# Generous Life Project – Life from Death

**Session 5**

**Theme:** Resurrected to be fruitful: life has purpose!

**Hook: Are we ripe, rotten or dehydrated?**

**Text:** John 12:20-26, 32, Isaiah 61:1-11

**Video**: Struggling Congregations Back From the Brink

**Learning Goal**: To recognize where death could be productive in the life of your

congregation

**Learning Activity**: “Images of the Kingdom of God”, T Chart, personal reflection,

congregational and neighborhood analysis

**Sending:** Luke 4:16-21

**Preparation/Need**

1. “Images of the Kingdom of God” newsprint
2. Analysis newsprint
3. Markers
4. Blank paper for folks to make a “T” chart

## Welcome

**Hook: Are we ripe, rotten or dehydrated?**

**Theme**: discovering the purpose of our life together will be the focus of our session. We know we are the Body of Christ working in and for the Kingdom of God. Today’s metaphor is the seed that is planted: what kind of life does it produce? So…since we are fruit…are we ripe, rotten or dehydrated?

**Prayer:** (Responsive)

Sometimes, God, we forget that resurrection means dying first.

**That the waters of baptism bring forth a new person by drowning the old one.**

Those things you call us to do are just a little bit scary.

**Bring forth, bind up, proclaim, provide. That’s taking risks!**

But unless a seed dies in the ground, nothing happens.

**Show us how to die to the world in order to bear fruit for you.**

**In the name of Jesus, our brother, first in death and first in life. Amen.**

## Video

Struggling Congregations Back from the Brink.

## Relevant Quotes

John 12:24: Unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies it bears much fruit.

Bishop Dean Nelson: But when we got there, no one showed up with a key.

Maria Paiva: We all gathered and gave thanks to God for all the years of ministry this building had. And we asked God’s direction on the future of this ministry. And we continued to pray and talk about what God will want us to do in this place.

MP: Samuel kept saying, “Give me a chance to go and take a look at the building.” And jokingly we told Samuel, “Sure you can go look at the building, but make sure you wear a bullet proof vest. We were not realizing that the Holy Spirit was protecting him and putting in his heart his passion for that community.

Pastor Samuel Nieva: I have one idea, mission statement…Sharing the spiritual bread and material bread.

Benito: Perhaps life would have been different for my children if not for this church community. Perhaps they would have joined gangs.

Pr. SN: Remember that for Pueblo de Dios, to share the gospel in the Food Distribution is not manipulation, it is liberation. Because the people receive the Good News, the people encounter the Grace of God in this world.

MP: The building was transformed, and now lives are being transformed. It’s not our work but what God can do in our midst.

## Biblical Foundation

Any Bible stories/passages going round and round in your head?

Have someone read John 12:20-23.

**20Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”22Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.** **23Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.**

## Conversation Starter

The Greeks seeking out Jesus serves as a sign that his “’hour has come.” Why would that be? (If no one has a response, just let the question hang…we’ll come back to it.)

Have someone read verse 24.

**24Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.**

## Commentary

Robert Kysar argues that in this passage, Jesus announces the meaning of his death (Kysar 1986, 193).

Raymond Brown adds that the choice illustrated here isn’t between fruit dying or rotting on the vine, but between dying and bearing fruit. The choice is between being unproductive or productive (Brown 1966, 471).

## Biblical Foundation

Have someone read verses 25 and 26.

**25Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.**

## Commentary

This is how dying is productive. It yields a life of service. Kysar claims that just “as Jesus surrenders his life for his followers, so must the disciples be willing to lose their lives for the benefit of the revelation.” When Jesus washes the disciples’ feet and commands them to love one another in the next chapter (13), he models what service looks like. The seed that dies produces the fruit of love in action (Kysar 1986, 196).

Have someone skip ahead a few verses to read John 12:32.

**32And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peopleto myself.”**

## Commentary

According to Brown, taking this saying in terms of the seed/harvest image means that the people who were coming to Jesus are the fruit produced by the death of the seed. This makes sense if we note that the Greeks coming to Jesus provided a sign to him that his “hour” had come (Brown 1966, 472).

Kysar sees the divine power (Kingdom of God energy) at work here drawing people to faith (Kysar 1986, 199).

## Conversation Starter

**Think, Pair, Share**

Now we revisit the questions above: What does this passage add to our images/understanding of the Kingdom of God?

In what ways do Samuel and his congregation reveal the kingdom of God?

Record insights on the “Images of the Kingdom of God” newsprint.

## Biblical Foundation

Have someone read Isaiah 61.

**61 The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
    because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
    to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
    and release to the prisoners;
2to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,
    and the day of vengeance of our God;
    to comfort all who mourn;
3to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
    to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
    the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
    the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.
4They shall build up the ancient ruins,
    they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
    the devastations of many generations.**

**5Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,
    foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines;
6but you shall be called priests of the Lord,
    you shall be named ministers of our God;
you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations,
    and in their riches you shall glory.
7Because their[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+61-63&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-18851a)**] shame was double,
    and dishonor was proclaimed as their lot,
therefore they shall possess a double portion;
    everlasting joy shall be theirs.**

**8For I the Lord love justice,
    I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
    and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
9Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
    and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
    that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.**

## Commentary

Second Isaiah announces the Homecoming! Cyrus leading on level highways! It all sounds great, but there’s no proof it happened that way. To the contrary, it was a difficult return. Life is hard, even when you are acting in obedience with the will of God. The difference in tone between chapters 40-55 and 55-65 is palpable (Hanson 1995, 185-86).

John F.A. Sawyer adds that the liturgical context of this passage is the Day of Atonement: “A day of fasting and spiritual renewal, and the day on which the jubilee year was to be proclaimed (Leviticus 25) (Sawyer 1986, 188).” Themes for that day are: repentance and forgiveness of sin, death and new life, exile and return. All speak to a new life, but not to an easy one.

To connect this to John/Jesus’ use of the seed/dying image, Sawyer claims, “In some sense the chapter is a sermon on planting (vs.3), rebuilding (vs.4) and new growth (vs.11) (Sawyer 1986, 188).”

### Going Deeper

This might be an interesting place to talk about the mystery of what happens in the dirt. What happens to the seed? What happened to Lazarus in the Tomb? What happened to Jesus in the tomb? What is this mystery of being buried, of dying and then rising as something different than before?

## Conversation Starter

**Large Group**

Looking at verses 1-4 especially, what do you notice about the servant in this passage?

What are they vowing to accomplish?

Will this be easy?

## Learning Activity

Samuel’s one mission is to “share the spiritual and material bread” as a way for people to “encounter the grace of God in the world.” Sawyer notes that both physical and spiritual needs are addressed in the Isaiah passage (Sawyer 1986,188).

Which phrases of the text speak to physical needs and which to spiritual? Fill in the “T” chart below. One example of each is provided:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  **Physical** |  **Spiritual** |
| 4They shall build up the ancient ruins, | 3to provide for those who mourn in Zion— |

## Conversation Starters

### Think, Pair, Share:

Maria Paiva joked that Samuel should wear a bullet proof vest in Compton. Samuel takes a risk working in a dangerous place. Benito praised the congregation saying that if not for being part of this church her kids may have joined gangs. Samuel’s willingness to take a risk provided a place of safety for Benito and her children. Similarly Jesus risked death on a cross, trusting the resurrection would be fruitful.

It’s usually difficult to recognize the assumptions we make as we go about our lives. We have deeply held opinions about other people and the causes of their situations. It is difficult to change a belief we’ve been taught and held for a long time. Pr Brenda Bos, the film maker for this video, notes that sometimes our assumptions need to die, in order for new life to rise up.

What are some assumptions you have begun to recognize may not be as true as you’d once thought? Reflect especially on your assumptions about poverty, or danger, or hopelessness. What would help you form a new understanding?

Spend a moment praying for God’s direction. What do you hear God say?

What scary place is your congregation being called into?

What needs to die? How might that death bring new life?

What risks are you willing to take? As a congregation? As an individual?

### Large Group

Add today’s learning to your congregation and neighborhood analysis, concentrating on the circle of Obstacles.

## Sending

Read Luke 4:16-21.

**16When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:**

**18“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
    because he has anointed me
        to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
    and recovery of sight to the blind,**        **to let the oppressed go free,
19to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

**20And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”**

### Dismissal

**Leader: Go in peace! Be courageous in the face of fear.**

People: Thanks be to God!

[[1]](#endnote-1)

1. Raymond Brown. 1966. “Gospel of According to John” Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday

Paul D. Hanson. 1995. “Isaiah 40-66” Interpretation. Louisville: John Knox Press

Robert Kysar. 1986. “John” Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament. Minneapolis: Augsburg

John F.A. Sawyer. 1986. “Isaiah Volume 2.” Philadelphia: Westminster Press [↑](#endnote-ref-1)