

Challenging Lifestyles Session 2
Matthew 5:7-16 – How to Change the World Around You

Resource: 'Challenging Lifestyles' by Nicky Gumbel, Chapter 2

Timing: 40-50 minutes, leading into ministry

Buzz groups: Suggestions are boxed, pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

Illustrations: Suggestions are noted, but your own ideas and stories are preferable

Focus: Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

Icebreaker: Who are your heroes or heroines – those Christians you most admire for making a difference to their world or the world of others around them? Name some of them to one another.

Introduction

Recap last week on *How to find 'the Secret of Happiness'*

Introduce this week on *How to Change the World Around You* – find newspaper clippings or quotes online about moral/spiritual decline in the UK and its social needs the church could address.

Key Point: Christians are distinct people who transform the structures and cultures they inhabit

Key Verse: "You are the salt of the earth..." (v.13), "You are the light of the world..." (v.14)

1. Give to others even when it's not deserved (v.7)

The Point: exercising mercy is a very practical way of breaking vicious negative cycles of hate

Illustration: Tell a personal story, if not find one in the news or books you may have, where mercy was exercised by someone. If you can give family, home and work examples.

Mercy has 2 sides to it: not giving out punishment when it is deserved, and offering forgiveness and gifts when they are not deserved

→ When we are being merciful we are being like our God.

→ What would our lives be like if God only gave us the reward or punishment we deserve?

→ Kindness to the hurting, hungry, homeless and sick is

Application: We often withhold pleasantries from people at work or in your family because they hurt or offended us. Think who that is. Decide now to ask God to help you show mercy to them.

Pairs: Share who that person is with the person sat next to you – even if you don't feel able to say why. We'll pray later about this. You don't need know how to proceed in the situation, just share it.

2. Be yourself (v.8)

The Point: Don't put on a mask, but be transparent

It's so easy to act one way in Christian company, but be a different person in other circles.

Being pure in heart, or having integrity, means being authentic – not having this distinction.

→ Authenticity key in work, family, and all intimate relationships

→ The question is who are we when no-one is looking? Christianity is not a calling to outer, behavioural purity, but to inner purity, until there's no distinction between our inner and outer selves.

→ We all have a long way to go! Impurity clouds understanding, but honest people "will see God".

Illustration: Tell a personal story, even one you regret, about being hypocritical or two-faced. Highlight the needless damage to reputation, confusion, or crisis that was the outcome.

Application: We often need other people to help see if we're being different people in different situations! Ask someone who has seen you in different situations if they think you change at all.

3. Don't stir up conflict but make peace (v.9)

The Point: We're called not just to love peace but to *make* it, to be active in situations of tension.

If there's any massive need in the world today, it's for peacemakers. But we start closer to home! We're called to help others find peace with God and to find peace with each other. Peacemakers are "called children of God" because they're like their father. God is a peacemaker who loves to see his children

Illustration: Look up "Peacemaker" on Wikipedia and share a few of the examples of Christians who have worked for peace in situations of extreme tension. Then share a personal example from your work or family life where you have tried to bring about peace – be honest about how hard it is.

Application (and Pairs): Turn to your neighbour and briefly share a current situation in your work or family life where you're aware of tension and want to bring about peace.

4. Don't expect anything in return except criticism (v.10)

The Point: Righteousness sums up Jesus' way to live. But it isn't always popular because it means being a public conscience and people don't like it.

Christians are persecuted people in the UK and abroad. Many say it will get worse in the UK... How do we respond?

- Rejoice! Because persecution assures us we're identified with Christ
- Therefore we have assurance of our salvation and our certain future in heaven

Illustration: Find recent interviews online with Christians suffering persecution and share them.

Conclusion

Alpha helps people see that "there is more to life than this". If we follow Jesus and live like he describes, our life won't be meaningless. We have a purpose: we can transform the world around us.

Illustration: Tell of a Christian funeral you went to (or google Martin Luther King's), where the eulogies described a life like Jesus – say you want to live so as to be remembered like that too.

Review the HTB Social Transformations website and ask the group whether they'd like to respond by signing up for one of the opportunities there (www.htb.org.uk/st).

Ideas for Ministry

- Pick up on the conversations had in pairs at the end of Sections 2 and 3 above. Lead people in asking for God's attitude of mercy, and the gift of peace making. Perhaps get those pairs to pray with one another specifically over those issues.
- Lead a meditation asking people to imagine being at their own funeral and listening to their friends, family and work colleagues speaking about them. Ask them to write down what they would like to hear those people saying about them. Turn these thoughts into prayer, reviewing whether their current behaviour will lead to those views, or whether changes are needed.