

# *Just*Faith

*Purpose. From a  
new perspective.*

## JustFaith Week 17

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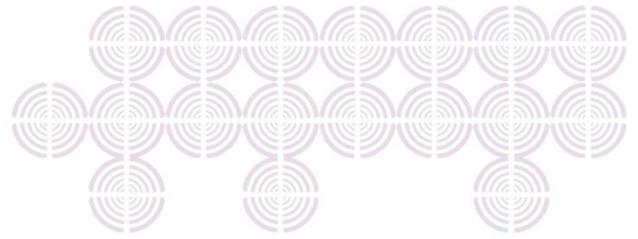


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## Note to Co-Facilitators

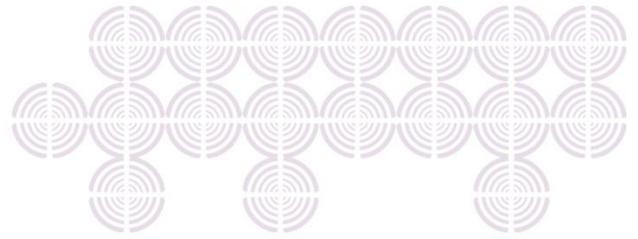
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It's important to create opportunities for your group to be together socially. JustFaith groups are a "soil," if you will, of the Gospel. The Gospel is not a private call to individuals to do some kind of solo response to a demanding ethic. Rather, the Gospel is an invitation to a community that embraces God's vision of a New Earth. We are to be a part of each other's life, including the parts of our lives that hurt and the parts of our lives that rejoice. We are called to be together. One aspect of that is gathering to celebrate and simply to be with each other.

By encouraging your group to be together outside of the typical JustFaith sessions, many good things can happen. Spouses can be included at times, and this is important. Those involved in JustFaith will often come home week after week from JustFaith sessions excited or anxious or agitated or full of energy, and spouses at home are often left scratching their heads, baffled by what this is all about. By providing opportunities for spouses to become acquainted with the group, this can make the post-JustFaith conversations at home easier and less threatening. (It might even provide your church with some JustFaith prospects the following year!)

In addition, by encouraging some social time during the JustFaith journey (but outside of the sessions), you are laying some groundwork for the post-JustFaith network. When JustFaith sessions are finished, many questions will be prompted, the most pressing of which will be "Now what?" In many cases, it is the members of the JustFaith group who will become the core or part of the core of social ministry in your church. By encouraging relationships that include both formal learning experiences and the informal gathering in each other's homes for hospitality and friendship-building, the community of believers is made more real and becomes better integrated.

Finally, faith should be filled with satisfactions. Yes, faith will know suffering and loss, disappointment and even a longing that can't be filled in this life. Nevertheless, faith should also be filled with satisfactions. One of those satisfactions is the deep pleasure of sharing one's life, hopes and convictions in a community that also seeks to do God's will. Gathering to share a meal and conversation with people whom you have come to care about is a gift from God. So, gather together and be filled!



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## Week Seventeen Components

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### Preparation for Week Seventeen

- Copy Week 17 Handouts (Note to Participants for Week Eighteen).
- Review Week Seventeen session information.
- Locate copies of Half the Sky to distribute.
- Bring your JustFaith group's copy of Prayers for The New Social Awakening and find "To Embody a God of Hope and Healing," page 64. Assure that this week's prayer has been assigned a prayer reader, or that it has been divided for the group members to read in segments.
- Gather prayer items: A Bible marked at Mark 4:26-32, a bowl filled with enough seeds for each person present, a cloth for the center of the circle, a pillar candle and any additional items you choose to create a prayer environment.
- Assign a Scripture Reader for Mark 4:26-32.

### Timing of the Session

Activity	Minutes
Prayer	15
Discuss reading and spiritual practice	60
Break	10
Business	5
View and discuss film	50
Closing prayer	10
Total	150

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## Welcome

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Welcome participants warmly, then begin with prayer.



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## Opening Prayer (15 minutes)

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- You will need:* Bible marked at Mark 4:26-32, Prayers for The New Social Awakening, a bowl filled with enough seeds for each person present to have one
- Symbol:* A seed, a small possibility, a little bundle of life that can result in enormous possibilities

### Introducing the Symbol

Hold up the bowl of seeds into the center of the circle. Introduce the symbol with these words:

**A seed – a small and sometimes unnoticed possibility, a little bundle of life that can result in enormous of possibilities.**

### Call to Prayer

Sit in the circle with the bowl of seeds. Pick up a seed and offer this prayer:

**Gracious God— source of wonder and mystery—we pause to consider the possibilities of our lives. It is true that in the great scheme of things, my individual life seems like such a small thing. But, in fact, my life can become something important.**

**Filled with your Spirit and Love, my life can become a great tool of compassion and healing and beauty. So, grow me, O God. Water my life with vision and courage. And let me become a refuge of shade from the glaring heat of injustice and violence. Grow me, O God.**

Pass the bowl of seeds to the person seated on the right. Invite participants to take one seed and pass the bowl to the right. Offer the call to prayer while the bowl is passed:

**Jesus, in your name we gather. You are here in our midst.**

**In the presence of your Spirit, we become your body.**

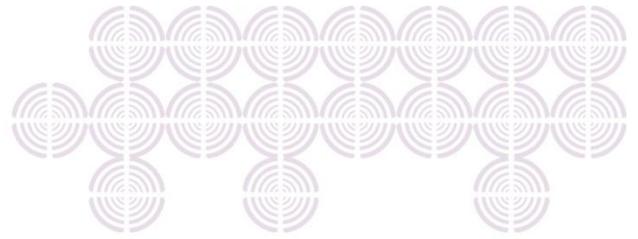
**To listen . . . to share . . . to learn . . . to care . . .**

**and to pray for one another.**

**Move within us. Move among us.**

**Spirit of Compassion, bind us to one another.**

**Propel us out into your world to be your compassionate justice.**



When the bowl of seeds has gone around the circle, place it in the center on the cloth.

## Scripture Reading

As each person holds the seed in his or her hands, **read Mark 4:26-32**. Ask the group to reflect upon these questions in silence:

**What does this simple parable teach us about our efforts to bring about the reign of God? Who has some responsibility for its gradual growth and realization within our world?**

**Reread the Scripture passage.** Pause once more before beginning the prayer from Prayers for The New Social Awakening: “**To Embody a God of Hope and Healing**,” page 64.

## Prayer of the Heart

After a couple of minutes of silence, introduce the mantra prayer in this way:

Leader: **Let us take prayer to heart. Echo this simple prayer from the Gospel of John, line by line. Then, echo the whole prayer. (Adapted from John 12:24)**

Leader:	Participants:
<b>Unless a grain of wheat</b>	Unless a grain of wheat
<b>Falls into the earth and dies,</b>	Falls into the earth and dies,
<b>It remains just a single grain.</b>	It remains just a single grain.
<b>But if it dies, it bears much fruit.</b>	But if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Leader: **Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,**

All: Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,

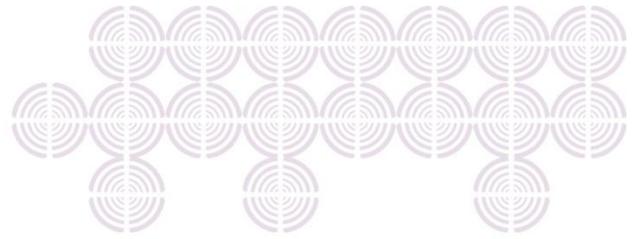
Leader: **It remains just a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.**

All: It remains just a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Leader: **Let this prayer echo in our hearts.**

## Rite of Blessing

Leader: **Holy Spirit, inspire our thoughts. May we speak your truth. May our hearts be opened. Let us say “Amen.”**



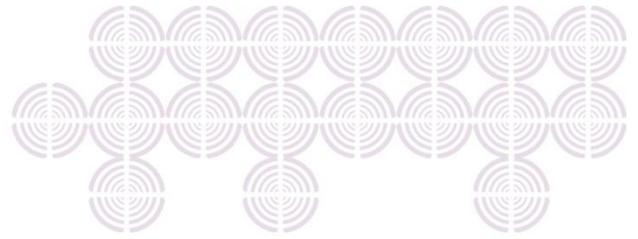
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## First Half (60 minutes)

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### Discuss Reading (45 minutes)

- Compassion, pages 87-137
1. On page 98, we read, “As long as we remain the victims of clock time, which forces us into the rigid patterns of time slots, we are doomed to be without compassion. When we live by the clock we have no time for each other.” What have been your own experiences of “living by clock time?” Can you share a concrete example of this struggle to be fully present to one another?
  2. The authors offer this account of prayer on page 105, “The discipline of prayer makes us stop and listen, wait and look, taste and see, pay attention and be aware.” How does this discipline allow for the possibility of compassion?
  3. On page 109, the authors address one of the most difficult issues of the Christian tradition when they write, “Prayer allows us to lead in the center of our hearts not only those who love us but also those who hate us. This is possible only when we are willing to make our enemies part of ourselves and thus convert them first of all in our own hearts.” Does this statement ring true to your ears? What has your experience been of praying for someone with whom you were in conflict? How did that experience of prayer change your perspective?
  4. The authors comment on the Eucharist on page 112, “There are very few places left in our world where our common humanity can be lifted up and celebrated, but each time we come together around the simple signs of bread and wine we tear down many walls and gain an inkling of God’s intentions for the human family. And each time this happens we are called to become more concerned not only about each other’s well-being but also about the well-being of ‘all people in our world.’” What are your thoughts on this understanding of Eucharist? What aspects of communion contribute to growing our sense of solidarity and oneness with all people?
  5. On page 114, the authors write, “If prayer leads us into a deeper unity with the compassionate Christ, it will always give rise to concrete acts of service. And if concrete acts of service do indeed lead us to a deeper solidarity with the poor, the hungry, the sick, the dying, and the oppressed, they will always give rise to prayer.” What does this quotation say about any serious effort that you might make in doing the work of social ministry?
  6. The authors also challenge: “The final criterion of the value of the Christian life is therefore not prayer but action” (page 117). What does this mean to you? Where in the Gospel have you heard this message before?



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7. Beginning on page 122, the authors address the topic of confrontation. They write, “The power of evil has become so blatantly visible in individuals as well as in the social structures that dominate their lives that nothing less than strong and unambiguous confrontation is called for. “Compassion does not exclude confrontation” (page 122). Ask each person to speak to his/her comfort or discomfort with this idea. To say “yes” to Jesus, do we have to sometimes say “no” to the world and the structures of our society? Can you name a time when you have confronted the world and its authorities in order to follow Jesus?”

### **Discuss Spiritual Practice (15 minutes)**

The spiritual practice that was assigned last week was to plan an occasion in which you could spend an hour in some kind of natural setting—away from buildings and roads—to enjoy the quiet and beauty of nature and to pray. Ask participants to share their experiences.

### **Break (10 minutes)**

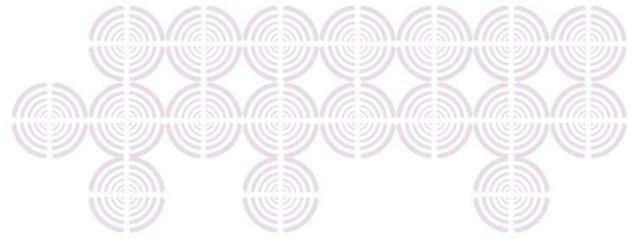
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### **Business Items (5 minutes)**

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1. Assign reading for next session: Half the Sky, pages xi-21, 61-92 and “Note to Participants for Week Eighteen.”
2. Distribute “Note to Participants for Week Eighteen.”
3. Distribute copies of Half the Sky.
4. Provide this introduction for Half the Sky:

**In the next few weeks, we will begin to explore the complex reality of global poverty. A powerful book for exploring how poverty affects half of the world’s population is Half the Sky, written by two Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists. At times, Half the Sky can be difficult to read. It raises to our attention topics that are both heart-breaking and, at times, difficult to speak about. The pain of these women can seem at once very distant and, in the next page, strike very close to home. So please be prepared for a challenging text. And yet, it is written with a bent towards hope and a passionate belief that the tragic realities shared within its pages can be overcome. May your reading stir you, disturb you and enliven you to new hope.**



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## Second Half (50 minutes)

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### View and Discuss Video

View “The Man Who Planted Trees” (30 minutes). Introduce the video with these words:

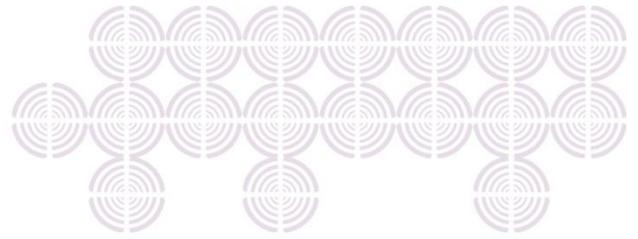
**This film is simply beautiful, both in its artistry and its message. It is an extraordinary and inspirational portrayal of hope and generosity. It is placed here in the syllabus as a way of emphasizing the gift that each of us can make to the world and to make links with our ongoing discussion of next steps after JustFaith.**

Allow time for general discussion before choosing from among the questions below. (20 minutes)

1. How does this story of simple, steadfast generosity touch you? In what specific ways can you think of this message applying to your life?
2. Compare this fable of Elzéard Bouffier with the non-fictional stories of other people you have read about or encountered this year in Cloud of Witnesses and at immersion experiences. What similarities strike you?
3. Does this story inspire you? How? To what end?
4. What parts of your own life have been characterized by the values of generosity, endurance, humility and service?
5. How is this video relevant to a world struggling with global warming and vast environmental destruction?

After everyone has had a chance to respond, ask the group to consider these questions:

1. The story of “The Man Who Planted Trees” speaks to the possibility that all of us can make choices that do tremendous good for the world. Do you believe this about yourself? Why or why not?
2. Who are you inspired by? What ministry inspires you, draws you in?
3. Do you think you inspire others? Share your thoughts with the group.



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## Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

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### Returning to the Symbol

Hold up the bowl of seeds and offer these words of blessing:

**Let us be open to the great possibilities that God has in store for our lives.**

### A Circle of Prayer

Invite the group to form a tight circle and link hands:

**We are disciples on a journey.**

**We are the body of Christ, broken for this world.**

**Let us quietly pray for one another and for our brothers and sisters in need.**

(Pause)

**If someone has a concern, a word of encouragement, or a short prayer to offer, please do so.**

### Words to Live By

Leader: **Let us again take prayer to heart. Repeat the prayer after me:**

**Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies...**

All: Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,

Leader: **It remains just a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.**

All: It remains just a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Leader: **May this prayer echo in our hearts throughout the week, as we walk, while we work, as we rest and when we pray for one another. Call to mind those who are suffering, in despair or fear.**

### A Sign of God's Peace

Leader: **Now we share in the peace for which our world hungers.**

**With a sign of peace, we affirm one another for the journey ahead.**

**May we extend God's love to all!**