

What in the World: Corona

Life Group Leaders Guide

Objective

This guide contains the information and questions you will need to lead a life group study during our current sermon series. Our aim is to spark Spirit-led, Bible-centered conversations that anyone can participate in regardless of how biblically literate they may or may not be. **The win** that we want you to experience is when your group members **connect** more closely with each other and with God so that they are encouraged to move forward in living out their faith.

Directions

The *Purpose* and *Move* sections are for the leader to read to the group to provide clarity. **Do not feel pressured to cover all the questions.** Decide which ones may work best for your group. You will see brief notes interspersed between groups of questions to help give the group context for their answers. The *Notes and Commentary* section (when included) is optional reading for the leader to get background information and better understanding of the passages before leading the discussion.

Series Overview

The Church must be prepared to respond in a timely and biblical manner when crises arise. We have created What in the World series as an ongoing way to respond quickly to situations in our culture and community. Our goal is to lead the way as followers of Jesus with words of hope, truth and compassion.

The Point Church Life Group Curriculum

Corona Virus

The Big Idea

The Church of Jesus shines most brightly when the world is the darkest.

Flow of Study

Icebreaker: What has been your personal reaction to the Corona Virus escalation over the past week?

Move 1: We must give the world a taste of something different

Matthew 5:13 (NIV)

¹³ “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 underfoot.

Read Commentary: Note that salt, to be effective, must be in contact with the meat or fish it is to preserve. To be effective, we must be involved where we work and where we live. This puts us in a tension because the dominant culture doesn't necessarily like us. The majority of the time, living according to the beatitudes may make us more successful in work. But we need to be prepared for the times it doesn't. What will we do if showing mercy, making peace, or working for justice jeopardizes our position at work? Withdrawing from the world is no answer for Christians. But it is difficult to live in the world, ready to challenge its ways at any time. In [Matthew 5:10-12](#), Jesus acknowledged the reality of persecution. But in our contacts with the culture, we must retain our “saltiness,” our distinctiveness. It's a balancing act we're called upon to maintain.

1. Salt adds flavor. How can followers of Jesus help people get a taste of Christ during this time of crisis?
2. What is one practical thing we can do as individuals or as a group to give people a taste of Christ?

NOTE: In the first century when these verses were written there was no electricity or refrigerators. Salt was critical for survival because salt was used to preserve food. Without salt people would have starved in seasons when they had no access to food.

3. Salt preserves. How can followers of Jesus help preserve our community in times of crisis?
4. What is one practical thing we can do as individuals or as a group to help preserve our community?

Read Commentary: Jesus is alluding to rock formations that contained deposits of sodium chloride. Meat and fish were packed in these rocks to preserve them. After a period of time the salt leached out of the rocks, so the rocks were not good for anything and so thrown out. As believers, we are either a preservative or a worthless rock!

Move 2: We must shine our light, especially when it is darkest

Read Matthew 5:14-16 (NIV)

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Read Commentary: The lamp used in a typical Palestinian home was a partially closed reservoir made of clay. It had a hole on top to pour oil in and a spout on one end into which a wick of flax or cotton was set. It was a fairly small lamp, which gave off only a modest light; thus, to give maximum illumination it was placed on a lampstand. Since many Jewish homes were often modest one-room structures, such an elevated lamp could give light to everyone in the house.



5. Light illuminates' darkness. How can followers of Jesus bring light to the dark times our world is currently experiencing.
6. What is one practical thing we can do as individuals or as a group to help people see God's goodness during dark times?

NOTE: Light is a transverse, electromagnetic wave that travels in all directions from a point source.

7. Light shines forth. It does not stay in one place but emanates outward in all directions. How can we let the light of Jesus that is within us shine outwardly to those around us?
8. What is one practical thing we can do as individuals or as a group to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people around us who need to know the hope of Jesus?

Next Steps:

1. **Host/attend a watch party** with your Life Group at your house this coming Sunday. Sing along and talk about the message afterwards.
2. **Serve our community** through the Point Care Center. We are committed to being the church by keeping our Care Centers open no matter what to feed and clothe those who will be in increasing financial need around the Triangle. We are also already exploring additional ways to serve our community over the next few weeks. Look for more information to come.
3. **Support your church family** through setting up recurring online giving at www.pointchurch.com/give. We don't know how long this will last and we need your support more than ever before.
4. **Attend your life group.** It is not good to be alone. Keep meeting together and think of who in your life needs hope and invite them to come with you this week.
5. **Pray!** We believe in the power of prayer. Pray by yourself, with your family and with your Life Group for God to turn the tide of this pandemic and allow us to shine the light of Christ in our communities.

Prayer Points:

1. Plead with God to turn the tide of this growing outbreak, not only in the Triangle, but around the world.
2. Pray for medical professionals and officials to be given supernatural wisdom to know how to treat and stop the spread of this outbreak.
3. Pray for local churches including ours to be beacons of hope to our world and for God to use them to share the love of Christ in a compelling way.

Notes and Commentary

The following are pieces of commentary, facts, and links based on the passages of this study in order. Use them to help supplement your group time or for your personal preparation.

Note that salt, to be effective, must be in contact with the meat or fish it is to preserve. To be effective, we must be involved where we work and where we live. This puts us in a tension because the dominant culture doesn't necessarily like us. The majority of the time, living according to the beatitudes may make us more successful in work. But we need to be prepared for the times it doesn't. What will we do if showing mercy, making peace, or working for justice jeopardizes our position at work? Withdrawing from the world is no answer for Christians. But it is difficult to live in the world, ready to challenge its ways at any time. In [Matthew 5:10-12](#), Jesus acknowledged the reality of persecution. But in our contacts with the culture, we must retain our "saltiness," our distinctiveness. It's a balancing act we're called upon to maintain.

"You are the light of the world." The job description of a Christian is not only to maintain personal holiness, but also to touch the lives of everyone around us. At work, we touch many people who do not encounter Christ in church. It may be our most effective place to witness to Christ. But we have to be careful about how we witness for Christ at work. We are being paid to do our work, and it would be dishonest to stint our employers by using work time for

evangelism. Moreover, it would be dishonorable to create divisions at work or a hostile environment for nonbelievers. We must avoid any possible taint of seeking self-promotion by proselytizing. And we always run the risk that our failings at work may bring shame on the name of Christ, especially if we seem to be enthusiastic about evangelism but shoddy in actual work.

With all these dangers, how can we be salt and light at work? Jesus said our light is not necessarily in the witness of our words, but in the witness of our deeds—our “good works.” “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father who is in heaven.” The beatitudes have spelled out some of those good works. In humility and submission to God, we work for right relations, for merciful actions, and for peace. When we live as people of blessing, we are salt and light—in the workplace, in our homes, and in our nation.

<https://www.theologyofwork.org/new-testament/matthew/the-kingdom-of-heaven-at-work-in-us-matthew-5-7/salt-and-light-in-the-world-of-work-matthew-513-16>

In the Beatitudes Jesus gave a pronouncement to the crowds and religious leaders and instruction to his disciples concerning the nature of life in the kingdom of heaven. Now with two piercing metaphors, he focuses on his disciples and declares how they will impact this world with the kingdom life they possess. Into the world in which they can expect to find persecution (5:10–12), Jesus’ disciples are to go as “salt” and as “light” (5:13–16). These metaphors reveal the nature of kingdom life that pervades those who belong to Jesus, the impact that life will have on a watching world, and the responsibility of Jesus’ disciples as they live in this world and await the coming of the kingdom of God.

You are the salt of the earth (5:13). Salt had a variety of natural qualities and uses in the ancient world. It was so important that it was used as a medium of exchange in commercial ventures across the Mediterranean, Aegean, and Adriatic seas. The variety of uses for salt leads to different interpretations of what Jesus meant to communicate with the analogy. (1) A primary use for salt until recent years was as a preservative. In a society with no refrigeration, salt could be rubbed into meat or fish to slow decay. Some suggest that with this analogy Jesus was indicating the influence his disciples would have on the moral decay of a fallen world.

(2) Salt is also an essential element in the diet of human beings and other warm-blooded animals. For humans, salt is normally ingested as a seasoning added to foods, while animals commonly ingest salt from natural or artificial salt licks. This is the most familiar use of salt to modern readers, so many suggest that Jesus indicates that his disciples will provide a God-enhanced, kingdom seasoning to this world with their presence.

(3) Salt was also used in small quantities as a fertilizer when applied to certain types of soil (“earth”). Thus, some suggest that Jesus’ disciples will enhance the growth of God’s work in this world.

(4) A widely held view suggests that since salt had a varied use in the ancient world, Jesus is not pointing to one specific application but is using it in a broad, inclusive sense to refer to a vital necessity for everyday life. Sirach echoed such a perspective (Sir. 39:26), and Pliny commented that “there is nothing more useful than salt and sunshine.” Taken in this way, the metaphor indicates that Jesus’ disciples are vitally important to the world in a general religious sense.

This last suggestion is appealing because to stress too closely one particular application of salt can lead to inappropriate allegorizing. In other words, Jesus indicates with this metaphor that his disciples themselves (“you are the salt”) are necessary for the welfare of the world. That is, the disciples have experienced a transformation in their lives as they have come into contact with the kingdom of heaven. They are now different from the people of this earth, and their presence is necessary as God’s means of influencing the world for good.

Jesus’ next statement has caused considerable discussion: “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” (5:13). Strictly speaking, salt cannot lose its saltiness, because sodium chloride is a stable compound. What then did Jesus mean?

(1) One possibility is that Jesus is alluding to rock formations that contained deposits of sodium chloride. Meat and fish were packed in these rocks to preserve them. After a period of time the salt leached out of the rocks,

so the rocks were not good for anything and so thrown out. As believers, we are either a preservative or a worthless rock!

(2) Jesus may also have had in mind the salt that was collected from the Dead Sea by evaporation. This salt often included crystals of another mineral, gypsum, which is formed by the precipitation of calcium sulfate from seawater. Salt and gypsum were often mixed in various saline deposits. When people went to collect salt, this impure mixture of salt and gypsum could easily be mistaken for pure salt. But the mixture was not usable for either preservation or seasoning, so was regarded as having lost its usefulness.

(3) Jesus may be alluding to the use of salt blocks by Arab bakers to line the floor of their ovens. After some time the intense heat eventually caused the blocks to crystallize and undergo a change in chemical composition, finally being thrown out as unserviceable.

(4) A quotation attributed to Rabbi Joshua ben Haninia (c. a.d. 90) may offer some help. When rebuffing a trick question, Rabbi Haninia alludes to a proverbial saying when he asks, "Can salt lose its flavor?" The context of the saying implies that it is impossible for salt to lose its flavor, because he parallels the saying by asking, "Does the mule (being sterile) bear young?" (b. Bek. 8b). Sterile mules can no more bear young than salt can lose its flavor.

If this last option is the background, Jesus is citing a known proverbial saying on impossibilities to describe an equally impossible characteristic of his disciples. As they go out into the world as salt, they must recognize that the proof of the reality of their profession is in the nature of their lives. True disciples cannot lose what has made them disciples, because they have become changed persons, made new by the life of the kingdom of heaven. However, imposter disciples, who simply attempt to put on the flavoring of the kingdom life, will be revealed. Their salt is only an external flavoring, not a real personal change. This imposter cannot be made salty again because he or she never had that kingdom life in the first place.

Jesus' next statement drives home the seriousness of the issue: "It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men." The response to imposter disciples is rejection and judgment by the very people for whom they are to have value. Imposters will be known for what they are. They have nothing to offer the world, because they are no different from the world. So the world turns on them for their arrogant hypocrisy. The challenge is for professing disciples to examine their nature and to confess honestly whether or not they have been transformed by the life of the kingdom of God.

The light of the world (5:14–16). Jesus' disciples are not only "the salt of the earth" but also "the light of the world." The light metaphor continues the salt metaphor and takes it one step further to illustrate Jesus' point. "Light" is an important theme in Scripture, normally emphasizing the removal of darkness in the unfolding of biblical history and theology. The literal contrast between physical light and darkness provokes a profound metaphorical contrast between metaphysical good and evil, God and evil forces, believers and unbelievers. Jesus later declares that he is "the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5), who has come as the light that enlightens all people (1:4–14), so that those believing in him will no longer be in darkness (12:46).

In the same way as Jesus' life and message of salvation bring light to those in darkness (Matt. 4:15–16), his disciples are a living demonstration of the arrival of the kingdom of heaven. The light of revelation from God that accompanies Jesus' announcement of the kingdom is not just carried by his disciples; they are that light (Matt. 5:14–16; cf. Eph. 5:8; Phil. 2:15).

Jesus continues the proverbial "impossible" language he used in the salt metaphor by stating that "a city on a hill cannot be hidden," and "neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl." The city to which Jesus refers may be Jerusalem, which sits on Mount Zion, since Israel with Jerusalem as the holy city was considered light to the world (Isa. 2:2–5; 42:6; 49:6). But since Jesus is now in Galilee near Capernaum, he may be using a local city as his illustration, because he often used images from his surroundings to illustrate his teaching. In either case, it is impossible to hide a city located on a hill.

The lamp used in a typical Palestinian home was a partially closed reservoir made of clay. It had a hole on top to pour oil in and a spout on one end into which a wick of flax or cotton was set. It was a fairly small lamp, which gave off only a modest light; thus, to give maximum illumination it was placed on a lampstand. Since

many Jewish homes were often modest one-room structures, such an elevated lamp could give light to everyone in the house. Lamps were essential for finding one's way in enclosed areas during the night and were placed under a measuring bowl only to extinguish the light (cf. m. Šabb. 16.1).

Jesus' disciples are called to be the light of the world. They cannot be hidden, for their very nature, the kingdom life within them, is living testimony to those in the world who do not yet have that light. Their good works are produced by the light and life that come from God.