

R U LIVING IT?

Steven Lefebvre

MAKING THE CONNECTION

(Watch the video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53WJGvojVns>)

MEET THE WRITER

My name is **Steven Lefebvre**, I work with the youth and young adults at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Before my life of working at a church, I was the lead vocalist in a hardcore band. These days, I spend my free time being an armchair film critic, reading comic books, and playing much quieter music. I'm also on a dart team called the Sandbaggers. I'm a huge fan of going to baseball games in the summer time and going to college basketball games in the winter. Professionally, I have a huge interest in monasticism, biblical studies, and pastoral care.

STUFF YOU WILL NEED

- matches or lighter
- candles (as many as you can provide)
- Bibles

PLUGGED IN

Consider these books as additional resources for this session:

- + *Simply Christian* by N. T. Wright
(http://www.amazon.com/Simply-Christian-Christianity-Makes-Sense/dp/0061920622/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1312382403&sr=8-1)
- + *Jesus Wants to Save Christians* by Rob Bell
(http://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Wants-Save-Christians-Manifesto/dp/0310275024/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1312382497&sr=1-1)

CHECKING IN

Have the participants sit together in a dark room. Then ask each person, in turn, to light a candle until the room is fully illuminated or until you run out of candles.

Invite the group to reflect on these questions:

What is the purpose of light in this room?

How many candles can I take out of this room until it begins to become too dark?

EXPLORING THE WORD

Scripture: Matthew 5:14–16, 1 Corinthians 6:18–20

Read aloud Matthew 5:14–16. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount begins by reminding the Jewish people of who they are and what their purpose was. The city of Jerusalem was literally a city on a hill. The Temple was built on Mount Zion, which was the highest point in the city. The Jews believed that the Temple was the physical meeting place of heaven and earth, where the realm of human activity and the realm of God's activity came together. In fact, they believed that God lived in a box, the Ark of the Covenant, in the Holy of Holies, the innermost room of the Temple. If people wanted to know who God was, they looked to the Temple. Thus, the Jews considered themselves to be the light of the world. If you wanted to know God, you looked to the Jewish people.

Encourage people to continue reading to the end of Matthew 5 and, if possible, through chapter 7.

Invite discussion:

What is the focus of the Sermon on the Mount? Is it about following the rules correctly, or is it something deeper?

What do Jesus' teachings say about God?

But wait! The story doesn't end with the Sermon on the Mount. When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain in the Temple "was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Mark 15:38, NRSV). And Paul picks up on this symbolism in his letter to the church in Corinth. Read aloud 1 Corinthians 6:18–20.

Paul argues that since the curtain in the temple was torn—the curtain that kept people from the Holy of Holies—and since the Holy Spirit no longer resides in a box but in the hearts of Jesus' followers, then our bodies are the temples where God lives. Our bodies are the meeting place of heaven and earth. If you want to know who God is, then look to the followers of Jesus, the ones who have the Spirit of God living in them. We are the light of the world. And through us the world will find God's way of wholeness, healing, and rescue.

Invite the group to discuss these questions:

What can the rest of the world gain by knowing who the Creator is?

If you are a follower of Jesus, then you are the light of the world. How are you letting your light shine?

How does seeing yourself as the light of the world change the way you treat other people? How does it change the way you treat yourself?

SHARING IN PRAYER

Invite people to reflect on their experience in the dark room with the candles.

What does this activity teach you about light?

Then ask people to think of themselves as candles in a dark room and to think of the church as a collection of lit candles.

What would the world be like without the church?

Would it matter if there were no church?

How would people come to know God?

How important is an individual's contribution to a community?

What is the importance of your church in the community?

Would it matter if the church weren't there?

How might your church take more responsibility for being God's light to the dark places of your community?

Close with this collect for Unity in the Church (from the *Book of Common Prayer*):

"Almighty Father, whose blessed Son before his passion prayed for his disciples that they might be one, as you and he are one: Grant that your Church, being bound together in love and obedience to you, may be united in one body by the one Spirit, that the world may believe in him whom you have sent, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."

TAKING IT FURTHER

Reflect this week on what it means to be the light of the world. Where is there darkness in your family? your community? your workplace? your church? How can you shine the light of Christ in the darkness?