

christians in student politics

introduction

FACILITATOR: *This four-pack takes a look at Christians' involvement in politics. At the beginning of the Old Testament in Genesis Chapter 1 we read about how God gives women and men the collective responsibility of stewardship over the earth. The story of the Good Samaritan told in Luke 10 illustrates how we can take individual responsibility for those living around us. As we consider whether or not there is a place for Christians to be involved in politics, these are good principles to start with. Jesus calls us to be 'salt and light in the world' and we are going to look at how that applies to our lives in college and in particular, Student Government. The world of student politics is a complex and volatile one, which can at first seem intimidating but is easily penetrable. Over the next few weeks we will be learning how to maintain Godly character while facing some of the hard questions that arise when we are willing to stand in the gap for Jesus.*

1: leading a life that influences society

welcome

CELL: My favorite way of avoiding my own responsibility is usually to_____.

- a. say the problem is too large
- b. blame somebody else
- c. insist that someone else go first
- d. put off the decision
- e. confess how inadequate I am
- f. decide that nothing can be done about the situation, so why bother

worship

FACILITATOR: *Read through Psalm 145 section by section. You might want to get three or four people to take a section each and use it as a basis to pray and thank God for who He is.*

word

FACILITATOR: *We are going to be looking at the passage in Matthew 5:13-16. Before reading it, let's set it in context. The passage is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Here he gave directions for living in his kingdom, proclaiming his attitude towards the law and explaining the importance of faithful obedience from the heart. He was preaching to a crowd which appeared to grow as the sermon continued. Among those present would have been the Jewish teachers of the law.*

CELL: Together, read the following portion of scripture then discuss and answer the questions:

Read Matthew 5:13-16.

What do you think is the principle of this passage?

Why do you think Jesus uses the analogy of salt and light?

What makes them good examples for the people he was talking to?

FACILITATOR: *Up until this point the Jewish religious leaders were dominated by the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees in particular were teaching that obeying laws and doing acts of righteousness was what was required in the kingdom. Jesus is saying something different in this passage. He is saying that it is not just the odd action but our lifestyle as a whole that demonstrates obedience and consequently makes us different from others.*

Referring back to the principle of the passage consider how living a life of 'saltiness' might be different to what the Jewish teachers thought was appropriate.

CELL: Consider Jesus' statement 'you are the light of the world'.

What is he saying in the verses about how we can effectively 'reflect' the gospel? What/how have we already learned about that in v13?

Think about and discuss how what you have learned from this study could be applied to your college.

-Are there areas where God's Word isn't being spoken and where there aren't any Christians being 'salty', showing that there is a different way of doing things?

-Now think about your Student Government. What is it like?

-What are its attitudes to different things?

-How might you go about influencing some of the attitudes that pervade in your Student Government?

witness

CELL: Use this time to think about the people you know who do different things in the life of your college whether it is being a club officer or an RA. Consider how you could support them in their job. Take some time to pray together for those individuals now. You might want to put their names on a regular prayer list, so they're not forgotten!

what now?

CELL: Consider your sphere of influence on the college campus, write down 3 specific things you can do to be salt and light this week and then act on it!!

2: Daniel - A man who held strongly to his faith

introduction

FACILITATOR: *By reading some of the story of Daniel there are many lessons we can learn about how to live a life that is pleasing to God and full of faith. We can understand more how we can engage in a power hungry, status dependent and often corrupt society, without compromising. We all face those challenges and temptations to some degree and this cell study will help us apply God's ways to our everyday.*

welcome

FACILITATOR: *Ask people to share testimonies from last week's "what now" section. What specific things did people do to be salt and light within their sphere of influence?*

worship

CELL: Have a hunt through the Bible and see how many different names and describing words you can find for God. Spend about 15 minutes doing this and then use your list to help you think about the magnitude of God's character. Try and incorporate some of what you found in your prayer life.

word

FACILITATOR: *We are going to look at the character of Daniel and see what we can learn from him as a person who rose to a position of great power in an environment that was hostile towards God. Daniel was taken captive along with his people and exiled to Babylon around 600 BC. He was then selected by the King to be trained to be in his service. As time went on, Daniel stood several tests of faith.*

CELL: Before we go on to look at what they were, discuss a time when you felt as if your faith was being tested. Maybe there are situations now that people are facing.

FACILITATOR: *In Daniel chapters 1 and 2 we see how, by having faith and trusting God, Daniel is able to interpret the King's dreams. The King was so impressed that he appointed Daniel ruler over the entire province of Babylon (Chap 2:48). Daniel was then called to interpret other dreams and writing on the wall and his favor with the King grew. As Daniel rose in power and authority, other members of the establishment grew jealous and were concerned that he was going to be given rule over the whole kingdom. They set about trying to bring him down but could find no fault in him.*

CELL: Read Daniel Chapter 6 and then discuss as directed.

-What key things do we learn about Daniel's character from this part of the story?

Through good character and faithful service Daniel was rapidly promoted from the bottom of the pile right to the top.

-How do you think he responded to the power he had? Does he strike you as someone ambitious and hungry for influence?

-What do you think are the challenges for Christians today who find themselves in positions of power and influence? How do we see power affecting those in authority around us?

Consider the 'public' position that students who play a large role in the Student Government find themselves in. If you were in that role, how might your faith be tested? What lessons can we learn from Daniel's life that would help us stand up to those tests?

witness

CELL: Think about the different clubs and societies that are run in your college and the various jobs that are available in the Student Government. Are there any that involve pastimes you really enjoy?

Consider the possibility of giving some of your time to these activities as a way of getting to know people who aren't Christians who share similar interests to you. If your schedule doesn't allow for any more commitment, see how you could pray for others who are able to participate. Spend some time encouraging each other in the extra-curricular activities you are already involved in.

what now?

CELL: Request info about campus activities you are interested in and pray about any areas God would have you become involved whether it be within the dorms, Student Government, or extra-curricular activities in your field of study. Act upon those things the Lord speaks to you.

3: compromise under pressure?

introduction

FACILITATOR: Today we are going to look at the issue of compromise. Everyday we are faced with decisions to make which place demands on our belief system and may require us to compromise in one way or another. Last week we looked at Daniel and how he rose to a position of power and authority. During his story we saw several occasions when he was in a position where he had to make a decision which could have compromised his beliefs if he did what was being asked of him. He stood firm and risked persecution. On all occasions we saw Daniel decide to obey God first and not people.

welcome

CELL: Think of a situation when one of your values was threatened or affirmed. See if you can describe what happened and how you felt.

worship

FACILITATOR: Get someone to bring along a CD or tape that you can use in a time of worship. People might want to sing along or just listen.

word

CELL: Describe a time when you were in a position where you felt as if you had a hard choice to make in terms of compromising your faith. Spend a bit of time discussing why you made the decision you did on that occasion and how you felt about it.

FACILITATOR: The question of compromise often arises for Christians when considering political power. There is an apparent conflict as you can't have politics without compromise and Christians would argue against compromising their principles. In tackling this apparent dilemma let's look at what the essence of personal and political compromise is all about.

Personal compromise is a question of choices we make based on our sense of morality. For example, as Christians one of our principles would be that we don't lie and if we, for whatever reason, cross that moral boundary we have compromised our personal principles.

Joseph was a man who wasn't willing to compromise his beliefs and integrity.

CELL: As a group, read Gen. 39 and then answer the following question.

Discuss together what we learn from this story about the character of Joseph and God.

FACILITATOR: Political compromise has a different emphasis from personal compromise. It is about living as part of a community and making choices for the benefit of the common good. We make decisions like this all the time, for example in an evening with your family you need to decide what video you might watch and what you will have for dinner. It is impossible to live as part of a community and not compromise on a daily basis.

The answer to this apparent dilemma is not to withdraw from society (God clearly calls us to be a part of it) but to play an active role in making sound, value-based decisions that do not compromise your personal morals, but allow room for common goals to be achieved. For example, in your church you might not like choirs, but other members do and so you might decide to have a choir singing once a month. That is a compromise which doesn't cross any moral boundaries. If, however, someone wanted to start to preach that living together outside marriage was okay and believed that you should do so to 'keep up with the times' you might want to make a stand morally if you believe that to be wrong.

There are always contentious issues which arise and will require a political decision to be made in aid of the common good and on these occasions we need to trust our relationship with God to help us make the right choices.

CELL: Read Romans 12:1-3 and discuss.

What guidance do these verses give us when seeking to know how to make a good decision?

An example of a situation that could arise in a Student Government could be that you were asked by your executive to represent the Gay Society at a regional conference looking at gay rights. How do you think you would deal with this issue?

FACILITATOR: *As we consider our actions, whether in a political environment or on a personal issue with one other person, we should be alert to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and seeking God's will for that time, looking to honor Him and give the best to those around us.*

Take time to break into smaller groups to pray for one another. Perhaps there are people in the cell group that are facing pressures in their spheres of influence and compromise is looming. Encourage everyone who shares to be transparent.

witness

CELL: What are we most passionate about? Is it Jesus or are there other things that get in the way? This should be a key question for us as we look at how effective our evangelism is. If Jesus is the most important thing for us and the person we are most fired up about then He will naturally become the topic of conversation for us and people will see him in our lives as we eagerly seek to be more like him. Challenge each other as to where the passions of your heart lay. If you need to re-focus then spend some time praying with each other about it.

what now?

CELL: If you haven't already, pray about what areas the Lord would want you involved in. Are you overcommitted? Perhaps He is asking you to lay aside certain areas of involvement in order to focus more time and energy to another area.

4: What are the values we are standing up for?

introduction

FACILITATOR: *Cell is about value-based discipleship and is looking to outwork the Kingdom values that Jesus demonstrated and taught. It means that our values are becoming like God's values. We know when this is happening because our values ultimately come through in our character, the things we say, how we live and the choices we make. The growth process in discipleship is something like this - Our VALUES effect our ACTIONS, our ACTIONS then begin to form HABITS and our HABITS then shape and determine our CHARACTER.*

welcome

CELL: Think of someone who inspires you and has had a great influence on your life. Talk about two of the positive ways they have impacted you and the qualities they have which you admire.

worship

FACILITATOR: *Go around the group and ask everyone to say something that they are thankful to God for. Use this as a basis to pray together and celebrate God's goodness.*

word

FACILITATOR: *When working in the world of student politics, or indeed in any field, we need to think carefully about what we believe and why. Sometimes God lays very specific things on our hearts at specific times but there is always the call to declare Christian truth and demonstrate Christ's compassion. Working in student politics is an ideal opportunity to live out kingdom values in our colleges and to see the lives of those around us profoundly affected as Jesus is glorified.*

CELL ACTIVITY: Split the cell into smaller groups and have them look up and discuss the following verses.

Gen 1:26-31
Psalm 82:3-4
Isaiah 61:1-3
Matthew 22:37-40
Luke 10:25-37
Phil 2:3-4

What do you think these sections of scripture teach us about the values we are to demonstrate to those around us?

Write down on paper some practical examples where you could practice what the Bible is teaching us.

Consider some of the values that are held by people around you who don't know Jesus. Are there any differences to your own? What are they?

One of the values that Student Governments hold to is that of equality and freedom of expression. How do you see that working out in practice? Are there any conflicts with Biblical values? Are there values that you share?

FACILITATOR: *It is very important that as Christians we know what we believe and why. There will be decisions made that we would take issue with, but it is also important that we stand by those values we agree with and support those around us, Christian or non-Christian, when we can. One Student Government complained that the Christians only showed up to general meetings when there was a vote about abortion. We need to gain credibility and show support when we think good decisions are being made as well as log our objections. How we express our values and beliefs will say a lot more about us particularly if our character also oozes grace and humility.*

witness

FACILITATOR: *This material will have stimulated a lot of thought and discussion about your college. Finish this term by praying about any particular issues on campus that you know need prayer and for your friends.*

what now?

CELL: Commit this week to pray for your campus' Student Government and those in leadership. Resolve to take action regarding those areas the Lord would have you become involved.