

Salt and Light

A Bible Study for Connect Groups

We are salt and light! Jesus says so! We are called to compassion and charged with seasoning and shining throughout the world!

This introduction could be read aloud by the group leader at the first session to give an overview of the study.

This month we reflect on what it means to carry our little light and our cellar of salt, sprinkling music and laughter, prophecy and praise as we go.

Salt has many properties and uses and so do we! How are we salt in our communities? Where are we enhancing flavour? Transforming texture? Preserving goodness? Melting ice? Scrubbing grime? Manufacturing solutions?

Small amounts of salt are vital for our neuro-chemistry to send signals through our cells. How are we enabling the 'neuro-chemistry' of our local communities? Helping to link together the cells of the Body of Christ.

Week one — Seasoning and shining! We begin our theme by looking at Jesus's description of us as salt and light! What can we learn about ourselves from this analogy?

Week two — Salt, light and laughter... In this week we consider the role of humour in grace, humility and self-discovery.

Week three — Bittersweet salt and light. Light can glare and salt can sting, this week we explore the bittersweetness of a life fully lived.

Week four — Paradigm shifts! As salt and light can startle us, our final week has us reading the Bible alive to the paradigm shifts in the text — the clean breaks and sudden twists!



Context:

The group leader reads *The Context* to set up this week's discussion.

We begin our theme by looking at Jesus's description of us as salt and light! We will be asking, what can we learn about ourselves from this analogy? And how are we bringing taste and flavour, colour and vibrancy to our homes and streets, places of work, study and worship?

What are all the different communities you are a part of? **Discuss!**

The group leader leads a quick discussion on any initial thoughts and reactions to these ideas before moving on to the next section: *Introducing the Reading*

Introducing the reading:

These timeless words come from 'The Sermon on the Mount' where Jesus climbs up a mountain to address a large crowd of people who have been following him. Over three chapters he preaches about living out radical compassion, forgiveness and selflessness — setting out his stall to the eager, questioning people. Climbing up the mountain to address them is an intentional echo of Moses who ascended Mount Sinai but Jesus is not a replacement for, or repeat of Moses — he is a continuation of the same project of shaping a people to love who will go on to show the world love.

Read Matthew 5: 13-16

Response:

Q: What words leap out to you from this reading? What inspires you, challenges you or intrigues you?

The 'Q:' sections are questions that are thrown out to the group to initiate discussion on the passage and themes. Pause after these to discuss the ideas.

Q: Salt has many properties and uses and so do we! How are we being salt in our communities? Where are we enhancing flavour? Transforming texture? Preserving goodness? Melting ice? Scrubbing grime? Manufacturing solutions? Sending signals and transmitting information?

Q: As a Connect group, how are we letting our light shine? What could we do to help our light shine for the world to see?

Q: Too much salt will ruin the meal and too much light will blind you. Is it possible to bring *too much* salt and light to a situation? Discuss! If so, how do we guard against such a danger in the church and our personal lifestyle?



Week 2: Salt, light and laughter.

Context:

The group leader reads *The Context* to set up this week's discussion.

This week we read scripture alive to the humour, the laughter, the human emotion that runs all the way through it. Laughter is the salt that makes the flavour hit harder as we: laugh in recognition, in wonder, in apprehension. We are called to a salt and light life — not a muted, bland life. Life should be bright and vibrant and lived to the full. There will be laughter.

What makes you laugh? When has God make you laugh with surprise? **Discuss!**

Introducing the readings:

The group leader leads a quick discussion on any initial thoughts and reactions to these ideas before moving on to the next section: *Introducing the Reading*

This week we read two psalms. The psalms famously contain many cries and shouts, laments and pleas but they are also full of laughter. There is the laughter of surprise and nerves, the laughter of relief and celebration, the laughter of fondness, joy, delight and survival — preserved in the repository of poetry and song for thousands of years.

Read: Genesis 18: 1-15, Psalms 100, 136

Response:

Q: Which of the two psalms speaks more to you today? Is there a verse from one of the psalms that hits you especially?

Q: In your life what makes you cheer, whoop and cry out? What are you glad for? What shining lights are you celebrating? Share with the group examples of Christ's light shining in your local community.

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Q: Often as the tension leaves the body, we realise 'we have survived' and it escapes as laughter. When something shocks us or surprises us we find ourselves laughing and crying out loud like Sarah, "How can this be God?!" When in the history of christianity and in our own lives have salt tears and laughter given us glimpses of the light?

Q: Laughter in Hebrew culture was often used as a protection — defending one's self against despair. Discuss Sarah's laughter as a defence mechanism against being disappointed. And do we ever chuckle at the absurdity that God might use a particular person or situation to bless a nation and fulfil his promises?



Week 3: Bittersweet salt and light

Context:

We often find ourselves drawn to the bittersweet in life — the flavours that are smoky and sugary, the image that is life-affirming and haunting, the story that is heartbreaking and heart-mending. Such juxtapositions resonate with us because they are true to life as we live it with all its light and shade. However great the darkness it never consumes the smallest light. And at the edges of a clear blue sky are the clouds that will gather, the darkness round the corner. This week we read scripture that blends the salt and the light, the bitter and the sweet, the sour and the fresh. In such moments we meet a God who comes running to meet us in the midst of our lives with compassion and love.

What bittersweet tastes, songs, books or films do you like? **Discuss!**

The group leader reads *The Context* to set up this week's discussion.

The group leader leads a quick discussion on any initial thoughts and reactions to these ideas before moving on to the next section: *Introducing the Readings*

Introducing the readings:

Abraham and Sarah have been surprised in their old age by a son. The very prospect made Sarah laugh and she laughs again in joy that she has been blessed. But this story of family unity and blessing move sharply to one of dysfunction and disunity. This is Sarah's first child. But Abraham already has a son, with Hagar. We move from miracle to meanness and from celebration to suspicion. Where is the music of Sarah's laughter now?

Division is also a key theme in our second reading when Jesus tells his followers about the opposition and hostility they will face for following him. The reading is uncomfortable and bittersweet. It is jarring to hear Jesus to confront us with swords and division instead of unity and hurt instead of wholeness...

Read: Genesis 21: 8-21, Matthew 10: 24-39

Response:

The messiness of this family is not presented as an archetype for us to follow. Rather it shows us a flawed patriarch and matriarch who have only partially understood God. And yet in the bitterness of this story — comes the sweetness of the water in the desert. Abraham may cast Hagar and his own son aside, but God won't.

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Q: What do we learn about humanity from this story and what do we learn about God?

In our second reading Jesus is challenging the tribal and familial ties that shaped so much of reality then (and now). Back in Abraham's time a patriarch sends his illegitimate son into the wilderness. The new relationship and sense of family Jesus is advocating runs against the grain of an earthly father's authority over a family.

Part of new beginnings is endings. Speaking into a culture where a father's power over his family, and elder extended family over others was great — Jesus says there may well be fractures when you choose to follow me. Your reality is no longer shaped by those ties, but by my ties — but remember my yoke is light.

Q: How can the bitterness of parting and ending be part of the sweetness of transformation and growth?

Q: Being the light can be very costly. Jesus speaks of divisions in households and friendships. How can the church help those in this situation navigate the cost of their discipleship?



Context:

In our final week we read the Bible alive to the paradigm shifts in the texts — the clean breaks and sudden twists. Part of being salt and life is bringing prophecy and critique to the mainstream. Showing the world that another way is possible. Light can blind and burn and salt can sting and scour.

The group leader reads *The Context* to set up this week's discussion.

What paradigm shifts have you seen in your lifetime? Perhaps a leap in science in technology? A change in social attitude and values? Or a more personal change in your own life? **Discuss!**

Introducing the readings:

This week we take a look at three short readings as we consider: 1 the internal paradigm shift to a life of freedom, 2 the external paradigm shift to a life of

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compassion, and 3 the cosmic paradigm shift to a life of holiness. Our first reading is from Paul's letter to the Romans where the apostle urges these early Christians to embrace a new kind of freedom where they are in the driving seat of their lives. Next we look at just a few verses from the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus sends out his 12 disciples and urges them to have a profoundly new outlook to the world. And finally we read just two verses verse, again from Matthew's Gospel, where the curtain in the temple is torn at the moment of Christ's death on the cross in a paradigm shift for the universe. This moment is highly charged and symbolic as the curtain in the temple separated the innermost holiest part of the temple. With Christ's death there is no longer any barrier to God's holiness. God does not live in a temple made by human hands, God now lives in us!

Read: Romans 6: 12-23, Matthew 10: 40-42 and Matthew 27: 50-51

Response:

Paul wants the Romans to grasp the shift in their lives that newfound freedom in God will bring — from having no control giving in to their worst habits, to being in the driving seat of our own lives. He juxtaposes the false-freedom of indulging in sin — inflicting pain and misery on ourselves and others — with the freedom of no longer being controlled by our impulses.

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Sanctuary First



Q: Paul talks about the 'gift of eternal life'. Do you think this is simply a promise of an afterlife, or an invitation to a new kind of eternal life that begins here and now? What freedom does living an eternal life here and now offer us?

Q: What paradigm shifts have we experienced in our social lives as we have got to know Christ? How have we found ourselves welcoming God when we have welcomed others?

In our final reading, just these two verses, the curtain in the temple is dramatically torn. It is a paradigm shift for reality. The death of Jesus, the tearing of the curtain in the temple is THE profound paradigm shift in our lives. In Jesus there is no barrier between us and God, no separation. God does not live in a temple made of human hands! God lives in us!

Q: The torn veil, is symbolic that God is no longer understood as contained in a location behind a curtain. We are the living containers or temples of God's grace. Knowing this How should it change the way we walk about in the world? Should our presence shed light into the places we live and work?

Let's take time as a Connect group to pray into this space — the beautiful paradigm shift at the heart of the universe — that God became one of us in Jesus, to show us how much we are loved, how much we belong, how much we matter.

Pray: What are our prayers for the light of God that we each carry in us?