

Living as Christians

Theme

The theme for this gathering is "Living as Christians." What do the Bible and others say about how we are to live as disciples of Christ? What instructions does Jesus give to aid us in following him? How would our world be different if we "lived" these instructions?

Life Issue
What are the challenges of living a Christ-like life today?

Community Building & Opening Question

- Share a story about light (for example, fireworks, Christmas lights, night lights, northern lights, candles, sunrises, lamps...).
- If you had to choose one person who exemplifies living as a Christian, who would it be? How do they live out their faith? (This can be a person known to you or a famous person, living or dead.)

Opening Prayer

Lord, you called your followers together in Christian community when you walked the earth. Gather us together today, so that we may grow closer to each other and closer to you. Be present with us, as we are present to one another. Guide us and renew us with your love and grace. Amen.

What does the Bible say?

Matthew 5:13-16

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Romans 12:9-18, 21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

What do others say?

Bland, tasteless, boring. Icy, slippery, dangerous. Imagine a world without salt. Dark, colorless, directionless. Imagine a world without light.

“You are the salt of the earth.” “You are the light of the world.” Those are two awesome pictures from Jesus of what our lives as Christians are to be about. Imagine a world without salt. Imagine a world without light. Imagine a world without you.

Notice that Jesus doesn't say: “You and I can be the salt of the earth if we choose to be or if we feel like getting around to it.” Jesus knows the transforming gift of God's grace in our lives. Through grace we can be what Jesus says we are meant to be. We are the salt of the earth; we are the light of the world. If there is to be any salt spread around the world, if there is any seasoning added to the world, if there is any ice melting in the world, it's up to us as Christians to be doing it. If there is going to be any light in the world, if there is going to be any illumination of how to live life with meaning, purpose, and direction, it's up to us to be that light. That's an awesome responsibility. That's an awesome privilege.

Part of our problem in reading these verses is that we are so used to having salt in abundance that we don't realize how valuable it was to people back in Jesus' time. Then, salt could be used as wages instead of coins. Salt was a preservative. Before refrigeration salted foods were needed for survival when fresh goods became scarce. Salt was used as a disinfectant to keep people healthy. Salt was used as a fertilizer to make the earth more productive. You didn't just walk into your local grocery store and pick up a box of salt for 39 cents. It had immense value. When people were told they were like salt they understood that they were very important to Jesus.

The people listening to Jesus also understood that salt needed to be spread around in order to be effective. Salt stored up in a pile wasn't useful to preserve, fertilize, give flavor, or even to melt ice. Salt must be sprinkled around to make a difference. As a picture of how to live, the use of “salt” by Jesus let people know that he expected his followers to get out in the world around them and scatter themselves about, to make the world different, to give life to others. As salt of the earth, Jesus says it is our job to work in the world, making it different than it would be without us. We are to scatter ourselves around and give life. We are to melt the ice of the world, the ice that makes the world a cold place for too many people to live in. A world that tells too many people they are not worth much, that lets people be lonely, that lets people suffer, that tells people they should fend for themselves, that tells people there is no way that the God of the universe could love them or care about them.

A world without salt, without light, will never understand what the Apostle Paul calls the marks of a true Christian in Romans 12. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering... extend hospitality to strangers... bless those who persecute you... do not repay evil with evil... if your enemies are hungry, feed them... overcome evil with good. Those are salty words. Those are actions that can shine light on a world that desperately needs it.

Salt does not exist for itself, nor do we. Jesus says our lives need to be turned outward to the world, not inward to ourselves. We are to make the world different. Imagine a world without salt. Imagine a world without light. Imagine a world without you.

Think About...

- How does the reflection clarify the meaning of the passage from Matthew 5 for you? How do you feel about being referred to as “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world”?
- How would you be different if you were fearless about letting your light shine in the world?
- What are the challenges for us in living out Romans 12?
- How can we support each other in being salt for the earth and light in a dark world?
- What do you think our society values? How does our culture encourage us to look out for ourselves? Why are results so important to us? How would these things be different for us if we truly followed Jesus?
- What’s our motive for following Christ? Is it for Christ, for others, or for ourselves?

What’s my response? *Select one or more ideas...*

God has given us many “instructions” for living as Christians. Choose something from Romans 12 to focus on this week or this month.

- Hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good.
- Love one another with mutual affection and outdo one another in showing honor.
- Be ardent in spirit.
- Serve the Lord.
- Rejoice in hope.
- Be patient in suffering.
- Persevere in prayer.
- Extend hospitality to strangers.
- Bless those who persecute you.
- Rejoice with those who rejoice or weep with those who weep.
- Live in harmony with one another.
- Do not claim to be wiser than you are.
- Take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
- Overcome evil with good.

Closing Prayer

Jesus, we thank you that you have called us to be salt for the earth and light for the world. Help us to realize what that means for each of us. We want so much to live in your light. Help us to shine brightly for each other in this group and when we leave this place, give us courage to shine like bright lights on a high hill to reflect your glory in the world. Amen.

Reflection written by Gary Medin

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