

1. Waking the dead.

Lifestyles of greed or immorality can desensitize people to the pain they often bring on themselves and others. It's as if they begin to sleep-walk through their lives. Shame and self-justification disguise their true predicament (read Ephesians 5:3-7 for more). Too often the common response of loving Christians has been to tell people of the devastation of God's coming wrath. Even though such words of warning may be true, this rarely wakes people up to their predicament so that they turn in hope to God. Scolding, shaming and finger-pointing will not awaken people to God. God knows this. That's why He prefers to awaken people with the light of Christ rather than to expose people by the heat of arguments. During this session, we'll ask God to do what our persuasive words cannot: to awaken people who are spiritually asleep.

Ephesians 5:8-11

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord.

¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

2. Pray for Christ's light to shine through your life.

What is Christ's light? It's certainly not a mystic aura radiating from you. Neither is it the glow of religious behavior. Christ's light becomes tangible by actions of goodness, righteousness and truth.

- **Form groups (vss 8-10).** Read Ephesians 5:8. At one point we each "were darkness." How did God wake you up? Share part of your story in a small group. Select one of the three fruits in vs 9 as something that you desire to be more evident in your life. Have someone in your group pray for you, that the fruit of Christ's light would become brightly visible to others so that God will be pleased.
- **Focus prayer (vss 11-14).** Verse 11 says that we are to expose deeds of darkness. How should we do this? Will scandalizing or shaming people wake them up to God? Probably not. Now read verses 12-14. Verse 12 implies that trying to use words to shame others moves them to bury their secrets even deeper. (The problem is not that we are shamed by talking plainly, but rather that the shame is in vain.) In your small group, mention a person that you know from your workplace, school, family or neighborhood who is not yet following Christ. Make them the focus of your prayers. Pray for them to encounter Christ so clearly that they come to honestly face their need and to seek the hope of new life.

Ephesians 5:12-14

¹² For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for it is light that makes everything visible.

This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

3. Waking from sleep. Raising from death. Opening a new life.

Yelling at people for their disobedience is as effective as waking up a dead person with an alarm clock. Verse 14 describes the only encounter that will both expose people and yet raise them to new life in Christ.

- **Pray it. Ask God for waking, raising and dawning.** Choose one of the three parts that seems to pertain most to your friend: waking from sleep, arising from death or opening a face-to-face friendship with Jesus.
- **Say it. Offer a "declare prayer."** Speak aloud, addressing your friend by name as if Christ Himself were speaking. It will be a form of prayer which expresses your faith that Christ Himself will encounter them. Use the following statements, or paraphrase your own:

"Wake up (their name). It's time to wake up to God."

"Arise and live, (their name). Your death is done. New life is yours by Christ's risen life."

"Open your eyes to Christ, (their name). He's giving you a new life and a new day."

1. Waking the dead.

This could be one of the most mind- and life-changing prayer gatherings that you lead. It's designed to guide people to face the realities of how starkly dark spiritual slumber really is. And at the same time, it will point out how brightly powerful Christ is to raise people to new life by the power of the gospel. Our instinct may be to scandalize and lecture people for their shameful deeds. But this only pushes them deeper into their disobedience and distances them from God's people.

Read the first scripture selection (Ephesians 5:8-10). Announce that we will be praying for others what we have experienced ourselves: moving from darkness to light. But before praying verse 14, we're going to explore in more detail why we are praying.

Discuss life in darkness. If you have time, have someone read Ephesians 5:3-7. Darkness is being stuck in disobedience. Our disobedience tends to operate in three ways: "immorality, impurity and greed." Ask how God gets people free from these lifestyles. Watch your time, allocating most of your time to pray from verse 14.

2. Pray for Christ's light to shine through your life.

Form groups of three or four people. Guide the discussion to focus first on their story. Be clear that they only have time for a brief, two-minute summary, not their entire life story. The point of the discussion is to establish that those who are praying are those who are freshly aware that they have a history of darkness. The fresh awareness will help them pray better for others.

Pray for fruit. The point of the prayer gathering is to realize that it's not so much our talk as it is a direct encounter with Christ that changes people. The spoken word of the gospel is, of course, essential. But Christ is pleased to expose by His light. That light is powerfully displayed in tangible ways by people who know Him, in lifestyles of goodness, righteousness and truth. Have each person select one of these three fruits. Have the person to their right pray for them with a sentence prayer that Christ's light would truly become evident in this way. Continue on to the next person so that in each small group, every person is prayed for.

Pose the question of exposing darkness. How are we to "expose" the "deeds of darkness" as verse 11 calls us to do? Have someone read verses 12-14. Who is actually shamed in verse 12? Have them try on the interpretation that it is the people in darkness who are shamed, without effect, by well-intentioned Christians trying to warn them of the dreadful, eternal consequences. People in darkness often feel threatened and accused by such talk. What does verses 13-14 really say? It's all about light, the light of Christ Himself.

3. Waking from sleep. Raising from death. Opening a new life.

Yelling at people for their disobedience is as effective as waking up a dead person with an alarm clock. Something much more powerful is needed! Go for two rounds of prayer from verse 14. Note the three parts of the declaration: 1) "Awake, O sleeper," 2) "rise from the dead, and 3) "Christ will shine on you."

Pray it. Have each person pick out one of the three items to pray for their friend. Or you can have three of the people in each group pray for each of the three parts, one at a time. Encourage them to ask God in their own words to bring about a day of awakening, to bring His resurrection power in their lives and to radiate the love and life of Christ in a direct encounter. As a leader, it's important for you to give them an example of how they might paraphrase and expand upon the prayer.

Say it. This is the most powerful part of the prayer gathering. Explain that they are speaking as if Christ Himself was speaking to their friend. It's essential that you have tried it yourself before the meeting, and that you give them an example of how to do this kind of prayer. Encourage them to use the prepared examples, or to make up their own. If they don't know the name of their friend or acquaintance, urge them to have that person's face before them. Have each person speak all three parts of this declaration for their friend.