

LIFE GROUP NOTES:
SERIES: Disciple
PART FOUR: Influence

"*You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.*

14 "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father." Matt 5:13-16



INTRODUCTION

How did the movement of Jesus followers spread so quickly and widely in the first few centuries after his death and resurrection? It didn't happen because the Jesus followers decided to be "Christians." It happened because they took Jesus' words seriously. And over time, they changed the world.

In the gospel of Matthew, we can read the message that got it all going. This was the beginning of the movement, and it happened early in the ministry of Jesus. He was laying the foundation of the movement. It was a revolutionary, world-changing message. Three hundred years later, the message of Jesus was everywhere. Nobody was worshipping Jupiter anymore. Principles like justice (righteousness), compassion, humility and generosity suddenly became positive virtues, not just the possession of the 'weak.' How did we move from "might is right" to these principles in just 300 years? The answer is; Jesus disciples took his definition of them seriously.

So what about us? Why would we settle for "Christian"- something we can't even define- when Jesus gives us such specific instructions?

DISCUSSION STARTER

In your own community, how have you seen the followers of Jesus as preserving and positive influences? What are some of the significant 'good deeds' that have attracted other people, giving them more reason to think highly of God and of what he is doing in your community?

MESSAGE SUMMARY

In the opening verses of 'the sermon on the mount' Jesus began to describe his followers as 'poor, sad, meek, righteous, merciful, pure, peaceful, persecuted, insulted people, waiting for a reward in heaven.' *Is that really what we are?*

Jesus then gave his disciples two word pictures. He called the "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." That's who you are, he was telling them. **SALT** is a preservative. Jesus was saying, "You're the world's preservative. Without you, everything rots, and culture starts to stink." Jesus also called his followers "the **LIGHT** of the world," like a town or a city placed on a hilltop, visible all around, day or night. He was saying, 'You've been strategically placed to have a shining influence.' And Jesus said "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Jesus wants us to live in such a way that when people see our good actions, they don't say "What a nice person," but they instead recognise something so extraordinary that they begin to connect the dots and give the credit to God. Be **SALT**, be **LIGHT**. Let your lifestyle point the way to Jesus.

Think about your own story. The only reason you're a Christian is that others were salt and light in your life, even though they didn't know it at the time. **SALT ALWAYS PRESERVES: LIGHT ALWAYS SHOWS THE WAY**. Salt works even when you can't see it working and light illuminates even when you're not thinking about it. No matter where you are in your daily life, Jesus has placed you there as the salt and light of the world. So let's not settle for "Christian." Let's ask God to make us more effective salt and more effective light. As God answers that prayer, who knows what he might do in our families, our communities, in our nation, and in the whole world?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) The first Christians embraced the words of Jesus with utter seriousness and ended up changing the world. How much potential for the same kind of change do you see in our world today?
- 2) What positive influences have followers of Jesus had on our culture in the past or present?
- 3) In what ways do you wish the followers of Jesus had a stronger influence on our culture?
- 4) How do the followers of Jesus view our world differently than other people? What tensions does this create?
- 5) If followers of Jesus were ‘salt’ and ‘light’ in our world, how could that help overcome the differences between them and those who don’t follow Jesus?
- 6) What convinces you that all human beings have great worth to God?

KEY POINTS

- Jesus described his followers with two distinctive word pictures: ‘the salt of the earth’ and ‘the light of the world.’ Wherever you are, Jesus has you there to be this kind of influence.
- Salt is a preservative. Without the proper influence of Jesus followers, the world’s culture will decay.
- Light shows the way. Jesus calls his followers to have such a shining influence through our good deeds that it causes others to give credit to God.

Moving Forward

What does being a ‘light’ in this world mean to you personally? How has God equipped you and prepared you for this? Which areas of darkness do you believe he wants you to shine his light in?

Preparing for session 4

To help you prepare- use these suggested devotions during the week leading up to your next life-group.

In the first chapter of the gospel of John, reflect on the teaching about Jesus (‘the Word’) in verses 14, 16 and 17. If you had never heard of Jesus, what would you learn about him from these verses?

Look over the encounter Jesus had with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-45. What evidence do you see that Jesus was full of “grace and truth” (John 1:14)?

In John 8:1-11, Jesus encounters another woman. What evidence do you find in this encounter that he was full of “grace and truth”?

Read Mark 2:13-17 (Matthew and his friends) and Matthew 23:32-43. What do you learn about living as a person of “grace and truth” from Jesus example.