



Joining in with the Spirit: Session 5 – Facilitator’s ppt script.

The numbers correspond with the slides. This is an edited version of the Content booklet. ① indicates an animation click is needed.

1. **Intro slide**
2. **In what ways is it helpful to think of God’s mission as a ‘battle’?**
3. In this session we look at how ① discipleship leads to joining in with God’s mission to restore the broken parts of creation and society. For example, the Booths worked to change and challenge injustice in several ways: ① By campaigning and advocating. By engaging with the political structures of the world. By establishing alternative ways of acting which reflected God’s justice.
4. They reflected (before its time) much of the content of the final two marks of mission - ① transforming unjust structures of society, challenging violence of every kind and sustaining and renewing the life of the earth. To follow Christ and to do the things He does will always involve a *realism about the cost and the struggle* involved. This is reflected in the way that God’s people are described as the ① “church militant” here on earth – willing to struggle with self-giving love for God’s kingdom and against darkness.
5. We experience this conflict for two main reasons: ① **We live in the ‘in-between’ period during which God’s kingdom is present, but not yet fulfilled.**
6. **God’s ① kingdom remains opposed.** Jesus came to set the oppressed free - as John wrote, ① “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.” (1 John 3:8) The final defeat of these enemies is to come, but in the meantime God’s kingdom remains *contested*. C.S. Lewis put it, ① “There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan.” Thus William Booth said, ① “While women weep as they do now, I’ll fight; while little children go hungry as they do now, I’ll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, I’ll fight; while there is a poor lost girl upon the street, I’ll fight; while there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I’ll fight – I’ll fight to the very end.”
7. **How involved *can* Christians be in the world?**
8. Christians have had a developing and often different approach as to how, and how much, to be involved in the world and its culture (the environment created by human life). There has been a spectrum of approaches to these questions which is shaped by how we answer two questions: ① Should we emphasise the world as fundamentally good, or fallen? ① How active should we be in influencing the world?
9. We could characterise these different approaches as: ① **Withdraw: Disciples are called to be separate from the world.** ① Christians who take this approach will emphasise that the world is ‘secular’. They will emphasise Jesus’ words, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36) as advocating withdrawal. They are likely to see discipleship as just being focussed on church and spiritual growth. ① **Critique: Disciples are called to critique society, but from the outside.** Christians who take this approach will emphasise that the world is fallen, but ① the role of the church is to influence *through the demonstration of our life together and by voicing what loyalty to God looks like*. While these two approaches have historically been adopted by some, most Christians have seen them as splitting life up into sacred and secular, and other responses have instead fallen somewhere between the following two attitudes:
10. **Cooperate: ① Disciples are called to look for the good in society and cooperate where possible.** Christians who take this approach will still live with the tension that many aspects of the world are fallen, and that their primary loyalty is to Christ. ① But they will see God’s grace *outside* the church, as well as within it, and believe that there is good in society already. ① **Transform: Disciples are called to join in with the transformation of the world in every aspect.** ① Christians who take this approach see the world as ‘in between’ good and fallen. But as disciples in God’s image, they are called to *both develop the goodness* of God’s creation, and *to join in with Him in restoring* what is broken in every area of life. At a church leaders’ conference, the convenor asked the assembled participants what the greatest problem was in their countries. Almost all included bribery and corruption, often as the most serious problem they faced. The convenor responded as follows: “If corruption is the major problem, then why are we preparing our young people only to be pastors and evangelists? ① Why aren’t we training them to be the godly entrepreneurs, economists, policemen, judges and politicians that our countries so desperately need?” This perspective emphasises that Christians are ① called to be *culture-formers* and not *culture-followers*. The Content booklet looks at how this might shape our involvement in politics.
11. **How important is it to pray for others?**
12. Jesus taught his disciples to pray not just so they could enter into relationship – but so that they *could see a genuine difference in the world*. ① This kind of prayer is known as intercession (literally “standing between on behalf of others”) or petition. When we intercede, we join in with the Spirit in the battle in praying for others. ① God repeatedly commands us

to pray: "...if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14) Karl Barth said, ① "To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world."

13. God ① has set up the universe so that talking to him affects Him and affects what comes to pass. Yet while the call to be in relationship and to pray is clear, it raises many questions which can undermine our confidence in thinking prayer matters and turn it into a duty done by rote. ① For example, if God wants to answer why do we need to be persistent? (Our children only have to ask for things once.) How does prayer make any real difference when God already knows everything? If God always does the best thing because it's His nature, what difference can my praying really make? Isn't God going to do what He wants anyway? In addition, we are used to seeing the world in terms of cause and effect, yet intercession rarely works so directly. We know too that often our prayers seem to go unanswered. ① The combination of these complex questions and mysterious experiences can undermine our confidence in prayer and make it hard for us to deal well with difficulties.

14. Does God always get what He wants? If not, why not?

15. God is all-powerful, yet He has created a world in which several factors, most of which are unseen to us, can affect what happens when we pray. In a real way, these factors can restrict (at least temporarily) God's perfect will and have an impact on our intercessions. ① **The laws of nature.** God's ability to answer intercessory prayer may be affected by the need for a stable and predictable natural world. ① **Human freedom.** Out of love, God has also chosen to *limit* Himself by respecting human freedom. This means that the people we pray for do not lose their free will. Thus, while God's love can *influence* us, He never *controls* us. ① **The spiritual battle we cannot see.** As we have seen, just as Jesus taught us to pray, "Deliver us from evil", so Paul describes us as being in a struggle against ① "the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms....With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people." (Ephesians 6: 12,18)

16. Can faith affect prayer?

17. According to Jesus, faith can, to a certain extent, also be a factor involved in prayer. In Matthew Jesus heals a woman of bleeding, saying, ① "Take heart, daughter...your faith has healed you." ① He then heals two blind men: "Then he touched their eyes and said, 'According to your faith let it be done to you.'" (Matthew 9: 22 and 29) ① We can perhaps wrestle with this by acknowledging that while faith is important in prayer, as we have seen, it is one of many factors involved.

18. At the heart of this is knowing that when we pray for others, ① having faith cannot mean that we need to generate *absolute certainty* in our minds about the prayer being answered. Neither does it mean pretending that our prayer has been answered by 'claiming it in faith'. Jesus prayed for a blind man who at first receives his sight back only partially. Jesus' response isn't to blame the man or tell him to act as if he has been healed, but instead to continue praying until he is fully healed. (Mark 8) When we pray for people or situations to be healed, because there are many variables involved we cannot be aware of, perhaps praying in faith is not about believing that the prayer will be answered in that moment. As Greg Boyd says, ① "If I pray for a person in a wheelchair with faith it doesn't mean I know they will get out, it means I have a picture and a hope that this will happen. I can see them concretely being healed and I know it's God's will. This creates a desire, a conviction, which I *press towards*. I know that that person will eventually get it - there are no wheelchairs in God's future. But it will not necessarily happen now."

19. When we pray for others what do we need to know?

20. While we can have confidence that God hears us praying, no one can claim to have complete understanding of what God wants or see every aspect of the universe in the way God does. In the light of this complex picture, the Bible gives us several principles to help us pray: ① **Being persistent and expectant.** When we pray it is not just about God saying yes or no, but we might be coming up against the will of people or forces that have genuine freedom and impact. So it is not surprising that Jesus spoke of the need for persistent prayer. ① In Luke 11, having taught the Lord's Prayer, He then tells another story to show the *attitude* needed in prayer in which a friend wakes up another friend late at night for bread with "shameless audacity". (Luke 11:8) ① **Praying with others.** Early Christians were acutely aware that, although it is impossible to see the full picture when we pray, the strength and number of people praying together is also an important factor. In Acts we read, ① "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken." (Acts 4:31) ① **Being specific and general:** We can be hesitant to ask for specific things for individuals, yet Jesus prayed particularly for Simon, ① "that your faith may not fail." (Luke 22:32) On the other hand, Paul wrote to Timothy, encouraging him to continue in general intercession: ① "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions..." (1 Timothy 2: 1-2) ① To pray for others is to join with God in taking responsibility and to use what God has given you. ① The Content booklet outlines how using the Scriptures, the gift of tongues or the practice of fasting to intensify prayer.

21. What right do we have to act on God's behalf, and where do we get any power to do it?

22. In the light of some of the complex issues we face, it is not surprising if, like Jesus' disciples, sometimes we might lack confidence in seeking God's kingdom and feel confused or powerless. ① Yet Jesus gave Peter and the church (us) "the keys of the kingdom". (Matthew 16:19) Later, He tells all His disciples, "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 18:18) ① He gave His disciples extraordinary responsibility, but not without entrusting them with the power and authority to act in His name in the world. ① What makes all the difference in our confidence is knowing who we are before God, and the authority He gives us, *before we act*. Jesus performed miracles not because He was God, but because He had deep confidence in who He was *before God*. In the same way, as disciples, joining in with God's work, the only place we can find the confidence to live, act and pray for God's kingdom is in first knowing who we are before Him. ① Any sense of authority, right or power we have to act in God's name *comes not from what we do for God*, but from who He says we are as His children.

23. How do we seek peace and justice in a Christlike way?

24. The fourth mark of mission is, "To seek to transform unjust structures of society...to challenge violence of every kind...and to pursue peace and reconciliation." If we are to live into the fourth mark of mission in a Christlike way which brings transformation, focussing on these principles might help: ① **Justice, as well as charity.** As disciples we may well be used to supporting charities to help those in need or to care for the earth. ① But the Content booklet story of three people supporting people who remain *in* prison, as opposed to one person who frees them *from* prison, illustrates the difference between acting with *charity* (or mercy) and ensuring there is *justice*. The fourth philanthropist acted to change the unjust situation, not just the circumstances. He acted to pursue justice and not simply mercy. ① **Structures and institutions, as well as people.** While I may live justly and in right relationship with my neighbour on a personal, day-to-day basis, the fourth mark seeks to address 'unjust structures of society'. The calling of God's people was wider than individual justice, and for their own community. God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah saying, ① "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29.7) ① There is a sense in which justice and peace for *some* can only be found when there is justice for *all*.

25. **Anger, ① as well as peace.** The fourth mark calls us to challenge all forms of violence. In the Beatitudes which describe the heart of a disciple, when Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9) the phrase combines the *manner* in which we seek peace as well as what we do. A good translation might be, ① "Blessed are those who seek peace in a peaceful way." Nevertheless, genuine change can be fuelled by the right kind of anger. ① St Augustine even argued that it is necessary. "Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are." Jesus famously demonstrated this "righteous anger" by turning over the tables in the temple. ① **Peace and justice making, as well as keeping.** Edmund Burke famously said, ① "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing." Peace and justice require initiative. One of the two meanings of the Hebrew word for justice is about being active – ① working to restore what has been broken (restorative justice). This second meaning is the most common – God's people are called to speak up for those who have no voice and rescue the disadvantaged. ① "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow." (Isaiah 1:17)

26. Why is caring for the environment a mark of mission and why is it a battle?

27. The fifth mark of mission is, "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth." ① Why should there still be such an internal battle within so many of us to care for the earth, or to actively seek change? When it comes to caring for the earth, one writer recently explored why it is that it seems that our brains are almost hard-wired not to accept climate change. In the book "Don't Even Think About It" George Marshall says that the main reason it might be a battle for us to take creation-care seriously is because virtually every one of climate change's attributes goes against our psychology. He outlines why.

28. **We ① only become truly aware of a threat posed to us when there is an external enemy involved.** ① **Issues that grab our attention involve pain, and in the present moment.** ① **Climate change requires immediate personal sacrifices now to avoid uncertain collective losses far in the future.** ① **Real changes need us to agree with different countries on a distribution of losses and how to allocate the earth's resources.** We don't like to jump first.

29. **We ① have a finite pool of worry**, and so will focus on what is immediately in front of us. ① **We have what he calls an "optimism bias"**, meaning we tend to think it's going to happen to other people first - we face lower risks than others. ① **We have a tendency to cherry-pick evidence that confirm our beliefs** that others are more threatened, and as a species we don't want to rock the boat and be outsiders. If our attitude to looking after the environment can be affected by these difficulties, how might we start to think as disciples in a way that will motivate us to act?

30. Some of these principles may help. ① **Remembering our first call.** God made the creation as good, and the purpose we were given as human beings is to protect and develop it. ① **Looking after the world because God thinks it is worth saving.** The life, death and resurrection of Jesus tell us how God loves, not just people, but the whole created world. God loved the world (cosmos) so much that He sent His only Son (John 3:16). Jesus said, ① "Go into all the world and preach good news to all creation." (Mark 16:15) By becoming human in Christ, God shows how the material world is valued and holy. ① **Living in anticipation of God's future.** In a short-term sense it is about being mindful of our future generations,

100 years from now, who will be living with the consequences of our decisions today. In the longer-term, big picture sense, ① God's plan is not ultimately to destroy the earth, but to "bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ." (Ephesians 1:10) Our future destiny involves a "renewed earth". ① How we care for God's world now is an expression of our anticipating that future.

31. Justice ① and right relationships. The way we care for the earth expresses the relationship we have with it. But God's call is not only to treat the land, sea and sky with justice, but ① to ensure that those who cause the least environmental damage do not suffer most from its consequences. ① Living simply is about letting others simply live. ① **We know God through His creation and caring for it is an expression of love and worship.** A sacramental approach reminds us of how God sustains His creation, reveals Himself to us through it, and calls us to celebrate its goodness, beauty and diversity. ① To care for creation is worship. Focussing on these truths is a way to move from paralysing fear to action, from apathy to worship. We can care for the creation in small ways – every act of recycling can be an expression of worship and a sign of God's future, every prayer is part of the battle. We can campaign, lobby, write, or protest to give momentum to the decisions that must be made by governments.