

CHRISTIAN

It's Not What You Think

Session 4 – “Showing Up”

How did the movement of Jesus followers spread so quickly and widely in the first few centuries after his death and resurrection? How did that happen?

It didn't happen because the Jesus followers decided to be “Christians.” It happened because they took Jesus' words seriously. And, over time, they changed the world.

In the gospel of Matthew, we can read the message that got it all going. This was the beginning of the movement, and it happened early in Jesus' ministry. He was laying the foundation of the movement. It was the beginning of the change. It was a revolutionary, world-changing message.

And three hundred years later, the message of Jesus was everywhere. Nobody was worshiping Jupiter anymore.

So, what about us? Why would we settle for “Christian”— something we can't even define—when Jesus gives us such specific instructions?

DISCUSSION STARTER

In your own community, how have you seen the followers of Jesus as preserving and positive influences? What are some of the significant good deeds that have attracted other people, giving them more reason to think highly of God and of what he is doing in your community?

VIDEO OVERVIEW

For Session 4 of the Video

In the opening verses of the message Jesus began in Matthew 5, he described his followers as poor, sad, meek, righteous, merciful, pure, peaceful, persecuted, insulted people, waiting for a reward in heaven. His listeners that day must have wondered, Is that really who we are?

Jesus then gave his disciples two word pictures. He called them “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” That's who you are, he was telling them.

Salt is a preservative. Jesus was saying, “You're the world's preservative. Without you, everything rots, and culture stinks.”

Jesus also called his followers “the light of the world,” like a town or city placed on a hilltop, visible all around, day or night. He was saying, You've been strategically placed to have a shining influence. And Jesus said, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (5:16).

Jesus wants us to live in such a way that when people see our good actions, they don't say, “What a nice person,” but instead recognize something so extraordinary that they begin to connect the dots and give the credit to God.

Be salt. Be light. Let your lifestyle point the way to Jesus.

Think about your own story. The only reason you're a Christian is that others were salt and light in your life, even if they didn't know it.

CHRISTIAN

It's Not What You Think

Session 4 – “Showing Up”

Salt always preserves; light always shows the way. Salt works even when you can't see it working, and light illumines even when you aren't thinking about it.

No matter where you are in your daily life, Jesus has you there as the salt and the light of that world.

So let's not settle for “Christian.” Let's ask God how to make us more effective salt and more effective light.

And as God answers that prayer, who knows what he might do in our families, in our communities, in our nation, and in the whole world?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The first Christians embraced the words of Jesus with utter seriousness and ended up changing the world. How much potential for the same kind of change do you see in our world today?
2. What positive influences have followers of Jesus had on our culture in the past or present?
3. In what ways do you wish the followers of Jesus had a stronger influence on our culture?
4. How do followers of Jesus view our world differently than other people? What tension does this create?
5. If followers of Jesus were “salt” and “light” in our world, how could that help to overcome the differences between them and those who don't follow Jesus?
6. What convinces you that all human beings have great worth to God?

MILEPOSTS

- Jesus described his followers with two distinctive word pictures: “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” Wherever you are, Jesus has you there to be this kind of influence.
- Salt is a preservative. Without the proper influence of Jesus followers, the world's culture will decay.
- Light shows the way. Jesus calls his followers to have such a shining influence through our good deeds that it causes others to give credit to God.

MOVING FORWARD

What does being a “light” in this world mean to you personally? How has God equipped you and prepared you for this? Which areas of darkness do you believe he wants you to shine his light in?

CHANGING YOUR MIND

In these words, Jesus leads us forward into our shining influence in this world, an influence that shows others the way and draws them to him:

Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:16

CHRISTIAN

It's Not What You Think

Session 4 – “Showing Up”

PREPARATION FOR SESSION 5

To help you prepare for Session 5, use these suggested devotions during the week leading up to your small group meeting.

Day One

In the first chapter of the gospel of John, reflect on the teaching about Jesus (“the Word”) in verses 14, 16, and 17. If you had never heard of Jesus, what would you learn about him from these verses? What further questions would you have?

Day Two

Look over the interesting encounter Jesus had with a Samaritan woman in John 4:1–45. What evidence do you see here that Jesus was “full of grace and truth,” as expressed in John 1:14?

Day Three

Move today in your reading to John 8:1–11, where Jesus encounters another woman. Again, what evidence do you find here that Jesus was “full of grace and truth”?

Day Four

Reflect today on what happens in the life of Jesus in Mark 2:13–17. As Jesus relates to Levi (also known as Matthew) and his friends, what further evidence do you find that Jesus was “full of grace and truth”?

Day Five

Search again for evidence that Jesus was “full of grace and truth,” this time by reading about the day of Jesus’ crucifixion in Matthew 23:32–43. What do we learn from the way Jesus related to the two criminals being executed on both sides of him?

Last Session

The Jesus movement spread rapidly in the first few centuries because the followers of Jesus embraced their calling to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” They represented a godly preservative. And their lights, displayed in good deeds, showed the way to God, so that others were drawn to become Jesus followers