

To begin, have a moment of silence, then lift up the first church on your list and lead the group in the Unison Prayer. After the prayer is spoken, light a candle to represent that congregation.

### **Unison Prayer for Other Churches**

God of Grace, may they come to know your Kingdom of Love more fully, and may their ministries grow strong as they serve you and our neighbours.

Once you have named all the churches, invite the group into a time of silence to pray for their own enemies, competitors, and perhaps those who annoy them. Remind them that they can light a candle for these persons as they desire.

After the candles have been lit, allow a few minutes of silence, then offer this prayer or one of your own:

*Lord Christ, you see us sometimes strangers on the earth, taken aback by the violence, by the harshness of oppositions. And you come to send out a gentle breeze on the dry ground of our doubts, and so prepare us to be bearers of peace and reconciliation.*

—Brother Roger of Taizé from *Songs and Prayers from Taizé*

### **Go in peace [5 minutes]**

Conclude by having one person in your group read aloud this quote by Dallas Willard from *The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 181:

*We know that we will be taken care of, no matter what. We can be vulnerable because we are, in the end, simply invulnerable. And once we have broken the power of anger and desire over our lives, we know that the way of Christ in response to personal injury and imposition is always the easier way. It is the only way that allows us to move serenely in the midst of the harm and beyond it.*

### **For the Coming week**

Read chapter 8, “Learning to Live Without vainglory (pride).”

The soul-training practice for the week will be five acts of serving in secret. You will want to read the chapter early so you have plenty of opportunities to serve.

# **The Good and Beautiful LIFE**

7

## **Learning to bless those who curse us**

### **WELCOME – Breaking the ice**

### **OPENING TO GOD – Opening to God (5 minutes)**

Read *Colossians 3:1-17* together

### **5 minutes of silence**

### **Prayer to end the silence**

You may offer a prayer of your own, chime a quiet bell, or simply say “Amen” to end the silence.

### **Soul training [15 minutes]**

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into small groups of three or four. Use the questions below to discuss your experience of praying for the success of your competitors.

1. What did you notice happening within you and around you as you prayed for the success of your competitors?
2. What did you learn about God or yourself from the exercise?

### **Engaging the Chapter [30 minutes]**

The main idea of this chapter is that in the Kingdom of God we are able to reach for something higher than retaliation and justice, and actually bless people who would harm us—just as Jesus did.

Read through the following questions before you begin your discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. When the author's friend lost her job as a basketball coach, he gave her these words of truth: "Just remember, Jane, the kingdom is not in trouble, and Jane is not in trouble" (p. 120). When your life has been thrown into turmoil, how would these words have helped you?

2. In the section titled "Kingdom Jujitsu," the author explores the four teachings of Matthew 5:38-42 (pp. 121-126).

With this section in mind, discuss these questions.

- a. How does understanding Jesus' cultural context change your understanding of Matthew 5:38-42?
- b. The author discourages us from turning these teachings into law. Why is it tempting to make them into laws?
- c. How does living in God's Kingdom make it possible to follow this teaching?

3. What struck you when you read the section titled "Love Your Enemies"?

4. Miroslavolf describes the person indwelt by Christ as "a rich self" and writes, 'A rich self' looks towards the future with trust. It gives rather than holding things back in fear of coming out too short, because it believes God's promise that God will take care of it. Finite and endangered, a rich self still gives, because its life is 'hidden with Christ' in the infinite, unassailable, and utterly generous God, the Lord of the present, the past, and the future (p. 129).

With a partner, describe in your own words why the one indwelt by Christ is a "rich self."

5. Return to the three stories of those who dared to be extraordinary (pp. 130-32). What wisdom do you gain from their stories?

What situations in your own life need this type of daring?

### **Experiencing transformation [20 minutes]**

For this activity, you will need to set up a table and candles. On the table there should be one larger, lit candle, which represents Christ's presence in the world. Scattered across the table should be smaller, unlit candles that represent churches near you or perhaps churches that have felt like "competition" to your own congregation. Have one or two additional candles for each member of your group.

Read the following:

The act of blessing those who curse us and praying for our enemies is very near to forgiving those who have hurt us and opening ourselves to receive healing. With this in mind, during our remaining time we will be praying for other churches, as well as our enemies and those who have hurt us. Our hope is to discover Christ's power within us to be healed and transformed when we pray for these groups.

If we consider our passage from Colossians, when we engage in prayer for our "enemies" or competitors, we are actively taking off our "old self with its practices," and we are putting on "the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."

As we discover who we truly are in God, boundaries and definitions for separation begin to melt away, leaving us in union with Christ and at peace with others.

One of the most painful divisions to witness is the division and competition that exists between churches. To help heal this division, I have created a list of churches near us. I will say the name of a church and then together we will say the Unison Prayer for that congregation: "*God of Grace, may they come to know your kingdom of Love more fully, and may their ministries grow strong as they serve you and our neighbours.*"

Then we will light a candle for that church.

After we have prayed for all of the churches, we will turn our attention to our enemies and those who have hurt us. During this time we will be in silent prayer together. Remember you should only pray as you are able for your enemies and those who have hurt you.

Allow yourself to be in dialogue with the Spirit about such relationships. When we pray for those who have hurt us, our hope is to find freedom, healing and wholeness. However, we may still have to hold the person accountable for their actions. As you offer these prayers, you are invited to light one or two candles for those you lift up in prayer.

Decide how you and the participants will light the candles.