

SESSION THREE: INFLUENCE (1 hour)

We recommend you read through these notes before leading the session. They are intended to help you understand the purpose and journey of the session, and to help you keep the group focused on the core issues.

OVERVIEW:

The focus of this week's session is the call of Christians to work in the public arena for the common good. We recommend getting the group to engage with at least a couple of these core ideas:

- God's people are called to work for positive change in the world. This gives us common ground with many other groups who do not share our faith.
- Jesus' words and actions were political – they profoundly challenged the status quo of his society and angered authority figures.
- Loving our neighbour has to lead us to seeking **justice**, because long lasting change has to address the structures that keep people poor e.g. slavery.

START (5min):

Share with the group the responses you got from carrying out the questionnaire.

- Were you already aware of the needs they raised?
- Who do you think has the influence to improve things? What resources would be needed?

The take-away action may not have been completed by everyone, but even if only a few people did it, it's worth talking about their answers. The more that people make their own discoveries out and about during the week, the more meaningful the journey of this course will be for them.

OR

Watch the vox pop and discuss:

- What do you think are the main needs are in your local community?
- Who has the most influence in your local community?

DISCUSS (20min):

Read Jeremiah 29:4-7 and Matthew 5:13-16 together and answer these questions:

1. How did God ask the exiles to behave in this foreign land? How does that relate to the church's role today?
2. Make a list of the qualities and uses of salt and light. Go through each one discussing how this might apply to God's people.
3. The images of light and salt are very different. One is very noticeable and one is often invisible. How can we influence life in our communities for the good through noticeable and invisible ways?

4. It has often been said that, 'Christians shouldn't just be pulling people out of the river. We should be going upstream to find out who's pushing them in.' What does this mean and how do we go about it?

Some thoughts on the questions:

1. *Seeking the peace and prosperity of our 'city', town or nation requires us to be fully involved in civic life. We are still to be distinctive in the way that we live – but not separate.*
2. *For example, salt provides flavour, cleanses, thaws and preserves. Light dispels darkness, reveals truth, provides guidance and gives life.*
3. *It's worth reflecting on whether we would rather our influence was invisible or noticeable – and which approach our church prioritises. Jesus' use of the images of salt and light suggests that both are important, and perhaps they also support one another.*
4. *Doing works of service and compassion is often appealing because we can see quick results, and we do not encounter much opposition. Going further and working in political and civil structures to bring about justice and positive change brings us into conflict with those who do not share our views or who have vested interests in the current set-up, so it can be a harder battle. Jesus encountered a lot of opposition from authority figures who could see that he was profoundly challenging the unjust status quo. Are we also prepared to do this work?*

WATCH (7min):

Watch the DVD clip 'Influence' in which Elaine Storkey, Tim Keller and Tom Wright offer their thoughts on these two passages.

Choose one of the following statements to discuss:

- **When we work with larger communities... people see that the church is not a self-righteous holy club keeping itself to itself, but living out the message of a generous, loving God.**
- **Jesus came into a profoundly political context... when Jesus preaches the kingdom of God he is actually turning the kingdoms of this world upside down.**
- **Salt means that we are supposed to penetrate society with God's truth; by living a truth-based life, we keep society from being as bad as it could be.**

STORY (8min):

Watch the 'Mothers Against Violence' DVD clip, which tells the story of a grass-roots organisation in Manchester.

Discuss Patsy McKie's comment: "I lived in the community, but I wasn't from the community. I was from a community of church people – that was where I lived".

Other stories you could watch:

- Garelochhead (description)
- Malawi/other Tearfund film (description)
- MOSAIC Citizens (stories from overseas):

REFLECT (Optional Extra)

Watch Jim Wallis reflecting on the Christian duty to influence our society for good (5 min).

PRAY (15min):

Choose one need that you have raised or found out about this week in your local community and spend some time praying for change in this particular issue, and asking God to guide you in how to respond. Finish by praying this Franciscan benediction together.

**May God bless us with anger
at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people
so that we may work for justice, freedom and peace.**

**May God bless us with tears to shed
for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war
so that we may reach out our hand to comfort them
and turn their pain into joy.**

**And may God bless us with enough foolishness
to believe that we can make a difference in the world
so that we can do what others claim cannot be done.**

ACT (5min):

This week's action is about 'going upstream to find out who's pushing the people in'. Choose an issue of injustice, locally, nationally or globally - perhaps the one you prayed about - and start to use your influence to work for change.

LOCAL: Buy your local newspaper, and look for any stories that strike you about local injustice. Write to your MP and/or councillor asking what is being done about it. (For advice on this, go to the website).
To find out who your local MP is, go to <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/commons/l/> or to find out who are local councillors are, go to <http://local.direct.gov.uk/LDGRedirect/index.jsp?LGSL=358&LGIL=8>)

NATIONAL: Check out the Current Affairs pages on the Evangelical Alliance's website and join in or consider joining a political party.

GLOBAL: Go to www.tearfund.org/campaigning - pick an issue and take action!

EXTRAS:

Visit the website for extra activities, clips and reading.

In the session -

Activity: Quiz about Christians who have worked for political change. Print off the quiz sheet from here: [insert url] and get people to work in pairs to match up the characters with the political change they worked for.

Extra film clips:

- [Jim Wallis on hope vs cynicism](#)
- [Garelochhead \(description\)](#)
- [Malawi/other Tearfund film \(description\)](#)
- [MOSAIC Citizens \(stories from overseas\):](#)

In your own time –

Inside Out journal – Chapter 3

Suggested further reading

- [Jonathan Bartley, *The Subversive Manifesto* \(BRF\)](#)
- [Graham Gordon, *What if you got involved?* \(Paternoster\)](#)
- [Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice: A Witness of Courage in a Hurting World* \(IVP\)](#)
- [Martin Luther King, JR, *Strength to Love* \(Collins\)](#)
- [Robert Lewis & Rob Wilkins, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* \(Eden\)](#)
- [Melba Maggay, *Transforming Society* \(Regnum\)](#)
- [Ched Myers, et al, *Say to this Mountain* \(Orbis\)](#)
- [Ronald J Sider, *The Scandal of Evangelical Politics: Why are Christians Missing the Chance to Really Change the World* \(Eden\)](#)
- [Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get it* \(Harper\)](#)
- [John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* \(Eerdmans\)](#)