romans 10:11-13

“There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Eph. 4:4-6

Our God is an equal access employer... even slaves and masters are welcomed equally into the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

There are two important perceptions that guided Paul’s approach to this issue in Ephesus:

- First, he believed that Jesus was likely to return within his lifetime and that the institution of slavery and other societal ills would be abolished without human effort.
- Second, he believed that inner freedom was more important than external circumstances. This was his personal witness even as he wrote this letter to the Ephesians from his jail cell.

Let’s consider several scriptures that make these points very clearly:

“What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. For this world in its present form is passing away.” I Corinthians 7:29, 31b

*“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”
Philippians 4:11b-13*

Paul knew suffering! Paul had dined with kings as well as rats. Paul’s heart was to help every person discover the extraordinary love and grace of God. That’s why he called for a transformation of attitude among both masters and slaves rather than an overthrow of the institution of slavery itself.

For masters and slaves to model Paul’s admonition to **“submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”** would provide an extraordinary witness to the world and an indication of the coming kingdom of God!

Discuss: Which would you rather experience... external or internal freedom? Why?

Share some examples of people in history who have lived in bondage and oppression and yet have experienced true freedom in Christ.

How do you know when to work within a system to achieve your desired result versus when to try to change it? Give some examples of this dynamic at work in contemporary culture. Consider examples from politics and religion for starters!

Read: Paul not only taught these biblical principles, he lived them. Do you know the story of the runaway slave named Onesimus? Paul had met him in prison and had led him to the Lord. Now, upon his release, Paul wrote to his friend Philemon, the owner of Onesimus, and pleaded for him to receive his slave back home as a new brother in Christ. In one of the shortest books of the Bible, the book of Philemon, Paul writes:

“I appeal to you for my son, Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. (vs.10)

“I am sending him – who is my very heart – back to you.” (vs.12)

“Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good – no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.” (vs.15-16)

Paul’s focus was never on the circumstances of the past but always on the new relationship that was possible because of Jesus Christ. As the Church began to teach and model this new “Christian ethic”... as both slaves and owners began to recognize one another spiritually as “brothers and sisters in Christ”... it put into motion a process that would eventually lead to the demise of the institution of slavery. Spirit-filled preachers like John Wesley and George Whitefield as well as godly statesman like William Wilberforce shared these same principles of the equality of all people before God. As a result, the legal slave trade in Europe and America was eventually stopped.

Discuss: Describe a time in your life when someone made an appeal for a second chance on your behalf. What impact did their appeal have on you and the recipient of the message?

Read: Paul’s teaching also provides the template for healthy employer – employee relationships in the world of business and commerce today. The age-old conflicts between managers and workers, white-collar and blue-collar, executives and unions, could benefit greatly by incorporating these simple principles of respect, sincerity, obedience and hard work.

What if every Christian worker adopted *Colossians 3:23* as their Mission Statement:

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.”

We need a revolution in the workplace today. We need a revolution of excellence that will result in a testimony for the Lord. Instead of viewing our daily work as merely a necessary evil, we are called to be “ministers in the marketplace” of everyday life. The long-term solution to labor relations is a bigger vision of the workplace on the part of both management and workers.

What if we began to recognize our different roles and responsibilities as part of our unique calling rather than a critique of our value? What if both the CEO who makes million dollar decisions and the janitor who decides when to mop the floor would decide to glorify God through their work?

God calls present-day “owners and slaves” to be productive for the kingdom of God. Paul’s words in *Ephesians 4:28* describe this transformation in Christ as impacting both attitude and outcome so that a person can move from stealing from society to blessing those in need.

“He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.”

The incorporation of these principles alone has the power to challenge our ever-increasing reliance on government and social programs to compensate for the lack of initiative on the part of so many.

Mutual submission is once again the bottom line. It represents the very character of Christ. It applies to all of life. Mutual submission, even in the marketplace, has the power to strike a mighty blow to the greed, suspicion and abuse that continue to divide employees and employers.

When Christians truly begin to live-out their calling to be ministers in the marketplace, the societal “*dividing walls of hostility*” will begin to crumble under the impact of God’s amazing love!

Quote:

“How far was Peter from Jesus when he began to sink? Just a few feet, since Jesus was able to stretch out His hand and get a hold of him. (see Matthew 14:31) Throughout human history, many of the greatest defeats happened within minutes of or inches from victory. Brave men quit and went down in defeat when they could have been crowned with victory had they persisted just a little bit longer.” (Silvoso, Prayer Evangelism, p.40)

Transformation Church Insights:

- Slavery is a striking example of a **societal** “*dividing wall of hostility.*”
- The early Church faced challenging questions regarding the application of its faith to real life just like we do today.
- Paul calls for even the most unequal of relationships in life to demonstrate the equality that is ours through Jesus.
- Paul taught that inner freedom is more important than our external circumstances.
- By modeling our new life in Christ by how we treat people from every part of society, we will break through the walls that have divided us.
- The workplace is an important arena of transformation.

Transformed Living

(40 minutes)

Read: On a larger level, slavery speaks of other “societal walls” that continue to divide societies into classes of rich and poor, “haves” and “have-nots.” The Babylonian economic system portrayed in the scriptures remains entrenched all around us. It is most often manifested through the political and economic institutions of the world, although the institutional church is not exempt. Its henchmen include “class envy, greed, the abuse of power and corruption.” This, along with a continual desire for the accumulation of wealth at the expense of the poorest and most vulnerable among us.

When Jesus spoke at the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth following his baptism and temptation in the wilderness, he unrolled the scroll of Isaiah and declared:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’” Luke 4:18-21

The reaction of the crowd was initially positive but it quickly turned ugly. The people drove Jesus out of town and took him to the edge of a cliff with the intention of throwing him down! Jesus miraculously walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Discuss: Why was this message of “Good News” met with such violent resistance? What societal “*dividing walls*” was Jesus challenging with this Spirit-filled declaration? Write down some responses from your Life Group.

Read: Jesus made it personal! His message was not about exhorting others to do good works. His message was about setting the stage for the “greatest work” in all of human history. The Good News of Jesus would touch society at its points of greatest pain:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me...” Luke 4:18a

“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Luke 4:21

Read the first sentence again as a Life Group and substitute your name for the word “me.” How did that feel?

Transformed Living is about making the Good News of Jesus personal. Don’t get scared away by the word “preach.” If you have Jesus “in” you then you have the Spirit of the Lord “on” you. You have been “anointed” and sent to speak peace, build relationships, respond to needs and share the Good News in Jesus’ name.

If that’s your heart, pause right now, and take a minute for silent prayer in your Life Group. Do some business with God. Tell God, “I receive it. I desire to live it! I pray that the truth of this scripture will be fulfilled every day in my life!” (Pause for silent prayer.)

Discuss: It is often said that people today just don’t want to make commitments. We like to hang loose and keep our options open. You never know what might come up!

How does this attitude change when the “*Spirit of the Lord*” comes upon us?

Read: There are both spiritual and societal “layers” to Jesus’ amazing words in *Luke 4:18-21*. Let’s reflect on them “phrase-by-phrase” and consider their potential impact for knocking down societal “*dividing walls of hostility*.” We will especially take a few minutes to unpack the meaning of:

“... good news to the poor.”

Why must the Church of Jesus Christ respond to the issue of poverty in our world?

- First, because if Jesus proclaimed “*good news to the poor,*” we should be doing the same thing.
- Second, because there is no greater “felt need” in our world today than poverty, and therefore, no greater need upon which to focus our attention.
- Third, because this problem is so large that it can only be solved with God! Therefore, when provision comes, God will get the glory!

The early Church took this declaration by Jesus very seriously. They immediately bridged the “*dividing walls*” between rich and poor through the mutual support that was shared. This visible testimony of unity among people from various social strata was like a magnet that drew people into the kingdom of God.

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”
Acts 2:44-46

From the very beginning of the Church we see “systemic poverty” being dismantled. “Systemic poverty” means the “root causes” that keep people in poverty. The rich and the poor, *“all the believers,”* shared what they had together. They did so not only with their fellow Christians but with *“anyone as he had need.”* This resulted in the favor of *“all the people”* and led to many more being saved.

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.”
Acts 4:32-35

Unity in the early Church opened their eyes to see one another’s needs. It allowed them to hold their possessions lightly and give generously. It led to an outpouring of grace and provision so that *“there were no needy persons among them.”*

From these passages we can draw two very important conclusions about the reality of a transformed world:

- First, because we live in a sinful and broken world there will always be **“people with needs.”**
- Second, because of Jesus Christ and his Church, we can believe and work for the day when there will be **“no needy persons among us.”** By taking our authority in Christ and standing against the evils of “systemic poverty,” we will provide a visible sign of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God.

Discuss: What can the Christian Church of today learn about poverty from the response of the early church? Where have we come up short?

Read: One of the greatest misconceptions about poverty in our world is that poverty is primarily material in nature. In fact, many of us, including Christians, experience various kinds of poverty. Until we come to recognize that we are all poor in different ways, we will never knock down the *“dividing walls of hostility”* between the rich and the poor, the “haves” and the “have-nots.”

In his book, “Transformation,” Ed Silvano provides a definition of poverty based on a key phrase in the Lord’s Prayer. The words are, *“Give us today our daily bread.” Matthew 6:11* Poverty may therefore be defined as “lacking our daily bread” and “systemic poverty” as the “structures that perpetuate this lack of provision.” On this basis, we can identify four kinds of poverty that at one time or another afflict us all. (summary of pp.117-118)

Spiritual poverty afflicts those who don't know that God is their father. They are not able to pray, **"Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name."** *Matthew 6:9b* They are spiritual orphans. They believe that they are all alone, that God has judged or abandoned them, and that no one loves them. When trouble comes, they have no spiritual resources to draw upon.

Relational poverty encompasses those whose focus is on themselves at the expense of the community of which they are a part. They may have great wealth but still suffer from a lack of close relationships with family, friends and associates. Or, it can be a type of relational poverty born of true loneliness in the world. They are lacking the **"us"** and the **"our"** of **"Give us today our daily bread."** *Matthew 6:11*

Motivational poverty is a state of hopelessness that engulfs those who have no adequate way, or means, or the confidence to tackle tomorrow's challenges. **"Daily Bread"** is exactly that. It's an ongoing occurrence. When people come under the grip of poverty, even when there is bread today, they have no hope that they will be able to provide for their needs tomorrow. This leads to anxiety, fear, insecurity and sometimes even greed.

Material poverty is the most obvious manifestation of poverty because it involves lacking the resources necessary to sustain life. In this context, **"Daily Bread"** may include food, water, clothing, housing and other essential resources. Material poverty always compromises people's ability to focus on their spiritual life, relationships and motivation, because when you are hungry, you can't think of anything else.

Discuss: This may be a moment to go deeper in your Life Group conversation... as the Spirit leads. Which of these aspects of poverty has touched your life most significantly in the past or is still affecting you today? Describe how it feels? How does it help to understand poverty from this broader perspective?

Quote:

"Systemic poverty is different from personal poverty in that it is something that most people are born into and their fate is dictated and controlled by it. Those who are not born into it are targets to be brought into it. That is why it must be eliminated – because it reflects a scheme that is diabolical in design and evil in its implementation. It deprives masses of people of their daily bread by stealing the fruit of their labor and keeping them in social misery." (Silvoso, Transformation, p.116)

Read: Next in our *Luke 4* text, Jesus proclaims:

"freedom for the prisoners..."

Millions of people sit in prisons around the world filled with anger, despair and hopelessness. Many are legitimate prisoners paying the penalty for their crimes. Others are imprisoned unjustly as punishment for political dissent or as the result of unfair rulings by corrupted judges and juries.

Jesus had a heart for prisoners, whatever the reason for their incarceration. In *Matthew 25*, Jesus tells the parable of the “sheep and goats.” He provides a fascinating image of judgment day:

“All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right,

‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

*The king will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’” *Matthew 25:32-40**

Discuss: Be reminded that we are “*saved by grace through faith... and not by our good works,*” (*Eph. 2:8*) but that genuine faith always demonstrates itself in love.

Why do you think that Jesus framed this “test of faith” on the basis of our response to “*the least of these?*” In what way is Jesus’ description of “needs” still the same in society today?

What are some other “prisons” that people find themselves in?

Read: Next in our *Luke 4* text Jesus proclaims:

“recovery of sight for the blind...”

There are many beautiful and inspiring stories of healing in the Bible. We also discover that both “blindness” and “sight” can have several layers of meaning. Take turns reading in your Life Group. Be challenged and encouraged by these scriptures!

“Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!’ The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!’ Jesus stopped and called them. ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ he asked. ‘Lord,’ they answered, ‘we want our sight.’ Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight”

and followed him.” Matthew 20:30-34 (Jesus is interruptible and compassionate. When our eyes are opened, our hearts will also be opened to follow him.)

“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” Hebrews 4:13 (You can run but you can’t hide from the righteous, yet ever-pursuing love of God.)

“This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.” Matthew 13:13 (Is it possible that you are “seeing but not seeing” when it comes to God’s plans and purposes for your life?)

“Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’ Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” John 20:27-29 (We like to say, “Seeing is believing!” However, faith is believing even what we cannot see.)

“When he was at table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’” Luke 24:30-32 (Revelation comes when we receive the bread of life, Jesus Christ. Do you have “heart-burn” Christianity?)

“We live by faith, not by sight.” II Corinthians 5:7 (Word alone – Faith alone – Grace alone!)

“Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” John 9:25 (A personal testimony of transformation is powerful and affective.)

Discuss: What is one area in your life where you need greater spiritual sight and insight?

Read: Next in our *Luke 4* text Jesus proclaims:

“to release the oppressed...”

Oppression is slavery of the soul! It will beat you down until you feel as though you want to die! Oppression can be *physical*, where abuse robs us of dignity or chemicals like drugs and alcohol rob us of self-control. Oppression can be *political*, where physical freedoms of voice and movement are denied. Oppression can be *psychological*, where voices within make life confusing, lonely, emotional and depressing. Oppression can be *social*, where the love of family and friends is withheld or absent altogether... where self-confidence is destroyed. And, oppression can be *spiritual*, where intimacy with God is robbed by demons of doubt and judgment... where Christian people and congregations are living in bondage to “old paradigms” of religion rather than relationship.

Jesus came to provide freedom from every type and kind of oppression. “Release” is a powerful word! Jesus said, *“to release the oppressed...”*

“My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare.”

Psalms 25:15 (Bondage comes when our eyes remain focused on the things of the earth. Release comes when our eyes are lifted up and we call upon the Lord.)

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:31-32, 38 (There is no other freedom to be found that is greater than the freedom that comes through the Son, Jesus Christ!)

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” Romans 8:1-2 (Oppression condemns. Jesus affirms.)

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1 (Don’t fall back when your freedom in Christ is calling you forward.)

Discuss: Where do you see oppression in your city or region? Which of the types of oppression mentioned above seems to be most prevalent?

Read: Of all the Old Testament prophecies by which Jesus could have introduced his life and ministry, he chose this amazing text from *Isaiah 61* that announces Good News to the poor. These themes of freedom for all who are imprisoned, blind and oppressed continued everywhere he went.

Jesus is the one who will do what no politician or program can do by bringing Good News to the poor, transformation and release from the bondages of poverty, imprisonment, blindness and oppression into abundance and true freedom. To all of these societal *“dividing walls of hostility,”* Jesus proclaimed *“the year of the Lord’s favor.”* As followers of Christ, we are now called to carry forward this amazing message!

Transformed Living comes when transformed followers of Jesus take their authority in Christ and continue knocking down the walls that enslave the people God loves. Jesus made it personal. So should we!

Read these beautiful and powerful words of Jesus from *Luke 4:18-21* together as a Life Group to conclude this Transformed Living section.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’”

Transformation Church Insights

- The issue of slavery is illustrative of other **societal** “*dividing walls.*”
- Jesus’ words are always meant to impact us personally.
- Jesus’ concern for the poor represents a call to the Church to respond to the slavery of “systemic poverty” with both compassion and justice.
- The authenticity of our faith can be measured by our capacity to love “*the least of these.*”
- Spiritual revelation moves us from sight to insight.
- A personal relationship with Jesus will lead to greater freedom from every area of bondage that enslaves our lives.

Life Application Challenges

(10 minutes)

Read: Your Life Application Challenges this week will include both reflection and action. Read them together and encourage one another to “Go for it!”

Your *Personal* Life Application Challenge this week is to meditate and pray on the classic prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, who lived from 1181-1226. Your assignment is to meditate and pray on this words which reflect the heart of Session 6 and the need to knock down **societal** “*dividing walls of hostility.*” Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in considering what your response might be as you apply these truths to your daily life.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is discord, union;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and

it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

You are also encouraged to continue your faithfulness in Daily Devotions, Prayer and Scripture Memory. If you have gotten off track, pick it up again this week.

Your *Group* Life Application Challenge is to identify someone in your congregation or community that is experiencing one of the four aspects of poverty; spiritual, relational, motivational or material. (You can go back to page 112 and briefly review these categories if it would be helpful.)

Your challenge this week will be to initiate a “group response” that will be received by them as “good news” and a sign of God’s love.

Material needs are always the most obvious, so stretch your Life Group to think about this for a moment. This individual or family may be from your local congregation. They could also be from one of your Circles of Influence or the community. Do some brain-storming right now and jot down some ideas of people and projects:

Now, try to arrive at a decision and put your game plan together. Keep it simple; a meal, some home repairs, baby-sitting, yard work, networking, a special gift...

We will reach-out to _____ by doing what _____ by when _____.

If you can't pull it off this week, this group challenge can carry over. It's better to go for it as soon as possible. Have fun!

Your *City-Transformation* Life Application Challenge is to engage in a deeper way with the issues of "systemic poverty" in your city and region. Ideas for exploration of this issue may include:

- Read your local paper with both sight and insight for **societal "dividing walls of hostility."** Pause and pray for those involved.
- "Prayer Walk" your community, perhaps with a friend or group, to speak peace and bless your city, including the troubled spots.
- Identify "the least of these" in your city or region. Try to find out what is being done by the Church and the community to be Good News to them? The Lord may prompt you to get involved.
- Engage in a discussion with a team of community leaders to begin to identify issues of "systemic poverty" in your city or region.
- Meet with your pastor or a team of people in your congregation to conduct a review of your church "outreach ministries." Ask, "Which of these programs and ministries responds to 'felt needs' and which of them is attempting to deal with 'systemic' issues related to poverty?" Is there a balance? Is any adjustment required to respond more effectively?

Take some notes as necessary in order to report back to your Life Group next week:

Prayer Support

(15 minutes)

Every week you will be encouraged to take a few moments to share personal prayer requests within your group. Go ahead and do that now. You may write them down here:

Now, close with a group prayer for these needs and continue to include them in your prayers throughout the week.

Details

(5 minutes)

Finalize any details with your Host/Leader and Life Group members. Remember to share responsibilities, especially refreshments and childcare as needed.

Our next Life Group Session is:

Date:

Location:

Time:

Remember to bring:

Memory Verse Challenge

Ephesians 4:28

*“He who has been stealing must steal no longer,
but must work, doing something useful with his own hands,
that he may have something to share with those in need.”*

Daily Devotions

Read: Continue your Daily Devotions this week. Is God blessing you through this quiet time each day? Do you feel rushed and pressured to get them in, or are you growing in your appreciation of this time of reading, reflection and prayer? Below you will find some passages of scripture for each day of the coming week, starting with Day One tomorrow. Read the scripture. Reflect on the questions. Pray as God leads you. Enjoy! This is about your relationship with Jesus!

Day One – II Thessalonians 3:6-15

What would happen to our social programs in the world if Paul's recommendation became the standard: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." Vs.10b Do you know people who qualify for the statement: "They are not busy; they are busybodies." Why does hard work hold such a high value in the Christian faith? Hint: Review Eph. 4:28 and Col. 3:23

Day Two – II Corinthians 4:7-18

In what ways can suffering strengthen a person's faith? Have you observed someone who is dying being renewed in their relationship with Jesus at the same time? On what basis ought we never to lose heart in life? What does it mean to keep your eyes fixed on what is unseen?

Day Three – Matthew 9:35-38

In what ways do people today often appear to be "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd?" What is your understanding or definition of compassion? Where do you see an abundant harvest available today? Is there still a need for willing workers?

Day Four – Matthew 20:1-16

Why does one man's generosity become another man's injustice in this story? How does the element of "fairness" or "greed" enter into labor relations today? Have you experienced it personally? Consider how this story may relate to God's desire to give salvation to someone that makes a deathbed conversion as well as a person who has been a faithful believer their whole life. Who is really cheated?

Day Five – II Corinthians 5:11-6:2

In what way has "Christ's love" compelled you? vs.14 Why is it easiest to regard the people in this world from a "worldly point of view?" vs.16 On what basis are we to see them differently? In what ways does reconciliation take the redemption earned by Jesus on the cross and make it personal?

Day Six – I Corinthians 6:9-11

Satan is a deceiver. In what ways would society like to convince us that God's Word is no longer valid related to social issues today? On the basis of this passage of scripture, is it possible for people to find hope and healing? Where must they go for help?

Day Seven – Your Life Group meets today!