

SMALL GROUP STUDIES LEADERS NOTES

CHURCH AND COMMUNITY MOBILISATION BIBLE STUDIES



tearfund

Following Jesus where the need is greatest

The Church as Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16

This series of bible studies are designed to be used in your small group, however they also contain additional 'Going Deeper' background notes at the end for a deeper understanding and for use as a sermon guide. The studies have been created from Tearfund's work around the world using the Church and Community Mobilisation (CCM) process.

CCM is Tearfund helping the local church work with its community, sharing a vision to address local needs using their own resources. Around the world it is an approach that has brought remarkable transformation to local churches and their communities

OVERVIEW

The aim of this Bible study is to build the Church's understanding of her vital role in bringing to the community certain qualities essential for true life. Given that this role is unique to the Church, the study aims to help us realise the urgency of our calling and the importance of maintaining our distinctiveness in order to fulfil this calling effectively.

We will explore what Jesus means by describing the Church as Salt and Light and go on to ask what the world is like when it chooses, or is forced, to live without these essentials for human wellbeing.

INTRODUCTION

Either

Pass round a bowl of chips, or something similar, without salt, for people to snack on. When people have each had one or two, bring out another bowl of salted chips/crisps. Invite people to comment on the difference between the two.

Or ask

Has anybody ever had an experience of being stuck in the dark? Can they describe it? What difficulties did it pose?

STORY

Katy is a 64 year old Grandmother of 14. She lives in Owii, in Soroti District. Eight years ago the local Church began Tearfund's Church and Community Mobilisation (CCM) process.

Katy said before CCM: *'We were doing nothing. We were living in grass houses and had grass-roofed Churches. We were not united. For many years the Church had concentrated on the spiritual growth of people but had not thought about how that should affect life on earth. So people were not developing in their homes because they were thinking, 'if only God would take me to heaven! Many people were backsliding because life was so hard.'*



Through a series of Bible studies, they discovered afresh God's purpose for their lives. Katy told us: *'CCM awakened the Church.....We realised we were meant to be salt and light in the community!'*

Instead of thinking they had nothing, they suddenly realised that they had lots of resources at their disposal. Together, the Church and the wider community identified their greatest problems and started to work together to change things.

Lack of water was an issue, People were having to walk three miles to fetch water for cooking, cleaning and drinking. The process helped them realise their need for closer clean water. They have now dug 58 wells themselves at very little cost which has put water within easy reach of most homes!

There was a very high mortality rate amongst mothers in labour. The nearest clinic is 8 miles from Owii which meant that at night there was no way of getting to the clinic. The community has now trained 10 birth attendants.

Children in the remotest part of the community were having to walk three miles to the nearest primary school which meant that most did not start school until they were ten. As a result the academic levels in the area were extremely poor. The community started a school which quickly outgrew the Church building they were using.

CCM trains the community in Advocacy skills and helps them realise what public services they are entitled to from their own government. They wrote to their local government asking for officials to come and discuss their educational needs. They didn't get a response so they wrote a second and third time. With no reply they wrote to say that as the officials wouldn't come to the community, the community would come to the officials. Fearful of a riot, the officials approached the Police for support. On reading the letters the police said, "They are only asking you to go and meet with them to talk - so GO NOW! The result of these talks saw the foundations being built for new classrooms for the 284 pupils now enrolled at that school.

People are building safe brick houses, raising more animals, digging fish ponds, planting citrus groves, and cultivating more crops. Incredible transformation has taken place.



DISCUSS

Read Matthew 5:13-16

Q What particular uses have people had, over the years, for salt?

Used as a flavouring, preservative, antiseptic, fertiliser in some places. Essential part of our diet without which we would not be healthy.

Q What might Jesus have meant us to understand about our purpose when he described the Church as “Salt of the earth”?

We are called to have an effect on the character of our community, make the world a purer and more palatable place, work to counter negative and unhealthy influences on the lives of those in our community etc.

Q Can you think of specific things which bring decay or disease to the life of our community? In what ways might we work to bring healing and positive flavouring to overcome these negative influences?

Q Are there ways in which we might be in danger of losing our saltiness? What can we do to make sure that we remain fit for the purpose to which Jesus calls us?

Q Imagine (if you can!) a world with no light. What would it be like? Think of as many ways as you can in which your life would be different.

Such a world would be unsafe, we would be unable to perform most tasks, unable to see other people, would not be able to find our way etc. The darkness is frightening and makes us fearful and uncertain.

Q Are there particular things you see in the lives of the people you know which seem to cause them to stumble in the darkness?

As well as allowing people to describe specific social and other problems, help people to understand that to live life without Jesus is to be in the dark, according to Scripture. Thus a key part of our calling is to help other people encounter Him and hear His Good News.

Q What might Jesus mean by describing us as “The Light of the World”?

Q How good are we at letting the light of Christ shine through us in word and deed? What steps could we take, individually and as a church, in order to be more faithful and effective in our witness to Jesus?

ACTION

Break into twos or threes:

- Q As a result of this study, what do I feel God is asking me to think more about, to do, to discuss further with others?**

PRAY

Pray for one another for strength and courage to do what God is asking of us.

GOING DEEPER

In this short passage, Jesus spells out the vital role of the Church as the bringer of gifts from God without which true life is impossible.

Salt, in ancient times, was used for flavouring food, as it is today, for preserving (vital in a hot climate where food decays rapidly), and as an antiseptic for cleaning wounds and killing bacteria. It truly was essential for life. In the same way the Church is called to flavour and preserve every aspect of life and culture, countering the impact of sin and evil, and thus making the earth a purer and more palatable place for human thriving.

The salt used by those in Jesus' world would very likely have been dug from the shores of the Dead Sea. This was a somewhat impure blend of salt deposits and gypsum, a chalk-like substance which resembled real salt but which did not have any of its properties. As time went by, the true salt would dissolve leaving behind a useless residue fit only for throwing on the land. There is something profoundly disappointing about something with the appearance of salt but none of its usefulness. Jesus warns us about maintaining our own salty distinctiveness so that we might continue to have an impact upon the wider world. This, we assume, depends on our maintaining relationship with Him and living His true life without compromise.

When the Bible speaks of doing justice, it means to live in a way that generates a strong community where human beings can flourish, to repair the fabric of shalom which has been eroded. This happens when we focus on the needs of the poor.

(Tim Keller - Generous Justice)

Without light, we are unable to perform even the most basic tasks. What's more, darkness is often a cover for all manner of evil and danger. No wonder lamps were vital for every household in Jesus time. Just as a lamp fills a house with light and thus banishes and overcomes darkness, so we, as the Church of Jesus, have a similar function in the world. We light the way for others, help to banish fear, and, most significantly, point the way through our witness in word and deed, to Jesus who is the true light. If we fail to speak for Jesus and help others discover Him then the world remains in darkness and cannot thrive.

Christians are meant to be visible. There is little use in being a secret disciple according to Jesus.

We cannot hope for the transformation of people without the involvement of the local church and the verbal proclamation of the gospel that has been entrusted to it.

(Brian Fikkert - When Helping Hurts)

We're Christians passionate about ending poverty. We go to the places of greatest need, responding to disasters and helping communities to see their own potential to overcome poverty. We won't stop until poverty stops.

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tearfund.org

100 Church Road, Teddington TW11 8QE

T 020 8977 9144 E info@tearfund.org

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