



BETWEEN SUNDAYS™ INSEASON

MEET YOU ON THE HILLSIDE

SMALL GROUP FORMAT

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT – MARCH 9, 2014

GATHERING TIME (7-10 MINUTES)

Leader: *Let's gather together now and begin our program.*
(Allow time for introduction of any new group members. Add any instructions for hospitality and overall program goals, etc.
Announce that the weekly videos are available for free viewing on The Five Loaves website, www.thefiveloaves.com.)

Leader: *Welcome. Thank you for joining me "Between Sundays." It is good to meet you here on the Hillside for sharing, prayer and fellowship. Before we begin, I want to remind us all that the conversation and sharing we experience here are a sacred trust with one another.*

First – we agree to Confidentiality. What is shared on the Hillside should stay on the Hillside and is not meant for texting, tweeting, emailing or conversing beyond here. You are free, of course, to talk about your own insights and comments, your experience of the time, and your encouragement for others.

Second - we agree to Share Appropriately. We respect others by entering the conversation and not just observing, by keeping our comments to the topic at hand, by not using this time to discuss grievances or personal problems, and by offering common courtesy to everyone as a brother or sister in Christ.

Finally, I invite everyone to Live Fully in This Moment. The real stuff of our lives is where we meet Christ in our midst – for He told us, where two or three are gathered in my name, there I will be. Do you accept to these ground rules for our time together?

ALL: **We do.**

Leader: *Thank you. I invite us to hold ourselves to these agreements and gently remind one another of them as may be appropriate.*

INVOCATION

Leader: *Please stand. (All make the Sign of the Cross.)
Our help is in the name of the Lord.*

ALL: **Who made heaven and earth.**

Leader: *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.*

ALL: **As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.**

HILLSIDE QUESTIONS (10 MINUTES)

PROCESS: The Hillside Questions offer a time to acknowledge the context in which we hear the Word of God, and to open ourselves to sharing and personal reflection.

Leader: *Let's take some time to reflect on the context in which we will hear the scriptures. Here are several questions to start our sharing:*

- 1. A common Lenten practice is to "give up" or "fast" from a particular food, beverage, or behavior. What is the hardest thing you've ever "given up" for Lent? Why was it difficult?*
- 2. This week in the scriptures, the Spirit leads Jesus into the desert. What or where do you hope the Spirit will lead you to this Lent?*
- 3. The desert is dry. What is a part of your life that could use a little "moisture" right now?*
- 4. (For personal reflection.) The devil tempts Jesus three times. What temptations do you currently experience in your life?*

NOTE: (If the small group is more than 10 people, consider giving the option to first share in pairs or threes, then with the full group. Allow at least 5-7 minutes for sharing in pairs, then ask for some sharing in the large group by saying: *If you are willing, let's hear a few of those most difficult things to give up for Lent, or a few of the places we hope the Spirit will lead us during this Lent.*)

OPENING PRAYER (3 -5 MINUTES)

Leader: *Keeping in mind all that we have just heard and shared, we pray:
(Pause for silence or spontaneous litany of Lenten hopes.)*

*Gracious God,
As we begin this Lenten season,
we ask for your mercy and grace.
Guide our time of repentance, fasting and almsgiving
and may these actions bring us back to you.
Give us eager minds, open hearts, and willing spirits,
to know, love and serve you.
We ask this through Jesus the Christ -
our Way, our Truth, and our Life.*

ALL: AMEN.

Option: Sing “Led By The Spirit” (*Breaking Bread 2014* #121 verse 2: OCP)
or another suitable song.

Option 2: Download and play the song, “Into the Desert” by Curtis Stephan
and Sarah Hart. (<http://www.spiritandsong.com/compositions/85891>)

INTRODUCTION OF THEME AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICE (15 -20 MINUTES)

PROCESS: Take this time to introduce the scriptures for the week and identify any themes that may be locally important or pastorally highlighted. You can find more information on the Five Spiritual Practices at www.thefiveloaves.com/practices.)

Leader: *As we begin our Lenten journey, we focus on the spiritual practice
of Praying All Ways. We hear in the scripture that the Spirit led
Jesus into the desert where he fasted for forty days and forty nights.
Fasting can be a form of prayer as it focuses our attention on things
that matter. What are the things we must personally and
communally focus upon during these Lenten days?*

*The devil tempts Jesus to doubt his relationship with God, to doubt
God’s providence, and then to abuse his power to save himself. Each
of us faces the temptations to mistrust our experience of God’s love
in our lives and to lose sight of the common good. Prayer offers an
opportunity to refocus on the Word of God and resist our idolatries.*

Let’s listen to the Word of God.

OPTION ONE (Use this option with the video.)

Lector: Proclaim the Gospel – Matthew 4:1-11

Brief Silence

Leader: *I invite you to share out loud a word or phrase that has touched your ear or heart as you heard the Word proclaimed.*
(Allow sufficient silence for sharing or for its own sake.)

NOTE: (If the group has scheduled sufficient time, continue in a similar manner to hear and reflect on the other scripture readings. Then, continue to the video.)

Leader: *Here is our weekly video to provide additional time to reflect on this week's Gospel. Take a few deep breaths to invite the Holy Spirit to lead you into the desert...*

Video Tech: PLAY *Between Sundays™* for the First Sunday of Lent.

OPTION TWO (If you are unable to show the video during the session.)

Lector: Proclaim the Gospel – Matthew 4:1-11

Leader: *I invite you to share out loud a word or phrase that has touched your ear or heart as you heard the Word proclaimed.*
(Allow sufficient silence for sharing or for silent prayer.)

Lector: Proclaim Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7

Leader: *I invite you to share out loud a word or phrase that has touched your ear or heart as you heard the Word proclaimed.*
(Allow sufficient silence for sharing or for silent prayer.)

Lector: Proclaim St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 5:12-19

Leader: *I invite you to share out loud a word or phrase that has touched your ear or heart as you heard the Word proclaimed.*
(Allow sufficient silence for sharing or for silent prayer.)

BREAKING BREAD: DISCUSSION/CONVERSATION (30 MINUTES)

PROCESS: Break open the Word through personal reflection and group sharing. If the group is more than 10 people, consider the same method of sharing in pairs first, and then with the larger group. The first questions are best shared in pairs or triads (max) and the second set of questions more appropriate for small group.

Leader: *Let's continue our discussion of this theme and our response.
Please take a few moments to reflect on these questions.*

Questions for Sharing

1. Describe a time in your life when you doubted God's presence and love. How did you overcome the temptation to doubt your experience of God?
2. Each time we say the "Our Father" we pray "and lead us not into temptation." How do you understand that part of the prayer for yourself?
3. Jesus' experience of *overcoming* temptation in the desert mirrors the Exodus story. Describe a time when God "lifted you up on wings of eagles."
4. What are some of the "idols" that we are most tempted by in our current culture? How can we best resist these temptations?
5. Jesus declares to the devil, "One does not live by bread alone." What sustains you when the going gets difficult in life?
6. What is a favorite prayer or spiritual practice that you intend to use during this Lenten season?

Leader: *Finally, if you are willing, share with the group your Lenten resolution so we can support you in your journey!*

CONCLUDING PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

Leader: *I invite us all to stand and offer any prayers for others or for ourselves. Our response will be: "Lord, hear our prayer."
(Allow sufficient time for intercessory prayer offered spontaneously at the conclusion of the discussion and sharing.)*

Leader: *Gathering our prayers and praise into one,
we pray in the words that Jesus gave us:*

ALL: Our Father...
... For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever. AMEN.

Leader: Let us offer one another a sign of Christ's peace.

SOCIAL TIME

Leader: *Thank you for your participation. Please help yourself to the refreshments. Here's a reminder that our next "Meet You on the Hillside" is scheduled on: _____*

Spiritual Practices for Growth and Renewal

This week, we focus on the spiritual practice to **Pray ALL Ways**. Our faith tradition is rich in prayer styles and spiritual paths developed and used by the saints. Each holds its own blessing. Consider adopting a new prayer practice this week, or during Lent as a means to open your eyes to God in new ways.

1. Add a time of *meditation* to your daily or weekly prayer. In meditation, we focus our attention and mentally let go of distractions and anxieties. Find a quiet comfortable place; focus on your breathing; relax your muscles; allow the worries of the day to drift away as you focus on deeper understandings. Here is a quote for meditation on this week's Gospel theme:

*One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*

2. Check your local area for a *Taize-style* prayer service and make plans to attend with a good friend.
3. Order the book, *The Path to Resurrection* by Mary Jo Tully (<http://www.ocp.org/products/30100973>)
Ideal for personal prayer, small faith discussion groups, this powerful resource reflects on the Way of the Cross and helps us walk in the footsteps of our Savior and faithfully bear our own crosses each day.