

SUNDAY - WHO AM I?

This may be the oldest question in human history. If it's not the absolute oldest, it's certainly one of them!

Have you ever asked this question? Do you still ponder it? Perhaps late at night or when no one else is around, do you stop and wonder just who you are supposed to be, and why on earth the good Lord put you here in the first place?

You can answer this question in many different ways. Each one of us is a child, a friend and now days a consumer. Many of us are parents, are or will be grandparents, uncles, cousins, aunts, etc. We are employees or employers, husbands or wives. We are servants or among the served, rich or poor, male or female, white, black, brown, red or yellow.

Who am I, and beyond that, *what* am I? Am I a painter, an artist, a writer, a teacher, a carpenter, or a salesman? Am I a farmer or a secretary or a waiter? I can be any of those things, or even several of them, but that's not who I am.

I suspect that most of what I've listed above will fail to satisfy us as we face this question. Being a friend or uncle is a role I assume as I go through life, but it isn't who I am, is it?

Am I the person that you see when we meet or work or worship together? Or am I the person I see, who questions and doubts and struggles with temptations that no one else knows anything about?

We are, in short, fallen human beings, created by the same God, inhabiting the same earth, struggling with the same sins and offered redemption by the same Savior, our Lord Jesus.

Even if I accept God's incredible offer of redemption from sin in Jesus, what does that make me? Am I a church member, a deacon, a teacher or an Elder or Pastor? More titles and roles, but somehow I know that I am more than all the things listed here on this page.

I love this question and hope that if you aren't asking it, that *you'll start right now!*

Tomorrow, we'll see what Jesus had to say about this, because as a follower of Christ it's His Word and insight that will decide this issue once and for all for me.

Normally we'll be giving you a bit more structure for your reflections. But

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Do you have something in your life today that's blocking or slowing down your being thankful to God? Or perhaps you remember a time when you bowed before God and praised His unchanging love, mercy and grace, even though your heart was filled with pain and you *didn't even want to do it!*

Can you offer up that kind of sacrifice today?

GETTIN' SALTY!

Is it crazy to be thankful when your live seems to be falling apart? Most people would say so - but in fact it's a key to mental, emotional and spiritual health. Where can you offer up that kind of praise this week?

SUNDAY - WE BRING THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess His name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.
Hebrews 13:15-16 (NIV)

If you are reading this before going to church (you *are* going, right?), I hope this will help prepare you to worship. Because part of worship is offering up to God a sacrifice of praise.

Note that the author of Hebrews says we ought to offer praise *and* good works and that *both of those things* are sacrifices that please God. Here again we see the indissoluble link that the Bible places between praising God and helping others.

When I'm being the Salty Christian Jesus died to make me, God sees my acts and attitudes as worthy, pleasing sacrifices. He is well pleased with this, and desires all His children to continually offer up such sacrifices to Him.

The word "sacrifice" implies something that carries a cost with it, often a very high cost. If praise is to be a sacrifice it must carry with it a price. This is where King David sets us a great example. *"No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them.* 2 Samuel 24:24 (NIV)

How can praise be costly? By praising God in and through my pain. By offering up praise when I'm lonely, hurting, depressed, angry, etc. Sacrificial praise is me **thanking God when I don't want to and don't even think I can!**

Praising God in the midst of great personal loss, terminal illness, divorce, disappointment, or even death itself is what God is calling all of us to do.

That's sacrificial praise!

As you worship this morning or this week - be sure to offer up that kind of praise.

REFLECTIONS

today as we get started I wanted to share with you the Poem I quoted in my sermon as some food for thought for you on this Sunday afternoon!

Who Am I?
by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Who am I? They often tell me
I stepped from my cell's confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a squire from his country-house.
Who am I? They often tell me
I used to speak to my warders
Freely and friendly and clearly,
As though it were mine to command.
Who am I? They also tell me
I bore the days of misfortune
Equally, smilingly, proudly,
Like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I myself know of myself?
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
Struggling for breath, as though hands were
compressing my throat,
Yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,
Tossing in expectation of great events,
Powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
Faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?

Who am I? This or the other?
Am I one person today and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
And before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?
Or is something within me still like a beaten army,
Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?
Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am Thine!

MONDAY - WHAT JESUS SAID

Yesterday, we asked the question, “Who am I?” Today we start looking at something Jesus said that helps us answer the question.

“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. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, 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 who is in heaven. Matthew 5:13-16 (ESV)

Today let’s focus on the very first part of what Jesus said. “*You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world...*” Sounds simple enough, but there’s something very significant here.

The way those statements are structured in the Greek throws great emphasis upon the words “**you are.**” In his commentary on Matthew, noted scholar R.C.H. Lenski translated those phrases this way: “**You alone.**”

He wrote, “you-you alone, i.e. Christ’s disciples. Lenski concludes that the Greek implies that the subject and object are interchangeable, so that we could say, “The salt of the earth are you.” [The Interpretation of Matthew, pg. 198]

Jesus is saying that *only His disciples* are the salt of the earth and the light of the world! This doesn’t apply to anyone else, no matter how well intentioned, noble, or hard working they may be.

As followers of Jesus *we and we alone* are salt and light, not because of who *we* are, but because of *Who Jesus is!* It’s His grace, His Gospel, His truth, His love, etc. shining through us that allows us to be that salt or light! Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12), and therefore only those people who have Christ in their hearts can also be that salt and light.

It’s a huge blessing to know the *we are the salt baby!* But it’s also a huge responsibility. If we don’t become salty Christians, then our friends and families and neighbors will *never be salted with God’s grace and salvation!* Now that’s something to think about!

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Who do you look to for approval? Who’s approval is important to you? We all have people who we hope will approve of what we do, and that’s find *as long* as Jesus’ approval is more important to me than anyone else’s. Is it?

GETTIN’ SALTY!

Where in my life to I need to being showing indifference to men’s praise and approval, so that instead I can focus on having God’s?

SAT.- GOD'S NOT MAN'S

"I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. John 5:41-42 (NIV)

Yet at the same time many, even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees, they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God. John 12:42-43 (NIV)

The two passages above set up a great contrast and allow us to make an important comparison. Let's compare Jesus with many of those who heard him.

Jesus: He lived to give His Father glory, He sought no praise from man, but from God alone. He was fearless in standing up for what He believed, and He never let fear stop him from doing the right thing. In short, Jesus is the perfect example of living for an audience of One!

His Hearers: They lived to please others, they craved the praise and approval of human leaders, and at the same time, feared their wrath and the consequences that would befall them if they followed their hearts and gave their lives to Jesus.

Obviously, we ought to follow and emulate Jesus, not His hearers!

So, what's this got to do with being thankful? A lot, actually. We need to have the strength to give thanks to God when others won't. We need to remain joyful, praise-filled believers even when those around us scoff or mock us as being "unrealistic" or "foolish."

Continually giving thanks to God is the most realistic mindset possible because God is the ultimate reality. What He says is true regardless of how things appear to be and regardless of what the "experts" say. Remember, an expert is only a drip under pressure - so choose Jesus, not the so-called and often wrong experts!

We must learn to crave God's approval and live for it, not anyone else's. Instead of worrying about what people think, let's be concerned with pleasing God.

God is pleased with our continual praise, so let's offer that up and bask in the pleasure of our Heavenly Father's love.

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

What do you think about you and you alone being the light of the world? Has that ever occurred to you before?

Spend some time in prayer today, asking Jesus to help you grasp that He has made you a vital part of His plan to save the world! Journal your thoughts below.

GETTIN' SALTY!

Now that I know I and all my Christian brothers and sisters are the salt of the earth, and that we're the only ones who are, I'd better get busy being the Salty Soul Jesus wants me to be! How can I do it?

TUESDAY - THERE IS NO TRY

Do, or do not. There is no 'try.' - Yoda (Fictional Star Wars Thing/Dude)

I know it seems odd to start a daily devotional by quoting Yoda, and in fact, *it is odd!* But when I thought about our topic today I couldn't help but think of the old guy, because he actually had something partially right! And just what might that be?

Jesus didn't tell us to "try" to be salt and light, He said we "are" salt and light!

A universe of difference lives in the space between those two little words. A difference that is often missed by those who read the words of Jesus.

For years, I was taught that I ought to be a salty Christian and needed to try and do just that. When I read the Sermon on the Mount, that's what I thought Jesus was saying, and so did just about everyone else in the youth group.

We were all wrong, proving that misery may love company but seldom learns anything from it.

I learned the difference as I began to study the Sermon on the Mount in depth. Lots of good books pointed out to me that I had failed to really engage the text. I skimmed over it, taking for granted that what everyone told me was an accurate representation of what Jesus said.

I assumed I knew what Jesus said, and you know what that made me, don't you?

In fact, Jesus is saying two things here:

1) When you come to Christ you become the salt of the earth!

That's who and what I am, whether I believe it, accept it, like it, or want it or not! The real truth is that only believers can bring to the world what they desperately need, but seldom want.

2) Because I am Salt - I ought to act like it! I don't become salt by working very hard and finally attaining a level of behavior that meets Christ's high standards! Thank God, as I could never do that!

Instead **I am** salt, and because this is true, if I follow Jesus and let His Spirit empower me, salty actions will naturally follow.

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

How much of my serving God as a Salty Christian is based on feeling, and how much on emotion? Am I willing to let God challenge me to highest unknown in my spiritual life?

Practicing regular praise and thanksgiving is a great place to start. Write about how thankful you are below.

GETTIN' SALTY!

Do you give thanks every day? Are you able to thank God no matter what you are going through? How can you help instill this discipline of thankfulness in your life this week?

FRIDAY - ALWAYS GIVE THANKS!

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)

As flowers always wear their own colors and give forth their own fragrance every day alike, so should Christians maintain their character at all times and under all circumstances. - Henry Ward Beecher

If you can read the Bible and not be challenged then you are either not reading it at all or don't understand what you are reading! To tell someone to be joyful or to give thanks often is one thing. To command us to *always* be joyful and to give thanks in *all circumstances*, well, that's something else again!

That kind of consistent, disciplined, discipleship is beyond most of us. To be thankful when I *feel it* or at certain designated times and places is something most of us could do. But to *always be thankful*? That's a daunting challenge if ever there was one.

I believe that's exactly what God intended it to be! Far too often, we say we're Salty Christians when in reality we're Spiritual Slackers! We're lazy, living by emotions, instead of living by faith as God calls us to do!

Christians have often praised that type of behavior. Remember the old hymn *Every Time I Feel The Spirit*? "Every time I feel the Spirit, moving in my heart I will pray."

What happens if I *don't feel Him*? Is it okay then not pray to or praise Him? **Not hardly!**

The Bible *never* tells us to step out in faith or obey God or practice our spiritual disciplines *when we feel like it!* **Never.** This is in part because we live by faith, and in part because when we obey without an emotional prompt, our obedience becomes a true sacrifice and a real test of our obedience.

So God's standard is clear - *He wants us to always be thankful!* That's a huge challenge and not possible to even approach, much less meet, without His Grace and Spirit to help us. But we have those, and each other, so let's go for it! We can start by giving thanks that we are called to always be thankful - strange as that may sound!

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

How does it make you feel to discover that if you are a believer in Christ then you are the salt of the earth? It might please you, or make you feel important. On the other hand, it could make you feel very uncomfortable having that kind of responsibility dumped upon you when you didn't even ask for it!

Guess what? How you feel *really doesn't matter!* What does matter is that this is what Jesus said - *it's true regardless of whatever our opinions might be!*

Spend some time in prayer asking God to help you accept your salty status, and then write about it below.

GETTIN' SALTY!

Okay - since I am the salt of the earth, then I know for sure Jesus wants me to live that out in every area of my life! How can I do that today or this week>

WEDNESDAY - PRESERVATION

Salt is used for many different things today, just as it always has throughout history.

One of the main uses of salt in Bible times, and now, is to use it as a preservative. You have to remember that in Jesus day, they had no refrigeration at all. And unlike cooler northern climes people in the holy lands seldom experienced temperatures cool enough to help preserve meat and other perishable items.

So they preserved it by using salt. Fish and lamb would be heavily salted to help make it last as long as possible. I know that raises health issues for many of us, in fact, I think my blood pressure went up a few points just typing the second sentence of this paragraph!

Today, salt is used much the same way, which is why you don't really need to add salt to anything because there's enough sodium in most of the food you eat to more than meet your daily requirements.

Too bad the same can't be said about our culture today.

Believers are to be active preservatives in whatever culture they find themselves. But what are we supposed to be preserving? Well, not our old cultural norms, that's for sure! There are many traditions that are, in fact unbiblical, and harmful to the lives and souls of people who subscribe to them.

Instead, we are to be preserving God's standards and the Gospel of Jesus! Which often means a Salty Christian will be seen as a radical change agent, living in such a way that will seem threatening to those who wish to continue to pollute the spiritual and moral atmosphere.

Salty Christians promote the preservation of honestly by *being* honest. We help preserve compassion by being compassionate. For example, if we want to help preserve the biblical understanding of what marriage is, then we'll be working hard to build and maintain quality marriages that reflect to all who see them the glory of one man and one woman becoming one flesh in the bond of marriage.

Of course, I can't do that if I haven't preserved Christ as King of my life. This is easier said than done, because our fallen world is constantly acting as a corrosive agent to our lives, relationships and our very souls. So, like most things, preservation begins at home, deep in my heart.

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Do you feel blessed? It doesn't really matter you know. You *are* blessed and that's the bottom line, because God says so! If you aren't too stuffed to write, ponder your blessed state below.

GETTIN' SALTY!

How can I use my blessings to be a more Salty Christian today and for the rest of this week? How does giving thanks make me a better follower of Jesus?

THUR. - GOD'S INCREDIBLE BLESSINGS

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.
Ephesians 1:3 (NIV)

“Not what we say about our blessings, but how we use them, is the true measure of our thanksgiving.” - W. T. Purkiser

The first time I engaged today's text was in Watchman Nee's classic book, "*Sit, Walk, Stand*," which is a simple study of some of the themes of Ephesians.

Today, some 40 years later, I'm still grappling with what Paul said here. One thing you have to admire about Paul - he knew how to be bold! This has to be one of the boldest things ever said by anyone!

It's bold because Paul isn't saying God will give us all His blessings at some indefinite future date. No, he's saying God *has already* given us *every spiritual blessing!* According to Paul, we've already got it all.

So where are they?

In the heavenly realms. That means they have your or my name on them, but they aren't visible down here yet. We own them, but don't experience them until we become mature enough in Christ to grasp what we've got and to begin to experience them by faith.

I'm not asking you if you *feel* blessed. I'm telling you that, according to the Bible, *you are blessed!*

That's something we can give thanks for no matter how bad things may be in your life. If you are a believer, you've been blessed with every spiritual blessing! Not a few, not some, not just the basic ones, but *all* of them!

Whooo Hoooo - thank you Jesus!

He died on the cross and paid the price for me to have them. Now I must begin to grow up into spiritual maturity so I can experience them in my every day life! Take a moment today to give thanks for God's incredible blessings - and that they are all yours!

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Have you taken an inventory lately of where you need some preservation in your own life? Have you asked God where you can best be a preservative in your life right now?

Spend some time in prayer, asking God to guide you into a purer life and a more active agent of preservation everywhere you go.

GETTIN' SALTY!

What can I do today or this week to help preserve God's standards in my life and the lives of those I love?

THURSDAY - FLAVORS

This is what salt is best known for - making food taste better. Adding some zip to whatever it is you are eating! (There goes my blood pressure again!!)

Yesterday, I talked about how ancient Israel had no refrigeration of any kind, and used salt to preserve food. But they also used it to flavor their food, as people pretty much always have.

But what does that mean to you and me today? Should I carry around a shaker of salt and sprinkle everyone's food? Of course not (especially mine - *no salt!!*).

Instead, we should live in such a way that we are open to exciting possibilities that add flavor and zest to our lives, and always be on the look out to add some of that zip to the lives of others.

Salty Christians are anything but boring! And why not? Look at the lives of Jesus, Paul or Peter, see any boredom there? Not hardly! They were boldly following God's call on their lives, willing to go anywhere, say whatever needed to be said, and sometimes got run out of town as a result!

Nothing like being lowered over the city wall in a basket to add some flavor to your life!

Salty Christians ought to be people who seek out risk, refuse to play it safe, and look to the future with a sense of expectancy when they think of what God might do in their lives.

How different would we impact on the culture if we were that way? But we aren't. "Look how these Christians love one another," said the ancient Romans of the church. What does the world say about us today?

Churches are known as dull, dry, boring places where everyone bows before the altar of "Play It Safe" three times daily! We plod along, letting the fear of running out of money or displeasing people, shape and form our ministries and churches. **That's a disgrace - and about as far from salty as you can get!**

Tomorrow, we'll look at what happens to us when we lose our saltiness, today let's close with a powerful question: **Am I adding flavor to my life and the lives of others like Jesus asked of me?**

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Is there anything greater than being used by God? How has God used you in the past? Where is He using you now? What new areas to you think He might want to use you in the future?

GETTIN' SALTY!

What can I give to God this week that He can use to make an eternal difference in other people's lives? Who can I invite to church? Who can I reach out to and help meet a need?

WED. - GOD USES WHAT I GIVE!

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! 2 Corinthians 9:12-15 (NIV)

The dictionary defines need as “a requirement, necessary duty, or obligation.” Given that definition answer this question: **What does God need?**

Answer: Nothing (nada, zero, zip, zilch, goose egg).

Now imagine this - the eternal, self-sufficient God not only allows me, but invites me to *give to Him* and then turns around and *uses my gifts to help others!*

Wow! Now there's something to be thankful for! God lets me in on blessing and helping others! He allows stubborn, sinful, old me into His work in the hearts and lives of others.

When I give God my time or my talents or my treasure, He takes it and uses it to build His Kingdom! If you stop for a moment and think about it your mind will boggle! My puny talents, my limited time, and my few dollars and treasure can *and will* be used to make an eternal difference in the lives of others.

But only when I give them!

This can be a great motivator to give more of my time, talent and treasure for God to use. When I realize that little, old me can be used by God to make a difference that will last beyond time and into eternity, what else can I do but open my heart and give back to God what He's given me in the first place?

So today, let's stop and give thanks to God that He deigns to allow us to bring our imperfect gifts and ministries into His Kingdom, and that somehow, by His grace and wisdom, our imperfections will result in perfection when we stand with Him in Heaven!

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Time to spend some time reflecting and writing in response to a two simple questions: **Am I being salty and adding flavor to my own life and the lives of those around me? Why or why not?**

GETTIN' SALTY!

What can I start doing **today** to starting adding flavor to my life? What do I need to **stop** doing, what's sapping my zest for living?

FRIDAY - UNDER FOOT

"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. Matthew 5:13 (NIV)

Jesus knew what was going to happen with His followers. He well knew that we would stumble, fall and lose that salty tang that should characterize His followers.

In case you are wondering, ancient salt did lose its saltiness because it was impure. Pure salt can't actually degrade, but when it's impure it can be changed and become unpalatable.

Jesus says when that happens, the only thing you can do is throw it out and walk on it. That's exactly what they did in ancient times, and this is the custom that Jesus refers to in this passage.

What does it mean? Lenski says it well when he writes: "a saltless and powerless Christianity makes more unbelievers than all the books of infidels that were ever written." [The Interpretation of Matthew, pg. 201]

When we lose our salt, we lose the distinctiveness that makes our faith attractive to unbelievers. Our witness to the world doesn't just suffer, it nearly disappears. So instead of the world remarking on how we love and live, it sees dull, boring hypocrites who say one thing but do another.

I think that sums up the sad state of American Christianity pretty well, doesn't it?

So what do we do? Well, I've got good news! Unlike ancient salt, we *can be renewed!* Jesus can do anything, even renew a boring follower of Christ!

*"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? **Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.**" Mark 9:50 (NIV)*

Have salt in yourself! We need to let Jesus rekindle our passion, push us to face and overcome our fears, and choose to be bold again! Most of us were much bolder believers at one time. Let's find that salt within ourselves and become bold believers once again!

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Can you think of a time or times when God's comfort got you through a terrible experience? Did you take the time to express your thanks to God then? Are you continuing to be thankful now?

Write about it below:

GETTIN' SALTY!

Who do I know who needs God's comfort? What have I learned from God that I can pass on to them? How can I express God's love to them in a helpful way?

TUE. - GOD'S COMFORT

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV)

God does not comfort us to make us comfortable only, but to make us comforters. - Dr. J. H. Jowett

I'm fairly confident that most believers can point to at least one time when they survived a difficult time because of God's comfort alone. Personally, I can think of several times like that in my life.

So we need to give thanks to God for His care and comfort! We should be ever thankful to God for all He has done for us.

But sometimes, we are afraid to take our pain and difficulties to God. R.A.Torrey summed up why this happens. "We sometimes fear to bring our troubles to God, because they must seem small to Him who sitteth on the circle of the earth. But if they are large enough to vex and endanger our welfare, they are large enough to touch His heart of love. For love does not measure by a merchant's scales, not with a surveyor's chain". - R. A. Torrey

Giving thanks for comfort is giving thanks to God for His amazing love. God's love isn't concerned with the bottom line, He never worries about what He'll get out of it, and He never grows weary over our failures and foibles.

This fact alone ought to result in a Hallelujah Chorus of praise and worship bursting spontaneously from our souls! Thanksgiving should spring from the heart of the believer who is beginning to grasp just how amazing the God we serve truly is.

We give thanks to Him but not for His comfort alone. As Paul and Dr. Jowett remind us, God has a purpose in *everything*. And His purpose in comforting us isn't just to make us feel good. God is always pushing us to move beyond our comfort and to live outside ourselves.

We are comforted so that we in turn can be comforters. That's how we can be Salt 'N Light - God's comfort continually renews and enables us to share the healing love of Jesus with everyone around us.

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Take some time to reflect on the state of your saltiness. Have you become a spiritually dull, play-it-safe follower of Christ? How did that happen? What fears are sapping your life of that salty zest that Christ wants in your life?

GETTIN' SALTY!

So where do I begin? How will I start right now, **today**, to find that salt in myself and start being salty again? Write down one or two things to do today!

SATURDAY - SACRIFICE

Did you know that salt played an important role in the sacrifices in the Law of Moses? Well it did, which tells us one more thing about salt.

You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt. Leviticus 2:13 (ESV)

“The salt of the sacrifice is called the salt of the covenant, because in common life salt was the symbol of covenant; treaties being concluded and rendered firm and inviolable, according to a well-known custom of the ancient Greeks... As a covenant of this kind was called a "covenant of salt," equivalent to an indissoluble covenant.” —Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament

Salt was a part of all the sacrifices because it symbolized the Covenant that God made with Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai. Salt symbolically purified and strengthened the sacrifice.

To be a Salty Christian I have to be willing to make whatever sacrifices are required of me as well. Jesus said whoever would save his life must lose it. We are called to live lives of service to God first and others second, with ourselves firmly in third place!

That's not easy.

It's great to talk about adding zest to life and preserving God's standards. But it's another thing to understand that this can only be done through sacrifice. I have to sacrifice clinging to my fears and comfort and security if I am to live the life of the Salty Christian.

Am I willing to let go of my ego? Am I willing to let go of what the culture tells me is proper or Politically Correct, and embrace what God says as right? Am I willing to be laughed at, rejected, and even hated, because I refuse to keep my faith within my private life as so many are demanding today?

All that, and a whole lot more that I don't have the space or time to mention, require sacrifice to do. Being a Salty Christian isn't easy or popular or comfortable.

But it is what Jesus calls us to do, and it is what make life worth living!

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

How often does the way I live, how I act and what I say, cause people to give praise to God? How would I have to change to make this happen more often?

GETTIN' SALTY!

During this Thanksgiving week what can I do that might help others see how much Jesus loves them, and cause them to give praise to God?

MON. - SNL = PRAISE TO GOD!

*In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and **praise your Father in heaven.***
Matthew 5:16 (NIV)

The Scriptures constantly command us to be thankful people who continually give thanks to God. So we are focusing on how being thankful is an integral part of being Salt 'N Light.

Today, I want us to think about the last part of what Jesus said in the quote above. I think we often miss what He actually said. He did not say that when we act as Salt or Light in our community, they'd be impressed and say good things about us.

When people talk about how great their church is, they are not fulfilling these words of Jesus. Often you'll hear people talk about a Christian who's really being Salt or Light to them, and they praise them as true, authentic believers. Again, that's *not* what Jesus said!

Jesus said that our acts and attitudes will be so unique and so outstanding they'll cause unbelievers to **give praise to God!** Now why on earth would they do that?

Because they'll realize that only God could have changed us and empowered us to act the way we do. They'll see the supernatural element clearly, because it's the only real, reasonable way to explain why and how we are behaving!

Now that's really something!

That should be our goal, not to be well thought of ourselves, but to be *the best possible advertisement for how good God is!* This should be a burning passion in the heart and mind of everyone who wants to be a Salty Christian.

When people see us being Salt 'N Light, they should see Christ in and through us. This gives more depth to those well-known words of the Apostle Paul: *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.* Philippians 1:21 (NIV)

Let's make sure the praise goes where it belongs - *to God!*

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Sacrifice. Not a popular word today, if it ever has been. Where in my life is sacrifice called for? What do I need to let go of? How is my lack of sacrifice holding my spiritual growth back?

GETTIN' SALTY!

What can I do today to begin the process of sacrifice in my life? What need to be changed **today?**

PRAY, PRAY, PRAY!

PLEASE KEEP PRAYING FOR GOD TO USE SALT & LIGHT TO BLESS OUR CHURCH AND OUT COMMUNITY!

PLEASE PRAY FOR OUR LEADERSHIP THAT THEY WILL BE GIVEN INSIGHT INTO WHAT GOD WANTS CCR TO DO NEXT.

PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER THAT EACH OF US CAN BECOME AS SALTY AND AS BRIGHT AS POSSIBLE TO BRING THE GOSPEL OF JESUS TO THE WORLD AND MAKE DISCIPLES!



Week

Four

PRAY, PRAY, PRAY!

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Week Two

MONDAY - WHO'S ON 1ST, PT. 1

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.
Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.... Revelation 2:4-5 (NIV)

I'm going to do things a little backwards and take a phrase from the second part of the verse today, and then tomorrow look at the phrase that directly proceeds it.

Jesus says that believers need to remember where we were before we fell, and then turn around (repent) and get back up there! The Greek implies we need to this *at once!*

Can you remember a time when you were closer to God than you are right now? If you are frustrated in your faith I want you to spend some time today thinking back on what you once had. Was there a time when your faith was producing concrete results in your life? When the Spirit's leading was real and fellowship with God and His children sweet?

Then, in the immortal words of Lennon & McCartney, "*Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.*"

I believe that this is one of the things God is doing here at CCR right now. SNL is designed to get us revived and excited about Jesus! He wants to lift us back up to where we once were.

But that's only the beginning! We cannot idolize our past. I know far too many Christians who are constantly bemoaning some spiritual golden age and how they wish they could be there again.

Well forget it! We are only getting back to where we were to use that place as a launching pad for the *greater things* God wants to do in our lives!

The reason it's important to remember where you came from is not to idolize it or to think that's all you'll ever be able to achieve. Instead, it's to remind you that what God once did in your life, He can do again!

So lift up your eyes to the hills and see them as challenges to be met with a renewed faith in Jesus! God has called all of us Salt 'N Light, and now is the time to jump out there, to take some risks for Jesus, and to show our community Who really does hold first place in our individual lives and in the life of this church!

JESUS!

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Can I take it? Can I really handle the truth?

I had better be able to because this is a big part of the Spirit's ministry in my life. He wants to reveal to me the truth of who and what I really am, so that I'll be set free from my delusions about myself and be able to deal with what's real.

Who do you think you really are?

GETTIN' SALTY!

How can I prepare myself to accept the truth and not be discouraged by it? What can I do today and the rest of this week to grow my character to be more like Christ's?

SUNDAY - THE BIG REVEAL

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Luke 14:34-35 (NIV)

"Character, in the long run, is the decisive factor in the life of an individual and of nations alike."
— Theodore Roosevelt

Flavoring my life with grace is important because, in the final analysis, it reveals just who and what I am. When you strip away everything from a man or woman what do you have left?

Their character, that's what.

If I lose my character, then as Jesus said in the lead quote, like savorless salt, I'm in big trouble! I'm useless and only good for the trash pile! I don't mean the recycle bin, either - you can't recycle savorless salt. It's completely worthless and irredeemable, by any human means.

Of course, there's always hope in Christ. Even if I abandon my character, I can have my life and soul rebuilt by the grace of God!

Our task as salty Christians is to make sure we don't just retain our character, but allow it to be changed every day to become more like the character of Christ. We salt other people's lives in order to help grow their character to become more Christ-like.

The Holy Spirit is constantly chipping away at all the things that encrust our souls so that our real character can be revealed. Once the truth is revealed, we can deal with it. When we find ourselves on the right track, it calls for further growth and encouragement.

However, when sin or self is revealed, those soul-deep character wounds can be healed through the ministry of the Holy Spirit as He seeks to grow His fruit in our lives. The Fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) is nothing less than the character of Christ. As this fruit grows within us, our character takes on the likeness of Christ.

So how's your character today? As you worship this morning, pray that the Spirit will do a big reveal to you about what your character is really like, so that healing, change, and growth can begin.

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

It's helpful to know where you've been before you try and figure out where you're going. So take a few minutes today and obey Jesus, remember where you've come from. Think back on it and recall some of the highlights here.

GETTIN' SALTY!

Based on what you recalled above, what kind of things do you expect to see God do in your live now? What can you pray for and work towards happening *this week*?

TUESDAY - WHO'S ON 1ST? PT. 2

Yet I hold this against you: You have **forsaken your first love**. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. Revelation 2:4-5 (NIV)

In many ways, the idea of knowing who or what your first love is, and then pursuing, building, and protecting that love is what most of our life is all about.

It's fascinating to me that Jesus doesn't say exactly what that first love was, He just says that they've forsaken it. He assumes they know exactly what it is, calls them to think back to where they were at one time, and to turn around and get back up there!

I think that for many modern people there isn't a who in first place at all. Instead we have a what. For some, it's a physical thing, like a car or how they look. For others, it's how well they fit into whatever group is important to them. I believe that, for many Americans, it is a concept called success. We are driven to succeed and to sacrifice time, money, energy, and even our families and health to achieve success, without ever being able to define what that first love is in the first place!

All of that is so sad from a Biblical perspective. It's such an incredible waste of the one life, many talents, and numerous opportunities God has given us.

It's clear that God has always wanted to be first in the lives of His people. *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment.* Matthew 22:37-38 (NIV)

Who's on first? According to Jesus, it has to be Him; otherwise, we'll never find the salt within us that's so necessary to living the life He has called us to live.

Not doctrine, not being praised for my ministry, not even succeeding in growing my ministry should be my first love. **The most important thing in my life must be knowing and loving Jesus!** Everything else that's good and Godly can then flow from that.

So today, I need to honestly answer one short question: **Who's on first?**

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Spend some time today reflecting if you've gotten carried away with what over how. Where do you need to address this in your life? Are you being salt at work, at home, in your ministry? Think about it, then write about it.

GETTIN' SALTY!

So what exactly do I need to change about how I do what I do? Write down some *specific traits*, and then make a plan to work on them!

SAT.- HOW IS GREATER THAN WHAT

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.
1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)

Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted. - Albert Einstein

When American Christians approach ministry, we often run smack-dab into a facet of our culture that leads us into trouble. We are a bottom line culture. Our businesses tend to focus very tightly on how much is produced, how fast are things done, and, of course, how much money was made.

This focus on the bottom line can be very helpful. It can keep us from pouring ourselves and our resources into ministries that are fruitless wastes of time.

But focus can easily mutate into obsession, and that's never good. Being obsessed with anything throws us off balance and makes some *thing* to replace Christ in the center of our hearts. That's when our pursuit of doing good produces bad things because we've allowed our culture to drive us, instead of God and His purposes.

Far be it from me to discourage anyone from doing anything good. But *how* you carry out your service to God is *just as important* as what you do for Him. Finding God's will, or His plan for my life, is great, but if I don't serve God in love and through the power of His Spirit, then all my work is in vain.

We need to do something very countercultural, and that is to just *stop!* Stop doing, stop working and stop producing. We need to take a little time to start praying, start reflecting, and start consulting with others wiser than we are, to make sure *how we're doing what we're doing* is consistent with the Spirit and grace of God.

You can't always see a bad attitude or a carnal spirit, but they are just as real as anything you can touch. What really counts in serving God is what can't be easily counted. In the end, God alone will make that call.

It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. 1 Corinthians 3:13b (NIV)

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Does that question make me uncomfortable? Or perhaps a better way to phrase that would be HOW uncomfortable does that question make me?

Is my faith Jesus centered or doctrine centered? Is Jesus the leaders of my life, or is culture - even *church culture* - taking His place? Write about it below:

GETTIN' SALTY!

If Jesus took first place in my life, how would that change me? Would I stop doing some things and start doing others? Would I do them differently? What can I do today to help Jesus take first place on the throne of my life - where He belongs?

WED. - BACK TO THE FUTURE?

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:20-21 (NIV)

What's your greatest treasure? I'm not talking about an heirloom that's been handed down through your family for generations. I'm not even talking about your IRA or retirement savings.

I'm asking about what you value most from day to day in your life. What's most important? Of what do you wish you had more? For most of us, I think we'd either say money or time. Today I want us to think about our time.

We all know everyone has the same amount of time everyday, yet some people seem to get more done than others. An entire industry has grown up around teaching us to be as efficient as possible, so we can get the most done in the least amount of time.

And we still don't seem to have enough time to go around. Something or someone always ends up being shorted as we continue to cram more and more commitments into the same amount of time.

Somehow God seems to come out on the short end of the stick all the time. We do this because Jesus isn't always on first, and we think this is necessary to do everything we have to do. But in the end, we are robbing our future to pay for our obsession with being busy in the present.

God has a future planned for all of us, but we won't see it if we won't give Him our time. Not some of it or even most of it, **but all of it!** When I make Jesus Lord of my time and appointment calendar what happens?

My future becomes sure when I sacrifice my time. God gives it back a hundredfold, and I find the true fulfillment that comes only through Christ alone!

Jesus first, and *everything else second*, ought to be how we order our lives. I know that, but lose track of it nearly everyday! *Oh Lord, help me to surrender control of my time and schedule to You. Use me today Lord - Amen!*

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

So how's your mouth? Most of us could do a little bit better in this area, couldn't we? Sometimes I say things I shouldn't, and other times I refrain from saying what needs to be said.

Which one is your biggest problem? Not speaking or speaking the wrong words?

GETTIN' SALTY!

Write down a few names below, and what kind of graceful words you need to speak to them today or this week.

FRIDAY - WATCH YOUR MOUTH!

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:6 (NIV)

“Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.” - Aeschylus (524-456 BC)

Paul tells us that our speech must be seasoned with the salt of God’s grace. He says doing this will help us know how to answer people who ask questions about what Christianity is about.

Paul has something far greater than being nice or PC in mind. He’s less worried about hurting people’s feelings and more focused on clearly communicating the Good News to as many people as possible.

We must watch our mouths, not in an attempt to please everyone, but to make sure what we say is pleasing to God, and helping others grow closer to Him.

Yesterday we talked about how our actions need to be focused on being Christ-like. Today, it’s time to look at our mouths.

The power of the tongue is amazing. James tells us that as does our own experience. I’ve been hurt by words much more often than I’ve been hurt physically.

And the pain from those stinging words often lasts a lot longer too; sometimes, it lasts a lifetime. I know people in their 60’s or older who can still recall the stinging words spoken to them by their parents or siblings 50 or more years ago.

That’s the power of words.

Which is why I quoted old Aeschylus above. He’s known as the father of tragedy, which explains that cheerful quote! But he has an important point. God’s grace isn’t always happiness and light! Often it leads us to pain and suffering. His free gift of salvation calls all of us into a life of following Jesus and into suffering as He suffered.

Speaking words of Grace means I’ll be speaking the truth in love, not just words that make people feel good. Again, just like Jesus!

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

There’s never enough time - heck you are probably rushing through this right now - if you’re even reading it at all! When do I get to slow down? How can I really turn my time (which means my life doesn’t it?) over to Jesus? Write about below:

GETTIN’ SALTY!

List a couple of things you need to change, or ways you can use your time differently this week. How would Jesus schedule me life? Take a few first steps below.

THUR. - WHERE'S MY TREASURE?

"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." Matthew 6:24 (NIV)

Since we talked about time as your treasure yesterday, you may have thought you'd escape this one - *come on* - you should know me better than that!

For Jesus to be first in my life in any kind of real, practical way, He has to impact what I do with my money and resources - what I'm calling my treasure.

Almost all American Christians have two things in common: 1) We are rich compared to almost everyone else in the world. 2) We are in debt or are having trouble making ends meet.

How does it feel to be rich and financially stressed at the same time? Weird, huh?

We are both, and the answer to both issues is Jesus. Seriously.

If we are following Christ, He will enable us to make much wiser decisions about how to spend and save our money than we would make otherwise. He'll also help us to develop a radically new view of Missions and the Third World.

American Christians can use their treasure to help the poor both here and around the world, to spread the Gospel, to meet needs and a whole lot more. We can do all that and still have plenty left to enjoy life with if we'll make sure Jesus comes first in our finances.

If everyone in the average church tithed (gave 10% of their income) that church would be far richer and ministry and missions would explode! The impact would simply be revolutionary.

A revolution brought about by my simple decision to put Jesus first, make 10% my *minimum gift to Him*, and live by faith. Really, that's all it takes.

Putting Jesus first in my finances is an act of faith. So am I ready to live by faith today?

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

How does it make you feel to be called a leader? Most people get real uncomfortable when that title is attached to them. But that's what you are - you are either leading people towards Christ or away from Him. Reflect on this reality of the Christian life.

GETTIN' SALTY!

Who, me, lead? Who in my life needs to be lead to Christ? Am I praying for them to be saved, inviting them to church and small group? Sharing the reality of Christ in my own life with them? Write their names down below and start praying for God to move you into leadership mode with them *today!*

THUR. - OH YES YOU ARE!

So select some wise, understanding, and seasoned men from your tribes, and I will commission them as your leaders."
Deuteronomy 1:13 (MSG)

Most of the people who read this would not pick the word leader to describe themselves. If you want to see people run, just call them leaders! They'll come up with all kind of great excuses too!

But here's the unpleasant truth - *every believer is a leader*. Like it or not, believe or not, it's true.

You may not be a leader of a group or be an Elder or anything like that, but that doesn't mean you aren't a leader. We need to shed our stereo typical ideas of what a leader is to see this part of what God wants to do with our lives.

What is a leader anyway? If you are just *one step ahead* of someone else - *you are a leader!* That means that *every Christian* is in a leadership position when it comes to every unsaved person in their lives. You aren't perfect, you probably don't have the answers to all the questions you are asked, and you may not be all that far advanced in your faith at all.

None of that matters one bit! The real truth is you are either leading people towards Christ or away from them. Which is it going to be?

If you are saved, you can tell your friends that Jesus died to forgive them, that He loves them with an undying love, and that they ought to follow you in following Jesus! But you'll have to do more than just *tell* them that if you are going to be true to your Salty nature. You'll be *showing them that as well!*

So today I'm challenging you to change both your worldview and your view of yourself, as well. God has saved you to use you, and He can't use you to lead others to Christ or to a deeper walk with Him if you refuse to accept your leadership position!

Most of you will probably never serve on a board, or in some formal leadership position, but that doesn't mean you aren't a leader. By the grace of God, *you have been called into leadership!* Will you accept that call today?

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

It's been said that money makes the world go round. It just might. For the believer in Jesus though it's not a primary motivator or mover. It is a sign and a symptom of whether I'm living by faith or not, and how healthy my faith life is. So how healthy am I in this area today?

GETTIN' SALTY!

Do I even know where my money goes every week? How can I be more Christ honoring in how I spend my money and with the causes I support? What can I do this week to begin the process of transforming my finances the way Jesus wants me too?

FRIDAY - ON LOAN FROM GOD?

"With talent on loan from God." - Rush Limbaugh

If I'm going to be the Salty Christian that Jesus says I am, then it's obvious I must use the gifts and talents I've been given. And it's important to remember that whatever my abilities may be, they are a gift from God.

"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' Matthew 25:19-21 (NIV)

Jesus makes a couple of things very clear here:

1) I've been given gifts from God. These include, but aren't limited to, my natural talents and spiritual gifts. These come straight from God. I can't boast about it if I can sing well, or am a natural artist, mechanic, etc., because those things come straight from God.

2) God expects me to use what He's given me. I haven't been given these things just to impress others or to please myself. No, they've been given to me to help others and bring glory to God! *All of them are to be used for God's Glory!* Even (and maybe especially) the "unspiritual" ones. An ability to cook or draw or fix things is just as much a gift from God as preaching or teaching.

3) God will hold me accountable for what I do with what He's given me. Make no mistake about it, what you've got is only yours for this life, in the end the real Owner will show up and *demand* an accounting. If you've buried your abilities out of fear or doubt like the man in this story, you will suffer loss.

Being a Salty Christian is all about letting God use all of me to bless as many people as possible! So I can smile and love and forgive and use my abilities in such a way that God can sprinkle it over everyone around me, bringing blessing and help and hope into their lives.

And remember - He's not *suggesting* that - He's *commanding* it!

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Life is full of the unexpected. We all love it when good things happen unexpectedly. We call those blessings! But we're not so thrilled when bad things happen just the same way. We call those many things, most of which I can't mention here!

So how are you at handling the unexpected difficulties that come your way?

GETTIN' SALTY!

What character qualities do you need more of in your life to handle things in a more Christ-like way? What's stopping you from being as cool as a cucumber in all of life's hassles?

WED. - CUCUMBER CHRISTIANITY

"I ... cool as a cucumber could see the rest of womankind."
John Gay's Poems, New Song on New Similies, 1732.

where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." Everyone will be salted with fire. Mark 9:48 (NIV)

This verse from Mark is very enigmatic, and has at least 15 different explanations for it. So if you don't like my take on it, you've got 14 more to choose from - enjoy!

What struck me as I looked at this verse is that everyone is salted with fire. If fire represents difficulty, pain, or hard times, then I think everyone would agree that everybody gets their fair share of fire. Some people seem to get more than their fair share.

The issue isn't what you get, it's what you do with it. If I'm a Salty Christian, then I'm going to deal with all these hard times by maintaining my cool and being Christ-like in the midst of turmoil. That's the kind of salt every life needs - the ability to not lose your head when everyone around you is losing theirs!

Jesus certainly modeled that kind of behavior. Remember when He walked on the water? Everyone freaked out but Him! The night He was betrayed and arrested all the Apostles freaked out and fled in terror, but Jesus remained as calm as the proverbial cucumber.

I don't know about you, but I can use a lot more of that kind of salt!

It not only does me good, but everyone around me as well. Emotional states are catching. Fear can spread through a group in mere moments, turning a calm crowd into a panicked mob just like that! Likewise, courage can also touch all those around it, calming their fears, steeling their courage, and helping them to do whatever it is that needs doing.

That's what leaders do in combat situations when they stand up in the face of enemy fire and cry, "Follow me!" That's what we are called upon to do as well. Often you don't have to say a thing, just do what needs doing with the cool courage that comes from knowing God is in control, and you are right in the palm of His almighty hand.

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Studies show that almost everyone underestimates the number of abilities they possess. If asked many people will lay claim to one or two talents or gifts, when in fact *everyone has hundreds of them!*

What gifts or abilities do you possess that you've over looked? Ask some friends, do some soul searching, and list them below!

GETTIN' SALTY!

How can I let God use me this week to be a blessing to someone else? Write down some people you'd know need some salt in their lives, and then make it a matter of prayer that God will somehow use you to be the salt they need right now.

SATURDAY - ASSUME THE POSITION

“You’ve gotta serve somebody” - Bob Dylan

Like it or not, and most of us don’t, being a Salty Christian means I must be a servant. That’s my calling and position in life.

Granted, the culture doesn’t exalt this idea very often. Oh, we talk highly of *other people* being servants - like Mother Teresa, perhaps. But there’s a *huge shortage* of people volunteering to follow her. The rock group Nickelback sums up our culture’s real desire nicely:

“Cause we all just wanna be big rockstars and
Live in hilltop houses driving fifteen cars
The girls come easy and the drugs come cheap
We’ll all stay skinny ‘cause we just won’t eat...
Hey, hey, I wanna be a rockstar”

Compare that to what we know and love about Jesus:

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself and became obedient to death--
even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.
Philippians 2:5-11 (NIV)*

Being a servant means I get precious little of what Nickelback talks about and plenty of what Jesus got - rejected, misunderstood, betrayed, and ultimately lifted up - but by God not humankind!

I’m called to follow Jesus, to be Salt and Light, and to be a servant. All of which will often cut against the grain of my fallen human nature. We’ll talk more about that tomorrow, but for now let’s reflect on the Word.

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Everyone gives. Sometimes we do it because we have too - like paying taxes - and sometimes we do it because we want too - like giving to God or a charity we support.

The question for today isn’t *if* I give, but *what’s my attitude* towards my giving? Am I joyful about it, or do I begrudge losing the time, talent, and money that I’m giving away?

What kind of attitude do I usually have about giving to God’s work?

GETTIN’ SALTY!

What can I do to bring more joy into my giving? Should I laugh out loud at church when I put my offering into the bag? *Why not?* If you don’t like that one, then write down some other things you can do this week to bring some laughter before the altar of God.

TUE. - LAUGHTER AT THE ALTAR

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross... Hebrews 12:2a (NIV)

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.
2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV)

Once we begin to settle the issue of giving ourselves to God, we must then face the challenge of how to make giving an integral part of every area of our lives.

This might conjure up visions of big haired television preachers laying all kinds of manipulative guilt trips on you to separate you from your money. But that's not what God wants. If you carefully looking through the New Testament, you'll find one unexpected word that is often associated with giving - and that word is joy!

Since we are followers of Jesus, it's only right to look to Him as our example in this regard. Hebrews tells us that He went to the cross because of "the joy set before him." Wow! What was so joyful about dying on the cross, becoming sin, and bearing all the righteous wrath of God?

Nothing actually.

But there was plenty of joy in looking beyond that and seeing the millions of men and women who would become children of His Father because of His death, burial, and resurrection.

That's why Paul says God loves a cheerful giver. The Greek word translated "cheerful" is where our word hilarious comes from. How can I be hilarious when giving up my hard earned money or some of my very limited time?

Easy! I can because I'm looking beyond where I'm at and, by faith, seeing some of what God will bring from my gift. I give what I choose to give and feel the incredible joy of knowing God will use my gifts to further His Kingdom and bless hundreds, if not thousands, of people because of it!

That's worth a good belly laugh, isn't it?

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Today is a great day to meditate on the verses above and to do some self evaluation on whether I'm living the life of a servant, and how much my actions and attitudes are consistent with the type of service I see in Jesus.

You've gotta serve somebody, but as a believer I am called to *choose to be a servant!* How well am I doing?

GETTIN' SALTY!

It's been said that one of the most dangerous prayers you can ever offer is, "Lord use me." I'd say that praying, "Lord, make me a servant," would come pretty close as well! Who can I serve this week, and how am I going to do it?

SUN. - IS IT A GOOD DAY TO DIE?

"When Christ calls a man He bids him come and die."
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

"It is a good day to die, follow me." - Crazy Horse

The man I was named after was my Uncle Louie. He died years ago back in Indiana. I didn't go to his funeral, but of course my Dad did. When Dad came home, he told me about what happened.

The service was conducted by a Roman Catholic priest. During the message he said that he couldn't think of a better week to die than the week leading up to Easter. True enough.

I can't think of a better day to die than a Sunday.

Christ has called me to take up the cross - and to die to myself. I can't be the Salty Christian I am unless and until I do. As Bonhoeffer suggested, this dying is an integral part of being a Christian. When you remove it from the faith - you don't have the faith anymore!

That explains a lot about Christianity in America, doesn't it?

If you are reading this on Sunday morning, you've got an interesting choice before you. You can drag your stinky old ego to church, demanding to be served, fed, and inspired. That would be par for the course for most American Christians. We demand to be "fed," i.e. entertained, and many churches comply with that demand, further polluting our faith.

Or, you can choose to die to self. Lay down the ego with all its petty, little demands and open your heart up to Jesus. Choose to let it all go, and embrace the kind of servant lifestyle Jesus lived.

Doing the second opens up worship to us in a more profound way. For then I can begin to see Christ's death for my sins on the cross and my death to self and ego lining up together. He died so I die. It's a beautiful symmetry between Savior and servant, between God and man, between Jesus and me.

Jesus calls out to all His disciples, "Follow me!" The big question I face everyday is *will I do it?* Let's make our worship service today into a celebration of dying to self and living to and for Jesus! *Now that's something to celebrate!*

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

While it's nice to know God wants me to be a *living* sacrifice, it's still not easy to lay myself down before Him. What areas are troubling me the most as I approach the altar? Where is my ego kicking and screaming the hardest?

GETTIN' SALTY!

What can I do today or this week to keep my self, my ego, my old nature, squarely on the altar of God? What can I do to help make God's Grace more real to me today?

MON. - WIGGLING OFF THE ALTAR

I never made a sacrifice. We ought not to talk of 'sacrifice' when we remember the great sacrifice which He made who left His Father's throne on high to give Himself up for us. - David Livingstone

*The trouble with living sacrifices is they keep wiggling off the altar.
- unknown*

Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings. Leviticus 2:13 (NIV)

You can't escape it, no matter how hard you try. Sacrifice is a part of being a Salty Christian. But as Livingstone says above, how much do we *really* sacrifice?

Not much - no matter how much we may feel otherwise from time to time. I find it interesting that those who've given the most usually think they've given little or nothing compared to Christ. While those who've given very little, who never endured physical persecution or went hungry for the Gospel, complain about how much they've given.

Happily for us, we aren't called to kill our sacrifices; that would defeat God's whole purpose! *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Romans 12:1 (ESV)*

God needs His sacrifices to be living so that we can be salt and light in the world! When we die to self we really live, and find much salt within ourselves.

Then and only then can we be Salty Christians. Sounds simple, but there's one small problem with all this - living sacrifices have a disturbing tendency to slide right off that altar and go do their own thing!

That's where God's Grace comes into the picture. When I remember that this isn't some terrible task God is demanding of me to prove myself worthy of His love (something I'll *never be!*) but is instead *my loving, grateful response* to what Jesus has done for me - that changes everything!

Lord, please keep me from wiggling off the altar this week!

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Am I ready? Am I willing? Will I do it?

Those are the 3 big questions I have to answer when it comes to dying to self and living for Jesus. Write about them below:

GETTIN' SALTY!

How can this Sunday become a celebration of living for Jesus and not for anyone or anything else? How can I show that I'm living for an audience of One - Jesus and Jesus only?

PRAY, PRAY, PRAY!

PLEASE KEEP PRAYING FOR GOD TO
USE SALT & LIGHT TO BLESS OUR
CHURCH AND OUT COMMUNITY!

PLEASE PRAY FOR OUR LEADER-
SHIP THAT THEY WILL BE GIVEN IN-
SIGHT INTO WHAT GOD WANTS CCR
TO DO NEXT.

PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER THAT
EACH OF US CAN BECOME AS SALTY
AND AS BRIGHT AS POSSIBLE TO
BRING THE GOSPEL OF JESUS TO
THE WORLD AND MAKE DISCIPLES!



Week

Three