

Act Justly Update 13

From the smallest seed, great things grow

The tallest trees in the world, the Redwood trees in California, which now reach heights greater than a 24-storey building, began as seeds just 3cm long.

A political movement that brings great change often begins with a few people planting the seed of an idea, about a different way to live, in the minds of others.

Nurturing the seed into maturity is what makes it mighty. In this study, we'll consider the difference that the smallest seed can make to the lives of people around the world.

Welcome activity and worship

1. Give small pieces of paper to each member of your group.
2. Begin a conversation about times when individuals have received a small encouragement from another person. Discuss how that made them feel, and what difference it made to the situation.
3. Explain that as a group you can bless each other. Ask them to write a short blessing or encouragement on the piece of paper, perhaps using a verse from the Bible or a sentence or two of prayer, and put all the pieces in a bowl in the centre of the group.
4. Distribute the blessings amongst the group.
5. Reflect on the way that blessing has made people feel, and lead a time of worship, thanking God for the blessings he has given us.

Burundi is a small, landlocked country in central Africa. It has few natural resources and a political legacy of conflict and corruption. Now that the civil war is over, ensuring a peaceful future requires involving all parts of society in the process.

The Batwa community makes up less than one per cent of the population. Poor and marginalised, they lack representation at a decision-making level and have often been ignored in discussions about the future of the country.

Their traditional trade, craft pot-making, is no longer viable as the raw materials now have to be used for making bricks. And as the community does not own land they have no income to pay for healthcare or education

Yet in this difficult situation, there are small glimpses of hope.



Batwa families practising agricultural techniques at a UCEDD seed centre

The work of Christian Aid partner Union Chrétienne Pour L'Education et le Développement des Déshérités (UCEDD) demonstrates how small changes can make a big difference.

UCEDD runs a seed centre, where about 500 families receive seeds and learn agricultural techniques, which improve the land and overcome diseases that destroy the crops. Working across ethnic divides, the projects bring communities together to work and learn side by side.

Beatrice and her family get seeds and training at their local community seed centre. She used to make clay pots and exchange them for food, but having gained new skills she can now be more certain of being able to obtain food regularly. Now the family can also afford to send their son, Bushwirima to school.

The seed project's impact extends much further than the individuals who get seeds. As Beatrice's husband, Christian, explains, 'The best thing about the seed centre is that it has led Hutu, Tutsi and Batwa to work together. Before we could not sit together, now we invite each other to our houses.'

Overcoming the legacy of violence to create a hopeful future has in a very real way begun with the smallest seeds.

Word

1. *Read Matthew 13:31-32*
He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.'
2. In the parable, the field, the man and the seed are also symbolic. What do you think they represent?
3. A seed is the means by which a plant reproduces itself and starts new growth it is not the full, mature plant. Does this teach us anything about the way the Church on earth and the kingdom of God are related to each other?
4. Read on to the second part of the passage, Matthew 13:33. Here the yeast is the agent of change. What point do you think Jesus is making about the seemingly small and insignificant parts of the bread?
5. Good cultivation of the seed or the yeast is essential to see their full potential. In what ways can Christians cultivate change that will further God's transformation of the world?

Response

Take time to discuss in your group how Jesus challenges his followers to make practical changes in the world. How will your group make a difference?

Make a commitment as an individual or a group to take at least one practical action. Don't forget to ask each other how you got on when you next meet.

For ideas on how to work with Christian Aid take a look at www.christianaid.org.uk/getinvolved

Prayer

Lead a time of prayer about the issues raised in this discussion.

- Lead a time of prayer to thank God for the work of UCEDD. Reflect on the difference the UCEDD projects are making to the people of Burundi, pray for the families that now work together and ask God to bless the work of UCEDD, so that the small acts of transformation combine to unify the population.
- Lead a time of prayer to thank God that each individual in your group can be an agent for change in the world. Reflect on the practical ways that each person can bring the hope of God's kingdom to suffering nations around the world.



Christian Aid/Severine Flores

UCEDD is helping Batwa families grow their way out of poverty by teaching them agricultural skills

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