



Christians
in Politics

**Being Salt & Light:
small group study
guide**



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INTRODUCTION

This study guide is intended to accompany the Christians in Politics introductory booklet 'Being Salt & Light'. It has been designed for adult small groups meeting together in a 'cell group' or 'home group' environment, which will be familiar to many UK churches.

The purpose of the course is to encourage and equip Christians to become more extensively and effectively involved in politics and government as an aspect of mission. It assumes no previous knowledge or commitment to Christian political engagement, just a desire to explore these issues more deeply from a biblical perspective.

SESSION FORMAT

The study guide provides 3 session plans, which would normally be completed over a 3 week period. Each session follows a format known as four 'W's. This is a well-established pattern used by many cell groups and home groups. Each meeting has four sections as follows:

Welcome: An 'icebreaker' to introduce the session and get everyone involved and talking. Some groups may choose to do this part informally over refreshments.

Worship: A time of collective worship. The style that this takes will vary widely depending on your church background and tradition, and we would encourage you to choose a format that you feel comfortable with. Some groups will sing hymns or contemporary worship songs together. Others will use recorded music either to listen reflectively or sing along. Still others may worship through liturgy, prayer, or visual / creative means.

Word: Studying and applying the word of God together. This will normally involve either studying a bible passage, or exploring a practical theme with reference to biblical truths and insights.

Witness: Applying what has been discussed to our mission in the world. The focus can involve prayer, evangelism, practical service, or a mixture of all of these.

As a group leader the session plans are there to help you, not constrain you. You may feel that you want to use them exactly as shown, or to modify them to suit the needs of your own group. Either approach is valid!

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

Each member of the group should have their own copy of the Christians in Politics Being Salt & Light resource. This can be obtained as a FREE download from the resource section of the Christians in Politics website:

www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk

The group leader will need to get various materials together to support each session. These are identified in checklist form at the beginning.

The 3 sessions are based on the theme of “Christian political engagement: Biblical, Missional, and Possible”.

The Christians in Politics website provides links to numerous other resources and organisations which can help you investigate any of the subjects presented in this course in more detail. We would also like to acknowledge the work done by Urban Saints in developing the Christians in Politics youth meeting plans, some ideas from which have been re-used for parts of these sessions.



Session 1: Political engagement is Biblical

PREPARATION: FOR THE GROUP

Group members should aim to read pages 1-4 of the Christians in Politics resource “Being Salt & Light” before the meeting.

PREPARATION: FOR THE LEADER

You will need:

- Paper and pens /pencils.
- A computer with internet connection and the ability to show a short video clip. Depending on the size of your group and venue you may want to use a video projector or big screen to ensure that everyone can see and hear. You may want to delegate this task to someone in the group who is ‘good with computers’ and/or has access to the necessary equipment...
- Songs or other materials to lead a time of worship.
- Bibles.
- Details of your local MP (name, contact address, and some basic information about their party, background, views, and interests). You can use www.theyworkforyou.com to find out who they are, then look up their personal website on the internet for more information.
- A blank greetings card suitable for sending to your MP.

WELCOME: DO RELIGION AND POLITICS MIX?

You will need: Internet access, and a computer, big screen, or video projector to show a video clip to your group. Pens and paper for every group member.

Watch the Christians in Politics video at <http://youtu.be/d1o5k9YjMb4>

The video shows a number of MPs, councillors, civil servants, and leading activists talking about their involvement in politics and government as a Christian.

As you watch the video together, consider the following question:

“Why would a Christian want to get involved with politics?”

Ask the group to note down as many answers to this question as they can while the video is playing, based on what they observe. At the end, discuss the answers that you have come up with. What motivates the people on the video to get involved in the work they do? What do they hope to achieve as a result?

The Point: To consider the reasons for Christian political involvement based on personal testimonies.

WORSHIP: THE KING OF KINGS

You will need: to prepare a short time of worship in a style appropriate for the group you are leading.

The starting point for any Christian involvement in the business of worldly government is a right understanding of the nature and character of God:

He is the “king of kings and lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:13-16)... and “the government shall be upon his shoulders” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

This has been a rich theme in Christian worship traditions for hundreds of years. From classic hymns to the latest worship songs to Handel’s messiah, these ideas have been explored in song, words, poetry, and art.

Lead a time of worship where the emphasis is on God as ruler and Lord, the one from whom all earthly governments take their pattern and mandate.

The Point: To worship God as the king and ruler of all things.

WORD: GOVERNMENT - THE FAMILY BUSINESS OF GOD

You will need: enough bibles for every group member.

Get the group to look up the following bible passages, individually or in pairs:

- Genesis 1:26-28
- Acts 17:24-27
- Genesis 17:3-8
- Deuteronomy 4:5-8
- Isaiah 58:6-8
- Luke 4:16-21
- Philippians 2:9-11
- Romans 13:1-5

Read out each verse in turn and discuss what it tells you about issues such as government, rule, nationhood, authority, law, and justice.

What, according to the Bible, is the role of government in God’s plans for humanity? In what ways can it be considered to be ‘God-given’? In light of this, should we see human government as wholly a good thing, an unfortunate consequence of sin, or flawed but with the potential for redemption?

The Point: To develop a biblical perspective on issues of politics and government.

WITNESS: ENCOURAGE YOUR MP

You will need: details of your local MP (name, contact address, and some information about them). A blank greetings card.

The Bible is clear that we should 'pray for rulers and those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Spend some time praying for your local MP. Ask that God would help them managing their busy diary, bless their personal and family life, and grant them wisdom in the decisions they have to make in parliament.

After praying, write a card to them from your group encouraging them in the work that they do and telling them that you are praying for them. The objective is simply to bless and encourage, so avoid raising any points about political issues or current affairs at this time (that is best saved for another occasion; see session 3). Get every member of the group to sign it. You do not have to provide a contact address, but if you do you will probably get a reply.

The Point: To pray for a local politician, and to witness your faith by making contact to encourage them



Session 2: Political engagement is Missional

PREPARATION: FOR THE GROUP

Group members should aim to read pages 4-8 of the Christians in Politics resource “Being Salt & Light” before the meeting, and to complete the ‘political compass’ quiz at www.politicalcompass.org. Ask them to bring a copy of their results along to the.

PREPARATION: FOR THE LEADER

You will need:

- One or more computers or ‘smartphones’ with internet connection (if available).
- Songs or other materials to lead a time of worship.
- Bibles.
- A “response gauge” on a large piece of paper or whiteboard. with an indicator you can move. The gauge needs to read: “none | some | much | total”.
- Pens and small pieces of paper, cards, or post-it notes.

WELCOME: WHAT KIND OF POLITICAL ANIMAL ARE YOU?

You will need: each group member to have completed the ‘political compass’ quiz at <http://www.politicalcompass.org/test>, and to bring a copy of their results along to the meeting. It would probably be worth providing one or more laptop computers on the night if possible, for those who do not have internet access or did not find time to do the quiz beforehand

Compare the results that different group members got from the quiz:

- Did your results surprise you?
- Which questions were difficult to answer?
- Which questions were easy to answer?
- What did you learn from answering the questions about your own political views and preferences?

The Point: To think about how our faith affects our political views and priorities.

WORSHIP: GLORIFYING GOD IN THE WORLD

You will need: to prepare a short time of worship in a style appropriate for the group you are leading.

Jesus commands his followers to live as ‘salt and light’ in a world which, without this influence, can be prone to darkness and decay (Matthew 5:13-16). He says that through this we will cause others to “glorify our Father in heaven” (v16).

There are many worship resources available which focus on our calling to go into the world, and the means by which we can glorify God as we do so.

Lead a time of worship where the emphasis is on God who calls us into mission, and the ways in which we can witness to his glory and love as we obey this call.

The Point: To worship God as the one who calls us to become part of his redemptive mission in the world.

WORD: IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF IT

You will need: enough bibles for every group member. A “response gauge” on a large piece of paper or whiteboard, with an indicator you can move. The gauge needs to read: “none | some | much | total”.

Read Daniel chapter 1 together.

Explain the context: it is a time of conquest and empire for Babylon, and the king’s chief courtier selects smart young men from among the aristocracy of the nations they have subdued to be indoctrinated into the political system, and become initiates of the new ruling elite.

Ask the questions: Do these four “go with the flow”, or do they choose to stick by their godly values and principles? Do they refuse to listen and learn about the political systems of the empire, or do they seek to understand with a critical mind?

Invite the group to put responses somewhere on the spectrum for the following statements about the young men in the story. Ask them to comment on the rating they have chosen: Is this a poor or good rating? Why?

□ Change in personal convictions. core beliefs:
none | some | much | total

□ Adaptation to cultural expressions of identity:
none | some | much | total

□ Understanding of the new political system:
none | some | much | total

□ Acceptance of the new political system:
none | some | much | total

Now complete the same exercise again, but this time thinking about ourselves and Christians in the UK as a whole, and how we respond to the political situation in 21st century Britain. Again, in each area consider: Is this a poor or good rating? Why?

The Point: To think about how Christians should engage with the political environment they find themselves in.

WITNESS: CHRISTIANS IN PUBLIC LIFE

You will need: pens and small pieces of paper, cards, or post-it notes

Get the group to identify Christians whom they know are involved in any aspect of public and political life. Try and focus on individuals known to you locally, but national figures can be included too.

Examples of categories are: local councillors, school governors, magistrates, civil servants, local government officers, political party members, campaign group members / activists, community group leaders.

Write the name of each and the role they fulfil on a card or post it note, and place them in the middle of the room or on a wall display. Now pray for each of the people you have identified by name. Ask that God will give them wisdom in what they do, discretion to present the gospel in an authentic and attractive manner, and courage to stand up as a fearless witness for Christ.

For those who are known to you personally, give one name to each member of your group and commit to calling them during the week and offering to pray for any more specific needs that they have at the moment.

The Point: To pray for Christians who have already responded to the call to mission in any area of public life.



Session 3: Political engagement is Possible

PREPARATION: FOR THE GROUP

Group members should aim to read pages 9-19 of the Christians in Politics resource “Being Salt & Light” before the meeting. They will need to bring their booklet (or a copy of page 19) along on the night.

PREPARATION: FOR THE LEADER

You will need:

- A selection of local and national newspapers.
- Plenty of scissors (ideally enough for each group member).
- A set of cards with the following roles written on them (one per card): individual citizen; campaign group; party member; local councillor, MP, community group; church leader; civil servant; local government officer; school governor; magistrate.
- Songs or other materials to lead a time of worship.
- Bibles and concordances.
- Pens and small pieces of paper, cards, or post-it notes.
- Spare copies of the ‘personal action review’ grid from page 24 of the booklet.

WELCOME: BEHIND THE HEADLINES

You will need: Some local and national newspapers, pairs of scissors, and cards marked up with roles that Christians might fulfil in public and political life.

Get the group to go through the newspapers and cut out headlines and articles which have any kind of political dimension to them. This will of course include articles about politicians, but don’t forget the huge number of areas affected by political decisions: education, crime, health, the economy, the environment, international affairs, public services, housing, arts and culture... the list is almost endless! Make sure that you get at least as many local articles as national ones.

Now get the group to match up each article to the role card which is likely to have most influence over the issue that is described. Thus, an article about a local school would go next to ‘school governor’, one about rubbish collections would go with ‘local councillor’, a government decision would go with ‘MP’. The quickest way is probably to get everyone to assign their own articles then debate as a group any you are unsure of.

What does this tell you about the potential that Christians in various roles have to positively influence decisions which affect us all?

The Point: To highlight the opportunities to bless and serve the world through political involvement.

WORSHIP: JESUS OUR EXAMPLE

You will need: to prepare a short time of worship in a style appropriate for the group you are leading.

For every role or calling we might fulfil in the world, the supreme example will surely be found in Christ. Philippians 2:5-15 shows us the attitude displayed by Jesus and challenges us to imitate Him so that we might 'shine like stars' before a dark world.

Jesus must always remain at the centre of our worship, whether that is the worship we bring when we gather together in His name or the worship of our lives lived as an act of service.

Lead a time of worship where the emphasis is on Jesus, and those aspects of His character which we will most need to imitate as we respond to His calling to engage in the world.

The Point: To worship Jesus as the pattern and example of all that we do in His name.

WORD: FAITHFUL SERVANTS

You will need: enough bibles for every group member. Concordances to assist with looking up verses. The role cards' used in the 'welcome' section. Pens and small pieces of paper, card, or post-it notes. Lay out the role cards on the floor or pin them up on the wall.

Asks the group to use their bibles and find verses relevant to each role, which would be helpful for 'teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness' in the work that they do (2 Tim 3:16-17). Write each verse out on a piece of card or post-it note and place next to the relevant role(s).

Depending on the maturity and biblical knowledge of your group, you may decide to work in pairs or threes. If their biblical knowledge is limited the leader may need to go through beforehand and identify some suitable verses. The group can then be challenged to look them up and match them appropriately, adding more of their own as they are able.

The Point: To think about the biblical qualities needed to fulfil roles in public and political life.

WITNESS: LIVING SACRIFICES

You will need: each group member to have a copy of the 'Being Salt & Light' resource, or a copy of page 19. Pray together as a group that the Holy Spirit would guide and lead you as you respond to what you have learned in these three sessions.

Spend some time prayerfully completing the 'personal action review' on page 19 of the resource.

Share together the decisions that you have made regarding your own response. It is normally best to do this in small groups of 2 or 3.

Finally, offer these commitments back up to God in prayer, and decide how you will review and hold each other accountable. It would be good to set aside a future meeting to share what individuals have done to follow up, maybe in about 6 weeks time.

The Point: To prayerfully make our own personal response and share it with others.
