

# LIFEGROUP LESSON



“Church on the Go”  
(Part 3 of 8)

## Being Salt and Light to Our City Matthew 5:13-16



### TIPS FOR DISCUSSION FACILITATOR

Ensure that the aim is first to understand the text and then to make it meaningful and relevant. The discussion questions provided are intended to bring out the relevance for today.

Begin with a prayer for the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Encourage everyone to participate in the discussion.

Begin the discussion by reading the sermon passage (where applicable), and discuss about its overall meaning by asking what could be the key focuses/emphases in that particular passage.

Spend appropriate amount of time on each question with as many members as possible making a contribution. At the end of each discussion the leader should summarise the main points that have arisen and direct the group towards making them applicable in their individual lives.

A balance must be kept between ascertaining what the Bible teaches and what are the opinions of participants. So the facilitator should make sure that there is an understanding of the passage before questions are raised.

## MESSAGE OUTLINE

1. Introduce the Values of the Kingdom (v13)
2. Demonstrate the Good Works of the Kingdom (v14-16)

### Background of the Passage

As the introduction of the Sermon of the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus taught the disciples and the crowd about what are valued in the Kingdom of God (i.e. Kingdom values), in contrast to what is valued by the world (Matthew 5:1-10). These Kingdom values are often counter-cultural but they promise heavenly rewards to those who persist in upholding them as part of their commitment to their King. But pursuing Kingdom values does not come without a price, as this would make those who do (i.e. the disciples; note the sudden change to a second person “you” from here onwards) stand out from the world and thus at times attract persecution as a result. Jesus, however, ends off this portion by reminding them of the reward for their perseverance in them (Matthew 5:11-12).

Matthew 5:13-16 continues to speak to this same sub-group of people (i.e. the “you” as referring to those who are committed to Christ and not the whole crowd, c.f. verse 11b) that their growth in Kingdom values (i.e. in Christ-likeness) has impact and significance for the rest of the world. Because of what they (and now we) have become in Christ, they (and thus we) are now the salt and light in relation to the rest of the world. This is our new identity before the watching world; this is who we are by virtue of our relationship with God.

It is important to stress that this is not something we need to strive to do; it is the influence that comes with all believers simply for them being positively different from the world and consistently living that out. In fact, the only way for Christ followers not to influence their world positively is by either (1) losing their original essence (or Christlikeness), in the way salt loses its saltiness, or (2) deliberately hiding their influence by concealing the essence of who they are and what they believe and stand for, in the way the light is deliberately kept under a bowl. In a nutshell, all Christ followers who live out their beliefs consistently in all areas of their lives will make a positive impact in the world.

### Discussion for Point 1: Introduce the Values of the Kingdom (v13)

- What are some values of the Kingdom that are clearly different from those of the world? In what sense are the values of the Kingdom superior to the values of the world? Why is it important for believers to follow after Kingdom values, i.e. what can happen if believers follow after worldly values instead of Kingdom values? On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the most conscious), how conscious are you in living out the values of the Kingdom in your daily life? Explain your rating. On account of its importance, how do you think you can grow in your understanding and application of Kingdom values in your life?
- What do you think is the difference between “living as salt” and

“trying to be the salt” to our city? Which do you think believers are called to do? Explain your answer. What do you think it means for believers to “add flavour” and “slow down decay” in our society? Give specific examples of how this can be done in our society. Do you think believers in our society are currently effective in being salt to our city? Give reasons for your answer. What do you think are some challenges that believers might face in living as salt in our city? Personally, what are the values of the world that you constantly struggle against in your workplace or school? What can hinder you from living out the values of the Kingdom in your environment such as your school, your family or your workplace? What do you think you can do specifically to live out your identity as salt in your environment?

#### Discussion for Point 2: Demonstrate the Good Works of the Kingdom (v14-16)

- In what ways are believers a light to the world? In what sense do you think it means that the believers as light “cannot be hidden”? Do you think believers in your school or workplace are shining as light to the rest of the community? Give reasons for your answer. What do you think it mean for believers to hide their light “under a bowl”? Do you think it is important for people around you to know that you are a believer? Explain your answer. What can you do more in your school or workplace in order to shine as a light in that environment? Is your LG a community of light to those who come into contact with it? Give reasons for your answer.
- Why do you think it is important for believers to seek to transform the city, i.e. what can happen to our societies if they are left on their own without the influence of the believing community? On the other hand, do you think a city can be transformed significantly without having more Christ followers in its midst? The preacher mentioned that “in order to transform our city significantly in the long term, we need to participate in “renewing its minds,” i.e. we need to invest strong Christ followers to influence the city’s values and its way of thinking.” Do you agree with this assertion? Give reasons for your answer. How can the church participate together in order to seek the long term transformation of our city?

*“In the same way, let your light shine before others,  
that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

~ Matthew 5:16 ~

## Appendix A (Reflection for mature believers)

### The Secularization of America

*How can we preserve the biblical values that are being systematically erased from our culture?*

By Charles Colson,

(Adapted from Discipleship Journal, <http://www.navpress.com/magazines/archives/article.aspx?id=13513>)

**Note:** This article was written against the backdrop of America, but the lessons learnt can easily be transferrable to our local context as we seek to be salt and light to our city.

*What responsibilities does the Church have to society? How can we address key public issues from a Christian viewpoint? Can the Church make a constructive impact on America?*

Over the past ten years, we have clearly experienced something of a religious resurgence in America. Religious activity seems to be increasing on all fronts. During that same period of time, paradoxically, we have also experienced a growing, rapid secularization of American life. This trend has become obvious in several areas: the number of abortions is growing steadily; more children are being born out of wedlock, particularly in the inner cities; drug use has reached crisis proportions.

In a period in which church attendance is rising, in which missions giving is going up, in which "born again" has become a household phrase, crime has been steadily increasing. The United States has the highest crime rate in the western world and the third highest rate of incarceration per capita in the world, trailing only the Soviet Union and South Africa. And research has shown that crime rates are directly linked to the moral state of a culture. Despite ostensible religiosity, our nation is undergoing a continuing decline in moral values.

The moral base of our culture is being attacked, not only frontally, but more subtly as well. The religious value structure of our thought process as a people is being systematically, steadily eroded, so Christian values contend less and less for the mind of our culture.

## THE SCHOOLS

If you want to shape the mind of a culture, you begin by shaping its educational system. That is why the so-called values clarification espoused in the field of education today is an alarming statement about our society.

*The New York Times* reported an instance of such "values clarification" in a classroom in Teaneck, New Jersey. Students were told that a woman found \$1,000 lying on the street, picked it up, and turned it in. Each of the fifteen children was asked, "Did that person do the right thing by turning in the \$1,000?" All fifteen said she was a fool. Afterward, the *New York Times* reporter asked the teacher, "Why didn't you tell those kids that turning in the money was the right thing to do?" The teacher responded, "That is not my job. My job is simply to help them find truth as they find it within themselves."

The undermining of religious values has become a pervasive problem in the American educational system. Paul Vitz, in an analysis of the content of textbooks being used in our schools today, examined ten standard fifth-grade history texts. He identified 230 references to religion: 121 of them in the seventeenth century, 59 references in the eighteenth century, 37 in the nineteenth century, and none in the twentieth—as if religion has nothing to do with modern history. He describes how one grade school teacher taught her class that Thanksgiving was a time in which the Pilgrims got together and gave thanks to the Indians. A young boy

came home and told his mother what he had been taught in school. When the mother confronted the principal with the inaccuracy, reminding him that Thanksgiving was a time in which thanks was given to God, the principal replied that her position "was just opinion and not documented fact" and that "they could only teach what was contained in the history books."

## THE LAW

A recent New York law indicates just how far we have stripped the religious base from our culture. The state's law against child pornography says explicitly in its preamble that this law was passed not for moral, religious, or ethical reasons, but because pornography and the abuse of children has a deleterious psychological effect. The legislators feared the law would be stricken if it was argued on any moral basis.

We're even systematically eliminating religious symbols from our culture. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Ten Commandments must be removed from the walls of a Kentucky schoolroom. Though the Court allowed Pawtucket, Rhode Island, to keep a manger scene on public property, Justice Burger said the creche could be allowed because it was the symbol not of a religious event, but of a commercial enterprise in the community.

## THE CHURCH

The role of the church is being circumscribed in the same way. Court decisions are encroaching upon the very essence of the church—holy, disciplined living among its members, who are held liable to its standards. The case of Marian Guinn sets a frightening precedent.

Guinn, a member of the Church of Christ in Collinsville, Oklahoma, began flaunting her affair with the ex-mayor of the town. Church elders repeatedly exhorted her to repent and come back into fellowship, but she refused. According to scriptural guidelines, she was publicly chastised and dropped from the church. She sued. Her lawyer argued, "I don't care if she fornicates up one side of the street and down the other, it's none of the church's business." Amazingly, she won a lawsuit against the church elders for invasion of privacy, recovering \$390,000. A juror who voted for Guinn said afterward, "I don't see what business it is for the church to tell people how to live."

## THE MEDIA

The media also reflect a disturbing shift in American culture. In January of 1987, ABC plans to televise a mini-series in which Shirley MacLaine Shirley will explain and dramatize her experiences with the occult. Carl Sagan's public television series, *Cosmos* argued forcefully that the universe has always existed, that God is unnecessary. This is a philosophic, not a scientific point. But Francis Schaeffer's *How Shall We Then Live?* cannot be shown on PBS because it's religious.

We have not only forgotten the religious influence that undergirds the culture, but we've explicitly rejected it. It's not just a matter of its unconscious expunging. It's a matter of eliminating the religious alternative in the name of pluralism. Yet in a relativistic society there are no values upon which people can rely. And that moral vacuum is filled, as Nietzsche predicted, with man's will to power. Thus big government has filled the twentieth-century vacuum created by relativism running rampant. The net result is that biblical values do not have a respectable place in the mainstream of American thinking today.

## THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE

The response of the Church has been twofold. Some have succumbed to what Jacques Ellul prophetically called, "the political illusion." But the idea that we can just elect Christians, take dominion over America, and thus set everything right is not only bad theology, it will actually lessen our impact on culture.

Christians do have a deep responsibility to be concerned with justice and righteousness in society. But we must never be deluded into believing that the ultimate question for man is political. It is not. The ultimate question for man is spiritual. You can't change the course of history by simply rewriting the laws. Something more has to happen.

The secularist believes that to change man, you have to change culture. The Christian believes that to change culture, you have to change man. Our first mission in culture is to present the good news, to win men and women to Jesus Christ. Then changed lives will begin to change the culture.

The other side of the coin, privatization of faith, is every bit as pernicious. It is best illustrated by a 1984 campaign speech by New York's Governor Cuomo. As a Catholic, he said he believed abortion was wrong. He believed that God was speaking and teaching on this issue through His Church. And yet, as the governor of New York, he said he could not impose his views upon his constituency without their consent. He went on to say that until a majority of the voters were in favor of eliminating abortion, he was free to support pro-choice legislation even though he believes God has prohibited abortion. In other words, God's truth is subject to majority vote.

This type of position simply says, "Faith is something that you believe in your head—you worship on Sunday mornings, and you practice when you're in your religious circles, but you don't apply it in life." It is a renunciation of the historic Christian confession that Jesus is Lord.

## HOW WE CAN FIGHT BACK

There are four things we must do to curb the secularization of our society.

**Restore an Orthodox Faith.** I believe the greatest challenge for the Christian Church today is the restoration of orthodoxy. Throughout the pages of history, the process of secularization has always been hastened by the loss of historic Christian orthodoxy within the Church. In the thirties, it was theological liberals who welcomed Hitler as "a gift of God." It was the conservatives who refused to marry the Church of Jesus Christ to a nationalistic ideology, even one that was immensely popular at the time. Strip away orthodoxy, and there is nothing to keep the Church from being tossed back and forth by the waves of secular trend and fad. The historic confession that we believe Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, that He lives today, that God speaks to man through His inerrant Word, and that we live under that authority—that's the great bulwark against secularization.

**Learn to Think Christianly.** Second, we must develop a Christian mind. Another great challenge for Christians is to think like Christians on every public issue in every context. I've often said the only way you can live in today's world is to have the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other. We need to take the issues that determine the shape of our culture and view them through biblical eyes. We need to speak intelligently and responsibly to our culture about the Christian alternative. It's not good enough to just talk to one another using our own jargon. We've got to go out there and talk in the mainstream—not with the kind of triumphalistic rhetoric that turns off the mainstream, but with intelligent arguments. We don't want only to say, "The Bible says in verse such and such," but rather to appeal to reason and good sense.

I love to tell groups of legislators about why restitution rather than prison is the right answer for nonviolent offenders. I explain how it costs \$80,000 to build a prison cell and \$17,000 a year to keep a person locked up. Yet under a restitution program, nonviolent offenders pay back their victims and impose far less cost on the taxpayers. Afterward, people always ask me, "Boy, that makes sense. Where'd you get that idea?" I say, "If you really want to know, let me take you back to [Exodus 20](#), because that's exactly what God told Moses to do with property offenders." It was in the Bible all along. But we must argue that and other issues on the basis that the biblical answers make sense.

**Take Responsibility for Change.** Third, we've got to put our Christian faith into practice. There's a dangerous temptation today to sit back and think, "You know, we can't really do much about life, so why bother?" But we can.

Every time I go overseas, I'm invigorated by the vitality of the Christian faith in almost every country I visit, particularly in the Third World. When I come home I find little but spiritual apathy. I think the reason is that, in America, we have celebrities and organizations, famous people and big structures, so the average Christian figures he doesn't have to do anything except write out a check or join an organization. But in these other countries, they don't have big organizations. They don't have celebrities. So they've got to go do it themselves. And it's amazing how God works through ordinary people.

When Jack Eckerd, founder of the Eckerd drug chain, became a Christian, the first thing he did was to take *Playboy* and *Penthouse* out of every one of his Eckerd drugstores. Though it cost him three million dollars, he did it, as he said, because, "God wouldn't let me off the hook."

Today, because of pressure by the community and the influence of Jack Eckerd on others in the business world, fifteen thousand retail outlets have taken *Playboy* and *Penthouse* off the racks. Those magazines are losing money.

They're hurting. And not a single law was passed. But some Christians got busy and did what we're supposed to do, which is to be witnesses in our culture. Small, voluntary groups of ordinary individuals can often accomplish more than the powerful.

**Become Instruments of Righteousness.** Finally, we need to work for justice and righteousness. Why? Not because we're taken in by a political illusion or because we think that politics is the highest art of man, but because we are instructed to be a witness to our culture, its salt and light, the instruments of God's righteousness and justice. We act not because we're bringing in the Kingdom of God—the Kingdom of God comes in from God's side, not man's—but because we want to somehow make things just a little better and a little more tolerable. And we want to be a witness to Christ in that process.

We can also be "the conscience of the culture," as Christopher Dawson put it. If the government is God's ordained instrument for preserving order, Christians must see to it that the sword is wielded righteously. It's the Church of Jesus Christ that holds government to moral account.

Cardinal Sin of the Philippines, a leader in the Catholic renewal movement worldwide, tells the story of the Philippine revolution against Marcos from his own perspective. After Cardinal Sin heard that Aquino had been assassinated, he began to search the Scriptures. He found in 2 Chronicles that God may punish a people by giving them an unjust ruler. He believed God was punishing the Philippine people. In response, he began to preach a message of repentance and personal commitment to Christ throughout the country. As he pleaded with people to surrender their lives to Christ, renewal began to break out all over the Philippine Islands.

When the election was rigged and the revolution broke out, Cardinal Sin announced over the radio that he wanted all Christians to go into the streets to pray and protect the soldiers. Within thirty minutes, three million people had poured out onto the streets. Every tank was stopped dead in its tracks before millions of people down on their knees praying to God. Not a single drop of blood was shed. The Church in the Philippines became the instrument of holding that government to moral account, the instrument of righteousness in that culture. That's what happens when the Church is truly the Church.

## REVERSING THE TIDE

As I look at what is happening in America today, I wonder how it's possible to reverse the surging tide of secularism. I wonder how it's possible for a Church that has labeled itself with wrongheaded, triumphalistic rhetoric to recover its proper influence. We are characterized in the American press as being backwoods, know-nothing, Bible-thumping, simplistic bigots. And I look around and ask how that could ever be changed.

Perhaps Christians, first of all, will see their way not to be taken in by the political illusion, but rather to begin thinking in terms of the Christian responsibility in culture. Then we might begin to articulate our views intelligently to our neighbors, and to our rotary clubs, and from our church pulpits. Perhaps then we might really become God's instruments for preserving moral accountability in a culture crying for values by which to live.

The only alternative is one that Donald Bloesch spoke of in his book *Crumbling Foundations*. Occasionally God simply brings down a people so that out of their destruction He can rebuild His pure Church. I pray that we will have the courage to stand in that gap and to be the righteous people God is looking for, if indeed this culture is to be preserved.