

Being **Salt & Light**

“Don’t let your Light be dimmed.
You were made to shine in the darkness!”



by Evelyn Alexander

Wall Postings for the Soul

This Life Study Guide is available for free
with registration at www.wallpostings.net

BEING

Salt and Light

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The freedom of BEING!

Over three years ago I became intrigued with the concept of us being spiritual Salt and Light. In looking back it's like I instinctively knew there was something important about it just waiting for me to discover what it was! When I set out to discover what it might be, little did I know where my journey would take me. I expected to learn more about why Jesus called His Followers salt and light, but instead it unexpectedly led me to...

The wonderful freedom that comes when we're simply able to BE...

What it means to be a "Christ Follower" instead of a Christian...

What "sin" is and what it is not...

The nature of stumbling blocks...

And how they all, and more, tie together!

These are all things I wish I had discovered years ago in my journey with Christ! For, let's just say, "*Things are not always as they seem!*" They can be better! Much, much better! I was captivated with what I was discovering, and wished I had discovered years ago how it can make life significantly better for us all, in our personal relationship with God... in our relationship with others at home, at work, and socially... and in every area of our life. Along the way I also developed a deep desire to share what I was discovering with others.

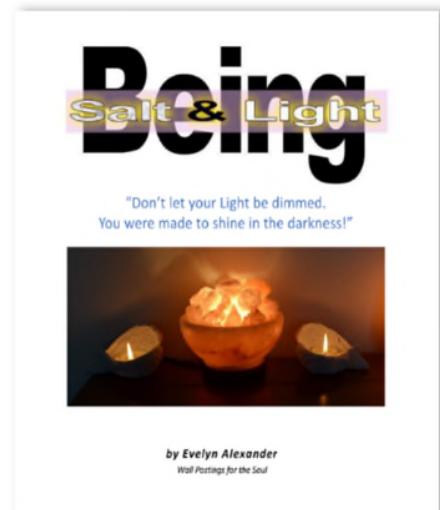
That desire gave birth to "Being Salt & Light". Since I was seeing things in a fresh new way, I hope to share these wonderful insights with you in a fresh new way too.

YOU set the pace that works best for you...

I wrote "Being Salt and Light" in a conversation style that invites you the reader, to further think about and explore any new "discoveries" for yourself. And you will find room in the outside margins for any thoughts or reminders you might want to leave for yourself as we go along. I also invite you to step into some familiar stories as if you were there, so you can better understand what was taking place in the hearts and minds of those who actually met Jesus and heard what He was teaching them about the mysteries and plans of God and life.

It's not a structured study, so you can use it for your own personal study or devotional, at a pace that works best for you. Or you can use it for a small group study by sharing any new discoveries or insights you've gleaned with each other, which greatly enhances our discoveries and drives His wonders deeper in our hearts and minds.

Let God lead you as you discover something more about BEING Salt and Light—and be blessed!



I discovered being salt & light makes life easier!

After retiring from a long career in Christian ministries, community service, and overseeing and leading women's small group studies, I never heard that booming voice from heaven *like we all wish we could hear from time to time*, telling me what I was to do next with my life.

But I did find myself increasingly utilizing the internet and social media to encourage others and be a voice for hope in Christ. In looking back, I can see how He was helping me learn about blogging and social media by trial and error! And the more I got into it the more I could understand why some people loved it while others hated it. It's definitely a modern-day challenge like no other!

Did you know that as soon as we accept Christ and follow him, we ARE God's salt and light? It's true. Jesus told us so. What then grabbed at my heart were the many professing Christians I was seeing on social media who were being pulled into its negativity. Some being sucked into a deep quagmire of confusion, depression, darkness, and despair, while others were openly hostile, cursing, becoming angry and mouthy with complete strangers—sadly not seeming to realize they were hurting the cause of Christ whom they profess to love. Still others were openly expressing disillusionment with their Faith and with fellow Christians—some even wondering if their Faith was based on a lie! It became very clear there is much confusion about the things of God and the Bible too being voiced on the internet. The desire was then birthed in me to join others and be another voice of God's Light in a very dark confusing world, to plant some seeds of encouragement and hope in the hearts of those hurting wherever I could.

While God was acquainting me with "the good, bad, and ugly" of it all, the words "Be", or "Being", and "You *are* salt and light" were also coming alive with rich new meaning for me. I was captivated with what I was discovering, and wished I had known about it years ago! ...**how Spiritual Salt and Light can dramatically enhance our daily lives in both our personal relationship with God and with one another in every area of life, and how it can help us in this new Social Media World we find ourselves being pushed into too!**

As Christians we are being challenged in a way never seen before. The world seems to be changing fast... and based on what I've described about Christians and Social Media, it seems many if not most of us aren't ready for it. Through this study though, I've come to believe that taking the words of Jesus, "*You ARE salt and light,*" to heart, is a mighty good place to start at **BEING so!**

Does that resonate with you too? Then let's see what we can discover my friends!



Evelyn Alexander

Evelyn

1

Let's take a fresh look at Salt and Light

*"Being salt and light is not optional. Jesus did not say you can be or you have the potential to be...
He said you are!"*

Dr. Michael Youssef

Jesus told His followers, "...you **are** salt and light." When I first read the quote above, the word "are" grabbed me. It also awakened in me the feeling I had been missing something important about the kind of "salt and light" Jesus was talking about. My desire then grew strong to discover what it was, and so began my journey almost three years ago to do so.

At one point the desire to somehow share with others what I was discovering began to build as well. *BEING Salt and Light* is the result. It's been an interesting journey that continues even now, for it seems I continue to discover even more about being Salt and Light. That tells me it's an ongoing process much like it is with becoming more like Christ.

My life has been wonderfully enriched with what I've discovered so far. Come discover with me why Jesus invites us to... "*Come unto me all you who are burdened, and I will give you rest. Be yoked to me and your burden will be light.*"¹



¹ The wording is my personal paraphrase of Matthew 11:28-30

To take a fresh look at anything...

it helps to purposely lay aside for a while any ideas and beliefs we might already have about the subject. This better helps us be able to receive with an open heart and mind any important truth or insight we might have been missing, or to clean up any misconceptions we might have about it as we receive new insight or strengthen our long-held beliefs.

Are you then ready to explore why Jesus told those listening, “*You ARE the salt of the earth and the light of the world*”²? Let’s then take a fresh look at the wonder of it for a few minutes, and what His words mean for us in today’s world.

Imagine with me...

what it would have been like to be among the people gathered to hear the one who would be the most controversial man of all time, Jesus, as He taught them what we know today as, *The Sermon on the Mount*.³ The elitists of His day along with the religious establishment hated him, while the common people loved him. Wherever He went they would often drop what they were doing to gather and hear what He had to say. I’m sure they also hoped to see with their own eyes one of those remarkable miracles take place they had been hearing about too!

Now picture yourself being one of the many who had become a disciple of Jesus. You along with many others would eagerly gather whenever you could to sit as close to Him as you could get, not wanting to miss the many practical things He was sharing about mankind and God, and how we all best relate. How to get the most out of life... how to get along with others... the importance of righteousness... how God is much like a loving father... God’s wondrous plan for man, and His loving care, justice and mercy... and more.

You were feeling blessed to be one of those present with many of Jesus’ followers, and the twelve who were closest to him, that memorable day when He told them, “YOU are salt and light.” Jesus was teaching not long after He had turned everyone’s world upside down by miraculously turning jars of simple water into the most glorious wine ever tasted!

It still gave you goose bumps each time you thought about it. No wonder so many were following Him everywhere He went. He was a true miracle worker—the talk of the town!

² Matthew 5:13-14

³ Matthew, Chapters 5-7: *The Sermon on the Mount* is the longest teaching of Jesus found in the Bible.

You will never forget the day He said those words for you hadn't felt the same since, and it had changed how you saw Jesus too.

You had walked with friends for quite a distance to see and hear this intriguing man who had been causing quite a stir among Israel's priests and leaders (which brought a smile to your face at the thought, knowing how He was challenging their feelings of superiority!) In addition to changing water into wine, Jesus was teaching and talking so uniquely about God, His reputation quickly spread far and wide. Unlike many of the established Jewish leaders and other itinerant teachers, He talks about the Almighty God as if He personally knows Him!

Now let's go back in time and take a look at what might have happened that day.

While walking to the place Jesus was going to be teaching that day, your mind had wandered to what you had been hearing people say about him, the son of a carpenter, who was also rapidly becoming the most popular, talked about teacher in all of Israel. The man who's been grabbing everyone's attention like no one in all of Israel ever had! He seems to give people hope as He gives them wonderful new insight into the things of God and His Kingdom. Many had also started calling Him a "miracle worker" since word quickly spread how He had turned water into wine at the now widely-known wedding celebration.

Your mind started wandering to what had happened that memorable day as you were walking. As unbelievable as it sounded when you first heard about it, you knew beyond a shadow of a doubt the story of what happened was true. You knew for your own cousin had been there helping in the kitchen area, and heard and saw for himself what had happened—how after getting over their initial shock, the servants who had drawn the water began chattering with excitement about the shocking thing that had just happened.

When the Wedding Feast Planner had discovered they had run out of wine long before they should, he started panicking. When Jesus heard from His mother what happened, He did the unthinkable and ordered the servants to fill every jar they could find with water! ...water! You still found yourself shaking your head in disbelief at the thought. As crazy as it sounded, the servants did as He instructed and filled the jars with water.

And then everything changed. One moment those jars were full of the water... the next they were full of quality wine! Your cousin was still shaking his head too in disbelief each time they talked about it, and he was there! His cousin told him how the atmosphere had felt too, which he could only describe as a "mysterious, unbelievable presence" ... something he had never experienced before.

Even though you believe your cousin, your mind like his was still struggling to wrap your head around the thought of a miracle like that happening among them. It all keeps seeming so unbelievable! But deep down inside you both know it's true.

The wedding of course is where the rumors started, for afterward people began reporting how they actually saw Him heal people who were seriously sick! He was creating quite a stir and was puzzling many—including yourself! For only God can miraculously heal... right? So who was this man, Jesus?!

You were looking forward to seeing Him again for you were eager to hear what He would be sharing with everybody this time.

It wasn't hard to spot where He would be teaching, for quite a few others had already arrived, visiting with each other as they shared information about noteworthy happenings in their families and communities. Today the gathering seemed to be buzzing with more chatter and anticipation than usual. Finding a nice spot, you eventually sat down with your friends and leaned casually back on your elbows to relax from your walk, and to chat with those around you while waiting.

You breathed deeply of the fresh air, thinking how nice it was to be out and about, enjoying the invigorating walk and clean air for a while instead of being cooped up at work!

Movement at the base of the hill caught your eye, interrupting your thoughts. "It's Jesus," you thought to yourself, while straightening up and straining your neck to get a better look. You noticed he's with the first twelve who Jesus himself had called to follow him. You had been hearing a smattering of interesting things about them too.

You were now able to see them better as they all moved a short way up the foot of the hill with Jesus, to a small outcropping of rocks that were perfect to comfortably sit on while Jesus was teaching. As He and His twelve disciples were settling into place, the chattering stopped. You could feel the anticipation as all eyes were now glued on Jesus.

It had suddenly become quiet as He spoke His first words....

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

That grabbed your attention even more, as you also felt thankful His voice was carrying nicely to you and your friends. You could hear quite clearly what He was saying, as He was speaking about some amazing things you had never heard before. Jesus had picked a good spot so all could hear!

Right from the start He did not disappoint. His strong, confident voice carried words of unusual blessing to where you were sitting. like...

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."

Yes. That one stunned you. He was saying some pretty amazing things. If anyone else said things like this, people would think Him crazy! But there was just something about him... you didn't know what it was. But there was something about Him and what He was saying that pulled at your heart. You yearned for whatever it was and wanted to know more.

You then heard something that suddenly made you focus even more on what He was saying. For some reason you strangely felt as if He was personally talking directly to you when He declared...

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its savor, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."

The thought gripped your heart. It seemed to jump at the wonder that sprang to life within you. You could feel His charged words ringing out loud and clear with more.

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they set it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house."

You somehow knew those words were meant for you. And then came the clincher. Jesus was now saying...

"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

That did it! You felt like Jesus had just given you a directive.

Each time Jesus said, "YOU..." it was like He was pointedly speaking directly to your heart! His words about being salt and light not only stayed in your mind all

Did you know...

This now famous teaching time of Jesus, which became known as, "The Sermon on the Mount" began with several, "Blesseds," which we now call, "The Beatitudes."

the way home. You also pondered them in your heart in the days that followed, never knowing you were exploring many wonderful insights... new revelation from God that had the power to not only change you, but the world for thousands of years to come!

Jesus was teaching spiritual truths and instructions they had never heard before. They were familiar with the strictness of the Law... but this was something different... but not entirely. Jesus' teaching seemed to bring more clarity, meaning and purpose to being God's people.

Let's then allow it to do the same for us today.

That is what you and I will be doing too as we go through this guide. We will be pondering the who, what, why and how, of BEING what Jesus said we ARE, Salt and Light.

As we dig into this study, we'll see why Jesus used these great analogies. They compare so well, it's like in the natural realm, salt and light are a shadowing of the spiritual realm. I believe you'll get that impression too as we dig more into this enlightening study, of *Being... Salt and Light*.

I'm a visual person and so learn best by being able to picture in mind what I'm aiming for. While preparing for the study, and reading again The Sermon on the Mount, it raised some questions in my mind, perhaps in yours too. For me, I wonder...

What does spiritual "salt" and "light" look like in our lives, and what do others see when it's there?

What might keep them from being seen in our lives?

*Doesn't scripture clearly tell us **Jesus** is the Light of the World? Why then did He tell those listening **they** are salt and light?*

Let's take a look at that last thought first in the next lesson. I believe one of the most intriguing stories we find of Jesus in the Bible will help answer this question, which for now might sound rather confusing, or like a contradiction.

2

Isn't Jesus the Light of the World?

Jesus himself said, "I am the Light of the World."

Jesus told His followers, "...**you** are salt and light!" One day while reading those five words, the word "are" grabbed my attention. It also awakened in me a feeling that I had been missing something important about the kind of "salt and light" Jesus was talking about. My desire then grew strong to discover what it was, and so began my journey more than three years ago to do so.

At one point the desire to somehow share with others what I was discovering began to build as well. This *BEING Salt and Light* guide is the result. It's been an interesting journey that continues even now, for it seems I keep discovering even more things about Being Salt and Light! That tells me it's an ongoing process much like it is with becoming more like Christ.



When I first read the words of Jesus, telling His followers they are salt and light, I realized it sounded like we have a contradiction in the Bible, for elsewhere in scripture we're told JESUS is the Light of the world. Perhaps it struck you the same way too. *Is Jesus the Light of the world, or are we?* Let's then take a closer look at that, for many times things truly are not what they might seem.

In His now famous *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus pointedly told those present, "**YOU are the light of the world.**" Yet in John 1:4, where John tells us who Jesus actually was and is, he wrote:

"In Him (Jesus) was life, and that life was the light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Jesus himself later⁴ affirmed that truth when He clearly told the people, “I am the light of the world....” He couldn’t make it any clearer than that, could he.

He also added something to that important declaration we might tend to skim over and not take time to ponder, which can cause us to miss out on the full meaning of one of the most wonderful promises He made to us.

After declaring who He was, Jesus added these wondrous words:

“...whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Coupling that with what He just said about being *the light of the world*, think about what Jesus is telling us here...

When we follow Him, we too will possess the Light of life!

We too then ARE light, just like Jesus said!

Isn’t that amazing! Read it again if you have to, for this is among the most hope inspiring *conditional* promises in God’s Word.

Yes, it is conditional. When He started with, “Whoever follows me...”, Jesus was clearly telling us that what He is about to say applies *only* to those who follow Him.

Did you notice...

John 8:12 also happens to answer that first question at the end of the previous lesson: “Was Jesus telling us that everyone is salt and light?” We’re now able to see that only those who follow Christ will have the Light. It’s clearly a conditional promise.

The word, “Whoever...” also beautifully tells us God is no respecter of persons; it then doesn’t matter who we are, what we look like, what we’ve done or haven’t done, or if for any reason we feel unworthy—God is looking for only one thing, are we following Christ or not. There is no denying that the promise, “Whoever,” does indeed mean me... and, yes, it means *you too...* *IF... we follow Him.*

There can be no doubt, He made the same wonderful, conditional promise to us all—without exception.

This next part should make our hearts swell with the wonder of it!

None of us need ever walk in spiritual darkness again! Think about what that means. We are able to have the victory over spiritual darkness. If you’re like me, one of your first thoughts after hearing something so amazing is, *How can this be?!* It’s possible because we’ve been given *THE Light of Life*. As a follower of Christ, it’s who we now ARE!

⁴ These words of Jesus are found in John 8:12.

Now isn't that truly an amazing promise from God himself?

This is why in "Being Salt and Light", you will see us focusing on being a "Christ Follower" rather than being what's commonly called, a Christian. Did you know it's possible for us to see ourselves as a Christian, yet not be a Christ Follower? The sad thing is if we're not, then we will unknowingly be missing out on some pretty amazing blessings.

In light of what we were just seeing in John 1:4, that "In Him (Jesus) was life", I want to give us one more verse to chew on, to help us drive this wonderful concept of life, hope and being in Him deeper in our hearts and minds. This particular verse presents us with a concept that made a tremendous difference in my life when I finally got what it's telling us from my head to my heart. Let's now read 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they (all things) are become new.

Since it's a familiar verse for most if not all of us, let's then step back a minute and take a fresh new look at it. Let's picture in mind what it's telling us this way:

Each and every one of us who made the decision to follow Him, are now *in Christ*. On a spiritual level, God has somehow replaced our old nature, which had no inkling of or desire for God, and replaced it with a new -nature that is awake to God and His goodness.

He has spiritually wiped us clean of the old nature, to make it possible to build a new life IN HIM! And this new life has, "*the Light of life*," within it. It will always be there too, as we journey through life following Him. It truly is an amazing promise!

Now let's connect some dots to see how this ties in with being salt and light.

We find an intriguing story...

that illustrates how this works, when Jesus had an eye-opening conversation with a demoralized woman. When you can, I highly recommend you read it for yourself; you will find it in John, chapter four. But for now, since it's a longer story, let's use our imaginations a bit again, and listen in on Jesus' conversation with this Samaritan woman. She's the main figure of our story, who also happens to be a reject of Jewish society in a couple ways. First, she was a despised Samaritan. And second, she was a social outcast, rejected by her own community because she was a morally loose woman—a person considered to be among the lowest of the low in any moral-leaning society.

Before we join Jesus as he's resting at a well, let's first take a look at the background of the story.

Some of you might already know that the Jews viewed the Samaritans with great disdain, and liked to show it by their actions too! The reason for it was the Samaritans were also of Jewish descent, but over time had allowed themselves to become a mixed race who practiced an impure, half-pagan version of Judaism. Practicing Jews then felt superior to them, and considered the Samaritans to be worse than pagans, demeaningly calling them, "dogs".

You can imagine the animosity between devout Jews and the Samaritans was pretty intense, seemingly more so on the part of the Jews. When traveling, we're told they would often show their disdain of Samaritans by walking miles out of their way, rather than "contaminating themselves" by taking the more direct route through Samaria.

With this background setting in mind, let's pop into the story where a tired Jesus is sitting alone on the edge of a well in Samaria...

Jesus and His disciples were on a long trek back to Galilee when they had decided to stop and find something to eat. His loyal disciples had left Him resting at the Samaritan's well while they went in search of some food.

All was quiet, and the sun was high and hot for it was way past the early morning time the village women normally came, while it was yet cool, and chatted as they fetched their fresh water for the day.

Jesus watched a lone woman approach the well. She was an unusual sight for the sun was at its blistering hottest. He must have surprised her when he a Jew, spoke to her, a Samaritan.

I wonder what was going through her mind, for in those days devout Jewish men would not lower themselves to talk with a strange woman, let alone an "unclean" Samaritan!

He asked her a simple question born out of a common need. "Would you give me a drink of water?"

Still stunned, she suspiciously answered with a question of her own. "Why are you, a Jew, asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" For in the past, she had experienced first-hand how practicing Jews treated her and her people... much like they would reeking pond scum!

The question launched them into quite a conversation, starting with Jesus answering her. "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asked you for a drink, you would have asked HIM and He would have given you living water!"

Since the heat was beating down on her, it's not too hard for us to understand why her mind was probably still on the refreshing drinking water Jesus had mentioned, so she wanted to know how it could happen. But before she could voice the question, He answered it while pointing to the well.

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

We can see by her answer she still failed to understand He wasn't talking about regular drinking water. Taking Jesus at his word, she asked him for the kind of water he was talking about, so she didn't have to keep coming to the well for her water!

Jesus then switched tactics and got her talking about her life style, which made her an outcast of society. It didn't take long for her to realize he knew personal things about her that no one could possibly know except for the spiritually discerning of her day. We at last see her beginning to awaken to the light of understanding when she responded, "Sir, I see you are a prophet!"

They then talked about how the Jews worshipped and believed one way and the Samaritans another, when she finally shared with him her heart. "I know that the Messiah is coming. And when He comes, He will explain everything to us."

Imagine how stunned she must have been when in response to her heart-felt words he declared...

"I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

I wonder if she felt what some call, "spiritual goose-bumps," raise on her arms like a wave passing over her, as she heard those stunning words, "***I am He.***"

Scripture tells us It was at that moment Jesus' disciples returned.

Was this marginalized woman mentally reeling with what Jesus had just told her, and the realization of what it must mean? Chances are good she was, for we don't see her saying anything in response. Instead, she quickly turned and left, leaving her water jar behind as she rushed back to town where she excitedly told those she found...

"Come... see a man who told me everything I ever did." Still feeling awed by it all, with bated breath she was barely able to breathe out the long-awaited question. ***"Could this be the Messiah?!"***

I'm sure her excitement along with her words were hard to ignore, for we see they quickly followed her back to the well to find out for themselves, who and what caused such a stir in her.

Imagine the excited yet cautionary chatter we would have heard if we had been there as they rushed to the well to see the one this lowly woman believed was the Messiah. We can be sure hearts were beating hard with their chatter and thoughts, like, ***"The long-anticipated Messiah...? Truly...? Here...? But we're a despised people... could this be possible...? Almighty God! Let it be true!"***

Let's discover what happened next by reading the rest of the story from the Bible.

"Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged Him to stay with them, and He stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

"They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.'"⁵

Let's take another look at what they voiced in that last line, for it's powerful. Think about what they were saying to the woman.

"We no longer believe just because of what YOU said. Now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world!"

*WOW! Do you see it? Without needing to think about it...
just by doing what came naturally after she met Jesus,
she was BEING salt and light!*

Do you see how she was being so? It's okay if you don't, for we are just beginning to dig out some amazing things about the simplicity (yet importance) of what these three words, "Being", "Salt" and "Light", mean to us as Christ followers.

For now, let's just hold on to the realization that after she met Jesus at the well, and knew who He was, this woman didn't have to think about being salt and light (and had never even heard about what that meant)! *She just effortlessly did what*

⁵ John 4:39-42

came naturally! She shared what happened with others. She simply talked about it.

Among many things, this story shows you and me that God can use **anyone**, in a simple, natural way too, can't he. Yes, even you and me, and those who've been made to feel like they're no good, when we choose to trust and yield our heart to Him like this broken, once demoralized Samaritan woman had done. Look what happened because of it too! Many (if not most) from her community came to know and accept Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah!

In the hands of Jesus, her simple act turned into a glorious one!

A personal side note...

I can't help but marvel how Jesus chose one who had been cast aside by her community to reveal himself to! She was the type of person whom others would see as being "unworthy" of such an honor, and she would too! By their conversation we see how Jesus looked beyond this woman's outward self and saw her heart, which was already drawn toward His Heavenly Father—and he honored it. What a beautiful message that should be for us all! Think how this seemingly insignificant woman, who was shunned by all the "*good people*" around her, became one of God's first Lights. He honored her—not only in her generation in front of those who had scorned her, but in future generations to come by each telling of her story!

In this amazing story...

we see how Jesus, as the Jew's long-awaited Messiah, is the *Light of the World* just like He said.⁶ Then we see how He was first "salting" His conversation with thoughts the Samaritan woman could relate to; which created a spiritual thirst within her to know more, until she suddenly realized God's promised Messiah had come!

We next see this once outcast of society sharing about her new-found light of understanding with others in her own little piece of the world, which was the little Samaritan town where she lived. Even though she had no idea what she was

⁶ Check it out for yourself, in John 8:12, where John recorded these words of Jesus, "*I am the Light of the world.*"

doing, she too was “salting” her conversation with thoughts that made the towns people thirsting to know more like she had.

When they too were ready to see Jesus for themselves, she was then able to point others to him, *the Water of Life*⁷, so they could decide and believe for themselves if He actually was or not their long-awaited Messiah, the Savior of the world.

We're part of His wondrous plan!

It's amazing to think about. No matter what we once were, when we believe in Him and let others know He's there for them too, you and I are part of the ongoing Biblical story and God's wondrous plan.

Our past which has been forgiven isn't important to God; but believing and trusting Him so we can faithfully follow Christ, is!

Why God desires us to be a part of the process was driven home for me when I read the following bits of scripture. Think about what these verses are telling us. Read them more than once if you need to; take thoughtful note of what I underlined until you fully grasp why He declared, “YOU ARE the Light of the world”.

“The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they may not see the light of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:4)

“For God who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness’, is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6)

“God’s love (light) has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:5).

“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit (light) dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

*The spiritually lost...
cannot see Christ... but they are
able to comprehend (see) His
Light through us as we follow
Him. We are then able to share
His Good news, and point them
to Him.*

These verses make it quite clear that the God of this world (Satan) **blinds everybody's mind** so we cannot comprehend the truth about who and what He is; nor are we able to comprehend the glorious Light of Jesus Christ and the personal relationship we can have with him! To break this no-win situation, God himself stepped in on our behalf to prepare a way for us to escape the enemy's relentless hold of spiritual darkness and hopelessness.

Jesus is The Way. With His miraculous birth and life, death and resurrection, Jesus victoriously penetrated Satan's blinding veil of darkness with His glorious Light,

⁷ This story is one of the reasons Jesus is also known as the “Water of Life”.

which we can see and possess too when we consciously choose to believe and follow Him.

Jesus proved himself to be, the “Light that shined out of the darkness,” piercing it with a big shaft of God’s glorious Light.

When we believe and choose to accept the Good News of Christ for ourselves—and make the commitment to follow Him—God then shines the Light of His Holy Spirit into our hearts so we can spiritually see and our minds gain knowledge of powerful spiritual truths.

Yes... similar to what happened to the Samaritan woman at the well.

But amazingly it doesn’t stop there with believing! When we first believe and follow Christ is when being Salt and Light kicks in. With our spiritual eyes now open to God’s light, we can point others to him, and they are able to see Him through us, so they too have the opportunity to go and hear for themselves the Good News of Christ, and escape the deep spiritual darkness so they too can bathe in, and receive the righteous Light of Christ.

That is what happened through the Samaritan woman to those she shared with about Jesus—and now through you and me who have thankfully come to that same awesome knowledge too, of Jesus the Messiah, BEING the Light of the World.

Simply put...

Unbelievers are unable to see (or comprehend) the illumination light of Christ! Satan has blinded them to it. Which leads to the realization: “If they cannot see it, they will never believe it.” Thus the reason Jesus made it clear that we who believe ARE salt and light, for we ARE a vital part of God’s saving plan for mankind! But how many of us know that?!

Think about what this means. We’re part of an amazing cycle of piercing the darkness and bringing hope too! That’s why Jesus told those listening: “YOU ARE the salt of the earth... and the light of the world!

When I think how the one who simply spoke the word and this world came into being—the one who holds this universe and everything in it together—has included you and me in His plan to redeem all from Satan’s darkness who come to Him... I find it all to be rather “aweing”. Do you find it so too?

Jesus declared God’s plan had been fulfilled with His coming⁸, to “bring good news to the poor... and proclaim release to the captives and recover the sight of the blind, and let the oppressed go free.” *He came to bring us the Light of God!*

What an amazing privilege He's given us, to share in the blessing of the greatest redemption plan of all time! It makes me want to know more about Him and His wonderful plan for me personally. *How about you?*

One important thing before we move on to discover more. We would be remiss if we did not recognize and acknowledge the vital work of God's promised Holy Spirit in our lives. He dwells within us, enabling us to be the "Salt and Light" Jesus told us we are. The work of the Holy Spirit is another amazing topic all by itself and worth digging into when you can.

What's next?

Let's now take a look at the first question that was at the end of lesson 1, *"What does spiritual "salt" and "light" look like in our lives, and what do others see when they are there?"*

This is a question that really nagged at me for a while, for I'm a visual person who was having difficulty "seeing" it. For how do we see spiritual things with our physical eyes?

When I first started digging into being salt and light, I believed I had a fairly good understanding of what these words of Jesus meant. And I did... but only on what I now understand to be a surface level.

One day while still wrestling with this question of, *"what would it look like?"* I felt impressed to dig into the meaning of the word, "be", as in the title of this study, "**B**Eing Salt and Light". Up to that point my focus had been solely on *salt* and *light* to develop a better understanding of why Jesus called us both. I had never thought of a two-letter word as being that important. But was I ever wrong!

I was amazed at what I discovered. This seemingly insignificant word was rich with spiritual meaning and insight, and pulled everything together for me. It pointed me to what I had been looking for... that something I could "see"

I believe you will soon discover as I did, that as we look more intently into the meaning of the word, it's going to become a pretty powerful part of the study!

Are you ready?

3

BE-ing BE-ers!

*God didn't call us to BEHAVE like a Christian,
He called us to BE LIKE Christ!*

The title, “*BE-ing BE-ers*”, does look a bit odd, doesn’t it. No worries though; it’s deliberate. I not only wanted to draw our attention to the word “be,” I also needed to coin the word, “be-er”, with the hyphen, specifically for this lesson. Otherwise everyone would get distracted and start laughing at what the phrase would look like otherwise: “*Being Beers!*”

Now be honest. It at least made you smile, didn't it?

Since we don’t want to get ourselves distracted with the image of being like cold *beers!* ...let’s go with the picture of faithfully “*BE-ing BE-ers*” of God’s Salt and Light.



Just between you and me though, each time you now see or hear the word “beer”, I hope it makes you smile and think of being God’s “BE-er”!

Let's look deeper into “BE”

This excites me, for I believe chances are good you’re in for a pleasant surprise. This one small word is so rich with wonderful life-changing meaning, “*Being...*” could be another wonderful study all by itself! *That is why from here on out, you will also often see me emphasizing the word too, to embed it deep into our hearts.*

As soon as I looked up the word in my Concordance, I realized the answer to the question that had bothered me for so long had been there at my fingertips all along. I naturally was then eager to discover more.

Did you know that the meaning of “Be”, is connected to our character?

That’s right, our *character—that which defines who and what we ARE*. Yes, the same word Jesus used when He said, “You *are*... salt and light.” It is not only what we *are*, it’s also what we are *BEing* or *BEcoming*! This means our character and

“BEING...” are intertwined. They are essentially the same thing. Two parts of a whole.

Are you surprised like I was with that discovery? It gave me one of those amazing, “Aha!” moments, as the proverbial light-bulb flashed bright in my head. But that was just the beginning. I discovered more. But I also found I was asking myself more questions too!

One of the first things I realized is Jesus told us we ARE salt and light... but I never thought of it being up to us to BE so, so our character reflects it.

We might naturally wonder what “being so” would look like. While wondering about that myself, I suddenly recalled hearing long ago, of how someone can become the “embodiment” of a character trait. I’m fairly familiar with what that means, but wanted to check out its meaning more fully, so I wouldn’t inadvertently skew or miss something important. I discovered one of its synonyms best describes its meaning for us, “*Personification*”, which means... “*The representation of a thing or abstraction as a person....*”⁹

We might say, “BEING puts flesh on something we can’t normally see to meet needs we can see.”

Now for us visual people, let’s picture what that looks like in action. I’m sure each of us have heard at some point, someone say about another, something like, “...they **are** the most *caring* person I know.” Or, “...they **are** the most *patient*... or *loving*... or *helpful*. What they’re meaning is the person they’re talking about is the **embodiment** of caring... or of patience... or whatever character quality they’re being.

They have faithfully practiced living out that quality so well, it’s become a natural part of who they **are**. It’s now their nature... their natural tendency; so much so you think of the person as being one with their character trait, for it’s now who they are!

This is what we mean by BEING.... and why Jesus made a point of telling His followers, “You ARE salt and light.” We are to BE the embodiment (the hands, feet, ears and voice) of Jesus’ Salt and Light!

⁹ Definition from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary 3/21/22, at this link: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/personification>

The amazing thing about this I want us all to see and understand is when we are simply BEING, it means whatever we are being, like patient, it's never a burden or inconvenience for us to be so, for it is who we now are. We generally never have to stress or debate with ourselves either before responding appropriately—or self-talk ourselves into being so, for we just automatically ARE. BEING like Christ can't be any easier or get any better than that!

Jesus' invitation

That last part of the paragraph above, and the word "easier", reminds me of something else Jesus personally invited us to do, and it's connected to BEing. We find a special invitation he issued to us all in Matthew 11:28-30.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Many people miss out on the good news that's included with this invitation, because they get stuck on the word, "yoke". They picture something heavy and cumbersome being placed on them that will not only weigh them down more than they already are, but it will also seriously limit their freedom while being forced to endure boring work!

If what they're thinking were true, I too would be rebelling at the thought of a "yoke" being placed upon me! But that's not the case. Just about anyone living in an agriculture community that still use oxen to help work the fields, will tell you the same too.

At the beginning of this lesson, I challenged us with the thought, "***God didn't call us to behave like a Christian, He called us to Become like Christ!***" (See side note.)

When we merely "*behave like a Christian*", we are molding our behavior to fit our own preconceived idea of what a good Christian would be like. When we do that, our change is merely external, not internal, not of the heart.

When we set out to ***be (or become) like Christ***, the only way we can do that is by getting to know Him personally, so we can get to know His character. By molding our character to be like His, we are then BEing like Christ!

The word "become" ...

is a common one to us all, so let's not take it for granted. When we are becoming, by definition it means we are changing, we are growing, we are "coming to be" whatever we have set our minds to be. And the wonderful encouragement of that is Jesus sees us as if we already ARE! (Yes, there's that same word again, as in "You ARE salt and light")!

There is no better way to become like Christ than to accept His invitation to be “yoked” to Him.

Let's find out why this is true.

When Jesus gave that invitation to His listeners so long ago, they immediately knew what He was meaning, for the end purpose of yokes was common knowledge; communities relied on them to control their oxen for work in their everyday life, and to ploy their fields to prepare and maintain them for successful future harvests.

Let's state the obvious. *Oxen aren't born ready to work the fields.*

With the help of a good yolk and a mature ox they **become** so. By being yoked to a usually older and larger, well-trained ox, the ox-in training is able to learn from its more mature yolk-mate what it needs to know and do to best serve its master.

By being yoked together, the well-trained, more muscular ox will bear the greater part of the load, while it's gently teaching the untrained ox—by example—how they're respond to each command or signal the master gives, as they walk the field together. The yolk is key, for it ensures the untrained ox will follow the lead of the ox who knows what each voice command and action from its master means! The experience of being yoked to a more disciplined ox will also help it become like its teacher, well-disciplined and obedient to its master.

We of course are not oxen who need to be trained with a physical yoke. But the word picture Jesus paints for us gets His important message across. Let's take another look at Jesus' invitation and meaning. But this time I'm going to rephrase it in such a way us modernized people will better understand and grasp the wonderful Good News it contains too.

"Those of you who are feeling weary and burdened with the hardness of life, come to me. I will see that your tired spirit gets some much-needed rest. Come... connect yourself to me so you can learn from me. I will teach you all you need to understand and know. I have a gentle and humble heart that can successfully guide you, so you can always find some peace and rest for your souls with me. Stay close, connected to me; you will find things will be easier and your burdens will feel lighter."¹⁰

Folks, Jesus is telling us here He came not only to teach us about our Heavenly Father and Spiritual Life, He also came to teach us

¹⁰ A modernized paraphrase based on Matthew 11:28-30

about THIS life, why it is the way it is, and how we can overcome its darkness so we can bask in the life-giving Light of God, and spend eternity with Him. Plus, He came to be an example of righteousness we can follow. Jesus showed us how to BE.

The last line you just read is very important, for it tells us WHY following Jesus is so important: “Jesus shows us how to BE” ...so our character can BEcome LIKE HIS!

Are you now ready to see what more we can discover about that small but mighty word, “Be”?

4

Let's Discover more about the BEs

*"Yes, Jesus clearly told us we are salt and light—
but it is up to us to BE so!"*

If I was to make a list of the “BEs” we can find in our Bibles, at the top of my list would be, **“BE centered on Christ”**. Why? When we’re centered on Christ, we actually have three top important “BEs” rolled into one. And they’re key to all the other BEs.

1. Be in Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:17)
2. Be imitators of Christ. (Ephesians 5:1)
3. Be like Christ. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)

We will be taking a more in-depth look at them. But before we read that first scripture in 2 Corinthians, we need to be aware this particular BE scripture is best read in the original King James version of the Bible. Newer versions don’t seem to use the word, “Be,” but the meaning is still there no matter which version you use.

“Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

When we become that “new creature,” it means we’ve been “born again”—but this time as a child of God. As soon as we’ve been born again, the groundwork has been laid for being an overcomer and victorious in our new life. Our old familiar lifestyle is a thing of the past, and all things have now become new. Among the wonderful “new things” is how we are now Christ’s Salt and Light.

I’m sure most of us have a general idea of what it means to “be in Christ”, but let’s take a closer look at it to pick up anything insightful we might have missed. To do that, let’s compare it to something we’re familiar with, like the phrase...



If you're not sure...

*what it means to be born again,
or have not yet experienced
what it means to “be in Christ”,
we highly recommend you read
about it in “The Secret Meeting”
page we’ve included in the
“Something More Appendix”.
It’s critical to know if you’ve
been born again, we believe it
will help you know if you are or
not.*

Count me in!

That's something we might say when we hear of a great idea or project, and want to be included in making it come about, or we would like to participate in some way. Other ways of saying it often go something like, "That sounds great! I'm *in*!" ...meaning, "I'm sold on the idea and want to be included in the project." Or, we want to be *in* on it. Our meaning is we want to *invest ourselves* in it... to *be a part* of making it become a reality.

The same is true with BEing IN Christ. We hear about God's marvelous plan for mankind, we believe it's right and true, and we want to be included in His plan. By accepting Christ as our Lord and Savior, we've said, "That sounds like just what I need... you can count me *in*!" We then yield our life into His care and follow Him¹¹ to make it happen.

Once we are in Christ...

we can get to know Him on a personal level. As we get to know more about Him and focus on His character, we're then drawn to IMITATE Him, much like a young child imitates the actions of someone they love and admire.

Let's see what the scriptures tell us about that in Ephesians 5:1 and 2 Corinthians 3:17-18.

"Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children."

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image...."

As we're imitating Christ, we see that we're being transformed, becoming more like Him, while the first verse gives us a precious glimpse of how it happens—by being like a precious child.



We've probably all seen how an innocent, impressionable child will often imitate the action or behavior of a parent or grandparent they love. In their own precious, awkward way they do their best to imitate whatever about them grabs their attention—much like in the photo we see here. This little child is not only trying to walk like Dad, he wants to look like him too!

Doesn't it warm your heart? Picture yourself as this little child you see here, following Christ. I have an idea when we do similarly

¹¹ Remember John 8:12 from our first lesson? "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*"

with Christ, it warms His heart too. If it makes our heart swell with precious joy to see a child imitating their dad like this, then it's not too hard to imagine what it must do to the heart of God the Father when He sees us doing the same!

Do you see it? A child who is imitating someone they love doesn't have to work at drumming up the desire to do so, do they? They're just naturally doing it!

A child's innocent heart and mind is so focused on the one they love, wanting to please them and "be just like them", they don't have to think about how to do it. They just naturally imitate them to best of their ability.

As adults, it becomes the same for us when we love and "admire" the one who saved us, Jesus. We have a good example of this in the story of Jesus and the Demonic. Which takes us to our third BE that helps us be centered on Christ, which is to...

Be LIKE Christ

While preparing this study, I grew to greatly appreciate this particular story of Jesus that I'm about to share, for it speaks to those of us who might feel we've done such "bad" things that even God in all His goodness cannot forgive us—wrongfully buying into one of Satan's deceptions by believing we're not worthy of the victorious new life He offers us.

For those who tend to wrongfully believe that way, God wants you to know NO ONE, ("no one" means you too) is so bad they're beyond His power to have a new life in Him... just like He did with this seemingly hopeless one we're about to see, who had become more "beast" than man.

But meeting Jesus changed him.

Let's now enter the story of the *Demonic and Jesus*, through the eyes of this miraculously changed man.

First read Mark 5:1-20. As you read the demoniac's story, try and put yourself in his place to see what happened through his eyes, and feel what he must have felt. Then return here and read on.

After Jesus delivered this poor tortured soul from the demons who had tormented him for so many years, imagine how he must have felt to at last be free of them! And once again be able to think clearly with a sound mind.

We have no doubt he must have retained at least some of his memory of those tormented years, which we know would be in sharp contrast to what he had suddenly become—healthily whole! Body, mind and spirit. It's not too hard to imagine his thoughts and feelings must have been all over the place for a while too!

If it had been me, I believe mixed in with my racing thoughts, my heart would have been overflowing with amazement, love and gratitude for the one who had just saved me from a torment that literally seemed like hell.

Wouldn't you feel similarly too? As much as we could, wouldn't we also want to stay close to the one who had just saved us from our frighteningly hopeless condition, while drinking in everything He was telling us, much like a dry sponge soaking up water. I know I would!

I'm confident I would also want to ask many questions and discover as much as I could about the one who had delivered me too.

Would I have also looked for a way to stay with him, even as a servant, if I could? Yes I would, for I would know there was no way I could ever repay Him for what He had done for me.

*I'm sure I would have also been on the alert for ways I could either help or do something for Him in return, *and even BE more like him.**

The Bible doesn't tell us how long this unnamed, once dangerously violent man was able to sit around the warm, comforting fire the disciples must have built, absorbing everything He could from Jesus and His disciples before the herdsmen returned with the villagers.

Could the time he spent in Jesus' presence be measured in hours... or days? We don't know. The Bible is silent on that. But since he was in the presence of the promised Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the Living God, we know the time he had with Jesus was meaningful and well spent.

Jesus must have implanted much in his heart about the things of God and His Kingdom that day. And etched in his memory was what life was like "on the dark side," the horrors that Jesus had saved him from, which he would eventually share about with others. But for now, the very presence of this now lucid man had become a living witness and reminder of God and His power.

What amazes me about the story is when the herdsmen returned with the villagers, even with this once violent man sitting right there—now in his right mind—they must have ignored him and plunged right in to their purpose for being there.

They didn't want Jesus around, and They quite pointedly told Him and His disciples to leave.

Why? Were they frightened? Perhaps not only frightened of Jesus who seemed to have "supernatural" powers well beyond what anyone had ever seen or heard of, but also frightened of the one they might have kept skittishly side-glancing at, the one who had once been so dangerous... fearful of what he now might be able to do since he was exposed to the unknown power of Jesus.

We might not know their reason, but we do know the local men clearly wanted Jesus out of there.

Do you think hearing the villagers tell the one he so deeply loved to leave sent waves of panic and horror through this once violent man's mind? I know it would have me!

I'm thinking most of us would have done the same thing he did too. Feeling like a critical part of our life was being ripped from us, we would desperately want to go with Jesus like he did, and follow Him to the ends of the earth if need be! A part of us might even have a seed of fear we might turn back into what we were before Jesus came. Born out of a feeling of panic or deep love, our voice might even have taken on a begging tone as his seemed to do when he implored Jesus to, "...take me with you!"

The thought of Jesus leaving must have been gut-wrenching for him.

The feeling of sudden separation and now rejection probably felt even more frighteningly painful when Jesus answered his heartfelt plea with a "No."

Thankfully, we have indicators that Jesus didn't stop there though. Can't you picture Him full of compassion, as He might have looked this born-anew man right in the eye as He continued with His answer, "...but I want you to do something special for me instead, which only YOU can do. How about it? Are you willing?" Then after this walking miracle gave a nod of expectation, Jesus at last told him what he could do for Him.

"Return to your own people and live life again among them. Tell them about me and what happened to you every chance you get."

I can picture how Jesus might have then given him a manly clasp to the shoulder and looked him encouragingly in the eye while saying, "You can do this. I KNOW you can."

As Jesus was leaving as ordered by the village men, I'm sure the man already felt lonely as he continued to watch Him and His disciples climb into their boat without him. They probably even gave him a knowing nod and a final good-bye wave as they slowly started pulling out into deeper water, heading toward their next destination. Did he continue to watch them until Jesus, their boat, and those with Him all merged into one spot bobbing on the water? The odds are he did. Giving one last longing glance I can almost feel his hesitancy as he turned to go

back to the village and the home he had been driven from so long ago. Can you too?

I'm sure he kept feeling a touch of sadness and loss for a while too, each time he thought of Jesus telling him he could not come with Him and His disciples when they left. But he must have also felt happy at the thought that Jesus himself had told him how he, who just days ago had been more monster than man, could now best serve him!

Think about how his gratitude must have spilled over into a deep love for his Savior, and because of it, did what was natural; he looked for opportunities to talk about the one he loved, Jesus, and how they had met. He would share with them everything he knew about Jesus too, and what He had told him... *never knowing he was BEING salt and light to those around him like Jesus told us to be.*

Jesus had delivered him from what bound him, and he became a new man. He was a new person, who like a child, was wanting to please the one they loved, and was wanting to be like Him as much as possible.

He was doing what Jesus asked him to do. And patterning himself after what he had learned from Him and His disciples.

He was doing what came natural, ***once we meet Christ***, which is something we can't emphasize enough. We can also see the result of how this simple man must have been an effective salt and light bearer too, when Jesus and His disciples later returned to the area. For those who had once hardened their hearts to Jesus, and had told Him to go away, now gathered eagerly, ready to hear His message of hope for themselves when He returned again.

Some Bible scholars believe as many as 4,000 people gathered from the area—some curious, some hungry—to hear for themselves the teachings of Jesus.

Was it because this unnamed man faithfully did what Jesus had asked him to do? To simply tell others what he knew about Him and how He had changed his life from brokenness to wholeness. I would say it was at least a large contributor to people's change of heart and mind about Jesus, wouldn't you?

Do you see it too?

Once our focus is centered on Christ, much like a child does with the one they adore, and like the ex-demoniac did, the more natural it is to "imitate" His character, ever-growing more like Him.

One day I stumbled across a wonderful example of how this works in a short video clip. I wish I could provide a link to it so you could see it for yourself, but sadly I was unable to find it later. It showed a lovable, not-yet 17-month-old who was trying to imitate her parents as they exercised, by struggling to lift their hand weights.

She put her all into lifting them too! Off camera you could hear one of them ask if she was “working out”. She didn’t even have to think about it. Her answer was a simple yet positive, “No”, for you could tell she was having fun, not seeing what she was doing as “work” at all. Instead, you could see pleasure and joy on her face, as she was **BEING just like mom and dad!** That was her goal; *and as much as she was able*, she was doing it too!

*THAT my friend, is how we’re supposed to feel about Christ.
When we do, just like this small child, it won’t seem like dreaded
effort or work at all, when we truly desire to be like him.*

The three BEs we just looked at are just the beginning of many other BEs we can find in the Bible, and they all lead to good things for us! But before taking a look at what some of them are, let’s take just a couple minutes to look deeper into just one more thing. And that is...

Being centered on Christ is key to the other BEs!

Before we come to know Christ, we all center our lives around someone or something that’s more important than anything or anyone else in our life. We may not be consciously aware of it, but we do. This means whatever we’ve grown to center ourselves around, we can safely call our *“control center”*, for it is controlling what the rest of our life and relationships will look like.

It can be our family... our children... our job... our social life... ourself... our religious faith... our church... or it can be something we’re knowingly or unknowingly hooked on, like drugs, pornography, the internet, online gaming or computer games, power, money, sex, casinos.... No matter what it is, when all else in life revolves around that center, most if not all of our decisions, choices, and actions in life are first passed through our *control center* to protect it by making sure what we’re considering won’t conflict, damage, or hinder it in some way.

When we meet Christ, He gives us the opportunity to have a type of “do over” with a new way of life, by replacing our old “control center” with HIM.

If we're to successfully relinquish our life to him, and not keep trying to take it back, it's imperative we trust him... is it not?

The only way we can build that trust is to get to know Him well... to build a close relationship with Him as we would with a best friend. That makes sense, doesn't it.

Making Him our *Control Center* is also one of the reasons Jesus sent us *The Comforter*, the Holy Spirit, whom He also called our "Helper".

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." John 14:26

His Spirit is always with us as we follow Him, to teach and guide us as we run everything through our new godly *control center*, so we can continue to yield ourselves to Christ and BEcome more like him.

God's written Word, along with personal prayer and the help of the Holy Spirit, are what guides us as we discover who God is... who we are... God's plan for us... The Way of Christ... who our enemy is and how he works... and so much more! Jesus wants us to know the truth about it all so we can succeed in our walk with Him, and grow in our love, knowledge, faith and trust in Him, and in our love for others.

He truly is a loving God, who has some pretty amazing things planned for us... **if we but trust and faithfully follow him, and NOT take back our control center from Him!**

Here are a few scriptures to memorize and drive deep into our hearts that show us what wonderful things God has in mind for us.

All scripture is God-breathed (meaning it was inspired by God) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." 2 Timothy 3:16

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." John 10:10

"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart'." Jeremiah29:11-13

Now about those other "BEs"

By now we can see how our character and the meaning behind the word "BE" are intertwined. *As our character changes to be more like that of Christ, we are not only increasingly becoming more like Him, we're also BEING His Salt and Light.*

As we dig into God's Word, we can find many wonderful "BEs" to instill in our heart and character. Some are obvious, while others can too easily be overlooked. It can then be very rewarding and enjoyable to discover as many of them as we can along the way, on our journey with Christ.

To help us get started, I've listed some basic ones in a chart at the end of this section. I encourage you to do a personal study of them sometime soon on your own, during your quiet time with him. If you have your own personal study journal, you might also want to note your thoughts about how you're doing with your BEs as you work on them in your life. I'm amazed at how much we can forget in our busyness of life, so in the future our journal entries can be wonderful reminders of God's care and leading, and of personal victories!

If you haven't already started a spiritual Journal, this might be a good time to seriously consider starting one!

Let's get started with those two portions of scripture that are rich with BEs. You might want to highlight in some way each BE (or character trait) you find in these verses. Add them to the list too, if they're not already there.

"But also, for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:5-8

Peter was clearly writing about adding to, or strengthening our character. The first one you might have missed, for it reads, "giving all diligence...". It may not read like one, but it too is a "BE". In one of the blanks in the list below, you might want to add it as "Be Diligent". Did you find all the others? Let's see if you did. Let's reread the verse, emphasizing our BEs as we do.

"Be growing in faith" (that would be faith in God of course). "Be virtuous" (righteous, ethical, or of good morals). "Be knowledgeable". It's my personal belief this means we're to grow in our knowledge of the Word, like we read above in 2 Timothy 3:16. We can never know enough about the mysteries of God, His grace, and His plans for us now and in the future; which means we would be wise to be life-long students of God and His Kingdom.

Then we see, "Be self-controlled" (self-disciplined). "Be persevering" (to not give up when things seem to go haywire. Keep going despite difficulties, opposition or discouragement). "Be godly" (devoted to God and a virtuous life). "Be lovingly kind" (charitable with a loving attitude). And last but definitely not least, "Be loving" toward others.

Before moving on to the next verse, did you notice something amazing takes place when "these things are yours and abound"? It tells us, "*You will be*

neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." One of the things we're to BE, "knowledgeable"! It comes with a promise too, folks.

Oh, but there's even more that's amazing. Let's take a look at what Peter tells us will happen when we do our best to do these things. Let's drop down to verse 10. I'll paraphrase it for us here...

"If you make every effort to do these things, you will never stumble! And you will receive a rich welcome into the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

Can you imagine never stumbling or faltering as you follow Christ?! Road and stumbling blocks might come your way... but they won't succeed in causing you to stumble or falter in your faith or becoming like Christ! You will be the victor over them, and not them over you. That's an amazing promise all by itself, but we're not finished yet. Look at what else He promises!

If we continue to faithfully follow Christ and grow in our faith, and in our BEs, we will not only remain stable and well-balanced in the Faith, ***we can also know with certainty we'll personally receive a special welcome into God's Kingdom!*** I remember the first time I read these verses; I was awe-struck with what they were telling me. Aren't these some pretty amazing promises?

Now do this next verse like you did previously. Highlight the character traits in this collection called "the Fruit of the Spirit." They don't have a "be" in front of them, but since this is the type of fruit we're to look for in a person's life, we know we're to **BE** such.

If you feel you would like to know the meaning of one of them better, you might want to do the simple way I do it. My secret is I do a fast check of its synonym on the internet. It's a simple yet effective way to become familiar with a fuller meaning of the word. And with the internet it's always easy to dig deeper if you would like to.

Galatians 5:22-23: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

As you come across more BEs in your personal time with God, you can add those to the following Chart too.

If you're part of a group, this section might also be something your leader would like to add to your group study. If so, they will let you know what you are to do next.

My BEING Chart

5

Let's stay salty and bright!

"Did you know every sin starts with self?! Now we know why the Bible tells us we need to die to self!"

As I was preparing this lesson, I kept thinking of the saying, "We have seen the enemy and it is us!"

There's a lot of truth to that; we truly can be our own worst enemy. Have you ever said, "*I shot myself in the foot?*" Meaning, "I was the cause of my own failure", or, "I allowed something to trip me up and caused me to fall hard!"

That sounds like a stumbling block, doesn't it? Life is full of them in all shapes and sizes. And as Christians, even more so with the enemy of our souls keeping busy, making sure we have plenty of things strewn in our path to hinder our growth in Christ, or to stop us from being effective salt and light to those around us.



This tells us if we're to keep our salt "salty", and our lights shining bright, we would be wise to be proactive, and discover ahead of time what can keep them from being so. This well-known ancient proverb is a good place to start.

"Know yourself and know your enemy, and you shall win a hundred battles without loss."

The more I chewed on this saying, the more I appreciated its insight! It tells us so well what we need to know to win life's battles (and overcome Satan and his stumbling blocks too) that come our way. And it even includes a promise if we follow its wisdom!

Perhaps you have heard these three important words many times, that people have taken from it... "*Know your enemy.*" Now we know why they say it. By knowing ourselves, our strengths and weaknesses, and by identifying those of our personal "enemy" too, and how they can stand in our way of victory, we become

better equipped to do what's needed to ensure they're not the victor—we are! And as the quote tells us, not just win, but be assured too of more tremendous victories to come—without loss!

With that kind of promise to look forward to, coupled with the victory we know we can have because of Christ, let's start identifying those personal "enemies" of ours, so we too can live in that kind of victory. Let's start by spotting some stumbling blocks that can spiritually hinder us from BEING.

Do you have doubts or feel blocked?

Do you have a lot of doubts about yourself? For one reason or another, do you believe you don't have what it takes to be spiritual Salt and Light in your corner of the world? Perhaps you simply don't yet know what it means to be Salt and Light. Or do you feel something is holding you back but you don't know what? Perhaps you feel stuck in your Christian walk from time to time—or perhaps most of the time! Or you might simply want to better grow in the area of *Being*. Whichever it is, please know you can be on the road to real change.

Today and our tomorrows can be the start of new beginnings and seeing wonderful victories!

But for now, let's get our focus off those feelings and our goal of *Being Salt and Light*, so we can focus on developing some understanding as to what might be blocking or hindering us from experiencing spiritual victories. Let's flush them out so we can **BE** overcomers, living the type of fulfilling life we desire to have as we follow Christ.

First and foremost, we need to know whatever is holding us back can be uniquely different for each of us, for we are uniquely different individuals in our areas of strengths, weaknesses and personality. What can be a stumbling block to you might not be for me or others—and vice versa. Most stumbling blocks aren't that hard to spot for what they are. But be aware, some can be difficult to see, for they can be well hidden by our thoughts and attitude, or they can be something that's seemingly an innocent part of life.

But there is one especially difficult "block" to overcome that is common to us all, which also has its fingers in every other stumbling block that comes our way. Let's then take a look at this major one first.

"Sin" may not be what you think!

Since this is a critical stumbling block and topic to us spiritually, let's take a few minutes to insure we truly know what "sin" is and what it is not.

Did you know the term, “sin”, which we find in the Bible, is also used in Archery? It’s true; an archer “sins” when they fail to hit what they’re aiming for, the bullseye on a target. Its basic meaning is *“to miss the mark.”* The word means similar in Hebrew too.

If you’re out having a good time doing some target practicing with a Hebrew speaking friend, and they laughingly announced you just *sinned*, they would be teasing you about *“failing to meet your goal”* ...which for the two of you was to hit that gnarly-looking knot hole you were aiming at!

It doesn’t mean what most of us probably grew up to believe, does it.



Once we understand what the word means, we can see why *“sin”* means the same religiously too. However, over time its meaning seems to have morphed into something different. Let me give you an example, which will more easily explain what I mean.

If you tell most people (Christian or not) that they’re a *“sinner”* they will often deny it—sometime vehemently. Why? Because to the average person, being labeled a sinner means they’re perceived to be doing *“bad”* things, which makes them a *bad, perhaps even evil, person!*

Since most of us see ourselves as a GOOD person with a GOOD heart who has GOOD intentions, it’s then understandable why so many believe “sin” and the Bible are ancient, outmoded ideas that are unwelcomed in what many consider to be our more knowledgeable and enlightened society. However...

That mistaken perception can get us into a huge amount of spiritual trouble! We might even say it’s a serious stumbling-block that can cause a person to “miss the mark” of salvation!

Do you also see how this misunderstanding, or misconception, of the meaning of the word can make it one of those *“hard to see”* stumbling-blocks we warned about earlier?

For now, let’s take a good look at two basic things about *“sin”* that is vitally important to know.

First, until we truly meet and accept Christ, we don’t realize we’re ALL born with a “sin nature.” It’s a self-centered one too that puts ourself first and automatically rejects all things God. Without God’s intervention, mankind would never have even a slight inclination of Him, let alone seek Him out. We would then never

discover who He is, and would remain locked in perpetual spiritual darkness. This scripture found in Romans 3:10-12 explains well this hopeless condition we are born into:

"...as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

Second, both good deeds and evil ones can cause us to sin. For either can tempt us to listen to our sin nature, and put our own will before God's, which then causes us "to miss God's mark" and sin.

Whether an action is good or bad, it is only the trigger that causes our sin nature to reveal that it is alive within us. Self-will, disobedience, or rebellion against God that is born out of our sin nature is the "sin"!

Do you see it? Each time we sin, it begins and culminates within us. Let's see how Paul explained it in James 1:14-16.

"But each one is tempted when by his own evil desires (our sin nature) he is lured away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers...."

An Important Note: Being a person who sins (a sinner) doesn't mean we're automatically a "bad" person. It means we have a sin nature this is blinding us Christ and HIS righteousness. And because of it, we are unknowingly (or sometime knowingly) *missing the mark* that leads to the most unbelievable Gift of all time, an amazing new life of victory that enables us to be a Child of God, with all its future wonders and inheritance to come too!

Christ is key to getting our blinders off. If you're not sure what it means to be a Child of God, don't wait. Go to our "Something More" Appendix, and select our one-page article, "*The Secret Meeting*", and read how Jesus explained it to Nicodemus.

Please know, we can be the most loving, kindest, right living person who ever lived... but we are still missing the critical mark of holiness¹². Without Christ we are still a sinner for He is the only one who can set us truly free from our sin nature so we can become a Child of God.

I underlined that last part for it's THE most important thing to know and do in this life, and for the next.

¹² God told us, "Be holy for I am holy." That is a spiritual mystery that is made possible only through Christ.

This verse tells us that sin is then simply anything we might consider “good” or “bad” that is in our life or heart that causes us to *miss the mark* of living God’s way, and all the wondrous things that come with it.

Please know by using the term, “missing the mark” we are not downplaying the seriousness and danger of sin in our lives. Instead, we are gaining a better understanding of it so we can “know our enemy” for the reason presented at the beginning of this lesson: so we can be increasingly victorious!

I like the way one Social Media commenter put it¹³.

“If we define our lives by a simple, well-defined target that we continually strive to hit and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus who never missed the mark and always got a “Robin Hood” (a modern phrase for splitting an arrow with a second arrow), then we know beforehand that though we will fail, we see that failing to hit the mark is part of learning to hit it.

“We become much more accepting of the failure in ourselves and in others, but this is a healthy acceptance of failure that keeps calling us higher to more success and does not leave us defeated.”

This writer’s insight of the importance of keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus is borne out by the verse that tells us, “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.”¹⁴ For if we’re to do as this scripture says, to seek the Kingdom of God above all else, we need to keep our eyes steadily fixed on Jesus so we can follow His lead! And in case you’re wondering, what we’re “needing” in this case is to hit the target!

The wonderful thing about that is when we put Him first, everything else seems to more easily fall into place, and we’re less apt to be tripped up and “miss the mark” that’s currently in our life. Instead, we can victoriously hit it!

We now know what sin is and is not. It’s now time to tackle identifying the things in our personal life that can cause us to sin, and “miss the mark” with God, which also hinders our salt from freely flowing and our light from shining bright.

¹³ Sadly I was unable to learn the commenters name, so I could give them credit for their insightful words.

¹⁴ Matthew 6:33. New Living Translation. *This is an especially good one to memorize for it can help keep us focused on Christ.*

Shining God's light on our personal life

The things in our life that can cause us to sin are what I like to call *stumbling blocks*, which can cause us to painfully stub our spiritual "toes" and lose our footing, which can cause us to stumble around in our faith. As we're trying to restabilize our balance we too often can fall hard on our spiritual faces or keisters!

But no matter which it is, as we're down or recovering, it can cause us to lag behind as we're following Christ, which can lead to us "miss the mark" and sin.

If you're not sure...
how to overcome the road-blocks of Sin, you're going to want to check out, "Three Simple Steps for Overcoming Any Sin", by Ty Gibson, in our "Something More" Appendix section.

These stumbling blocks can stop us all together from keeping our eyes locked on Jesus so we can follow him, or they can temporarily "trip us up," or hinder our Faith.

As we read previously, what our stumbling blocks are can be uniquely different for each of us, for we each have uniquely different areas of strengths and weaknesses. However, we do have one stumbling block that is part of our sin nature, and that is "Disobedience".

Disobedience will cause us to *miss the mark* and sin 100% of the time.

No matter what our other stumbling blocks are, Disobedience influences them to one degree or another, which makes this one a critical key to overcoming sin in our lives. Let's then take a closer look at the sin of Disobedience for a minute.

We of course now understand that *Sin simply means to miss the mark. But now we need to know it's also much more than that.*

Sin is not just a simple mistake or poor choice as so many like to think and say. Continuing to "miss the mark", especially willfully, has serious consequences. It weakens us spiritually, and weakens our relationship with God. For while we're "missing the mark" we're also missing God's will and best for us by living in disobedience.

James 4:17 helps us see how simple it is to slip into sin by our disobedience.

"Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do, yet fails to do it (who misses the mark) is guilty of sin."

Did you get that? Highlight the word, “Anyone”. There’s no avoiding it. It’s talking about us all, which includes you and me. We then need to pay close attention to that next part... “**who knows** the right thing to do—but doesn’t do it.” It’s clearly our *act of disobedience or rebellious nature* that makes something a sin...which can be especially dangerous if we don’t take God and His will seriously! Read the box note to see why.

Be aware...

A lifestyle of disobedience can also lead to eternal separation from God! Jesus himself told us not everyone who claims Him as their Lord, will enter heaven—including those who do wonderful things in his name, like casting out demons, prophesying, and performing miracles! Why? Because they failed to “do the will of My Father who is in heaven!” He then went on to say, “...I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.’” Those would be horrible words to hear! This is so important, I recommend everyone read this for yourself, in Matthew 7:18-23

Let’s look at that in a little different way. If we know to do good, but for one reason or another choose to do otherwise, we are allowing our sin nature to take over by **knowingly** choosing to do wrong. We are then guilty of sin, for we “missed the mark” of *BEING obedient* to God. *When we do that often enough, we’re REINFORCING our sin nature—not dying to it—so we can practice being like Christ. We are then risking being one of those we read about above, who were blind to the seriousness of their disobedience to God.*

It’s good to know too stumbling blocks that lead to sin take on many shapes and forms that can be very deceiving (*more about that in the true story below*) which can look innocent, but easily trip us up as we follow Christ and HIS righteousness. They then can be among the hardest to see for what they really are, distractors that can keep us from doing God’s will, and BEING His Salt and Light.

When we allow ourself to be distracted, we may not knowingly be choosing to disobey God, but the end result is the same. At some point we realize we “missed the mark” by not keeping our focus on Christ so we can faithfully follow and remain obedient to Him.

But I do have some good news about stumbling blocks! Since the roadblock of disobedience touches on them all to one degree or another, the more we work at overcoming the stumbling block of disobedience, the easier it is to overcome ALL others that are strewn on life’s path as we follow Christ!

Overcoming the sin of disobedience is then key to us experiencing wonderful victories in our lives!

The trickiness of sin...

which we introduced above, came into focus for me while I was an older teen attending *Bethany Church* in Anaheim, California, thanks to my Pastor, Rev. Gordon B. Francis. One Sunday morning he drove this important truth home for us by sharing his own personal experience with it.

His experience with its trickiness was so unique it drove this invaluable insight deep into my mind and heart. His struggle with it will be more understandable if you know a little more about his background. Brother Francis ("Brother" and "Sister" is what we respectfully called one another back then) was a highly educated man, with a wide range of talents, experience and interests, which was an unusual combination for a pastor. He was first a youth pastor for an Open Bible church in Iowa, where he also attended Open Bible College. Later he became the West Region Youth Minister, and received a degree in Psychology from the University of Denver, before moving to California where he taught at Northrop University in Inglewood, founded Calvary Temple in Orange, and became a Clinical Psychologist for the State of California.

Needless to say, he had a very successful career, with a wide range of interests before answering the call to full-time ministry at *Bethany Church*, where he remained my pastor until I was married with a family of my own, and moved to Central California.

I naturally cannot remember his exact words on that memorable day, and so will retell the essence of his insightful message to us.

I believe those of us who love to read can relate well to Brother Francis' enjoyment of each new issue of that era's very popular, Life Magazine. He would spend many an hour enjoying its stories, absorbing its wealth of information, which helped satisfy his inquiring mind and kept him apprised of what was happening in the world.

He thoughtfully assured any of those who enjoyed reading the magazine that there was nothing wrong with doing so—for them. But he had grown to understand that for him it was a problem. God had been working on his heart to let him know he was spending so much time reading "Life", he was spending less and less time in prayer and being in the Word for personal time with Him.

God convicted him of that... and of his need to give up his magazine since he had become so addicted to it. He obeyed and repented, and gave up reading his favorite magazine, for he didn't want anything to come between him and his relationship with Christ. If he had not done so, he would have been guilty of sin... of "missing the mark" with God.

Thanks to Brother Francis sharing from the heart, I learned something vitally important about sin that day... a lesson I have obviously never forgotten. And my respect for him as a Man of God grew much higher that day too!

Let's now read that verse again.

*"...to him who **knows** to do good and does not do it, **to him** it is sin."*

My friends, this story shows us that we need to be aware it's not necessarily what we're DOING that is sinful. Instead, the sin comes from our own heart when we choose to "obey" (or follow) our sin nature and put our own desire and will above that of God!

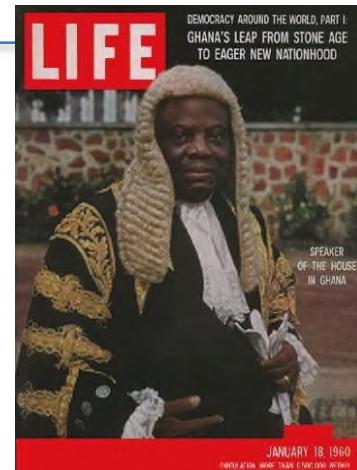
We can now see why these words in James 4:17 are so important to better see and understand how sin works. And how it can sneak into our lives in innocent looking ways.

Now we're ready...

to look for our own personal stumbling-blocks! But I'm not going to list for you what they commonly are, for it's easy to focus so much on the common ones it can keep us from seeing our personal ones! (Yes, like what Brother Francis shared about himself and Life Magazine.)

Instead, let's look at how we can identify our own personal stumbling blocks, both the common and our personal ones.

Let's not forget to write them down as we identify them. It's helpful to be able to refer back to them later as needed, to help us stay on track with conquering them. It's also helpful to record how we're doing from time to time, for during those times we're bound to feel discouraged it can be encouraging to look back and see how God has been working in our life, and see how far we've actually come!



Life Magazine was probably the most popular and well-read magazine ever published; copies are still purchased today as collectables by its fans.

A good way to start identifying our current stumbling blocks is by looking at the “BEs” we discovered in our previous lessons, then flip them around to their opposite meanings. Instead of now seeing the “fruit of the spirit”, we’re now able to see what the *fruit of the flesh* are, or as the Bible calls it, the “works of the flesh,” or the “acts of the flesh”, which God warns us about in Galatians 5:19-21.

Just like the Fruit of the Spirit are Building Blocks that move us closer to being like Christ, the fruit of the flesh are Stumbling Blocks that move us further away from becoming like Him!

The “works of the flesh”, which stem from our sin nature, are our main stumbling blocks, and not only can cause us to “miss the mark”, but can also cause our spiritual “salt-shakers” to be plugged and God’s light dimmed within us!

The Bible tells us, “*By their fruit you will know them.*” Let’s then not only be fruit inspectors of others, so we can know what kind of “tree” they are—let’s also ask God to shine His revealing light in our own hearts, so we can better know the type of fruit others, and God, are seeing in us.

Take the time to talk to God about each one you come across as you compare it to your own attitude and behavior as you go about your day. Ask yourself, and God, if there are any hints of them in your life. If so, those are the ones you want to write down on your own personal list to focus on changing.

For those of you who don’t already have a journal, you will find a blank Chart at the end of this lesson you can use.

As we’re working to identify those stumbling blocks in our lives, let’s be like King David who even though he was an imperfect man, he had the right attitude spiritually, and so God declared he was a “man after His own heart.” Let’s be willing to say something similar to God like David did...

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way (bad fruit) in me; lead me in the way everlasting.”

Let God’s Holy Spirit guide you, with identifying your own stumbling blocks that cause you to “miss the mark” with God, and you WILL have your answer. It’s guaranteed!

Stumbling-blocks

6

Salt and Light meets Social Media!

"Darkness itself does not exist for it's a condition. It's the absence of light! The result of having no light."

"Social Media amplifies both the good and dark sides of human nature." I found that well-said observation on the internet.

I'm sure whoever wrote it learned its truth through personal experience, as have I and millions of others. Many times I have called SM both *a blessing and a curse* on society and us all—with good cause.

There is no denying it; the personal experience of users and research show almost all forms of SM frequently brings out the worst in people. It's generally believed the reason why is because it's a world of anonymity. A person can use their own name or a pseudo one, it doesn't matter which, for even if they use their real name and photo, they know those who read their posts or responses won't know who or what they are, or know anything about them. They then feel safe behind a cyber wall of protection... free to let off hateful steam or dump on others... free to say or do anything they want without repercussion. For afterward they can easily blend into a mass of millions of people, which many take full advantage of.

That is what spiritual darkness does.



"...The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."

John 3:19

As much as we wish it wasn't so, SM has taken over the world as THE premiere communication tool of the century. Like it or not, it is full of darkness too, and is here to stay in one form or another!

Yes... it is full of deep darkness. But just like a mission field, the dark *World of Social Media* needs the Light of Christ too.

As His salt and light...

What do YOU believe God would have us do?

There is one thing we can unquestioningly know. God wants us to BE Salt and Light to those living in spiritual darkness wherever it is found, and not get pulled in to become a part of it!

Sadly though, far too many of us stumble and fall into SM's trap, inadvertently adding to its darkness instead of showing the refreshing Light of Christ; or we understandably hate what we see and experience with SM and avoid it all together.

Thankfully though, some see this relatively new cyber world for what it is, another opportunity to reflect the heart of God in our day to day lives, so we can show the goodness and hope of Christ, *while others have caught the vision of it being the largest mission field in history, and have established online outreach with God's Light to those living in darkness.*

As bearers of His light, isn't it then good to ask God what HE wants us to do with social media? I emphasized the word, "HE", for each of us already know what WE would like to do or say when personally hit with its darkness, and it wouldn't be Christ-like either! It then makes sense that if we are desiring to follow Christ, we will then ask Him how He would like us to *BE* when faced with the oppressive darkness of Social Media.

Let's then take the time to discover as individuals, what God would have us do about this controversial new world; and how God sees us when we pull back from those trapped in darkness, or when voicing our thoughts, ideas, and opinions while participating in this unique cyber world.

Is He seeing us as His much-needed light bearers? ...or more like the voices of those who are caught up in the darkness, needing to experience the Light of Christ?

Ask yourself, "Are my ACTIONS more like one who is in SM's dark trap... or am I BEING more like one who's showing God's light?"

When we get on the internet...

or link to any SM platform, we may not realize it, but to one degree or another we will be voicing ourself God's way, or our "fleshly" way. We will either be showing the *Fruit of the Spirit* that is working in our life... or we will be reflecting what the Bible calls, "*the works of the flesh*". You will recall we discussed both in the previous lesson.

They are of course polar opposites, with all of us generally being somewhere between the two extremes. Let's then get real and try and see ourselves as God sees us while on Social Media, and perhaps at other key times in our daily lives as well. That can be a tough thing to do, can't it? But it is so worth it when we do!

Let's answer the following questions by rating ourselves on a scale of 1 – 10, with 1 being more "fleshly," and 10 being more like the fruit of the Spirit. Feel free to add others you might think of that are appropriate.

How do I rate?

Do my words, actions and attitude...

1. _____ Show more love or hate?
2. _____ Lean more toward the positive or the negative?
3. _____ Sound unifying or divisive?
4. _____ Attract or repulse?
5. _____ Reflect peace or anger?
6. _____ Communicate goodwill or malice?
7. _____ Challenge or attack?
8. _____ Encourage or discourage?
9. _____ Honor Christ and His Good News, or debase them?
10. _____ Please Christ, or displease him?
11. _____ Other _____

Add them up _____

You're almost there: divide your total by the number of questions. _____
(Don't forget to add the number of questions you might have added. For example, if you added 2 more to the 10 already there, then divide by 12.)

Now mark that final number on the following scale.

FLESH ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10 -- SPIRIT

Marking it on a scale like this truly helps us see how we're doing at BEING salt and light, doesn't it.

If you feel discouraged with your score, please know God doesn't want you to be. He wants you to be enlightened and encouraged. For you now know the areas you need to focus working on, and have the opportunity to do so with God's help. Just think how with God on your side, you can look forward to becoming a person who has changed in a manner that not only pleases him, but yourself too!

But don't misunderstand me. When we've been "missing the mark" of bearing good fruit in our lives, it's also good for us to feel some pangs of conviction. For God's conviction leads us to repent and do what's needed to successfully get back on track and keep moving forward toward our goal. What God **does not** want for us is to feel CONDEMNED, for that discouraging darkness comes from our spiritual enemy, Satan, who wants to keep us locked in a cycle of hopelessness.

It's wise to drive this truth deep so we can always remember...

Conviction comes from God, and can healthily lead us to correction and victory. Condemnation comes from the enemy, Satan, and is designed to destructively cripple us, seriously hindering our ability to be like Christ.

Social Media holds a unique lure

As we mentioned before, unlike other forms of communications, SM gives us anonymity if we want it to, with little if any accountability for our attitude, words or actions. Thus, for whatever reason, too many feel it's okay to lash out at others, verbally intimidate, whip or abuse whomever and whenever they like by name calling, swearing, using filthy, shocking language... whatever enters their mind to do. Their actions generally make them feel like they're better than others, powerful and in control—and safe from well-deserved repercussions. But they're being deceived in their darkness.

I need to warn you, I'm about to switch to a hard-to-hear message for some. But it's a necessary one, for Christians are not immune to SM's lure either.

We too for various reasons can become embroiled in its deceptive darkness. James 1:14-15 reminds us how it works.

"But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."

Sadly, sinning against God and others like this, runs rampant in today's society... especially through social media. Even sadder is when we participate in it, for we

are also inadvertently defaming the cause of Christ with our wrong attitude and conduct, and can even be souring would-be seekers against Christians and a possible eternal relationship with Christ!

Social Media then becomes not only one of the most devastating stumbling blocks a Christian can have in their life, causing them to dangerously continue “missing the mark” with Christ... but we in turn can be part of a spiritually dangerous road-block in the life of others!

*Remember, the “sin” isn’t the deed, it’s referring to the **attitude of our heart** when we knowingly¹⁵ “miss the mark”! And in this case... missing the mark of BEING like Christ while on social media and interacting with others.*

That is why when we get caught up in any sin, we need to wake up to it and see it for what it is so we can go back to the Father and get cleaned up from the darkness we’ve been participating in. 1 John 1:7-9 explains it well...

“But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

That's why we're thankful for God's mercy!

God knew we were going to “miss the mark” with Him from time to time, and planned ahead of time a way for us to get right with Him again so we could escape the pull of darkness and step back into His light. But please be reminded, it’s conditional. **“IF we confess our sin...”** THEN... **“he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!”**

To me this promise is the most powerful, eternally life-changing words ever written...

And to think they were given to you and me, and any who come to Him! We are truly blessed.

¹⁵ James 4:17 – “So for one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, for him it is sin.”

Let's never forget who we are, and why...

“You are the Salt of the Earth...
the Light of the World”

Jesus

“You are a chosen people...
God’s special possession,
that you may declare
the praises of Him who called you
out of darkness into His wonderful light.”

1 Peter 2:9

Something More

APPENDIX

The Secret Meeting 58

Three Simple Steps for Overcoming Sin 59

There's an unusual and vitally important conversation recorded for us in the Bible between Jesus and a man called "Nicodemus."

Let's give Nicodemus the shorter name of, "Nic".



himself as he traveled through the country. But for reasons we can learn about later, Nic saw Jesus differently and wanted to meet him privately to learn more about what he was teaching.

Some reasonable speculating tells us that even though he had great wealth and was highly educated for his day, Nic sensed Jesus held the answer to his discontentment with life. Yet like many of us he feared what others would think of him if he, a well respected man of the Law, was seen consulting with a wandering teacher who challenged the status quo of their religious beliefs and systems, and who was disliked by his fellow peers! He then decided to go to Jesus at night when there was little chance he would be seen.

Nic's plan worked for he had an enlightening conversation with Jesus who surprised him big time! Nic told Jesus he personally believed him to be a teacher sent by God. From here on I'll give you just the high-

What Jesus called being “Born Again” is a process that starts with “hearing” that Christ loves you and me, and came to save us from our sin nature, which brings “conviction” that leads to “repentance” and new life.

He gives us hope!

Q What does the “Born Again” life look like, according to the Bible? We also hear this process being called, “Growing in Christ” (like a newborn to adulthood), “Growing in the Faith”, “the Christian walk”, and similar. [Read more here →](#)



lights of the story, and you can read the rest later for yourself.

During their conversation, Jesus pointedly told Nic, *“I’m telling you the truth. No one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again.”*

That was a pretty shocking statement, wasn't it? I'm sure Nic was initially stunned like you or I would be if we had been there in his place. After recovering his wits, I can almost hear him quizzically ask, *“How can someone be born when they are old? Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”*

Jesus explained he was talking about a **second** kind of birth: Just like a physical man made it possible for Nic to be born into this physical world, similarly he has to be “born again” a second time. But this time he would be born into GOD’s spiritual world *by the Spirit (who is part of the God-head), which would place him in God’s family as one of His Children!* This is how we all become “born again” and connected to God as our Heavenly Father. Now how awesome is that?!

You’re going to want to read the rest of the story for yourself in [John 3:1-21](#). It’s not long but is full of good info. Then start digging into your How-to book, the Bible—a must study to better understand who God is and how to grow strong in your new life as a Child of God. If you don’t know where to start, we selected the below verses to help you gain a good foundation in your faith ↓ ↓ ↓

A A new believer usually wants to tell others what they’ve just experienced: [Rom 10:9](#); [Luke 8:21](#); [John 1:12, 16:7-8](#); [Rom 10:9](#) We also see them develop a desire to grow and live in their new found Faith like what the Bible describes below.

FYI: These scriptures link to [biblegateway.com](#), in the translation many Bible scholars agree is most reliable, NASB:

- **New way of life** [2 Cor 5:17](#); [Phil 3:13-14](#)
- **Righteousness** [1 Jhn 2:29, 3:9](#); [Heb 12:11](#)
- **“Fruit of the Spirit”** [Jhn 15:5](#); [Gal 5:22-23](#)
- **Perseverance** [Heb 10:36, 12:1-2](#); [Jms 1:2-4, 12](#); [2 Thess 3:13](#); [Gal 6:9](#); [Rom 5:3-5](#); [Rev 3:11](#)
- **Love Others** [1 Jhn 4:7](#); [Gal 5:13-14](#)
- **Comforts/Encourages** [Heb 10:24-25](#); [3:13](#); [2 Cor 1:3-4](#); [1 Thess 5:11](#); [1 Pet 5:2-3](#)
- **Read, Study & Applies the Word** [Matt 4:4](#); [Pet 2:2](#); [II Tim 3:16-17](#); [Ps 119:9-12](#); [Heb 4:12](#)

IMPORTANT: The Bible tells us before Jesus died and rose again, He made it very clear that *“To see the Kingdom of God, you must be born again.”*

This tells us it’s critical we know for sure what that means, doesn’t it? Based on the story we see here and other scriptures, we’ve broken it down into an easier to understand 3-step process: We first “hear”, understand and believe the Good News of what Jesus did to give us new life. The Holy Spirit then “convicts” us of our sin that stands between us and God, which leads us to “repent” of our sin nature so we can develop a relationship with Christ. The below scriptures give more info about those 3 Steps and how to grow. We highly recommend you find and mark them in your Bible.

We also wish you well in your journey with Christ, and pray you grow stronger every day in your Spiritual Life!

“For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.” Ephesians 5:8-10

Three Simple Steps for Overcoming Any Sin

By Ty Gibson

Copied from: <https://lightbearers.org/blog/> as of 4/6/22

"We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

Whoever you are, whatever your struggles and temptations may be, sweet victory is yours for the taking.

Right now!

Here are three simple steps that will release you from the grip of even the most besetting sin.

1. Name the Thing

Honesty is the precursor to victory.

Before God, and in your own conscience, call your sin exactly what it is. Cease all explanations and excuses. Just get on your knees and confess that this thing is absolutely opposed to God's character, that it is hurting others and destroying you. Verbalizing the truth of the matter is vitally necessary. Doing so awakens a deeper sensitivity and places your heart in an honest position before God and before yourself.

Moses instructed Israel, "It shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing" (Leviticus 5:5).

Confess "that thing," the specific "thing," for exactly what it is, without reserve and without any kind of justification.

David gave us an example of total transparency before God:

"I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin." (Psalm 32:5).

Stop hiding!

Stop lying!

Stop explaining!

Simply tell the truth.

2. Decide and Act Against the Thing

There lies within you a God-given power to choose. It's a power no force in the universe can prevail against. Satan himself, and all his unholy angels, cannot make a man or woman sin when the will has decided not to.

The biblical word for the movement of the will away from sin and toward God is "repentance." It basically means a deliberate change of mind and direction.

Call it a spiritual 180.

The moment you decide against sin and begin to act in a new moral course, new neurological, synaptic pathways immediately begin to form. Your mind actually begins to take on a new shape! Paul says you literally “become renewed in the spirit (the bent or inclination) of your mind” (Ephesians 4:23). As the repentant frame of mind is sustained, a new personhood is formed in the image of Christ. New patterns of thought, feeling and behavior become easier with every passing day. You become naturalized to and at home in the character of God.

But now comes the most vital factor of all.

3. Receive Power Over the Thing

No matter how honestly you confess your sin, and no matter how firmly you decide against your sin, your willpower does not innately possess the quality and kind of power you need to overcome. Of yourself, you are utterly bankrupt of the moral oomph to obtain victory.

You can't “git 'er done.”

Not when it comes to overcoming sin.

So where does that leave you?

Well, you are in desperate need of a power outside of and above yourself to be poured into the moral fiber of your being. You need a steady inflow of a particular kind of power that is not of human origin. This power is not a mysterious or nebulous thing. It's not a magical wave of energy or some kind of miraculous act of divine fiat that bypasses your awareness and freewill.

Quite simply, the power you need is... wait for it... the love of God!

Paul says:

“The love of Christ compels us... He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

That is, the love of Christ is the power that moves us to cease living for ourselves and to begin living for Him. The love of Christ, alone, is of sufficient power to break the strength of sin at its most foundational level, at the level of our natural inclination to live for self.

Again, Paul says:

“We through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith... faith energized by God's love” (Galatians 5:5-6).

God's love is the vital energizing factor in the victorious Christian life. No other power will do, because no other power can do.

The inner moral strengthening we need is none other than the love of God, in Christ.

“God does not employ compulsory measures; love is the agent which He uses to expel sin from the heart” (Thoughts From The Mount of Blessing, p. 76).

The practical question is this, then:

If God's love is the power I need, then how do I tap into it? How do I drink it in? How do I get God's love into the moral fabric of my being?

The Bible offers a simple answer to this vital question. Paul says that God's love gains access to our lives through the conduit of comprehension; that is, through the rational faculties of the mind:

"I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:11-21).

Paul is clear here. The inner moral strengthening we need is none other than the love of God, in Christ. We need to become rooted and ground in this love. And the way we do it is by giving our minds over to the task of comprehending God's love manifested in Christ. This love, when comprehended, is "the power that works in us." This is Paul's exact point.

When assimilated through the medium of understanding and faith, God's love becomes the muscle behind the entire experiential process of victory over sin. Read that again and again until you understand it and believe it.

To the degree that you believe—both intellectually and emotionally—that the matter of conquering sin depends on you, you will fail. Conversely, to the degree that you give your heart over to dependence upon the love of God, you will succeed. From self-centeredness to God-centeredness—this is the fundamental and crucial paradigm shift upon which victory over sin hinges. Hang the entirety of your faith-weight precisely here, and you will be more than a conqueror through Him who loves us.

So there you go—three simple (and infinitely powerful!) steps to overcome any and every sin.

Really, it's that simple.

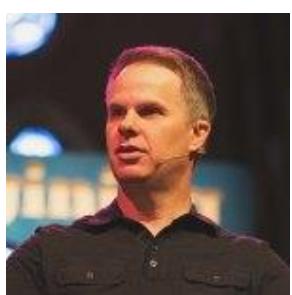
And that practical.

Name your sin with honest confession before God.

Decide with repentance against your sin.

Receive a steady intellectual and emotional inflow of God's love as your source of power over sin.

With these three simple faith-actions, there is no sin that can hold you down.



About the author, Ty Gibson, Speaker/Director at Light Bearers

Ty is a speaker/director for Light Bearers and pastor of Storyline Adventist Church. A passionate communicator with a message that opens minds and moves hearts, Ty teaches on a variety of topics, emphasizing God's unfailing love as the central theme of the Bible. Ty and his wife Sue have three adult children and two grandsons.

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