

Salt and Light
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We are in a sermon series entitled Knowing God and Making Him Known. My sermon today is entitled Salt and Light. It's based on what Jesus said in Matthew 5:13-16

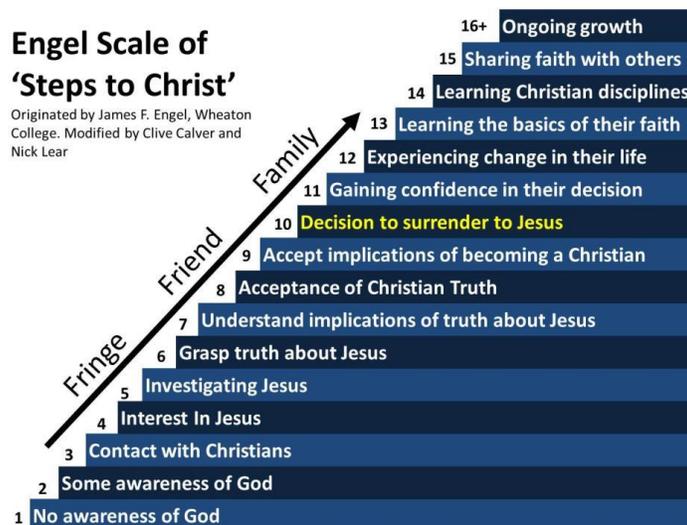
You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Jesus said that we are to permeate our surroundings like salt and light. Salt preserves, provides taste, and produces thirst. Light dispels darkness and opens eyes to truth.

Salt does no good until it touches our food. Light does no good until it shines on the darkness. We do no good if we hide our lights and lose our saltiness. We've got to get out of the salt shaker and into the world.

Here's the thing about salt. Too little salt leaves food tasting bland. Too much salt makes food inedible. We must use the right amount of salt. That means we start with a little and gradually add more.

It helps to discern where people are in the salvation process. Dr. James Engel has given us a model of the spiritual decision-making process called the Engel Scale of Steps to Christ. This shows that conversion does not happen overnight; people go through several stages over a period of time before becoming Christians.



Everyone is somewhere on this scale in terms of their receptivity to the gospel. When I grew up – most people were at a 6 or 7. That’s because in those days we had Bible reading and prayer in public schools. People heard about the Bible and Jesus – so they were higher on the scale. Today – many people are at a 1 or a 2. Our goal is to figure out where they are in their spiritual journey and to do whatever will bring them a step closer to knowing Christ. We are not trying to take them from 1 to 10 all at once. We can’t get so focused on the event, we forget the process. In 1 Corinthians 3:6-8 Paul said:

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.

The process of salvation requires total dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Some plant seeds - Others water it - others reap – God gives the growth! The primary communicator of the good news is the Holy Spirit.

Success in witnessing is simply sharing Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God. The New Testament is full of examples of the gospel being presented and receiving a wide range of responses. When Paul preached the gospel in Athens, the crowd divided into three camps (Acts 17:16-34). Some rejected his message. Some believed his message. Others said “We will hear you again concerning this.” They were not yet ready to believe, but their curiosity had been sufficiently stimulated for them to want more information.

Since not everyone is at the same level of spiritual preparedness, we need to ascertain as best we can at what point the listener is on the scale, then help him move toward trusting Christ. Sure, some are ready to receive Christ, and we need to be ready to lead them to Christ. However, others are struggling to gain a grasp of the gospel and we need to understand they are on a journey. They need to receive information and encouragement from us to take that step and move closer toward receiving Christ. To do that we must pour on the salt and turn on the light! In John 9:5 – Jesus said

While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

Jesus was the light of the world while He was on earth. But what happened when He left? In Matthew 5:14 Jesus told the disciples:

You are the light of the world.

While Jesus was here – He was the light – now His light shines through His followers. God has put no obligation on unbelievers to come to Him. He has put the responsibility on believers to go to them and share the truth about His desire to forgive their sins and change their lives. If people are not coming to Christ – it’s because we are not going to people!

It's our responsibility to shine our light! Think about light for a moment – what does light do? Light gives us sight. You see better in the light than in the dark.

I heard about some kids who had a sleep over at their house one hot summer night. They were going to sleep outside in a tent, but the mosquitoes were biting them, so they came inside to sleep. However, since they had been going in and out and leaving the door open, some started complaining about mosquitoes again.

The mom didn't want to wake everybody up so she left the light out and went into kids' rooms, sprayed all of the kids and the room with insect repellent and went back to bed. The next morning – to her horror - she discovered that she had covered the kids, the bedding, the room walls and everything with blue spray paint. She said, "I thought it smelled kind of funny."

The problem was she could not see clearly in the dark. Her solution created a bigger problem. What should she have done? Turn the light on!

And without God's light, people live in spiritual darkness. They're in the dark about life - about God - about how to handle problems. They try to fix their problems – but because they're in darkness, they only make them worse!

People won't see clearly unless until they know the light of the world. That means they need to know Jesus and they come to know Jesus when they see His light shine through us.

Here's a very interesting fact about light – When there is too little light – people cannot see. But the opposite is also true - Too much light will blind you. So what we need is an appropriate amount of light.

Our lights need a dimmer switch so we can turn the light up or down as needed. With the right amount of light, people will be drawn to Jesus.

There should be an attractive quality about us that draws others to Christ – not a repulsive quality that pushes them away. If Jesus lives in us, He will live His life through us to draw others to Him. That means that the quality of our lives – our marriages, our family, the way we do our jobs, the way we deal with life in general – should be different from unbelievers. It's only when they see positive qualities shine through us that they are drawn by that light.

If you put light on a continuum, there is an extreme where light is too dim and ineffective. This represents the Christian who never shares his faith because he's afraid or he believes that religion is a private matter, or he doesn't feel equipped. The Bible says that we don't light a lamp and hide it under the bed. So, if light is too dim it has no effectiveness and is essentially worthless.

On the other end of the scale, however, is blinding overpowering light. This glare represents the fanatic with his "turn or burn" witness.

He is highly confrontational and self-righteous with his message and he offends other people with his attitude and words.

Somewhere on the scale is an appropriate amount of light. The light should be neither too dim nor too overpowering.

For example, if you were sleeping and someone tries to wake you by shining 100,000 watts of light into your face, it would be too much. You would not have a positive opinion about the light or the person who was shining it. Similarly, in the same situation, a dimly lit candle would be ineffective. It probably wouldn't wake you up.

Spiritually speaking, many people are spiritually sleeping and need an appropriate amount of light that is sufficient to wake people up without being overpowering and offensive.

I believe this is what Jesus is teaching us when He says, *"Let your light shine...in such a way."*

Use an appropriate amount of light in such a way that people are drawn to the light and place their faith in Jesus. Non-Christians have had blinding encounters with over-zealous, 100,000-watt Christians AND with dimly lit, ineffective, five-watt Christians. The result in both cases is a failure to be drawn to Jesus Christ.

In the Bible, lost people were constantly attracted to Jesus. Jesus said in John 12:46:

I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in Me should stay in darkness.

Jesus knew how much light to shine into the lives of others in an appealing way. Jesus always met people where they were. He discerned when that person was ready and turned on sufficient light until people acknowledged their sins and turned to Him for saving grace.

John 4 tells about the encounter that Jesus had with the woman at the well. It began with a discussion about water and ended up with the whole town coming to faith! John 4:7-39 says:

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and he would have given you living water."

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

"I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am He." Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

The disciples came back then and Jesus told them:

Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony.

Here's some principles we see from that encounter:

1- Sharing the gospel begins with a conversation.

Jesus initiated a conversation with this woman. We need to do the same and the only way to do that is to spend time with people and really listen to them. The conversation does not have to immediately center on Jesus or the Bible, but there needs to be a conversation.

2- Look for common ground

Jesus always had the goal of bringing the person He encountered into a salvation experience, but He always started where the person was. We must do the same. Look for common interests. Enter their world.

What was the common interest between Jesus and this woman? Water.

We can find common ground with people through things like family, work, hobbies, shared experiences, news stories. Don't feel that you must immediately begin talking about spiritual matters. Take time to nurture common interests.

3- Use your common interest to introduce spiritual matters

This woman went to the well that day to get some water. She had no idea when she left home that her life was about to change dramatically. But Jesus saw this open door and grabbed the opportunity to offer this thirsty woman the water of life. He took something natural and used it to have a spiritual conversation.

4- Don't go too far, too fast

Give the person what they are ready for. The woman at the well thought she needed water – but she really needed living water. Sometimes people don't realize what they really need. They might want to talk about something else first. That's OK – don't rush them.

And don't get into religious arguments like this woman wanted to do. When the focus got on her spiritual condition – she kept trying to bring up religious arguments about Jewish worship vs. Samaritan.

Unbelievers mistakenly think that their religious ideas are just as true as anyone else's. They do not understand that one way to God is objectively true, while others are necessarily false. Rather, they view religion as a matter of preference: "You like chocolate, I like strawberry. But neither one is right or wrong."

But Scripture is clear that unless we worship the one true God as He has revealed Himself through His only Son Jesus, we're worshiping idols. So we can't let people get away with the idea that it really doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere. Don't make concessions, but offer gentle correction. 2 Timothy 2:23-26 says:

Don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights. A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people. Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will learn the truth. Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil's trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.

5- Your ultimate goal is to introduce them to Jesus.

The main issue that every person must consider is the question that Jesus asked His disciples in Matthew 16:15:

"But who do you say that I am?"

The point is that when you're telling someone about Jesus, find out who they believe Jesus is and then let them know who He claimed to be. If the person tries to go off on rabbit trails, bring him back to the person of Christ. He is *everything* in our witness!

6- Reaching one person can open many doors.

One conversation with one person and the whole city heard the gospel. This is the Power of One! Who knows whether the one person you reach may bring many to Christ? This is exactly how evangelism spread in the first century and how it spreads today.

But think about this: Jesus' disciples went into the town, came into contact with lots of people, but never reached one person. Jesus never entered the town, but He reached one person and converted the whole town.

By the way – any believer can be a witness.

Here was an immoral woman who hasn't had time to clean up yet.

She doesn't know much doctrine, she doesn't know the plan of salvation.

She just knows that she encountered Jesus and He changed her life!

She just invited the others to come see for themselves.

You can do the same – wherever you are in your walk with God.

7- Open your eyes to opportunities around you.

Jesus challenged the disciples to open their eyes to the harvest around them know rather than putting it off to a future date. They entered the city and interacted with a number of people in order to buy food – but they were thinking only of themselves and not of the spiritual needs of those around them. We are no different. We easily move through our day without even a thought or prayer for those around us.

We must understand that sharing the gospel is urgent. We cannot wait or put it off for a “better day” while there are people we know who are dying without the gospel because we are waiting for a “convenient” time to talk to them. We must understand:

Without Jesus people are lost – and they need to know that He is the way!

Without Jesus people are confused – and they need to know that He is the truth!

Without Jesus people are weak – and they need to know that He is the Almighty!

Without Jesus people are aimlessly wandering through life – and they need to know that He is the Shepherd!

Without Jesus people are depressed – and they need to know that He is the Counselor!

Without Jesus – people are addicted and bound up in sinful lifestyles

– and they need to know that He is the Deliverer!

Without Jesus – people are trying to find their own way to God – and they need to know that there is only one Mediator between God and man – and that’s Christ Jesus our Lord!

Without Jesus – people are spiritually dead – and they need to know that He is the resurrection and the life!

Without Jesus people are blind – and they need to know that He is the light!

And they’ll never know until you pour out the salt and turn on the light and tell them the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ!