

Living a Life of Impact

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Key Scripture

Matthew 5:13-14 (ESV) “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”

Sermon in One Sentence

As followers of Christ, we are called and empowered to live distinctly, preserving societal goodness and illuminating spiritual truth, thereby making an eternal impact for God’s glory.

Introduction

Have you ever stopped to consider what kind of legacy you are building? Is it one of quiet comfort, a ripple in a small pond, or one that truly alters the landscape around you for the better? In a world increasingly marked by apathy, division, and despair, the call to make a lasting, positive difference can feel daunting, almost impossible. Many Christians feel an internal tension: a desire to live out their faith meaningfully, yet an uncertainty about how to translate their beliefs into tangible, impactful action in their daily lives. We see the brokenness, we hear the cries, but often we default to a mindset of just surviving rather than truly shaping our sphere of influence.

This struggle is not new; it resonates with the very heart of Jesus's early disciples, who, like us, lived in a complex and often hostile world. They wrestled with how to be faithful to God while also engaging with a society that largely rejected their Messiah. It's a question that echoes through the centuries, demanding an answer from every generation of believers: how do we, followers of Christ, truly live a life of impact? Today, we turn to the words of Jesus himself, spoken from the mountaintop, to discover God's profound design for our lives — a design not just for personal holiness, but for world-altering impact.

Historical & Biblical Context

Our key passage comes from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, arguably the most important sermon ever preached. Delivered early in His ministry, likely to a large crowd of disciples and curious onlookers from Galilee, it lays out the foundational principles of His kingdom. It’s important to understand that before these verses, Jesus had just pronounced the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12), blessing those who are poor in spirit, mourn, are meek, hungry for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and persecuted. These are not merely suggestions for moral living; they describe the very character of those who belong to God's kingdom.

Immediately following these declarations of character, Jesus shifts to the *function* of these kingdom citizens in the world. He isn't giving them a new identity; He is revealing the inherent purpose of the identity they

already possess through Him. This teaching wasn't just for a select few apostles but for every disciple present and every believer since. He is addressing ordinary people, much like us, and telling them that by simply *being* what He has made them, they will inevitably have a profound impact on the world around them. The "salt" and "light" metaphors were easily understood in an agrarian, ancient Near Eastern context and served as powerful images of preservation, flavor, guidance, and revelation – critical elements for life and society.

Main Point I — Preserving Goodness: The Salty Disciple

Scripture: Matthew 5:13a “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?”

Jesus's declaration, "You are the salt of the earth," is not a suggestion but a statement of inherent identity and purpose. In ancient times, salt was invaluable. It was not just a condiment; it was a primary preservative, crucial for preventing decay in food, especially meat, and for purifying water. It was also used in religious offerings and even as a form of currency. When Jesus calls His followers the "salt of the earth," He is saying that their very presence in the world is meant to preserve it from moral and spiritual decay. We are to be agents of goodness, stopping the spread of corruption and holding back the forces that would otherwise lead to complete societal breakdown. Our lives, lived according to the Beatitudes, introduce a preserving and purifying quality into every sphere we inhabit.

The warning that follows is stark: "if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?" Unlike modern table salt, ancient salt often came impure, mixed with other minerals. If the sodium chloride leached out due to dampness, what remained was a tasteless, worthless residue. Jesus's point is that a Christian who loses their distinctiveness, who blends in so completely with cultural norms that they no longer offer a preserving or purifying influence, becomes useless for the very purpose God intended. This isn't about personal comfort; it's about our God-given utility. To live an impactful life as the salt of the earth means resisting assimilation, maintaining our Christian character and convictions, and actively counteracting the moral decay around us with grace and truth. It's about being flavor, not blandness; preservation, not passivity.

Main Point II — Illuminating Truth: The Luminous Disciple

Scripture: Matthew 5:14a “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”

Having established our role as preservatives, Jesus immediately adds another profound metaphor regarding our impact: "You are the light of the world." Just as salt is essential for preservation, light is essential for seeing, for guidance, and for dispelling darkness. In a world shrouded in spiritual ignorance, moral confusion, and the darkness of sin, followers of Jesus are called to be beacons. We do not *generate* the light; rather, we *reflect* the true Light of the World, Jesus Christ (John 8:12). Our lives, characterized by His truth and modeled after His love, naturally shine into the darkness of the world, revealing God's reality and showing others the way to Him. This is not an extra task to be added to our spiritual to-do list; it is a fundamental aspect of who we are as His disciples.

The image of "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden" powerfully reinforces this point. Ancient cities on hills were strategic, visible from afar, serving as landmarks and places of refuge. Jesus is emphasizing the inherent visibility of a distinctive life lived for Him. Our witness isn't meant to be hidden under a bushel basket (as the next verses, 5:15-16, clarify); it's meant to be openly displayed. This means our actions, our words, our integrity, our joy, and our peace should be observable, drawing attention not to ourselves, but to the God who empowers us. To live an impactful life as the light of the world means letting our good deeds, motivated by love for Christ, so shine before others that they see them and give glory to our Father in heaven. This is the essence of evangelism through lifestyle – living in such a way that others are compelled to ask about the hope that is within us.

Main Point III — Good Works, God's Glory: The Purposeful Disciple

Scripture: Matthew 5:16 "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Jesus brings these metaphors together with a direct command and a clear purpose. He doesn't say, "try to be salt" or "try to be light." He declares who we *are*, then instructs us to *act* in accordance with that identity: "let your light shine before others." This "letting" is an active choice, a conscious decision to live out our Christian distinctiveness in public. It means intentionally displaying "good works" – not as a means of earning salvation or boasting, but as a natural outflow of a redeemed heart. These "good works" are the practical embodiments of the Beatitudes and the moral purity implied by salt; they are acts of love, justice, mercy, integrity, and selflessness that stand in stark contrast to the world's self-serving behaviors. They are the tangible evidence of God's transforming power within us.

Crucially, the ultimate purpose of our shining light and visible good works is not for our own accolades or recognition. It is "so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." This is the apex of impact: lives lived so authentically and devotionally that others, witnessing the transformative power of God in us, are drawn not to us, but to God Himself. Our impact is measured not by our fame or success, but by the extent to which our lives point others to the glory of God. This shifts the focus from an egocentric pursuit of impact to a Christocentric dedication to magnifying God. To live a life of true impact is to live a life that directs all praise and worship Heavenward, compelling others to acknowledge and adore the Father.

Illustration

Consider the story of William Wilberforce, a devout Christian statesman who lived in 18th and 19th century Britain. For over two decades, Wilberforce tirelessly fought against the institution of slavery. He wasn't a charismatic revolutionary; he was a steadfast, prayerful man who felt deeply convicted by his faith to combat this great societal evil. He embodied the "salt of the earth" by preserving the moral conscience of a nation, relentlessly speaking truth to power, and exposing the corruption inherent in the slave trade. He was also "light of the world," his moral integrity and unwavering stand illuminating the darkness of injustice. Despite immense opposition, ridicule, and personal health struggles, he persevered. Just three days before his death in 1833, the Emancipation Act was passed, ending slavery in the British Empire. Wilberforce's life wasn't just about personal piety; it was about public impact, fueled by his deep faith, leading countless

others to see the principles of God's kingdom in action and ultimately sparking a global movement for justice, giving glory to God.

Practical Application

1. Identify Your Spheres of Influence: Take time this week to list the top 3-5 places or groups where you spend the most time (e.g., job, neighborhood, family, hobby group, school). Intentionally pray for opportunities to be salt and light in each of these specific contexts.

2. Practice Intentional Distinctiveness: Choose one area this week where you will deliberately act differently from societal norms, not for attention, but to reflect Christian values (e.g., forgiving someone who doesn't deserve it, speaking truth kindly in a gossiping conversation, showing radical generosity, refusing to compromise on integrity).

3. Engage in "Good Works" with Prayer: Look for one concrete "good work" you can do this week – a tangible act of service, kindness, or justice – and consciously dedicate it to God, asking Him to use it to bring glory to His name.

4. Reflect and Course-Correct: At the end of the week, honestly evaluate: "In what ways did I lose my 'saltiness' or hide my 'light'?" Confess those areas and ask God for grace to improve, remembering that our impact comes from Him working through us, not our own strength.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to you personally to be "salt of the earth" in your daily life? Can you identify one specific area where you feel called to preserve goodness or prevent decay?

2. How do you distinguish between "shining your light" (Matthew 5:16) and drawing attention to yourself? What are practical ways to ensure God receives the glory for your good works?

3. Jesus warns against salt losing its taste. What are some spiritual or cultural factors today that might cause a Christian to lose their distinctiveness or impact?

4. Think of someone you know (or a historical figure) who truly lived a life of impact for Christ. What specific qualities or actions made their life impactful, and how can you emulate them?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the profound privilege of being called Your salt and Your light in this world. Forgive us for the times we have been passive, tasteless, or hidden. Rekindle in us a passion for Your kingdom and empower us by Your Holy Spirit to live lives of bold distinctiveness, shining Your truth and preserving Your goodness wherever You place us. May our every deed and word ultimately bring glory to You, our Father in heaven. Amen.

Benediction

Now go forth and live as Christ's salt and light, preserving what is good, illuminating what is true, and bringing glory to God in all that you do, both now and forevermore.