

# *Just*Faith

*Purpose. From a  
new perspective.*

## JustFaith Week 24

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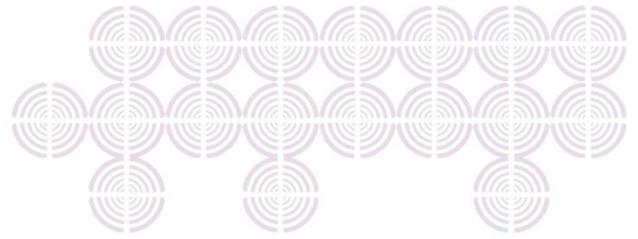


*www.justfaith.org*

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## Note to Co-Facilitators

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This week's session continues the process of engaging participants in the question of "What next?" by introducing the group to the work of the Christian hunger lobby organization, Bread for the World. By hearing from someone who is involved with this outstanding organization, our hope is that participants will begin to understand the power that can be created and channeled for God's work when Christians come together from across the country. It is our conviction that there is no finer ecumenical organization than Bread for the World when it comes to advocating on behalf of those who suffer from hunger and its related effects.

The consideration of nonviolence and Jesus' call to "love our enemy" in The Powers That Be draws us into a consideration of one of the great Christian spiritual commitments. The history of Christianity is seasoned with the remarkable stories of people who were apparently drawn so deeply into God's bottomless compassion that they lost any sense of fear for their own lives. They seemed to draw from some deep well of intimacy with God's Spirit that allowed them to transcend fear, hate, and vengeance, and embrace and forgive those who would do them wrong. Was there a more significant news story in 2006 than the forgiving reaction of the Amish to the killing of the five girls in the one-room school in Bart Township, Pennsylvania? Is there a more compelling witness than the Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation (MVFR) who, despite having experienced a family member murdered, oppose the death penalty. Then there is a long list of people, many anonymous, who gave up their lives so others could live.

This kind of behavior speaks of new life in Christ, the kind of behavior that can only come with a deep and profound experience of God's transforming love. This kind of reckless, forgiving, fearless love is too much to ask of anyone, but it is something that we as a Christian community are not surprised by. God's Spirit will blow where it will; we can only make ourselves open to its life-changing, world-changing nudge.

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## Week Twenty-Four Components

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### Preparation for Week Twenty-Four

- Review Week Twenty-Four session information.
- Copy **Week 24 Handouts** (Note to Participants).
- Confirm with guest speaker(s) one week before and one day before session.
- Bring your JustFaith group's copy of Prayers for The New Social Awakening and find "For Peace Seekers," page 130. 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, a large candle, prayer cloth, and cross.
- Assign a Scripture Reader for Luke 6:27-36.



## Timing of the Session

Activity	Time
Opening prayer	15
Guest speaker on Bread for the World	60
Break	15
Business	5
Discuss reading	50
Closing prayer	5
Total time	150

### Opening Prayer (15 minutes)

*You will need:* A Bible marked at Luke 6:27-36, Prayers for The New Social Awakening, a large candle, prayer cloth, and cross

*Symbols:* Clenched fist and open palm – the power of violence and the power of nonviolence

*Environment:* Set the candle and cross on the prayer cloth. Light the candle and dim the lights.

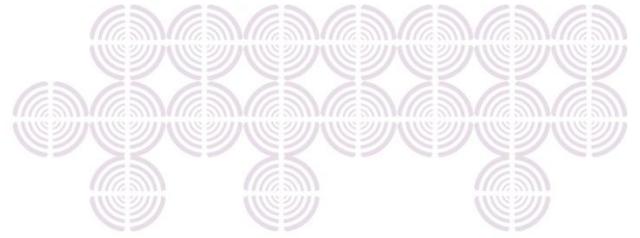
### Introducing the Symbols

Walk into the center of the circle and hold up a hand in a clenched fist. Introduce the symbol with these words:

**The clenched fist. The threat of violence. The willingness to hurt and beat and maim and kill the other. The clenched fist. The warning of physical harm. The clenched fist. A sign of fear, the opposite of love.**

The facilitator drops her/his left arm and raises his/her right arm; then with palm open and facing up, slowly introduces the symbol with these words:

**The open palm. Receptive. Open. Inviting. Unthreatening. The open palm. Ready for handshakes or joining hands or prayer. The open palm. Courageous. Determined. Unafraid. A sign of love.**



## Call to Prayer

Stand in the circle and pray aloud:

**Gracious God— source of wonder and mystery—we pause to consider the possibilities of our lives.**

Raise your clenched fist again:

**We can do as we are told is normal: retaliate, threaten, oppress, dominate, exploit and destroy. Or,**

Gently open your hand into a receptive posture, as if catching raindrops:

**We can extend the hand of friendship, the hand that shares and cares for the distress of the world. We shall all pass from this life. The quality of our lives will not be determined by how long they were but by the depths of our love and compassion. Do we choose to scar our lives and this world with violence? Or do we choose to bless this world with love, even suffering love, as did our savior and our God?**

Have a seat in the circle. Invite participants to clench their left fists and hold their right hands open and upward. After a pause, offer the call to prayer:

**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.**

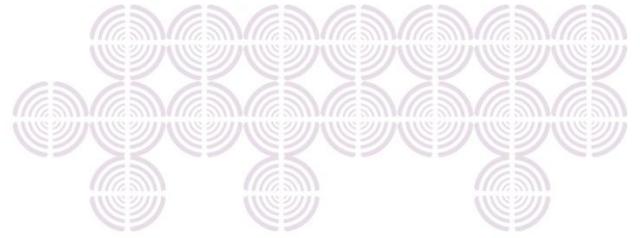
**Move within us. Move among us.**

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

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

## Scripture Reading

**Read Luke 6:27-36.** Pause for a minute of silent reflection before reading the prayer **“For Peace Seekers”** (page 130) from Prayers for The New Social Awakening.



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## Prayer of the Heart

Introduce the mantra prayer in this way:

Leader: **Let us take prayer to heart. Echo this simple prayer, line by line. Then echo the whole prayer.**

Leader:

**Not by might,**

**Not by power,**

**But by My Spirit,**

**Says the Lord.**

Participants:

Not by might,

Not by power,

But by My Spirit,

Says the Lord.

Leader: **Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord.**

All repeat: Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord.

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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### Guest Speaker to Discuss Bread for the World

Invite your Bread for the World regional organizer, a local Bread for the World leader, or a member of Bread for the World to address your group about the work that Bread for the World is involved in and how you and your church can get involved. To learn who might be able to visit your group, visit Bread for the World’s website at [www.bread.org/contact/regional.html](http://www.bread.org/contact/regional.html) or contact the national office for Church Outreach at 202-688-1106.

Allow time for discussion and for participants to ask any questions that might have been prompted by Bread for the World’s website.

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## Break (15 minutes)

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## Business Items (5 minutes)

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1. Assign the reading for next week: The Powers That Be, pages 128-200; Cloud of Witnesses, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” pages 261-265; and “Note to Participants for Week Twenty-Five.”
2. Distribute “Note to Participants for Week Twenty-Five.”

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## Second Half (50 minutes)

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### Discuss Reading

- The Powers That Be, pages 63-127
  - Cloud of Witnesses, “George Zabelka,” pp. 231-237
1. Look over Chapter Three in The Power That Be; choose one interpretation of a teaching of Jesus that differs from what you were taught. Lift it up for discussion by the group. Are traditional teachings in our churches also influenced by the Domination System?
  2. The prophets often condemned the accumulation of wealth while so many were impoverished. They also condemned judges who took bribes and ruled against poor people in favor of the rich. Where do we see similar behavior in our society today?
  3. Wink states that Jesus’ ministry taught us, “Violent revolution fails because it is not revolutionary enough. It changes the rulers but not the rules, the end but not the means” (page 81). Apply this statement to the “war against terrorism.”
  4. Ask the group to share their reactions to reading George Zabelka’s view of just war from the Cloud of Witnesses book.
  5. Consider the forgiving reaction of the Amish community to the murder of five girls in the one-room school in Bart Township, Pennsylvania in 2006. The authors of the book, Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy write, “What we learn from the Amish, both at Nickel Mines and more generally, is that how we choose to move on from tragic injustice is culturally formed. For the Amish, who bring their own religious resources to bear on injustice, the preferred way to live on with meaning and hope is to offer forgiveness—and offer it quickly. That offer, including the willingness to forego vengeance, does not undo the tragedy or pardon the wrong. It does, however, constitute a first step toward a future that is more hopeful, and potentially less violent, than it would otherwise be.” (Quoted from *Christianity Today*, web version posted 9 Sep 2007.) How does the culture in which we live and which we create help us or hinder us from choosing forgiveness over vengeance?
  6. Express the feelings that reading this material on Christian nonviolence stirs up in you.



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## Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

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### A Circle of Prayer

Invite the group to form a tight circle. Ask each participant to extend their hands, palms up:

**We can extend the hand of friendship, a hand to care for the distress of the world. We shall all pass from this life. The quality of our lives will not be determined by how long we live, but by the depth of our love and compassion.**

Invite participants to link hands in prayer:

**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

Return to the mantra prayer and invite the group to echo it again.

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

**Not by might, not by power**

All: Not by might, not by power

Leader: **But by My Spirit, says the Lord.**

All: But by My Spirit, says the Lord.

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 peace to all!**