

FACILITATOR



Towards a Transformed Society

Bible Studies Linking Faith to Transformation



Social Justice Season 2011
Diakonia Council of Churches

CHANGING LIVES

Bible studies linking faith to transformation



*Towards a
Transformed
Society*



Social Justice Season 2011
Diakonia Council of Churches

OPENING PRAYER FOR EACH WEEK

Gracious God, the Spirit of Life,

*I offer myself to you this day, inviting
your will and your way to flow as living
water in my life.*

*I acknowledge that your power of
goodness is the force in my body, mind,
spirit and soul.*

*I ask for your inspiration as I allow
your transformation to take place in
my life, my church, my family and my
community.*

*I pray this prayer for transformation
through Christ, who strengthens me.*

Amen



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DAILY MEDITATION

I am willing to do the personal work needed to sustain, activate and hold the resonance of my own transforming journey.

What could an individual possibly do in the face of impending global disasters? How could an individual make a difference, in the face of the personal self-centeredness and addiction to and/or aspiration to achieve unsupportable Western lifestyles – that are built upon the exploitation of the human and natural resources of the rest of the world? In the face of leaders of nations who do not see beyond their next election campaign or whatever other process keeps them in power? In the face of corporations that put monetary profits above human and planetary concerns?

I've come to believe there is something significant that each of us can do.

http://www.enebuilder.net/emmabragdon/e_article001144880.cfm?x=b11,0,w

Awaken your spirit to adventure
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

John O'Donahue

SOME TIPS FOR THE FACILITATOR

1. Use one of the 'defrosting' suggestions (see page 6) to break the ice – at the beginning of each week's gathering – especially if yours is a new group or if new people have joined your group specifically for the Social Justice Season.
2. Allow some time for people to share something about their week – from the second week ask them to share how their social action went.
3. Encourage everyone to participate. There are usually talkative people and quiet people in every group. Try to monitor that the talkative ones do not take over and find ways to draw the shy ones out to also make a contribution to the discussion. Give the shy ones the task of reading out loud if they seem hesitant to share personal stories.
4. Use the 'Learning Cycle' format to help everyone gain the maximum benefit from the study each week – *read, look, reflect and act*.
5. Try to vary the format of each week's discussion. A good facilitator avoids repetition and that keeps the group guessing as to how the Bible Study will be approached each week. At the first week's study it is usually appropriate to lead in a familiar way – in order to make everyone feel comfortable. From the second week introduce some small changes to the format. Remember that role-plays and other creative innovations help people to remember what they have learnt.
6. Set a time frame, in consultation with the group, and stick to it. It builds confidence in the group members if they know exactly what time they will start and what time the Bible Study will end. This also helps those who have to make transport arrangements.
7. Prepare well! If a facilitator is unprepared it shows and people will start dropping out if they feel that the group leader is disorganised. Place bookmarks in any books or the Bible that you wish to refer to during the discussion. Give each component a time frame (for your own use) and then ensure that you keep to it in order to cover every aspect of the Bible Study. (It is not crucial if the group doesn't finish discussing all the questions.)
8. Start and end with a time of prayer.



DEFROSTING SUGGESTIONS

Defrosting suggestions for 'breaking the ice' – especially for new groups or where new people have joined existing small groups:

1. Personal Scavenger Hunt

Take five minutes and find the following items in your wallet or purse: Something that ..

- you've had a long time.
- you're proud of
- reveals a lot about you
- reminds you of a fun time
- concerns or worries you.

Have each person share the first item. Go around again on the second item, and again until you have gone through each one. Don't feel like you have to use the whole list because it will take too long. Perhaps you can ask the participants to share two items on their list with the group.

2. Get To Know You Questions

- What do you do for fun?
- What would be your ideal vacation?
- What is the most memorable activity you did with your family as a child?
- What quality do you appreciate most in a friend?
- What is one characteristic you received from your parents that you want to keep, and one you wish you could change?
- What is a good thing happening in your life right now? What makes it good?
- If you knew you couldn't fail and money was no object, what would you like to do in the next five years?
- What would you like said at your funeral?
- When, if ever, did God become more than a word to you, and how did it happen?

3. Did You Know?

This is great for a group that doesn't know one another well. Find interesting facts about individual group members before the group meets. Try to discover information that sets each person apart from the others, such as "I have a tugboat named after me" or "I once wrecked the same quarter panel of my car four times" or, "I have a twin."

Then make a sheet with one fact from each person and a blank beside this fact. Give everyone in the group a sheet and five to seven minutes to find who goes in each blank. When they find the right person they must also learn one other fact about that person. At the end, introduce everyone in the group in the order on the list.

4. My Life in Pictures

Bring a newspaper or magazine and have each person tear out a picture, article or anything they think tells something about themselves. If there's enough time they can make a collage that tells more about themselves.

5. Deserted Island

Ask, "You've been exiled to a deserted island for a year. You are told you may take three things you want, apart from the essentials. What would you take and why?"

6. Heroes

Ask each member to name three people, past or present, they admire. Why? Or, ask them if they could interview anyone in history, who would that be and why? What one or two questions would you want to ask?

7. Most Unique

Go around the room and have each person share something that makes them different from anyone in the group, like, "I've never left the province I was born in" or, "I am one of ten kids."

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Social Justice Season of 2011. Let us allow space during these four weeks for God's Holy Spirit to move in our hearts, to transform our lives and to enrich the life of our congregations.

We continually need to reflect on the concerns in our communities and so we invite you to participate as fully as possible. We also warmly invite your group to share, as fully as you can, in the Social Justice Season exposures, planned for the month of August.

Each of the four Bible Studies follows a similar pattern. A suggested opening prayer for each week is printed on page 2 of this guide, along with a reflection and/or a poem. A scripture passage draws your attention to the focus of the week's study and some thoughts for consideration are provided. Please use the suggested material or pray your own prayer – or both. The thoughts for consideration could be shared out loud or in quiet personal reflection or, if yours is a large group, in smaller groups or in twos.

The *Discussion Questions* draw out personal, community and congregational responses from the participants. You may not be able to answer all the questions, please don't let this affect the group's participation. Allow enough time for discussion. The extra questions could be discussed after worship services on a Sunday or informally.

Allow enough time, at the close of each session, to discuss the '**action plan**' for the week ahead. The journey towards transformation requires us to respond to the challenges of each session and to make commitments to consider, talk about and do something about these four areas of study. Agree with one another to hold the group accountable for the 'action plan' component of each week. Remember that these plans could be short or long term. They could also be individual, group or church activities.





*Towards a
Transformed
Society*

Week
I **TRANSFORMATION
OF OUR ATTITUDE TO
GOD AND OURSELVES**

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: Romans 12:1 – 8

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is true worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - God's good, pleasing and perfect will.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION:

The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter; and indeed, the Spirit of God does comfort the disturbed, but equally, the Spirit disturbs the comfortable. A divinely transformed attitude to ourselves will mean fresh courage and confidence for those who think too negatively of themselves, and humility to those who think too much of themselves. As you think of your own life, what have been the areas where the Spirit of God has needed to discomfort you? What have been the areas where you have known the restoring comfort of God's Spirit?





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Many expressions of religion involve the offering of sacrifices, but what does it mean for us to offer ourselves as a “living sacrifice”? How has this influenced your attitude towards God over time?

2. For the first disciples it was really hard to proclaim “Jesus is Lord” in a society which said “Caesar is Lord”. What are some of the ways in which our society exercises pressure on us to conform our thinking to its value systems, rather than those of Jesus?

3. In your experience, what are the damaging results that come from people either thinking too highly of themselves or thinking too lowly of themselves? As you consider this, think of the political arena, labour relations, church life, family life and community life.

4. How does having an estimation of ourselves, which is transformed by God’s Holy Spirit, release us to serve with much greater confidence, using all the gifts and talents we have received from God?

ACTION PLAN:

Have some suggestions for the group’s social action written down but first ask them to share their own ideas and opinions with the group.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

EXTRA RESOURCES

God delights in justice and righteousness:
“Let not the wise one boast of wisdom or the strong one boast of strength or the rich one boast of acquired riches, but let them who boast, boast about this: that they understand and know God, the One who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these God delights” (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Spiritual Transformation

Spiritual transformation has a variety of overlapping meanings that carry distinct connotations:

In psychology, spiritual transformation is understood within the context of an individual’s meaning system, especially in relation to concepts of the sacred or ultimate concern. Two of the fuller treatments of the concept in psychology come from Kenneth Pargament and Raymond Paloutzian:

- **Pargament** says that “at its heart, spiritual transformation refers to a fundamental change in the place of the sacred or the character of the sacred in the life of the individual. Spiritual transformation can be understood in terms of new configurations of strivings” (p. 18).
- **Paloutzian** says that “spiritual transformation constitutes a change in the meaning system that a person holds as a basis for self-definition, the interpretation of life, and overarching purposes and ultimate concerns” (p. 334).



them accountable. Our confrontation can be indirect, careful, polite – but unmistakable about their wrong behaviour. We need also to recognise that we may not have all the facts and be a little humble. A good story and even some satire could also help to break the ice for everyone.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Can you remember any time in the scriptures that Jesus challenged the religious or political authorities of His day?

2. Have you ever said “I would like to ask the government about this!” What did you do about it?

3. If you feel reluctant to engage with political leadership, are there some organisations or structures in your church that could support you to do so? What role are you willing to play and how do you think you could contribute to your church and/or other organisations in terms of holding leadership accountable?

4. Are there any specific leadership issues in your church or denomination that need to be raised?

ACTION PLAN:

Again have some suggestions for the group’s social action written down but first ask them to share their own ideas and opinions with the group.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

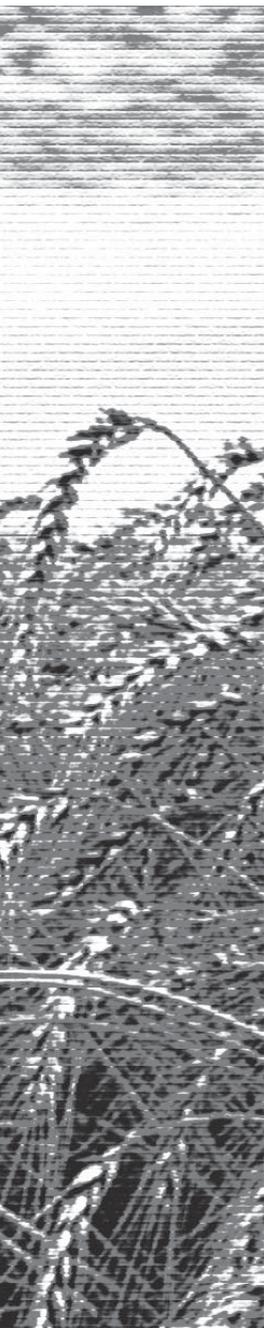
EXTRA RESOURCES

Often, the best way to offer constructive criticism is through the simple formula of firstly an affirmation, e.g. we notice the many jobs your new programme is creating, secondly state clearly what we believe is wrong e.g. we think tenders are being awarded unfairly, and thirdly to show that we believe they have our best interests at heart e.g. we feel sure you will look into this and let us know what you have done to fix it.

Encourage the group to think of other ways in which to hold their leaders accountable.

Promoting a culture of peace for children through education is the main intent of *‘Acts of Transformation: from War Toys to Peace Art’*. Why do we allow our children to play with war toys? What values are learned? Children play with toys to learn socialisation skills that foster growth and development, to become self-reliant, self-disciplined citizens. The Promoting a Culture of Peace Society of BC’s (UNICEF) hope is: that children who participate in this project will learn to display a sense of social and environmental responsibility, who will understand and support the values of a democratic, pluralistic and peaceful society.
(<http://www.wartoystopeaceart.com>)





Boaz's actions with Ruth were unusual though – asking the reapers to deliberately drop some wheat stalks for Ruth. Was he moved by her loyalty to Naomi, or Ruth's hard work or perhaps she was very attractive – the bible does not say? But something made him do it. In our culture, especially with regard to the African concept of *ubuntu*, we also have ways in which we could be generous in sharing our resources. The situation was very similar for Ruth then to what it is like for refugees in South Africa today. As a foreigner, Ruth too had no right to work in that country. Think of some examples of how you could be more generous towards the refugees that you meet. A few years ago, a Social Justice Season focused on *The Oikos Journey*, which invites us to reflect on 'the Household of God'. Theologically this proposal stresses that there is enough in the world for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed. Like Boaz, we could practice being generous because we have learned to trust God rather than our material goods. Generous people are not necessarily people with lots of money, they are more often people who have learned to share their resources. If you hoard when you have little then you will hoard when you have much. On a percentage of their goods poorer people are often more generous than wealthy people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. When have people been very generous with you, how did this make you feel? Share an example with the group.

2. Where is it easiest for you to be generous and where is it hardest?

3. How can we become as little children who do not notice class distinctions?

4. Which justice issues are raised for you in this scripture passage?

5. How can we, in our local churches, show generosity in keeping with the value of common good?

ACTION PLAN:

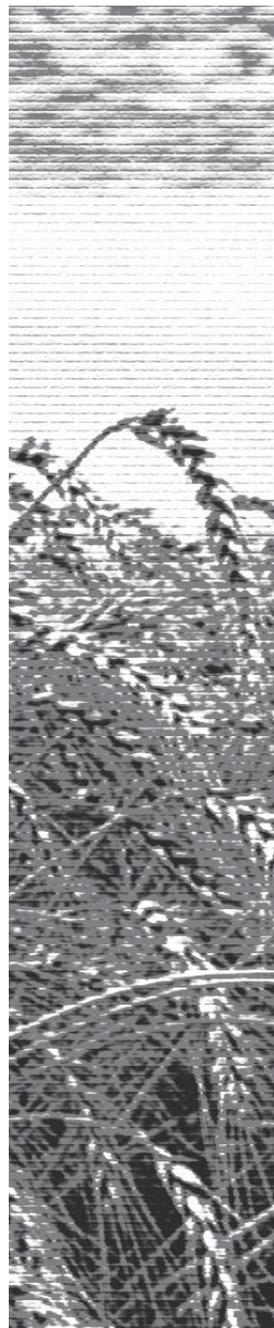
Again have some suggestions for the group's social action written down but first ask them to share their own ideas and opinions with the group.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____





Week
4

MOVING FORWARD IN HOPE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: Colossians 1:3-12

We always thank God, the parent of Christ Jesus, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people – the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven, and about which you have already heard in the true word of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world – just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Verses 9-12: For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of God's will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of God and please Christ in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to God's glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to God, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of God's people in the realm of light.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION:

In his book, "The Power of Hope", Viktor Frankl, whilst reflecting on his observations in Hitler's labour camps, writes, "He [she] who has a why to live for can bear almost any how." In the bible hope is both a focus and an attitude, and it stands at the centre of a response to the Christian gospel along with faith and love. Think of times when you have

seen the power of hope at work transforming a seemingly desolate situation and motivating people to move forward.

Spend some time (about 5 minutes) in silent reflection:

- a. Consider what hope means for you.
- b. How have you been able to move from despair to hope?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What part does hope play in your life?

2. If you are comfortable with it, share any insights that emerged for you during the silent reflection, with one another in the group.

3. On what is your hope focussed?

4. How has hope strengthened you to grapple with real-life issues?



5. How have these bible study sessions helped you on your spiritual journey?

6. Take the prayer in verses 9–12 and rewrite it for yourself or your team to address a specific situation that you are struggling to respond to in a positive manner.

ACTION PLAN:

Again have some suggestions for the group’s social action written down but first ask them to share their own ideas and opinions with the group.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

EXTRA RESOURCES

Additional theological questions

1. In the opening section of this passage all three qualities of faith, hope and love are mentioned, in what ways does the writer distinguish each of them and show how they bring different things into focus in our lives?
2. For the Colossian Christians, what was the evidence that the hope which the Gospel had produced in them was having practical results?
3. The church in Colossae faced many trials and threats, how does the Apostle’s prayer in the second section of the passage serve as a description of the way authentic Christian hope should shape our character and attitudes?

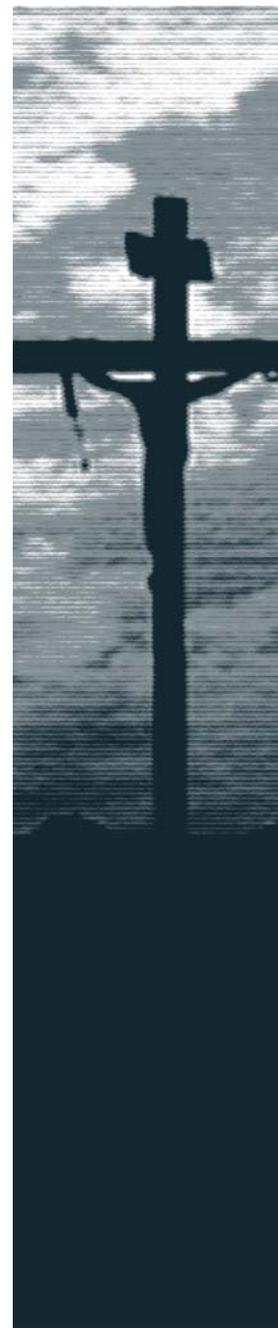
What’s the difference between a Christian definition of hope and the way it is usually used?

<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/what-is-so-important-about-christian-hope>

The word “hope” in ordinary English vocabulary is generally distinguished from certainty. We would say, “I don’t know what’s going to happen, but I hope it happens.”

When you read the word “hope” in the Bible (like in 1 Peter 1:13 —“set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ”), hope is not wishful thinking. It’s not “I don’t know if it’s going to happen, but I hope it happens.” That’s absolutely not what is meant by Christian hope.

Christian hope is when God has promised that something is going to happen and you put your trust in that promise. Christian hope is a confidence that something will come to pass because God has promised it will come to pass.



Resources:

1. **The Poverty and Justice Bible**
Contemporary English Version, British and Foreign Bible Society 2008.

Websites consulted:

1. <http://www.wartostopeaceart.com>
2. <http://www.innovint.com/services/small-acts-of-inclusion.php>
3. http://www.enebuilder.net/emmabragdon/e_article001144880.cfm?x=b11,0,w
4. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_\(philosophy\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_(philosophy))
5. <http://bible.oremus.org>
6. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritual_transformation
7. http://www.google.co.za/search?q=random+acts+of+culture&rls=com.microsoft:en-us:IE-SearchBox&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&sourceid=ie7&rlz=117ADRA_en
8. <http://www.randomactsofkindness.org/>
9. <http://www.diakonia.org.za>
10. <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/what-is-so-important-about-christian-hope>
11. http://www.equalityforwomen.org/courses/russell/rus_1_2.htm

(Some materials from the websites have been used as is, others were adapted and some have merely served as sources of inspiration.)



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