

FIVE MARKS OF GROWING

Session 2 – Influence

LEADER'S NOTES

The order of the Five Marks of Growing is.....

*Christ-likeness
Commitment
Partnership
Influence
Numbers*

However, in this course I have chosen to change the order to so that the course ends with Commitment session. I think it is appropriate to have as a climax to the course the opportunity for everyone to be invited to recommit themselves to Christ and to serving him. I have also put Influence came before Partnership. So my revised order is.....

*Christ-likeness
Influence
Partnership
Numbers
Commitment*

However, you are clearly free to use the order your prefer.

This session took 1 hour 30 minutes including serving refreshments when we broke into discussion groups after the Part 2 input.

With 24 people present, people were sat in fours around tables and this worked very well.

On the pages that follow are.....

- The Session Notes (pages 2-10) which include the worship, input and discussion questions in order for the Leader.*
- The Opening & Closing Worship (pages 11-12): print back to back and fold.*
- The Discussion Questions (pages 13-14). It is suggested that you guillotine the two A4 sheets into four A5 sheets and give the questions out at the four points so that people don't anticipate the next main point and so that you can reveal the four main points one by one as you proceed.*

Some opening and closing worship is included, or you can devise your own. Appropriate hymns and songs that could be used include.....

*Lord of all power I give you my will
Make me a channel of your peace
Thou whose almighty Word
Lord Jesus Christ*

The opening item was chosen because it is a song of worship and it's good to start with praise.

You will need to make copyright arrangements when printing the songs and some hymns. Many churches will have a CCL licence.

You might like to obtain some copies of a Prayer Diary from Care [www.care.org.uk] and give them out at the end of Part One.

The Prayer Diary is also available on line at <http://www.care.org.uk/resources/prayer>

CALL TO WORSHIP

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth:
Worship the LORD with gladness.

Come into his presence with singing:
Enter his gates with thanksgiving.

Enter and his courts with praise:
Give thanks to him and bless his name.

SONG

MEN

WOMEN

I will worship	<i>I will worship</i>
With all of my heart	<i>with all of my heart</i>
I will praise You	<i>I will praise You</i>
With all of my strength	<i>all my strength</i>
I will seek You	<i>I will seek You</i>
All of my days	<i>all of my days</i>
I will follow	<i>I will follow</i>
All of Your ways	<i>all Your ways</i>

*I will give You all my worship,
I will give You all my praise.
You alone I long to worship,
You alone are worthy of my praise.*

I will bow down	<i>I will bow down</i>
Hail You as King.	<i>hail You as King</i>
I will serve You	<i>I will serve You</i>
Give You everything	<i>give You everything</i>
I will lift up	<i>I will lift up</i>
My eyes to Your throne	<i>my eyes to Your throne</i>
I will trust You	<i>will trust You</i>
I will trust You alone	<i>trust You alone</i>

I will give You all my worship....

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BIBLE READINGS

1 Peter 2.9-12

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honourable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

Matthew 5 13.-16

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

HYMN

Thou, whose almighty Word
Chaos and darkness heard,
And took their flight;
Hear us, we humbly pray,
And, where the Gospel's day
Sheds not its glorious ray,
Let there be light!

Thou, who didst come to bring
On thy redeeming wing
Healing and sight,
Health to the sick in mind,
Sight to the inly blind,
O now, to all mankind,
Let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love,
Life giving, holy Dove,
Speed forth thy flight;
Move on the water's face
Bearing the lamp of grace,
And, in earth's darkest place,
Let there be light!

Blessèd and holy Three,
Glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, love, might!
Boundless as ocean's tide,
Rolling in fullest pride,
Through the world far and wide,
Let there be light!

John Marriott 1813

CONCLUSION

Lord Jesus, as we gather in your name:
Inspire us and guide us by your Spirit.

May all that we think and do and say:
Bring glory to your holy name.

May blessing and honour and glory and power:
Be yours for ever and ever.
Amen.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Introduce the topic if you have not already.

Prepare four or five bowls of crisps of different flavours. You must include some unsalted crisps. Walkers make these and they are called "Salt Shake" and they have a little blue twist of salt in them (which you should not use).

I have five flavours: Ready salted, Unsalted, Prawn Cocktail, Salt & Vinegar, Cheese & Onion.

Mark each bowl with letters (A-E). Invite everyone to taste the crisps and to try to identify the flavours.

When you have done this you can make the salt connection and how some of the crisps were salted and some were unsalted.

Some would say that the unsalted ones were bland and that when salt is added it makes them much more tasty. The parallel with Jesus words in Matthew 5 is obvious.

As someone who thinks that all flavoured crisps taste like poison (I call them all "chemical crisps"), you could make the point that there are other influences out there in the world that seek to poison our way of thinking and our society. We are not the only people who influence the world.

Just as salt adds flavour to plain crisps, so Christians are meant to add flavour to society by our influence.

INTRODUCTION

Include your own introduction in place of the purple text

When I was a small child, I can recall having meals with my Grandparents. My Grandma would pass the salt to me, and to my brother and sister with the clear expectation that we were meant to sprinkle some on our food. On more than one occasion she would tell us in her Yorkshire accent, "Eee you can't live without salt". So there was a clear understanding that salt was good for your health.

My mother would always add salt to the water when boiling vegetables, and if she ever forgot add it to the potatoes, there would be a chorus of "Er you've forgotten to add the salt!", when we tasted it.

How things have changed. My wife never adds salt when boiling vegetables, and our tastes have altered accordingly. Today we are warned that salt causes high blood pressure which is particularly harmful as we get older. So we are advised that our daily intake should not exceed 2,400 milligrams, which - to someone like me who doesn't recognise a milligram when I see one - is a teaspoonful!

In our reading from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5, Jesus talked about salt.

He said to his disciples.....

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. (Matthew 5.13 NRSV)

Today we use salt mainly for giving flavour to our food. But in Jesus' day, before fridges and freezers were invented, it was mainly used as a food preservative, to keep it from going bad.

The parallel is obvious: as "the salt of the earth" - as disciples of Christ - we are called to prevent the world from going bad! Of course, salt doesn't actually stop the decaying process, it merely slows it down. In a similar way, Christians will never eradicate all badness and evil from the world, but we can be effective in arresting the spread of evil and ungodly ways in society today. We are meant to be a sort of moral disinfectant as we stand up for Christian values that we know are right, true and good.

However, for salt to be effective in this way, two things need to happen.....

First, the salt has to come into contact with the food it is meant to be preserving. Similarly, we Christians have to come into contact with the society that we are meant to be preserving! If we are out of touch, we will not have any influence over the society of which we are part.

As one commentator says.....

"Christian salt has no business to remain snugly in elegant little ecclesiastical salt cellars; our place is to be rubbed into the secular community, as salt is rubbed into meat, to stop it going bad."

(John Stott, *Christian Counter Culture*, page 65)

The second thing that needs to happen if we are to act as moral disinfectant is that, as well as being immersed in society, salt must not lose its saltiness, otherwise it becomes useless and is no good for anything. As Christians it is easy to make the mistake of.....

- Either being so church-focussed that while we keep our faith alive but cut ourselves off from society.
- Or of being so immersed in the world that we lose our Christian distinctiveness - our saltiness.

But how can salt actually lose its saltiness? Surely salt is salt! Certainly the chemical Sodium Chloride cannot lose its actual saline properties. But it can be contaminated by being mixed with impurities. When this happens it becomes useless – even dangerous!

It has been suggested that what was commonly called salt in Jesus' day, was in fact a white powder which, although it contained some Sodium Chloride, it also contained much more, since there were no refineries in those days.

Within the white dust that they called salt, the sodium chloride was probably the most soluble component and was most easily washed out. The residue of white powder still looked like salt, but it neither tasted or acted like salt. It was just road dust! So it was thrown on the refuse tip, which in the East was, and often still is, the street where it is trodden underfoot.

So the message to us is that we must not to lose our Christian distinctiveness, otherwise our influence in society will be nil. When, in our day-to-day lives, we mix with people in various situations, we must not allow ourselves to become contaminated by the standards of the world. We need to retain our saltiness.

And as salt, we need to be influencing our society for good as we work to establish standards and values that, in the words of St Paul, are *"true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent and praiseworthy"* (4.8 NRSV)

Certainly Christians in the past have influenced society in this way, but we so often seem to be reticent to get involved as salt today. As one writer has said.....

"If the meat goes bad and becomes inedible, there is no sense in blaming the meat, for that is what happens when the bacteria are left alone to breed. The question to ask is, 'Where is the salt?' So if society deteriorates and standards decline, till it becomes like.....stinking fish, there is no sense in blaming society, for that is what happens when fallen men and women are left to themselves, and human selfishness is unchecked."

So, as Christians, as disciples of Christ, how can we respond to the challenge of Jesus to be "the salt of the earth" – to be an influence for good in society? At this session we will focus on four ways in which we can respond to Jesus' teaching.

PART ONE

BY PRAYING OUT

What do I mean? This is about the content of our prayers. We need to make sure that our prayers are directed not just inwards towards our personal concerns or the concerns of our church – which is good and right – but also outwards to our world!

As you watch the television, listen to the radio, read the newspapers, or just observe the behaviour of people, do you ever ask yourself the question: “What is the world's coming to?”? If so, may I ask, “How many times you have prayed about these situations?” How often do such topics feature in your prayers and mine?” I know I could do much better than I do! I guess we're good at thinking those things, but not as good at praying about them. It's been said that we should pray with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other.

So, we can respond, first, by praying out!

GROUP DISCUSSION: PRAYING OUT *(8-10 minutes)*

Discuss any of the questions in any order

- How could we pray in a more focused way for society at a local, national and international level?
- How might we do this together?
- How might we do this individually?
- How could such prayers be included in a more often in a creative way in your Sunday intercessions?
- Who are your community leaders who you could pray for by name? (MP, local councillors, head teachers of schools, etc)

At the end spend no more than two minutes inviting people to share just a couple of ideas that emerged from the discussion.

You could give everyone a copy of *Care's Prayer Diary*.

PART TWO

A second way we can respond to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5 is.....

BY LIVING OUT

By this I mean that we need to live out our faith by the way we behave and conduct ourselves day by day. If, as they say, "actions speak louder than words" the way we live as Christians can have a real influence.

If the members of our families, if those in our neighbourhoods, places of work, or leisure networks know that you and I are Christians, then our actions will have an effect – either for good or ill. As someone has said, "Christians are marked people both at work and at home."

So it is important that we live out what we claim to believe. John Stott wrote.....

When we do....."One Christian nurse in a hospital, one Christian teacher in a school, one Christian secretary in an office, one Christian sales assistant in a shop or supermarket, one Christian worker in a factory, can have an influence out of all proportion to numbers and percentages.

Who can calculate the influence for good in the whole neighbourhood of a single Christian home, in which husband and wife are faithful to, and find fulfilment in, each other. And if there are children, who can calculate the influence for good as they are observed growing up in the disciplined security of love, and in which the family are not turned in on themselves but outgoing to the community?"

(JRWS, CCC p75)

What's more, the influence and effectiveness of our example is increased dramatically when it is the example of a group of Christians – a community of Christians. But we must live it out!

Rather than live it out, Christians sometimes become flabby and just follow the way of the world. The influence of our liberal, secular society can have a drip-drip-drip effect on us Christians such that we often unwittingly change our way of thinking away from what God wants. In order to be the salt of the earth and have an influence we must live it out!

An appropriate point at which to serve refreshments

GROUP DISCUSSION: LIVING OUT (8-10 minutes)

Discuss any of the questions in any order

- How much of an influence for Christ do you think you are by the way you live out your life?
- Sometimes Christians can be viewed as being negative because we speak out against things. As we seek to influence society for good, how might we present an a more positive image?
- How much might people observe you (individually and as a church) behaving/reacting in a better way than non-Christians do?
- Is there an aspect of your character where you can easily react in a non-saltlike way?

At the end spend no more than two minutes inviting people to share just a couple of ideas that emerged from the discussion.

PART THREE

A third way we can respond to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5 is.....

BY SPEAKING OUT

When you read what some columnists write in the newspapers, or listen to what some opinion formers have to say on the television or radio, does it ever make you cross?

So what do we do to help shape public opinion? In the last 12 months have you written to a newspaper, or television or radio station in response to something you were not happy with? Have you ever written to your MP about anything? Have you ever written to the producer of a television programme in praise of a particularly wholesome and good programme? Have you ever called a phone-in programme on the radio? If we don't shake the salt out of the salt cellar, it won't have any effect on the food.

I sense that we Christians have a natural reticence to speak out in this way. Think what effect it could have if the members of a church, or a local Mothers Union branch, or house group all wrote to a newspaper or TV company to praise something wholesome that had been featured, or to object to some unwholesome article or programme. I wonder why we tend to be so reticent to get our hands dirty? As disciples of Christ we can act as the salt of the earth by speaking out.

GROUP DISCUSSION: SPEAKING OUT (8-10 minutes)

Discuss any of the questions in any order

- How do you feel about writing to your MP, a Newspaper, a Television or Radio Station?
- Could you think of a letter or email you could send in praise of something good?
- Is there an issue you would have liked to have made your voice heard about, but did not have the courage? What would help give you confidence to do this in the future?
- Would it be appropriate and helpful to make our voice heard as a group of Christians or a local church?
- How might we encourage each other to speak out in appropriate ways?

At the end spend no more than two minutes inviting people to share just a couple of ideas that emerged from the discussion.

PART FOUR

A third way we can respond to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5 is.....

BY TURNING OUT

As we constantly listen to the views of our political leaders in the media, do you, like me, so often regret the demise of Judeo-Christian values? I wonder why there are not more Christians in politics.

Could I, could you encourage a Christian young person to have a career in politics where he or she could have a real influence in how society is shaped? Is there someone in your church who could stand for election in your own local council? Names from the past like Wilberforce and Shaftsbury are an inspiration to us – but I wonder why are there so few people who follow in their footsteps today?

Jesus has told us that *We are the salt of the earth*. When he first said that, he was speaking to an obscure, pretty powerless, uninfluential group of twelve uneducated men. They probably didn't think they could have much influence - but they did - they changed the world! And we might feel that we are an obscure, pretty powerless, uninfluential group of people who can't do much. Yet with the will and the determination and the power of the Holy Spirit, I believe we can!

GROUP DISCUSSION: TURNING OUT (5 minutes)

- Is there someone you could encourage to become involved in politics?
- Could you?

At this point spend no more than two minutes inviting people to share just one or two ideas that emerged from the discussion.

FINAL QUESTION (3 minutes)

- What action could you take as a result of tonight's session?

CONCLUSION

We have seen that we can influence society: by praying out, by living out, by speaking out and by turning out.

A final point: you don't need a lot of salt to keep food fresh. You need even less to flavour it. So it may only take a small Christian influence to make a difference, be it in the classroom, the office, the factory, the shop, the university, the college, the high street, the neighbourhood, in our networks, on Facebook, on Twitter, or wherever. One active Christian in a network of people can have a great influence.

A man called Tom Sine wrote a book called, *The Mustard Seed Principle*. It is sub-titled, "You can make a difference in tomorrow's troubled world". I end by quoting an extract from it.....

"Jesus let us in on an astonishing secret. God has chosen to change the world through the lowly, the unassuming and the imperceptible.....That has always been God's strategy – changing the world through the conspiracy of the insignificant. He chose a ragged bunch of people to become the insurgents of his new order.....And who would have ever dreamed that God would choose to work through a baby in a cow stall to turn the world right side up! 'God chose the foolish things.....the weak things.....the lowly things.....the things that are not.....'

It is still God's policy to work through the embarrassingly insignificant to change his world and create his future....."

(Quoted in John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* [First Edition] p.75)

So as those who claim to be disciples of Christ, may we respond to his challenge with obedience and courage, that in the power of the Holy Spirit we may influence the society in which we live and change the world in some way for his glory !

CLOSING WORSHIP

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me bring your love;
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;
And where there's doubt, true faith in you.

*Oh, Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love with all my soul.*

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life let me bring hope;
Where there is darkness, only light;
And where there's sadness, ever joy.

*Oh, Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love with all my soul.*

Make me a channel of Your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
In giving to all men that we receive,
And in dying that we're born to eternal life.

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Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

**Heavenly Father,
as we seek to serve you as individuals and together,
help us to be "the salt of the earth"
by what we say, and how we live.**

**Inspire us to pray out,
to live out,
to speak out,
and to turn out.**

**Inspire and guide us by your Spirit
so that others will see our good works
and give praise and glory to you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

CALL TO WORSHIP

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth:

Worship the LORD with gladness.

Come into his presence with singing:

Enter his gates with thanksgiving.

Enter and his courts with praise:

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SONG

MEN

I will worship
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I will praise You
With all of my strength
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CONCLUSION

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by what we say, and how we live.**

**Inspire us to pray out,
to live out,
to speak out,
and to turn out.**

**Inspire and guide us by your Spirit
so that others will see our good works
and give praise and glory to you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

PRAYING OUT

Discuss any of the questions in any order

- How could we pray in a more focused way for society at a local, national and international level?
- How might we do this together?
- How might we do this individually?
- How could such prayers be included in a more often in a creative way in your Sunday intercessions?
- Who are your community leaders who you could pray for by name? (MP, local councillors, head teachers of schools, etc)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

LIVING OUT

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- How much of an influence for Christ do you think you are by the way you live out your life?
- Sometimes Christians can be viewed as being negative because we speak out against things. As we seek to influence society for good, how might we present an a more positive image?
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- Is there an aspect of your character where you can easily react in a non-saltlike way?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

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Discuss any of the questions in any order

- How do you feel about writing to your MP, a Newspaper, a Television or Radio Station?
- Could you think of a letter or email you could send in praise of something good?
- Is there an issue you would have liked to have made your voice heard about, but did not have the courage? What would help give you confidence to do this in the future?
- Would it be appropriate and helpful to make our voice heard as a group of Christians or a local church?
- How might we encourage each other to speak out in appropriate ways?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

TURNING OUT

- Is there someone you could encourage to become involved in politics?
- Could you?

FINAL QUESTION

- What action could you take as a result of tonight's session?