



5 Marks of Growing – Children and Young People



Session 2 – Growing in Influence

Introduction: (J, I, S)

ASK: I wonder what difference it would make to the world if there weren't any Christians in it?

In this session we will be thinking about what difference Christians can make in the world.

ASK: Can you think of any examples of how Christians have made a difference in the world?

Or I wonder how Christians make a difference in your life?

If the group is struggling to think of ideas – either personal or historical – you could briefly mention some examples such as William Wilberforce fighting to end slavery, food banks run or supported by churches today, Victorian Christians setting up hospitals and schools for everyone in society, not just the rich, or people leading your youth groups.

Note: You may need to be prepared for examples of Christians having a negative impact in the world (eg: in the Crusades or the abuse of children). Do not deny or underplay these. We must accept both sides of the past while we try to make sure similar things don't happen again.

ASK: I wonder why Christians should make a difference in the world?

If the group cannot answer this, it doesn't matter. Leave the question for them to think about, that is what the rest of the session will look at.

Bible reading:

Matthew 5: 13-16





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Activity: Salt of the earth (J, I, S)

Matthew 5:13 'you are the salt of the earth'

Crisp tasting: You will need different flavoured packets of crisps, inc some **unsalted** (completely plain) ones. Put the crisps out in different bowls of each flavour. Offer the group the unsalted ones to taste first, and ask them what they think? Then give out the salted and flavoured ones.

ASK: I wonder what difference you can taste in the crisps?

In the bible salt was very important for making things taste different, but more importantly it was used to stop food from going rotten.

ASK: I wonder what it might have meant to the people Jesus was talking to, to be told to be 'the salt of the earth'?

Today we have other sorts of preservatives, and fridges and freezers to stop food from going rotten, but salt is still very important for making things taste better.

ASK: I wonder what this verse might mean for us today? What might it mean for us to be 'the salt of the earth'?

Whatever it is used for, salt is a very noticeable taste. You can tell immediately if it is in food – or if it is missing. Jesus wants his followers to be like salt in food, and to make a difference in the world around us. You might also like to think about this: there are many things influencing the world – some of them are like poisonous flavourings on food, or bacteria making it go rotten. What sort of things might be like this in the world?

Alternative version : You could make up two bowls of porridge with water (rather than milk), one without salt and one with salt. Again, ask the group to taste them both and say what difference they think the salt makes. Or you could get them to taste the unsalted porridge and then put some in and invite them to taste it again – notice that only a small amount of salt can make a difference.

Activity: Light of the world (J, I, S)

Matt 5:14 'you are the light of the world'

If you can, make the room you are in completely dark. Once the excitement has died down, get people to describe what it feels like to be in the dark.

Wait for a few minutes while their eyes get used to the dark. *How does it feel now? Are you getting used to the dark?*

Now light a candle in the middle of the room. *What difference does it make?*



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Light a few candles – how much more difference does that make? If you are careful you can try and hold three candle flames together – they should burn far more brightly than the three burning individually.

If lighting candles is not a safe activity for your group, you can use torches, or plug-in nightlights to bring a little bit of light into the room and see what sort of difference it makes.

Alternative version: You could find pictures of the night sky from the internet, with stars or the moon etc giving off some light (be careful about copyright issues). You could project them onto the walls or ceiling of the dark room.

Talk about the light given off by stars. They are tiny, yet we can see them so well, even millions of miles away, especially if we look at the sky at night in the countryside without street lights. Stars can make a huge difference to the sky, from being a black mass of nothingness, to being full of vibrancy and interest.

Activity: Make a Difference (J, I, S)

Salt and light can both make such a dramatic difference! Followers of Jesus can also make a difference to the world in which they live. Think back to the last session about Jesus' character and how we might grow to be like him. Write down as many things as the group can remember on cards and place them in the middle so everyone can see them. If we show some of these characteristics we will start to behave differently. What sort of things might we do that could make a difference in the world?

Try to come up with a list of MAD (Make a Difference) ideas that they, as a group or individually, could do to make a difference in the world:

- a) it might help to think about different places where you could make a difference eg: in your home; in your school / college / work place; in other countries around the world. – use a map of the world or newspapers to help the group to visualise the different places or some of the issues.
- b) it might also be helpful to start by thinking about what problems or bad things the group sees in the world around them. What could they do to make a difference to those things? – First of all, write down all the bad things, then think about how you might make a difference to them.
- c) If your group is looking to go a bit further, you can find some ideas from these websites that go further than just fundraising (also an option):
<http://www.christianaid.org.uk/ActNow/campaigns/index.aspx>



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http://www.tearfund.org/en/about_you/

http://www.hopetogether.org.uk/Groups/161047/HOPE/Resources/Ideas/Ideas.aspx#.Usr_LPuMDB8

Don't worry about being unrealistic or 'dreaming' about the things that you want to see change. Years ago many people thought they would never see the end of apartheid in South Africa, or the end of the conflict in Northern Ireland or the Cold War. You might have to explain how significant these things were – if you remember them. There will be time in the final reflection to think more specifically about some action you might get involved in.

Activity: Video discussion (S)

Watch this video (or just the sections mentioned below). It is quite a long and complex video about the way our social networks (the people we spend time with) can influence us, and then the way we can influence other people – and the world.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U-tOghblfE>

How people can 'catch' obesity from their social contacts (0-6 mins)

How we might use our social contacts to be a force for good (14.30mins – end)

The key ideas mentioned are:

Our social networks have a strong influence on us – it is even suggested that things such as obesity can be affected by the people we mix with (although it is not as simple as 'you will get fat if you hang around with fat people').

Because our social networks are very important to us as human beings, they give us the opportunity to be a positive influence on those around us.

If you feel the first video and ideas are too complicated for your group, you could try using this video to illustrate the effect one person can have on others:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GA8z7f7a2Pk>

ASK: How much influence do you think your social groups or networks have on you? – you might like to think about what groups or networks you are part of, and then think about how much they might influence you. I wonder if they are an influence in good ways or in bad ways?

ASK: Can you think of one thing that you might do to be a positive influence on the people (or the world) around you?



Activity: The Steven Johnson Mystery (I, S)

Everybody loves a mystery and here is one for your group to solve! In the process they will hopefully begin to explore how Christians can influence others, both individually and across the world.

WHAT TO DO

- Steven Johnson was never interested in Christians or church, but he has changed his mind. You have to use the information provided on the next page to work out why.
- Split into groups of four people. You will need to print off (and cut up) enough copies of the grid on the next page to give a set to each group.
- Each group has to use the information to decide on **an** answer to the question, ‘Why has Steven Johnson changed his mind about Christians and the church?’
- Let them know that:
 - a) there is no obvious ‘right/wrong’ answer,
 - b) there may be several answers. This is very like real life where nothing is ever simple!
- Your group may not need any help and may dive straight in, but there are ways you can give them some guidance:
 - a) they could start by sorting the information given into groups – eg: Steven/Sarah/ Michael; or for church/against church; or relevant/not relevant.
 - b) they could try and create a storyline for Steven – an order of events to work out what happened. Not everything will fit neatly into it, but that doesn’t matter.
- When the groups think they have one (or more than one) reason for Steven changing his mind, ask them to show the cards that refer most closely to those reasons.
- Ask the whole group to a vote on what things they think have influenced Steven the most. Can you identify a top three?
- You can end with a discussion about how Christians and the Church can be an influence on the world around them. Sometimes that influence hasn’t been good! Be prepared to admit this and think about how that can be changed, just like it was for Steven.

“It’s going to prayer spaces that did it”

“No, it’s his friends who are mint!”

“I think it’s because he saw that telly programme”



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<p>Steven has a couple of friends, Michael and Sarah, who go to church. You would never catch him going though!</p>	<p>Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were going to have Steven baptised at St. Botolph's when he was a baby but the vicar was quite rude to them so they went elsewhere.</p>	<p>"All the church ever does is cause wars and fall out with each other" says Steven in an R.E. lesson</p>	<p>Michael's dad does some volunteering at the local food bank.</p>	<p>In the history lesson on the Victorians, they discover that some organisations today that take care of people were started by Christians in the 19th century.</p>
<p>A group called 'Prayer Spaces' come into school and set up areas in the hall for a week where people can come and explore what prayer is. It's cooler than expected and a lot go to it.</p>	<p>Michael and Sarah invite Steven and a couple of other people to the big church youth event. Steven wants to say yes but is scared of what his other friends will think.</p>	<p>Mrs. Johnson's mother has just died. She contacts the local vicar who comes to visit and is very good at helping the family and listening to them.</p>	<p>Sarah has volunteered to go on a project to help build a school in Africa and is raising money to get there. Steven is secretly impressed.</p>	<p>When Steven is upset about losing his gran, Sarah notices and takes him along to the Prayer Spaces in the hall. No one puts any pressure on him and he feels quite peaceful there.</p>
<p>Steven and Michael are both in the football team. The matches are usually on a Sunday morning. Michael often invites Steven for lunch afterwards with his family.</p>	<p>There's a programme on television about relief organisations in war-torn countries. Some of the organisations are Christian.</p>	<p>Sarah befriends someone in the class that she sees is being bullied. She deliberately sits next to him in as many lessons as she can.</p>	<p>Steven is out with some boys from the area and is in the newsagents with them. They are going to steal some sweets and drinks – he stops and thinks " what would Michael do ?"</p>	<p>Steven's dad has been made redundant and there is not much money at home, even for the weekly food shop.</p>



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Final reflection: (J, I, S)

Whatever it is used for, salt is a very noticeable taste. You can tell immediately if it is in food, or if it is missing. In the darkness, even a small light can make a big difference.

ASK: I wonder how Christians are like salt or light in the world? – What things can they do that can make a difference?

Allow the group to answer this in any way they can think of – whatever might have stuck with them from what you have done so far. You might like to have a couple of examples eg: praying, acting, speaking out, in case the group is completely stuck.

*ASK: I wonder what difference **you** can make in the world?*

This week try to do something that makes the world a bit better, a bit more like God wants it to be. It may be worth starting with something small and trying it out before you move on to changing the world!

Part of being salt or light in the world is also to be busy praying for God's world. Here is one way you could try praying for the world;

The Hand Prayer: you can use each part of your hand to pray for a different aspect of the world we live in eg:

Thumb: Say a prayer for those closest to you - family, friends etc

Index: Pray for those who point us to Jesus (friends, church members, group leaders, clergy etc), and pray for those people who we want to point to Jesus but don't know him yet.

Middle: Pray for world leaders and governments. What do you think they might to be prayed for?

Ring finger: Pray for people who are ill and for places where people are suffering for other reasons such as a natural disaster or war.

Little: Pray for yourself. How would you like God to help you?

Palms: Celebrate and thanksgiving – what things can you thank God for in your life?

Use any other ideas of your own to help the group to pray. For loads of other prayer ideas search “creative prayer ideas” on the internet.