



# History: History and Changes

## What if history were about being agents of change?

Laura's high-school history class was studying the Civil Rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's, and she wanted them to see that the movement produced social change against deeply entrenched opposition.

"Too often I hear people just accepting things with a shrug of the shoulders, as if nothing can ever be changed. Many of the civil rights leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Ralph Abernathy, and Joseph Lowery, were ministers who saw themselves as 'agents of change', and they made a difference. I chose to use as a case study the boycott that ended segregated seating on the buses in Montgomery, Alabama. I decided to introduce the subject using a modern campaign from the Stop the Traffik website (<http://www.stopthetraffik.org>), which is about obtaining good conditions for cocoa workers. I made the link between the two campaigns in order to make being an agent for change relevant to the present.

"I brought in chocolate and used material from the Stop the Traffik website to briefly explain the conditions for some child cocoa-farm workers. I asked the students how they would approach change, and we looked at the methods Stop the Traffik uses. We went on to look at the Montgomery bus boycott and the use of community buying power, providing alternatives and moral pressure. This gave us an example of African-American ministers who were agents of change, and we went on to look at others. At the end, I gave the students an opportunity to take part in the chocolate campaign if they wished to by sending Valentine's Day cards to a chocolate manufacturer."

## What's going on here?

Laura saw her history lesson as an opportunity to look at agents of change and encourage students that change is possible. She affirmed the role of faith in this.

She engaged students in comparing two parallel case studies to lead them to make connections between history and their own context, and included a focus on the role of faith.

She reshaped her practice by using an object to introduce the lesson (chocolate), discussing ways of actively working for change with students, choosing appropriate case studies and faith examples, and providing an opportunity to put the learning into practice (campaign cards).

What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love? The way Laura taught this lesson highlighted the possibility of change and the engagement of ordinary people in that process, encouraging her class that their actions could lead to change. It is all too easy to look at social change in an abstract way and not explore the mechanisms used or how it relates to life now.

With the news usually being bad, it is easy to give up and feel that nothing changes, but the eye of faith sees things differently. One day all evil will be no more when God's kingdom comes in its fullness. That kingdom is peace and love, justice and joy. This is the kingdom that Jesus taught about with parables such as the mustard seed and the pearl of great price. God calls Christian communities to begin living this kingdom life now as a signpost of what is to come, bringing hope. Christians are called to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in order to be a blessing to the communities around them. Love is what drives the desire to change—love for people that God made and who should be treated with dignity.

## What difference does it make?

The way Laura taught this lesson highlighted the possibility of change and the engagement of ordinary people in that process, encouraging her class that their actions could lead to change. It is all too easy to look at social change in an abstract way and not explore the mechanisms used or how it relates to life now.

## Where could we go from here?

Teachers could highlight other subjects where people and communities become agents of change, for example, geography (environmental change), English, religious education,

and science.

## Digging deeper

Being an agent of change is not about “fixing” things. It’s about Christians living a communal way of life that says to the world, “It does not have to be like this. Another way is possible,” and then taking that alternative way of being and living out into the wider world through their work and relationships ([Matthew 5:14](#)).

*God is looking for you and me to be fellow workers with God. Bishop Desmond Tutu*

*Each group of Christians is, as it were, a pilot plant, showing that something can be done in the present situation, if only we begin in the right way. Francis Schaeffer*

The decisive battle with evil was won by Jesus through his life, death, and resurrection. Evil is still active, but the outcome is not in doubt. Evil does not win. The cross is not just about personal faith in Christ and God transforming individuals; it’s about hope for the whole world ([Romans 8:21](#)). Faith brings both hope and realism; we live in a broken world, and things will be difficult—but, with God, not impossible. Discouragement often comes when people try to do things in their own strength and as individuals. In the Bible the emphasis is on Christian communities in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus preached God’s kingdom, and the Lord’s Prayer talks of God’s will being done “on earth as in heaven” ([Matthew 6:9-10](#)). The kingdom is the rule of God that one day will be complete but starts now. It is the great reversal of all that is wrong with our world, and it began with Jesus. His coming launched the kingdom; his ministry showed its power; his death and resurrection demonstrated the defeat of evil and declared his lordship over sin and death. The resurrection was a foreshadowing of the renewal of this world when the kingdom comes in its fullness.



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