

A **Visual** Bible Study

“Shake the Salt... share the Light!”

by Evelyn Alexander
& WallPostings for the Soul

A Guidebook to
BEING

“Shake the Salt & Share the Light”

***...helps us discover new insights
into the wonders and purpose of
BEING, to help us be victorious
overcomers!***

Are you seeking for “something more?”

Do you feel discouraged, or struggling
to find hope?

Do you feel stuck in your Faith?

Do you feel too broken, or feel like you
don’t have what it takes, to be a “good”
Christian?

Do you feel confused about what it
means to be a Christian... to be born
again... or to be “saved”?

Do you struggle with the thought:
“How can a good God send people to
Hell?” Or the flip of that, “How can God
send a good person to Hell?”

Do you ever think or wonder about what
it means, to be “Salt” and “light”?

Do you feel yourself getting sucked
into the darkness of life, social media,
or the internet?

***Please take comfort in know-
ing you are not alone. Come
join us as we discover answers
to these questions... and more!***



Shake the Salt & Share the Light!

A Guidebook to BEING

Wide Margin Version for Notes

by Evelyn Alexander
Wall Postings for the Soul

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

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Discovering the Salt & Light Life!



For the last several years God has been taking me on a spiritual journey of BEING and showing me the wonder of what it can do in our lives.

My journey began when these words of Jesus took on new meaning for me: *"You are the salt of the earth... the light of the world."* Those two words, **"You ARE..."** unexpectedly gripped me tight and never let go. They had planted a strong desire in my heart to discover what Jesus might have been picturing when he called us, "salt and light."

After doing some digging and comparing, it didn't take long to understand why He used the terms "salt" and "light", but then I became proverbially stuck!

It might sound strange, but for the longest time I knew I was not getting the full picture of the type of lives we would be able to have by being salt and light like God intended. The analogy though, seems pretty straight forward, doesn't it? Yet I knew I was missing something... but what?! The question continued to nag at me.

Then one day, seemingly out of nowhere, the thought hit me to look up the word, "Be" (as in "Being" salt and light) to understand its full meaning. From there, my discovery shot off, and everything changed.

My Christian faith took on new life and understanding as I discovered the importance of that little word, "be", which I discovered has a lot to do with our character. Now it seems so obvious, what a "salt and light" life would look like; it seems so simple too—how could I have not seen it sooner?

Perhaps you too feel stuck in your faith... or you feel as if there must be more to it... or feel you might be missing something (like I did)... or you are just looking for that "something more" in your life. Whatever it is...

**My hope for you is that you too will discover how to
have a fulfilling Christian life.**

I have grown to not just see being salt and light as a Bible Study, I also now see it as the victorious life-style Jesus might have been picturing we can have, when He declared those memorable words that day, ***"YOU ARE salt... and light!"***

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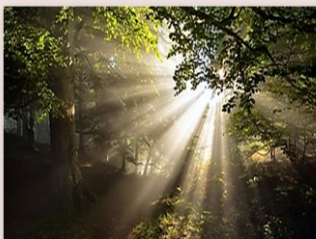


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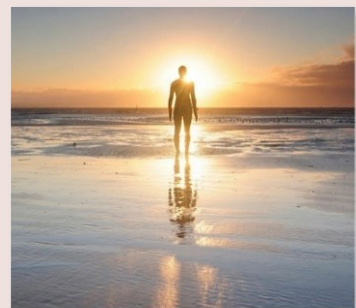
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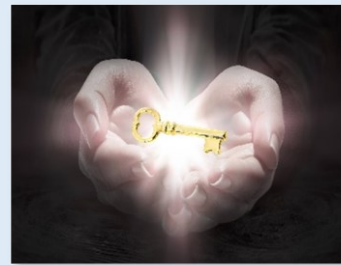
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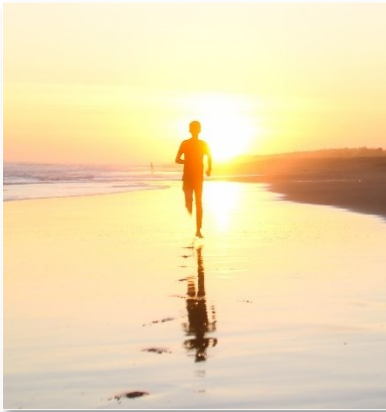
My God turns my darkness into light!

Psalms 18:28

Changed by Being!

ATTENTION:

We're going to do something different. Before digging into "BEING," we're going to start with the beginning of the last lesson FIRST, starting on page 75. **Please turn there now**, and then return here when asked to do so.



When Jesus told us, "You are salt and light," He used the word, "ARE"; that's important. He didn't say anything like, "You will be..." or, "You can be...", instead He was letting us (His Followers in the past and those of us in the present) know, ***we already are!***

This means we don't have to become a Bible scholar to be spiritual salt and light, or become a minister or pastor of a church body to do so.

For God designed them to be part of us, within our spiritual DNA, so it can be as natural as breathing when we've become "born again" as His child.

All we need do is let it flow and shine!

Does that sound like it's too good to be true? Does your life or thoughts tell you otherwise? Then let's set our mind and heart to discover what we can about the wonders and benefit of BEING God's spiritual salt and light no matter who we are, or what our failures tell us.

In the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus declared to His followers that they are salt and light He opened not only their eyes to the wonder of that truth, but ours as well!

When we read in the Bible about the morally loose Samaritan woman meeting Jesus at the well, and what happened next (*we will see that on page 17*) we will discover how she was immediately set free to BE salt and light by simply telling

others about whom she just met and what He did for her, and by inviting them to come meet Him for themselves.

And when we read the story of the violent, dangerous man whom Jesus delivered from tormenting demons (*that dramatic story starts on page 34*) we see how **NO ONE (not even you or me)** is beyond the reach of Christ to save from our own personal pain or “demons,” so we too can be His salt and light and help build His Kingdom.

Together, they show us we don’t have to wait for years to receive enough biblical training or experience to be pleasing to our Savior as we’re being effective salt and light to those around us. Nor do we have to leave family and friends behind so we can go to a foreign country to be a missionary... or prepare ourselves by memorizing a gazillion number of verses... or practice what we’re going to say to others about Him until we have it well memorized, to assure ourselves we won’t forget it while sharing.

We just need to start where we are...
and humbly
live and share what we already know about Him and His Good News!

The catch is somewhere along the line it’s been ingrained in us there’s got to be more to it than that! In a way that’s correct—but not like we think.

As we explore “*Shake the Salt & Share the Light*”, we’re going to discover why.

With our “natural man” having its sin nature (which we’ll be taking a closer look at both later) along with their many deceptive ideas and stumbling-blocks, our natural man is destined to stand in our way of BEING. It’s also keeping us from enjoying the benefit of being His salt and light, like Jesus so clearly told us we **ARE**.

The good news is God made a wonderful way for us to overcome our sin nature, and those tricky stumbling blocks in our lives!

Come join us as “*Shake the Salt & Share the Light*” helps us discover what has been holding us back from enjoying the new life of purpose and hope God planned for us to have, for simply **BEING, truly can be life changing!**

Freed to BE!



Out of God's mercy, He planned a way that would empower us to BE His salt and light in a VERY dark world—and He promised too, the darkness would not be able to overwhelm or extinguish that light!¹

But that doesn't mean we ourselves can't knowingly or unknowingly, dim or cover it.

When I plunged in to explore what it means to be salt and light, my first surprise was the realization that...

The moment we met and accepted the Good News of Jesus Christ we also became His salt and light!

I then set out to discover everything I could about it. And the more I found, the more I discovered the joyous victories we can have in life, just by being what Jesus told us we already ARE, salt and light for His Kingdom. *But the bad news is something too often stands in our way or hinders us from being so.*

While searching, I discovered what is probably one of the biggest hindrances too, in today's world.

Increasingly I found myself using 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 the dark world of the internet and social media by exposure, trial and error. And the more I got into it, the more I personally experienced why some people loved it while others hated it!

What happens in the world of technology is definitely an added modern-day challenge to today's Christian, to be salt and light! It's a world of darkness that powerfully penetrates the heart, mind and soul of those in today's world, much more than any of us realize. It's also a world where people are looking for hope.

Like a mission field, it's a modern-day "unreached people group" like no other!

¹ "In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." John 1:4-5

Whether we use social media or not, this guidebook can help us discover the important message Jesus was sending us when He told His followers, “YOU are salt and light.” This tool of darkness (the internet) might be different than what mankind has had to deal with in the past... but the antidote for its spiritual darkness remains the same as it’s always been... ***we need to be salt and light***, which pierces the darkness so those blinded by it can see Christ and learn of His Good News.

I was awed when I began to see why and how God designed us to be part of His wondrous plan to rescue man from spiritual darkness.

Did you know the Bible tells us that anyone without Christ cannot see His light, for they have been blinded to it!

This means we are all born into spiritual darkness, and blind to being so too! Because we are, without God’s grace, it would be impossible for us to know anything about Him and His goodness... or even desire to!

BUT the giver of Life worked around Satan’s plan to make a way for us to penetrate that darkness. He made it possible for the spiritually blind to see Him IN us, His followers... His light bearers! And he revealed to us *The Way*² to spend eternity with Him, through the physical birth, life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Think about what the Bible is telling us

Because we carry Jesus’ light within us, others who are normally blind to Him, are able to see His light in those of us who follow Him! ...and discover that Jesus is real and alive so they too can get to know him.

Sadly though...

what grabbed at my heart were the many defeated Christians I was seeing around me, and on social media, who were being pulled into its darkness... online, at work, and among family and friends. What light they

² Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6

had was becoming increasingly harder to see. It's like their own light was being sucked into its deep borderless quagmire of darkness, sin, fear, confusion, hatred and anger.

There's also much confusion and misconceptions being dangerously voiced today on the internet about the things of God, the Word of God, and Christianity, which has spread far and deep throughout society. The mayhem of conflicting voices has become deafening on a whole new level!

The desire then grew in me to join others and simply be an additional voice of **God's light** in a very dark confusing world—and to plant some seeds of encouragement and hope in the hearts of those hurting whenever the opportunity arises.

"Shake the Salt & Share the Light" is designed to help seekers of spiritual truth, new Christians and long-time ones, discover new insight into the amazing life and overcoming power we have by simply BEING what Jesus told us we are, salt and light.

BUT *(there's always a catch, isn't there)* there are things in each of our lives that too often trip us up, hindering us from BEING... like described above. We're then going to be exploring and discovering too, how we can be overcomers of what's holding us back from BEING what Jesus told and showed us we ARE, His salt and light in our little corner of what has become a very dark, confusing world.

And that my friends, is the purpose of this *"Shake the Salt & Share the Light"* guidebook.

As Christians we're being confronted by a type of darkness and challenge never seen before. The world seems to be changing at an astounding pace... but God knew it would be. And foreseeing the need, empowered us to BE His salt and light in a VERY dark world. We can assuringly know too, He promised the darkness would not be able to overwhelm us!

That's an amazing promise, isn't it. Are you ready to explore for some spiritual treasures?

Then come join us as we take a fresh look at the wonder and privilege God's given us of **BEING**, and what might be hindering us from effectively experiencing the surprising salt and light life that's possible for us to have in Him.

2

Let's start fresh!

*Jesus did not say you need to be, can be, or
have the potential to be salt and light...
He said, "you ARE!"*

Jesus told His followers... *"You are salt... and light."*

When I first read that, the word "are" grabbed me. It seemed so emphatic; it awakened in me the feeling I had been missing something important about the salt and light Jesus was picturing us to be when he said those words.



The more I dug into it, the more I wanted to keep digging, for those words seemed to hold some promising special wonders. My desire then grew strong to discover what they might be, and so began what turned into a four-year journey of wonderful discoveries.

It's been an interesting journey that continues even now, for the more I discover, the more it seems to eventually lead to even more promising wonders. This tells me being what Jesus said we are, is an ongoing process that seems to go hand in hand with becoming more like Him.

My life has been wonderfully enriched with what I've been finding, and I know yours can be too. Come discover (or rediscover) with me more about this wonderful invitation Jesus extends to us all...

"All you who are heavily burdened, come. Be yoked to me. I will give you rest. And you will find your burdens grow lighter too!"

That is my personal paraphrase of what Jesus invites us to do. I encourage you to read it for yourself. You will find your copy of His invitation in Matthew 11:28-30.

You might be wondering what this has to do with being salt and light. But you will see how it fits. When our goal is to take a fresh look at anything, it helps to purposely lay aside for a while any ideas or beliefs we might already have about it. This better helps us prepare to receive and evaluate with an open heart and mind, any important truth or insight we might have been missing. It also helps us clean up any misconceptions we might have about it too, as we receive new insight or strengthen long-held beliefs.

So let's get started exploring why Jesus told His followers...

“You ARE the salt of the earth...” and, “...the light of the world”!³

Imagine with me...

what it would have been like to be among the people who gathered to hear Jesus as he⁴ taught what we now know as, *The Sermon on the Mount*.⁵ While he walked among them, he would have been seen as a regular man—BEFORE He became known as the Savior of the world.

Think about the divisiveness he was causing! 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, while also hoping they would get to see with their own eyes, one of those remarkable miracles they had been hearing about!

Now picture yourself as being one of them.

After the shocking news of how he had turned water into wine, you too had become one of His disciple-followers, and along with many others in the area, would eagerly gather to hear him speak whenever possible. He had such wonderful insights about the things of God... His loving care, justice and mercy,

³ Matthew 5:13-14

⁴ Some of you might get bothered by the personal pronouns not capitalized in this story when referring to Jesus. Please know It is deliberate, for we're taking ourselves into the past to imagine what it would have been like to see and hear Him BEFORE His death and resurrection proved He is the Son of God! While in the flesh, he was seen to be an ordinary man of flesh and blood.

⁵ Matthew, Chapters 5-7; just a bit of info, the Sermon on the Mount is the longest teaching of Jesus found in the Bible.

life, and more, you didn't want to miss anything Jesus would be sharing! So you would always head home after hearing him, full of hope!

You were already feeling truly blessed being able to be there with everyone gathering that special day, with many of Jesus' followers and the twelve who were closest to him, when he revealed to them those memorable words, "*YOU are salt and light!*"

You will never forget that day for It's been forever etched in your mind.

You and your friends had been walking for a while, to see and hear again this intriguing Jesus who had been causing quite a stir among Israel's priests and leaders—which you had to admit brought a smile to your face at the thought, knowing how he was challenging their feelings of superiority!

After his miracle of changing simple well-water into wine, he started teaching, sharing such a unique understanding of the nature of God, his reputation quickly spread far and wide. Unlike many of the established Jewish leaders and other itinerant teachers, he would talk about the Almighty on such a personal level, it was as if Jesus personally knew Him!

As you walked along, the voices of your friends began to fade as your thoughts began wandering to what you had been hearing people say about him—the son of a carpenter—who was rapidly becoming the most talked about teacher in all of Israel. He was grabbing everyone's attention like no one ever had! Jesus was giving people hope... and wonderful new insights too about the things of God and His Kingdom. Many had also started calling him a "miracle worker," since word quickly spread about how he had turned water into wine at the now well-known wedding feast.

Yes. The memory of that is now deeply etched in your mind. How could it not be!

As unbelievable as it sounded, when you first heard about it happening, you knew it was true. Your own cousin, who was the most trustworthy man you knew, had been there helping in the kitchen. He then saw with his own eyes the true miracle. A true inexplainable happening took place that day... and he witnessed too how after getting over their initial shock, the servants who had drawn the water began uncontrollably chattering about the shocking thing they had just witnessed. The chatter became so loud and unusual, the festivities even stopped as people started straining to see and hear what was happening in the kitchen!

Even now, thinking about it gives you goosebumps! Evidently the wedding steward had horribly miscalculated the amount of wine they would need—or a lot of people showed up unexpectedly, for they had run out of wine long before they should have. The steward of course started panicking. His cousin later heard that Jesus' mother had heard about the wine, and asked Jesus to help.

Of course, no one expected what happened next. Jesus did the unthinkable when he told the servants to fill every jar they could find with water. Yes... water! You still find yourself shaking your head in disbelief at the thought. As crazy as it sounded though, the servants did as told.

They brought the water-filled jars back to the kitchen, and then life was no longer the same.

One moment those jars were full of the water... then the next they were full of quality wine! Your cousin still shakes his head in disbelief, each time the two of you talk about it... and he was there! And even more mind-blowing is how he described the atmosphere felt afterward. Your cousin could only describe it as everything looked brighter, colors richer, almost with a feeling of intense euphoria too... unbelievable love and peace inexplicably filled the air too, but even that description seemed to fall short from what he's been trying to tell you about it. You couldn't help but wish you could have been there too, to experience it all for yourself.

The water changing into wine at the wedding is of course what caused the rumors to start, for after it happened, people were beginning to report how they had actually seen him heal people who had been seriously sick!

Yes. It looks like they have a true miracle worker in their midst! ...who's been creating quite a stir and puzzling many—yourself included! For only God can miraculously heal... right?!

Who then is this man, Jesus?! Really... who is he? *Whoever he is, you were sure looking forward to hearing him again!*

When they arrived, it wasn't hard to spot where he was teaching, for quite a few others had already arrived and were visiting with each other as they shared about noteworthy happenings in their families and communities while they waited. For some reason the gathering had seemed to be buzzing with more chatter and anticipation than usual too.

You could feel excitement in the air!

Finding a nice spot, you eventually sat down with your friends, and leaned casually back on your elbows to relax from your walk, as you too chatted with those around you.

You breathed deep 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 with 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 whom he had personally invited to follow him. You had been hearing a smattering of interesting things about them too.

Thankfully all were finally able to see them better as they moved a short way up the foot of the hill with Jesus, to a small outcropping of rocks that were perfect to sit on while he was teaching. As he and his twelve disciples were settling into place, the chattering was slowly dying down. You could feel the anticipation as all eyes began turning to the reason they had all come.

It suddenly grew quiet when 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 felt glad his voice was carrying nicely to you and your friends. You could hear quite clearly what he was saying, as he was voicing as usual, some pretty amazing things!.

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. If anyone else said something like that, people would think them crazy! But there was just something about him... you didn't know what it was. But there was something... and what he was saying pulled at your heart! You yearned for whatever it was, and wanted to know more.

What you heard next definitely caught your attention, and made you focus even more on what Jesus was saying. For some reason you 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 even more directives.

“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 now seemed to be giving you a command.

“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 personal directive!

Each time Jesus had said, “YOUR...” it was like he was pointedly speaking directly into your heart! His words about being salt and light not only stayed in your mind all the way home. You also pondered them in your heart for weeks afterward, never knowing you were exploring many new revelations from God that had the power to not only change you, but the world for thousands of years to come!

In the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus was teaching spiritual truths and giving his followers life concepts they had never heard before. They were familiar with the strictness of the Law... but this was something much different... but not entirely. Jesus’ teaching seemed to bring more clarity, meaning and purpose to the Law and what it meant to be God’s people.

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

That is what we 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!

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 these words, it raised some questions in my mind, perhaps in yours too. I wondered...

- *Was Jesus telling us everyone is salt and light?*
- *What does spiritual “Salt” and “light” look like in our lives, and what do others see when they are present?*
- *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?*

We're going to be taking a look at that last thought first in the next section. I believe one of the most intriguing stories we find about Jesus in the Bible will help answer this question, which for now might sound rather confusing or like a contradiction to many of us.

3

Wait a minute! Who's the light?!

What gives?! Jesus said, "YOU are the light of the world." But later said HE is!

In our last section we read where Jesus told His followers, "**YOU** are salt and light!" Yet we're now going to see where scripture tells us JESUS is the light. And even yet another verse where Jesus personally confirmed He is by telling us HE is the light of the world!

So, what's going on? Is this a contradiction in the Bible as some claim?

Is Jesus the *light of the World*, or are we?
We both can't be the light... or can we?



One thing we do know is in this life, things are not always as they seem. And many serious Biblical scholars tell us the Bible doesn't contradict itself. Let's then take a closer look at this seeming contradiction to understand why it's not.

In John 1:4, John tells us who Jesus actually was and is.

"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."

Then Jesus himself later affirmed the truth of that when He clearly told the people, "**I am the light of the world....**"⁶ He couldn't have made it any clearer than that, could He.

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

⁶ These words of Jesus are found in John 8:12.

After declaring he was the light of the world, Jesus added this amazing promise to those who follow Him:

"...whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

When we couple that with what we just read about Jesus declaring He's the light of the world, think about the amazing thing He's telling us here!

**When we follow Him we become partakers of *HIS* light.
That then means we too **ARE** light, just like Jesus said!**

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 only those who follow Christ have the light.

Isn't that verse amazing! Read the whole verse again if you need to, for this is among the most hope inspiring conditional promises in God's Word.

Yes, it is conditional, so it's as important to know that as it is to know the promise. When He started with, "Whoever follows me...", Jesus was clearly telling us that what He is about to say only applies to those who follow Him.

The word, "*Whoever...*" also beautifully tells us **God is no respecter of persons**. It 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 checking for only one thing: ***are we following His Son, Jesus, or not?***

There is no denying that the promise, "*Whoever,*" does indeed include you... and it includes me... ***IF... we are following Him.***

There can be no doubt, He made the same wonderful, conditional promise to **ALL** His followers, with no exception.

The next part of the verse should make our hearts swell even more with the wonder of it too, for it means we don't ever have to walk in spiritual darkness again!

Think about it!

Because we have His light within us, it's with us wherever we go. Which means, He has us covered. It's then true, and we need to let it sink in; we need never walk in darkness again!

If you're like me, one of your first thoughts after hearing something so amazing is, **"How can this be?"**

John 8:12 makes it clear for us. It's possible because as soon as we're a true follower of Christ, just like at the marriage celebration, when the water under Jesus' hand instantly converted into wine, the same happens to us. Because of Jesus, we are miraculously changed into light bearing vessels that show those around us, His light of life within us. As His followers, it's who we now ARE... His light to the world!

Isn't that truly an amazing promise from God himself?

This is why in *Shake the Salt & Share the Light*, you will see us focusing more on BEING a "Christ Follower" than being a "Christian", for...

Did you know...

It's possible for us to see ourselves as a Christian, yet not be a Christ Follower? ...but a Christ Follower is a Christian. It's important for us to know the difference between the two, because we could be missing out on some critical blessings, and so could others around us! But the good news is, if we don't already know the difference, by the end of this study, we will!

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 thoughts.

This next verse presents us with a concept that made a tremendous difference in my life when I finally got from my head to my heart, what it was telling me. We find it in 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 probably a familiar verse for most of us, let's step back for a minute so we can take a fresh look at it this way, to see what it's telling us:

Each and every one of us who made the decision to follow Him, are now IN Christ. **That means our spiritual nature can now be molded by His.**

It's important to see...

I wrote, "our nature CAN BE" molded by His, not "WILL BE." That's because it's up to us how much we yield or not, to God's molding process. I remember someone once said, "God is a gentleman. He will never force His will on anyone." In this case... "He will never force His *molding process* on anyone!"

You might remember how earlier I wrote that I was a visual person, and sometime it's a great help for me to picture what is happening. Being IN Christ is a perfect example. This might sound crazy, but this word picture worked for me! Perhaps it will help you as well.

I can almost picture Christ as a type of invisible "mold form" we can choose to pour ourselves into. By being IN Him, it's now possible for us to allow our spiritual nature (to participate in the process of being molded) to become like His. As we do, we are now a "new" person, made with a "new" nature, with a whole "new" life ahead of us! That's a lot of wonderful "news," isn't it!

Have you ever wanted a "do-over"? If so, this is it!

Can you see it too?

I hope so. It's amazing to see how He makes it possible for us to build a new life IN HIM. And to think... this new life already has His light, *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 and relationship!

We find a beautiful example of how this "new life" of being salt and light works within us, when Jesus had an eye-opening conversation with a demoralized woman.

When you can, I highly recommend you read the story for yourself; it's found in John 4. But for now, since it's a longer story, let's use our imaginations a bit

again, and listen in on Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman. ***She's the main figure of our story, who also happens to be a beaten-down reject of Jewish society in not one, but two ways!***

First, she was a Samaritan, a group of people who practicing Jews despised and treated like they were sub human, a rejected people who they believed were to be avoided to the extreme! And second, she was a social outcast, rejected by her own community for she was a morally loose woman, perhaps a type of prostitute. She was the type of person considered to be among the lowest of the low in any moral-leaning society. (Right or wrong... that's the way it was.)

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

Some of you might already know the Jews viewed the Samaritans with great disdain and liked to show it by their actions too, because they too were of Jewish descent. But over time they had allowed themselves to become a mixed race who practiced an impure, half-pagan version of Judaism.

Religious, pharisaical Jews then felt superior to them, and considered the Samaritans to be worse than pagans, demeaningly calling them, "dogs", and treating them like a low-life breed, not even worthy to occupy the same space with them—and that's no exaggeration!

You can imagine the depth of hatred and animosity between the Jews and Samaritans were pretty intense, seemingly more so on the part of the Jews. We're told that when Jews traveled, 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 their territory, Samaria.

With this setting in mind, let's pop into the story where a tired Jesus is obviously unconcerned about this demeaning Jewish, "tradition" of avoiding Samaritans, for we find him sitting alone on the edge of a well in Samaria...

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

Jesus and his disciples had been on a long trek back to Galilee when they decided to stop and rest. His loyal disciples had left him resting at the villagers' well while they went in search of some food.

Alone with his thoughts, a lone figure approaching the well caught Jesus' eye. It was a woman. She was an unusual sight at this time of day, for the sun was

at its blistering hottest. When he, an obvious Jew, spoke to her, an “unclean” Samaritan—and a woman too, it surprised her!

He started a conversation with her by asking a simple question born out of a common need. *“Would you give me a drink of water?”*

Still stunned, the woman 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 often 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 asked for, so she wanted to know how it could happen. But before she could voice the question, he surprised her again by answering, 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 tell by her answer she still failed to understand this man 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. The LIGHT of understanding began to rise in her, and she declared, **“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 the obvious longing of her heart. *“I know that the Messiah is coming. (She showed she “believed!”) And when He comes, He will explain everything to us.” (She knew He will have all the answers! Isn’t it amazing what she knew and believed?)*

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.”

Her personal life-changing time with Jesus then ended, for it was at that moment His 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 to Jesus’ last declaration to her. Instead, we see her quickly turning, 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 shocking 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 excited chatter and thoughts, like, “The long-anticipated Messiah...? Truly...? Here...? But we’re a despised people... can this be possible...? Almighty God! Let it be so!”

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.’”⁷

⁷ John 4:39-42

Let's take another look at what they were saying in that last line, and think about it, for it's powerful.

*"...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!"*

Without needing to think about it... just by doing what came naturally after she met Jesus, her whole life changed as she was BEING salt and light!

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

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—for she had never heard about what that was!

This new follower of Christ, just effortlessly did what came naturally! She shared what happened with others; she simply shared about it, for it had become an amazing experience in her life.

Let's now take a closer look at what had taken place.

In her case, by simply sharing what she knew, she was "salting" their hearts with the Good News their Messiah had come, which helped them thirst for more and opened their spiritually blind eyes enough so they too could see the light of Christ like she had, and believe He was whom He claimed, like she had too!

This story shows us that God can use **anyone**, in a simple, natural way too.

Yes, "anyone" includes any of us who might be feeling irreparably broken... perhaps even been made to feel like we're no good! BUT... there IS good news. When we choose to trust and yield our heart to Him, like this once demoralized, rejected Samaritan woman had done, It doesn't matter who we are or what

we've done; for when we say, "Yes" to Him, He accepts us as we are and lifts us up too! He wants us to know we too are important to Him. He did not leave us out. He did not overlook ANY of us! We can be assured, He did indeed include us ALL in His great plan for mankind.

Chew a while on what happened to this entire community because of this once demoralized woman... simply because she believed Jesus, and let others know about Him too; many, if not most, came to believe and accept Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah!

In the hands of Jesus, her simple act turned into quite a glorious one, didn't it!

And what we sometime have a hard time truly grasping with our human understanding is He can do the same amazing thing for us... ***if we're willing to let go of our past so we can experience the wonder of a new life and relationship with Him.***

Now let's keep going so we can discover what just might be holding us back from trusting and experiencing God's best in our own personal lives, like this woman at the well did.

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, even today, as being "unworthy" of such an honor, and she would feel the same too!

*We see by their conversation though, how Jesus looked beyond this woman's outward appearance and saw her heart, which was already drawn toward her 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. What an amazing, loving God we serve!

Why so excited about this man, Jesus?

In His conversation with the woman at the well, Jesus was salting their conversation with things 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!

Do you see it too? If not, you might want to consider rereading the story to look for how Jesus so naturally did it.

We next see her, who's been an outcast of society, sharing about her new-found **light** of understanding with others in her own little piece of the world, which was the Samaritan community where she lived. Even though she had no idea she was doing so, she too was "salting" her conversation with thoughts and spiritual light that made the townspeople thirsting to know more!

Their spiritual blinders had been removed by her telling them about Jesus. And when they too were ready to meet him for themselves, she was then able to point them to Him, their Messiah...THE light of the world.

The amazing thing is, we too are part of His wondrous plan!

Just think...

Once forgiven, our sinful past that's been forgiven is no longer important to God, for the Bible tells us when we confess them, He forgives and forgets them! But believing and trusting Him so we can faithfully follow His Son, and be His salt and light is definitely important to Him... for we're His light carriers!

I don't know about you, but to me that statement is an amazing one 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 this wonderful ongoing Biblical story and God's wondrous plan.

The following scriptures help us understand WHY God not only desires us to be a part of the process, He needs us to be! Read them more than once if you need to; chew on what they are telling us... taking thoughtful note of what I underlined until you fully grasp the wonder of why He declared, "*You ARE the salt of the earth, and 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

These verses make it quite clear why Jesus told His followers, "**YOU ARE** salt... and light."

It's hard to believe, but...

Unbelievers are blind to the light of Christ! BUT... they are able to comprehend (see) His light in those who are following Him! Pause a minute and think about what that means. Like the Woman at the Well, who shared about him with others, who went to see Him for themselves... we too share the good news about Him with others, so they too can personally meet and get to know Him for themselves. ***This means He needs His followers to BE His light!***

God designed those of us who follow Jesus, to be a large part of His, "*How to Build the Kingdom*" plan! You might say, we are His *ambassadors*⁸, to help build his Kingdom!⁹

Did you know that Jesus himself publicly declared this mighty plan of God had been fulfilled with His coming to man? He did so when in the synagogue He was handed a scroll to read from, and read these words...

"The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ¹⁰

He then rolled the scroll back up, handed it to the attendant, and sat down. Every eye was on Him when He then shockingly declared...

⁸ "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us." 2 Corinthians 5:20

⁹ We're referring to "His Kingdom" in two ways, in the here and now, the kingdom of God is a spiritual rule over the hearts and lives of those who willingly submit to God's sovereign authority, and in the future, when His Kingdom becomes eternal, with those who lived in obedience to Him.

¹⁰ Luke 4:18, 19

*"Today this Scripture is fulfilled
in your hearing." ¹¹*

We see from the four scriptures we read on the previous page, that with this declaration, He was in essence announcing...

*"The one who was planned to bring the world
the light of God and His good news is here!"*

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

Personal note...

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 well-worth digging into when you can.

What's next?

Before answering that, let's first take a look at the second question, at the end of our previous lesson...

- ***What does spiritual "salt" and "light" look like in our lives, and what do others see when they are present?***

This is a question that really nagged at me for a while, for as a visual person I was having difficulty "seeing" it. *For how are we to see spiritual things with our physical eyes!*

One day while still wrestling with this question of, "what does salt and light look like?" I felt impressed to dig into the meaning of the word, "**Be**", as in the title of this study, "**BE**ing salt and light". Up to that point my focus had been solely on

¹¹ Luke 4:21

the salt and light part, to develop a better understanding of why Jesus called us that.

But I was in for a surprise! I was amazed at what I was discovering. This seemingly insignificant word, “be”, was rich with spiritual meaning and insight, and pulled everything together.

It points us to what I had been looking for... that something we can “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? Let’s move on to “BE-ing BE-ers”.

4

BE-ing BE-ers!

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

Our title, "*BE-ing BE-ers*", does look a bit odd, doesn't it. No worries though; it's by design. 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. You might be thinking, "Why?!"



It's a legitimate question. But take away the hyphen and you'll see why! It's laughable, isn't it!

If it wasn't there, we couldn't help but be distracted, and would probably start laughing at what the phrase said! "*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 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"!*

Now let's look deeper into "BE"

This part of the study excites me, for I believe chances are good you're in for a pleasant surprise like I was. 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 often see me emphasizing the word with caps, to embed it deep into our hearts.

As soon as I looked up the word, “Be” in my Concordance, I realized the answer to the question that had nagged at me for so long had been there at my fingertips the whole time, and made me 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.” **Was He in essence saying, “Your character will be like salt and light?” It’s possible!**

It is not only what we now are, it’s also what we are BE-ing or BE-coming! This means our character and BEING are intertwined; they are essentially the same thing. Two parts of a whole.

Maybe I was just dense. But are you surprised like I was with its deep connection with our character?

BEING salt and light molds us into who we ARE.

This new insight 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.

Like...

**Yes. Jesus told us we ARE salt and light...
but it’s up to us to BE so.**

I also found I was asking myself more questions too! I remember years ago hearing someone say that it’s possible to become the embodiment of a character trait. I was young and didn’t fully understand what that meant, but after digging into the rich meaning of BEING, I do now. They were 100% right!

Now before anyone can think by using the word, “embodiment”, we’re promoting letting a spirit of some kind take us over, you can relax; for that’s DEFINITELY not what we’re meaning here.

Here’s where those on-line dictionaries and synonym finders come in handy.

If we look up the word, “embody,” according to one source, the way we’re using it simply means to, “*REPRESENT a quality or idea exactly.*”¹²

I especially like how *Merriam-Webster* defines it, for it clearly goes along with what that now unknown person told me so long ago. It means, “*...something that is made “concrete (tangible) and perceptible.”*”¹³

Simply put, BEING enables us to SEE a spiritual concept!

What that also tells us is, “BEING puts flesh on something we can’t normally see, to meet needs we CAN see.”

I find that’s a wonderful word picture of why Jesus made a point of telling His followers, “*You ARE salt and light.*” **We (our character, our attitude, hands, feet, ears, and voice) are to BECOME and BE the embodiment of spiritual salt and light that reveals HIM.**

Isn’t that an amazing picture!

When we are becoming...

That means we are changing... we are growing... we are “coming to be” whatever we have set our minds to be while following Christ and becoming more like Him! And the wonderful encouragement of that is Jesus sees us as if we already ARE!

Since Jesus said we ARE His light, we then just need to practice finding ways to let those character qualities of light shine through.

God makes things wonderfully simple for us. It is then us who tend to muck things up by making the things of God more difficult than necessary.

BEING God’s salt and light is intended to flow naturally. When it does, it’s never difficult or a burden to be so. **If we find it’s becoming so, then that’s our warning bell that tells us we’ve gotten off track somehow.** We’re probably inadvertently trying to do so on our own, which can be a stumbling block that can seriously hinder our being salt and light.

¹² Cambridge Dictionary <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/embody>

¹³ Definition from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary 8/30/22, at this link: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/embody>

We will be learning more about stumbling blocks in our next two lessons. Meanwhile, let's take a look at...

Jesus' invitation!

That first part of the paragraph above, about BEING God's salt and light flowing naturally and is then never a burden, reminds us of something else Jesus personally invited us to do, and it's connected to BEING. We find a special invitation He extended 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 (meaning, be molded by 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, which they believe will not only weigh them down more than they already are, but it will also seriously limit their freedom while being forced to endure hard, boring work!

If what they're thinking was true, I too would be rebelling at the thought of a "yoke" being placed on me! But that's not the case. Just about anyone living in an agriculture community, who 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 BE like Christ."***

When we merely *"behave like a Christian"*, we (not Christ) are the ones molding our ***behavior (our external self)*** to fit our own preconceived idea of what a good Christian would be like. ***When we do so, our change is merely external, not internal; for it's not changing our character.***

But when we accept Jesus' invitation to be yoked to Him, we are then able to "become (or be) like Christ", for we are in the process of molding our ***character*** to be like His. The change is within, at the very core of who and what we are.

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

Let me state the obvious. *Oxen aren't born ready to work the fields.* However, with the help of a mature, well-trained ox, and a good yolk, they can **become** so.

By being yoked to a usually older and larger 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. The larger, more muscular ox, will also bear the greater part of the load, while it's gently teaching the untrained ox—by example—how it's to respond to each command or signal the owner gives, **as they walk and work 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 owner 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's voice and signals.

Of course, we are not oxen who need to be trained with a physical yoke. But the word picture Jesus paints for us gets this important insight across to us.

While picturing the purpose of the yoke with the oxen, let's take another look at Jesus' invitation and what it means for us personally. But this time let's rephrase it in such a way us modernized people will better understand and grasp the wonderful *Good News* it contains.

*"Those of you who are feeling weary and burdened with the hardness and confusion of life... come to me. I will see that your tired spirit gets some much-needed rest. Come. Connect with me so you can learn from me. I will teach you all you need to understand and know. Please 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, firmly connected to me. And I promise, you will find things will be easier for you, and your burdens will feel much lighter."*¹⁴

Folks... Jesus is telling us He came not only to teach us about our Heavenly Father and Spiritual Life, He also came to teach, guide, and prepare us for THIS life... 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. Simply put, Jesus shows us how to BE!

¹⁴ A modernized paraphrase based on Matthew 11:28-30

The last line you just read is very important, for it tells us WHY following Jesus is so critical...

"Jesus shows us how to BE" ...so our character can BECOME LIKE HIS!

When our focus stays on Him, and what He does, it's life-changing for *us*!

Let now see what more we can discover about that small but mighty word, "BE".

5

Discovering more BEs!

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

If I were 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"**.

The reason why is when we're centered on Christ, we actually have three critical "BEs" rolled into the one, which is key for all the other BEs we find.



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, we need to be aware this particular one is best read in the original King James version of the Bible, for newer versions don't seem to use the word, "Be".

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

Important side note...

If you're not sure what it means to be born again, or what it means to "be in Christ", we highly recommend you read about it in "The Secret Meeting" page you'll find in our "Something More" Appendix. It's critical to know if you've been born again or not, and this 1-page guide can help.

Let's now take a closer look at that scripture we just read. When we become that *"new creature,"* it means we've been "born again"—but this time we're born into God's family, and our eyes are opened to God and Kingdom living, which makes it possible for us to BE an overcomer of sin and darkness and enjoy spiritual victories in our new life. The hold our old familiar lifestyle had on us has been broken, and a whole new way of life has opened up for us.

All things become new...

It has become a reality! We have been set free to BE salt and light in a dark and continually searching world.

I'm sure most of us have a general idea of what it means to be IN Christ. But let's take a look beyond the surface to see what more it might hold for us.

Let's compare it to something we're familiar with, like the phrase...

"You can 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 become a reality, 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.

However we say it, our meaning is we want to invest ourselves in it, in some way... to be a part of making it happen.

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 just like what I need... You can count me in!"*

We then invest ourselves into God's plan for ourselves and mankind. And we yield our life into His care **and follow Him**¹⁵ "to make it happen".

¹⁵ 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."

Once we are IN Christ...

we can now get to know Him on a personal level. As we get to know Him, and focus on His character, we also grow to love Him. And just like a child naturally imitates those they love and admire, so they can be “*just like them*,” we do the same with Jesus, as we journey this life with Him.

Now let’s see how God’s Word backs us up on that, in those final two, “Be centered on Christ,” scriptures: 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**...”*



By using Christ as our role-model, we see that we’re being transformed... becoming more like Him. The first verse gives us a wonderful 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 actions of a parent or grandparent they love. In their own precious, awkward way they do their best to be like them—much like in the photo we see here.

With hands behind his back, by dressing like his daddy, this little child is not only trying to *walk* like him, he wants to *look* like him too!

Doesn’t it warm your heart to watch a child do something like that? Now picture yourself as this little child you see here, following Jesus. I have an idea when we do similar with Him, no matter how awkward we might do it, it warms His heart to see it too. **If it makes our heart swell with 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 with Christ!**

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 just naturally picture in mind doing what their loved one does... and then wholeheartedly do the same!

As adults, it becomes the same for us when we love and “admire” the one who saved us, Jesus. We too want to stay as close to Him as possible, just like a child does.

The big question is...

Have you personally taken the time to get to know the one who saved you, enough to love and admire Him like a loving child? When you do, it can't help but change your life!

I believe we have a good example of all this in the story of Jesus and the Demoniac—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, 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. Sadly, when we think that way, we're wrongfully buying into one of Satan's deceptions by believing the lie that we're not worthy of the victorious new life He gives us.

For those who have been deceived this way, God wants you to know, NO ONE (including you and me) is so bad they're beyond His power to have a wonderful new life in Him... just like what happened with this seemingly hopeless one we're about to meet, who sadly had become more “beast” than man.

Meeting Jesus completely changed him forever.

Let's now enter the story of the Demoniac 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 from his perspective, and feel what he must have felt. Then return here and read on. Please know our story follows the verses in Mark, but to personalize it, we will be adding personal interactions that could have happened to the scene.

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 from those tormented years, which we know would have been a sharp contrast to what he had suddenly become—healthy and whole! in body, mind and spirit. It's not too difficult to imagine his thoughts and feelings must have been all over the place for a while, as he was discovering who he now was!

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 the frightening, hopeless condition we had been in, while drinking in everything he was telling us, much like a dry sponge soaking up water. I know I would!

As a child I used to drive my parents crazy, asking questions! I'm then confident I would also want to ask many questions and discover as much as I could about the one who had just delivered me too.

Out of a heart flowing with gratefulness and love, *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, my hero, as well.

The Bible doesn't tell us how long this unnamed, once dangerously violent man was able to sit around the comforting fire the disciples must have built to have a meal... 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 had been instantly changed from an out-of-control demonized man to a sane one, and spent some time with the promised Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the Living God, we can be sure the time he had with Jesus was meaningful and well spent!

Jesus must have implanted much in his heart that day, about the things of God and His Kingdom. And etched forever in his memory was what life was like "on the dark side," and 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 over all..

What amazes me about this story is when the herdsmen returned with the villagers, even with this once violent man sitting right there—now in his right

mind—they seemed to ignore him and plunged right in to their purpose for being there.

To put it simply, they didn't want Jesus around! What had happened frightened them, and they quite pointedly told him and his disciples to leave.

Do you think this newly changed man, hearing the villagers tell the one who had rescued him to leave (the one whom he now so deeply loved) sent waves of panic and horror through his 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 could revert back into what we were before Jesus came walking into our life. 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, while he might have looked this born-anew man right in the eye as He said....

“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 a wonderful life again among them. Tell them about me and the Father every chance you get, and how you've been given a new life!”

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 something like...

“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 but empowered, as he continued to watch Him and His disciples climb into their boat without him. I can picture them giving their new friend 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 go 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 this man's **gratitude** must have spilled over into a deep love for his Savior, and because of it, he did what came naturally; he took every opportunity he could to talk about the one he loved, Jesus, and how they had met. He would share with them everything he knew about Him too, and what He had told him... ***never knowing he was BEING salt and light to those around him like Jesus told us we are when we follow Him.***

Think about it...

What kind of life did Jesus save YOU from? Or if you are not yet following Him, what kind of life WILL HE BE saving you from? Is your gratitude more like that of the ex-demoniac's, or more like one who is taking what Jesus did for you, for granted? It's easy to do, especially when we've been church goers for a long time. The way we feel about Him, will tell us a lot about how good or bad our relationship is with Christ. ***Just remember though, wherever you are with Christ, you are never too far from the hope He gives!***

Jesus had delivered this once hopeless man from what bound him, and he had become a new man. He was a new person, who like a child, was wanting to please the one he loved.

Out of obedience and love, he was not only doing what Jesus asked him to do, he was also patterning his new life after what he had seen and learned from Him and His disciples!

By wanting to please the one he loved, he just naturally wanted to do what Jesus asked Him to do. In other words, he willingly laid his own will aside, so he could do what Jesus asked him to do. He obeyed Jesus; he followed His instructions. Some would say, he was, *“Walking in obedience.”*

But notice how it came naturally, once he got to know Jesus and chose to follow Him. When he did, he wholeheartedly loved Him and the peace and hope that was finally his.

And because he loved Him wholeheartedly, he had no desire to “drag his feet” about doing what he was asked to do. Nor would he have needed to force himself to obey. In fact, it was just the opposite! He had wanted to be with Him, learning whatever he could, and serving Him as any good Master should be served.

The more we love Him...

The more natural it is to be salt and light!

We can also see the result of how this simple man must have been an effective spreader of salt and light 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! *...just like the Samaritan community did, after the Woman at the Well had told them their Messiah had come, and that He had talked with her!*

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



Was the number of seekers so high, because this unnamed man faithfully did what Jesus had asked him to do? I would say there was an excellent chance it was. At the very least, I believe it's safe to say his testimony of how Jesus

changed him from a monster to a man, was a large contributor to the people's change of heart and mind about Jesus, wouldn't you?

From the mouth of babes!

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 preciously struggling to lift their hand weights... trying to imitate her parents.

She was going at it wholeheartedly too! Off camera you could hear one of the parents ask if she was "working out". She didn't even have to think about it; her answer was an immediate, simple yet pointed, "No".

Those enjoying the video could tell that to her, it was a joy (not work) to do what those she loved was doing! How could she be "working" by joyfully **BEING just like mom and dad!** That was clearly her goal, and to the best of her ability she was doing it too!

THAT my friend, is how we're supposed to feel about Christ and being like Him. When we do, just like it was for this small innocent child, we won't see it as work... we'll be seeing it as BEING like the one we admire and love!

The three BEs rolled into one that we looked at, are just the beginning of many other BEs we can find in scripture. And as they mold our character to be more like that of Christ, they all lead to good things for us! But before taking a look at what some of them are, we're going to take just a few minutes to look deeper into one more thing that can affect our BEs, and that is...

WHO or WHAT is your life centered on?

Before we come to know Christ, we may not be aware of it, but we all center our lives around someone or something that's more important than anything or anyone else in our life. What this means is whatever has grown to become more important to us than all else, we not only protect it as a much-needed part of our life, but it literally guides and controls what our life and relationships will look like.

It's then important we take a closer look at how that control center works. It can be a person or a thing, but whatever it is, for now we're calling it our **"Guidance Center,"** or "Center."

If it's not Christ, who or what our Guidance Center can be will vary with each of us. It might 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 unwittingly addicted to, like drugs, pornography, the internet, online gaming or computer games, parties, power, money, sex, casinos, boating.... The list could go on and on, but by now I'm sure you know what we mean.

No matter what or who it is, when most (if not all) of our decisions, choices, and actions in life are considered in light of how it might affect that one thing that is more important than anything else, THAT is our "Center."

When we meet Christ, He gives us the opportunity to have a type of "do over," with a new enriched life by Centering our life on HIM.

That's where TRUST comes in.

The only way to build that kind trust in such a way it comfortably makes Jesus our "Center," is by getting to know Him well... much like we do with a new best friend, who can seem closer to you than your own brother or sister.

We also have one who can help us build that kind of relationship with Him. Jesus called Him, "the Helper", who's also known as "The Comforter, or who's more commonly called, the "Holy Spirit".

"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

As we follow Him, His Spirit is always within us, wherever we go, to teach and guide us as we run everything by Him first. The Holy Spirit is our new, "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 with and without Him... God's plan for us... the way of Christ... who our enemy is and how he works... and so much more! He wants us to know the truth about it all so we can live lives of victory.

He truly is a loving God, who has some pretty amazing things in mind for us... ***if we but trust and faithfully follow Him, and NOT bump Him from being the Center of our lives!***

Here are a few scriptures that would be good to memorize if you haven't already, for they show what God's heart is for us... just as a perfect, righteous

parent would! He wants to see us have a rich, meaningful life—blessed in spirit and heart, not lacking in any way.

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’.” Jeremiah 29:11-13

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 naturally **BEING** His salt and light too.*

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 be too easily 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 get us 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. And don’t forget to add more BEs as you come across them in the future!

If you have your own personal study journal, you might want to note your thoughts about how you’re doing with your BEs as you work on them, as God’s Holy Spirit guides you.

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!

JUST A THOUGHT: If you haven’t already started a spiritual Journal, this might be a good time to start one!

Let's now get started with those two portions of scripture that are rich with BEs. You might want to highlight 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 is easily missed, for it reads, "giving all diligence...". It may not read like one, but "diligence" is also a "BE". In one of the blanks, in the list at the end, 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 first 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* (don't 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 when they are, "*You will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the **knowledge** of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" "Knowledgeable" is one of the BEs that's listed in the 2 Peter 1:5-8 scripture we just dug deeper into, and it specifically comes with a promise!

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."

What an amazing promise! Can you imagine never hesitating or stumbling around as we follow Christ? If we did, it would make us drop behind, eventually losing sight of Christ! Road and stumbling blocks might come our way... but they won't succeed in causing us to stumble or falter in our faith as we're becoming like Christ.

If we hang in there and persevere, we're promised that we will be the victor over them, and not them over us. 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.

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, and draw out the full meaning of the word. And with the internet, it's always easy to dig deeper if you want to.

"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."
Galatians 5:22-23

Don't forget, as you come across more BEs in your personal time with God, it will be helpful to 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.

Because of the possibility of repagination in the future, if you don't see the "My Being Chart" here, it's on the next page.

My Being Chart

| | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Be Wise - Proverbs 23:23</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Be Trusting - Psalm 9:10</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Be Loyal (Faithful) - Numbers 30:2</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Be Forgiving – Colossians 3:13</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Be Righteous – James 2:10</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Be Compassionate – Romans 5:8</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Be Pure – 1 Corinthians 6:18</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Be Alert (on the lookout) – Matt 7:15</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Be Truthful - Proverbs 12:17</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Be Loving – John 13:34-35</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Be Holy – 1 Peter 1:15-16</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

6

Staying salty and bright! (Part 1)

Let's "seek and destroy" those things clogging our salt and keeping us from shining bright!

While doing a search on the internet, I found there was page after page listing articles that encourage us to keep our light shining. But after scrolling through quite a few pages, I gave up trying to find any article that seemed to help us identify things that can discourage and hinder it from doing so!

Encouragement is wonderful! ...we all need it. But I've learned it's also wise to discover what might be keeping or hindering us from *staying* encouraged and shining in spite of the toughest situations of life.



The Bible calls them, "stumbling blocks," which the dictionary simply defines as, "An obstacle (or obstacles) to progress."¹⁶

Let's then be wise and find out what those "obstacles" to progress might be in our lives, which are holding us back from more closely following and becoming like Christ, and enjoying success.

Once I first started digging into what stumbling blocks are, and how they can affect our lives, I realized for some reason I had tended to see them as something not that serious of a thing. Yes, I thought, they might trip us up a bit, and might even cause us to fall, but for the most part there's no permanent damage. I was sure wrong though!

¹⁶ Merriam-Webster online dictionary, as of 9/15/22; at URL, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stumbling%20block>

In the physical world, that might be true, stumbling isn't that big of an issue—unless it makes you fall and break a bone. But even then, that will heal. However, “stumbling” isn't the same in God's Kingdom world.

Spiritual stumbling blocks...

are different.

They can't be seen with our physical eyes for they lay hidden in our attitude and beliefs, which can not only cause oneself to stumble and dangerously fall, but they can cause others to stumble as well.

As I was preparing this lesson, I found myself thinking of the saying...

We have seen the enemy and it is us!

There's a lot of truth to those insightful words. We truly can be our own worst enemy and “obstacle” when following Christ. Without meaning to, we can be keeping ourselves from reaching our spiritual goals, which can affect eternity.

Think about it. Have you ever said something like, *“I shot myself in the foot?”* Meaning, *“I was the cause of my own failure.”* Or how about, *“I allowed myself to be tripped up, and fell... hard!”*

That sounds like a stumbling block, an “obstacle to progress,” or success... doesn't it? Yes, I have no doubt life has seemed to be full of them at times for us all. One way or another they can not only cause us to miss a personal goal, they can cause us to **miss the mark** with God too!

A major one of those “marks” we miss is what we just focused on in our last lesson, which is becoming more like Christ. When that happens, it can hinder or stop us completely from being effective salt and light to those around us, and affect our personal relationship with Him.

We then truly can be our own worst enemy!

In battle, if we're going to defeat a very real enemy, we first need to be able to identify and know our enemy... even when it's us. And when it's us, too many times we find it's especially difficult to be honest with ourselves!

I came across this well-known ancient proverb that can better help us grasp why knowing our “enemy”—in this case our stumbling blocks—is so important.

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

That sounds pretty good, doesn't it! The more I chewed on it, the more I appreciated its insight. With just a few words, it tells us so well what we need to know. And did you notice, it even includes a promise if we follow its wisdom!
"...and you shall win a hundred battles without loss!"

And who doesn't want to BE THE VICTOR in our battles!

It almost sounds like it's taken from scripture, doesn't it? It hasn't been, but it still reflects the wisdom we can find in the Bible.

By getting to know our strengths and weaknesses—and those of our enemy (Satan) too—we're better able to understand how they can be standing in our way of knowing victory. When we recognize and acknowledge them for what they are, we're then better prepared to plan ahead so we can overcome them.

Plus, as we're striving to become more like Christ, we're guaranteed to have God on our side! It can't get any better than that, can it.

We saw that in our last lesson too. **Reread 2 Peter 1:4-8 & 10.**

We're told that if we add to our faith the character qualities listed, *"...they will render (us) neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,"* and, *"...we will never stumble," or falter! That's an amazing promise; it also sounds a lot like the old saying too, doesn't it.*

This encourages us to know, we CAN remain salty and bright!

So let's start "knowing our enemy," who would love to hinder us from continuing to "add to our faith" the character qualities mentioned in these verses... for he wants us to stumble and fall hard!

Stumbling blocks...

*can keep us from successfully
BEING the kind of salt and light needed to pierce spiritual darkness, so those
blinded by it can finally see the light of Jesus Christ. Think about what this means.*

Let's get to know more about these stumbling blocks, which can obviously be more damaging and dangerous than we think.

But first, how about YOU?

What is your relationship with Christ like? Remember, we need to accurately know about ourselves too. So be honest with yourself. What is your relationship like? Do you have a lot of doubts about yourself? ...about God? For one reason or another, do you feel inadequate or “fall short” in some way? ...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 comfortably understand what it all means. Or you might feel something is holding you back, but you don’t know what.

A fairly common feeling is to feel stuck in our Christian walk from time to time—or most of the time too!

Or perhaps you feel all is healthy with your spiritual life and in your relationship with Christ, and you just simply desire to continue growing in your faith, and exploring ways to do so.

Wherever you are at, feeling secure in your faith or insecure, please know God is bigger than any stumbling-block that is known or unknown, which could hinder you from being where you want to be with Christ, and being His salt and light.

Even more encouraging is He’s always ready to help us individually overcome what’s standing in our way of enjoying those personal victories we want to celebrate with Him!

Now let’s go hunting!

Let’s discover as many of our stumbling blocks as we can, and see them for what they are so we can flush them out and fulfil our goal of **BEING**. But before we do that...

it’s important for us to know that what can be a stumbling block for me, may not be for you and others—and vice versa.

Whatever is causing us to “miss the mark” in our spiritual walk can be *uniquely* different for each of us, for we are *uniquely* different individuals with our *unique* areas of strengths, weaknesses and personalities. Yes, that’s a lot of *uniques*, but that’s only because we are!

Most stumbling blocks aren’t that hard to spot for what they are. But be aware! Some can be difficult to recognize for they can be well disguised, hidden or buried in our thoughts and attitude, or they can be something that seems to be an innocent, natural part of life.

Always remember...

It doesn't matter if a thing is "good" or "bad". If it's hindering our relationship with Christ, then it's a stumbling block in our life that we need to overcome.

With that in mind, let's start by taking a close look at an especially difficult stumbling block that is common to us all. It's good to start there too, for it has its fingers on every other stumbling block that will come our way!

We touched on it at the beginning; it's commonly known as "sin". But sin may not be what many of us think!

Since this is a key stumbling block for us all, let's take a few extra minutes to take a new look at it. Would you believe there seems to be much confusion about sin, even among some Christians! Let's then see what we can do to *un-confuse* it, as much as possible.

Sin made simple

*The word, "Sin", simply means to miss God's mark that has been placed before mankind, which is simply **to do** His will. When we don't, we "sin" against God. "Sins" (with an 's') are the multiple things we say or do, or don't do, that cause us to miss doing His will. And we will be discovering that by not doing His will, it can keep us from being able to enter heaven and spending eternity with Him.*

For those who just rebelled at that idea, hold on! That's not my idea; Jesus himself tells us that through a story He told. We'll be taking a close look at that and other verses straight from the Bible later on. But for now, let's take a closer look at what it means to sin, and how it can personally affect us.

Did you know the term, "sin", as it's used in the Bible, is also a term used in Archery?

It's true. *An archer "sins" when he or she fails to hit the target. The basic meaning behind the word "sin", is simply to "miss the mark."* The word has similar meaning in Hebrew too, which means. *"Failing to hit the target."*



That's a pretty straight-forward definition, isn't it.

On a spiritual level, “missing the mark” is very similar... yet is critically different too.

Failing to hit the mark of whatever you’re using for target practice, isn’t that significant... but not so when compared to missing God’s “mark,” or marks!

The consequence of missing His marks can be more dire than what we think; so let’s be wise and take some time to discover more about the trickiness of sin.

“Sin” can be confusing!

If we were to throw out to everybody, the question, “*What is God’s ‘mark’?*” Or, “*What is ‘sin’?*” The answers could vary greatly with each person. Yet it’s something we can’t afford to be mistaken about.

I personally believe what has contributed to the confusion about what *sin* means in today’s world, is that over time its meaning has become blurred; for right or wrong, people’s tendency is to morph uncomfortable things into something that’s more comfortably livable for themselves. To clear up this confusion...

We all need to use the same definition source. That’s the Bible for Christian believers, which was left to us as our authority and warns about the consequence sin, of missing the mark.

First, let’s take a look at one of the portions of scripture I’m basing this on. We find it in 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for instruction, for conviction, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the man (or woman) of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.”

Now let’s turn off all the confusing voices out there with varying opinions about sin, so we can focus on what God tells us it is and what it is not.

Let’s start with this example.

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, if you call them that, you just told them you see them as a bad (perhaps even evil) person, who is doing “bad” things. This flies in the face of how we see ourselves.

Most of us see ourself as a *GOOD person*, with a *GOOD heart*, who has *GOOD intentions*. It’s then easy to see why so many believe the idea of “sin,” and the Bible are both antiquated ideas... outmoded ideas that are unwelcomed in what many consider to be our more “knowledgeable” and “enlightened” society. However...

That mistaken belief can get us into a tremendous amount of spiritual trouble. We might even call it a serious stumbling block, which can cause a person to see things in a skewed sort of way... causing them to miss God’s plan of salvation!

But we’re just beginning to scratch the surface of how to identify the Christian’s “mark”. For now, let’s take a look in God’s Word to get a solid answer to our original question of...

“What’s this “mark” we don’t want to miss?”

Like we did before, let’s again lay aside for a while, any preconceived ideas we might have about the answer, then dig into His Word with fresh eyes, to see for ourselves what God tells us about “missing the mark” (AKA, sinning).

Let’s do something different. When we were much younger, I’m sure most of us played, “*Connect the Dots*.” As we dragged the point of our pencil from dot to dot, we would begin to see the outline of something take shape. Let’s do similar to see how our answer takes shape.

Let’s connect some “Dots!”

We’re going to be taking a look at only 11 of the many portions of scripture available, to see the common thread that connects them. You might want to highlight in some way, those items in each verse as you spot them.

Let’s go back to the beginning with Adam and Eve for our first “dot”, and see what caused them to be separated from God and be evicted from the garden God had made for them. This will be a good place to start, to instill in our hearts what God considers “missing the mark” and what he doesn’t.

- 1 Genesis 3 ▪ This is a whole chapter so I’ll outline some of the more important parts, and print out only the last few verses, 21–24.

“God told Adam they could eat from any tree in the garden, except for one. / They would walk with God in the garden every day. / The evil one caused Eve to question God’s instructions. / The forbidden fruit looked good and satisfying to her, so she chose to disobey God, and ate from the tree. / She took some of its fruit to Adam (who knew it was from the forbidden tree) and he too ate it. / Their eyes were then opened, and they realized they were naked. / They hid from God because of their nakedness (even though they had covered themselves with leaves) and also now feared Him.

*They made excuses for what they had done. / God put a curse on them both for what they had done. / ²¹ “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. ²² And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, **knowing good and evil**. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” ²³*

So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴ After He drove the man out, He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

That was a long one. But you can rest easy, for the rest of the verses are much shorter. So how did you do with this first one? It had several key areas that can give us a better picture of sin, and how it works, and what it does in our lives.

Now let’s see how things are going to take shape with the rest of our “Dots”.
(I will give you a hint; as you study the following verses, compare them to what Adam and Eve did.)

- 2 Matthew 22:36-40 ▪ *“Teacher, which commandment is the greatest in Moses’ Teachings? Jesus answered him, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ All of Moses’ Teachings and the Prophets depend on these two commandments.”*
- 3 John 14:15 ▪ *“If you love me, keep my commandments.”*
- 4 James 4:17 ▪ *“So for one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, for him it is sin.”*
- 5 John 1:12 ▪ *“But to all who believed Him and accepted him, He gave the right to become children of God.”*
- 6 I John 3:4 (Amplified Version) ▪ *“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness [ignoring God’s law by action*

or neglect or by tolerating wrongdoing—being unrestrained by His commands and His will].”

- 7 **Philippians 2:3-5** ▪ *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”*
- 8 **Isaiah 53:6** ▪ *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him (Jesus) the iniquity of us all.”*
- 9 **1 Peter 2:25** ▪ *For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*
- 10 **Galatians 6:8** ▪ *“Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”*

Now this last one can be a shocker for some. But focus on what we’re told. That on the day of judgement, Jesus is going to say to some who thought they were worthy of heaven because they believed themselves to be amazing Christians, who had done extraordinary things for Him. But in reality, none of the wonderful things they thought wonderful, enabled them to enter heaven!

Why? How did they fool themselves so greatly, completely missing it with God? Jesus tells us the reason why all their good works were meaningless. And why they “missed the mark” of gaining heaven.

- 11 **Matthew 7:21-23, 26 (Amplified Version)** ▪ *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, **but only he who does the will of My Father** who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day (when I judge them), ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, and driven out demons in Your name, and done many miracles in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them publicly, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME (you are banished from My presence), you who act wickedly (disregarding My commands).’*

“So everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, will be like a wise man (a far-sighted, practical, and sensible man) who built his house on the rock… And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them, will be like a foolish (stupid) man who built his house on the sand.”

How did you do? By following the dots, what kind of picture did it form for you?

Do you see the common thread that runs through them all? It might show itself a little differently from verse to verse, but it's there.

Did you notice the answer clearly lies in "● 6"? To help us answer the question I could have given us just this one verse. But it's important to see it is also interlaced throughout scripture. **And when we take a look at the collective verses, the examples start giving us a invaluable deeper look at what "missing the mark" actually means, and what it can look like in our day to day lives.**

Let's then take a closer look at "● 6", to see what it says about *sin*. I must admit it surprised me when I first read it, for it's quite clear; scripture calls it *lawlessness*! And reading it in the Amplified Version explains well what the term, "lawless" means.

By the way, I love to use this particular version for those times I want to really dig in to a verse like this one. I highly recommend you consider it for your studies too, for the same reason.

But back to "lawlessness." Thanks to the Amplified, it's easier to see the hard truth.

"Lawless" in this case is focusing on ignoring God's law by our action OR NEGLECT, or by "tolerating wrongdoing". We don't usually think of Adam and Eve in this way, but they are good examples of "lawlessness." Let's view it a more personal way: it's essentially choosing to live by our own self-will, not allowing HIS instructions, commands and will to keep us from doing "lawless" things!

We now have the answer to our question, ***"What's this 'mark' we don't want to miss?"*** The answer is short and simple. But as the saying goes, it's also one of those things that is, *"easier said than done."* Jesus told us through his story that God's mark for us is to, ***"Do the will of the Father."***

Short but powerful...

1 John tells it like it is... "The world and its desires will pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever." This is a verse well-worth memorizing as a reminder when needed. And it's short too! "Whoever does the will of God lives forever... with Him!"

THERE IS NO DOUBT! When we try and “beat the system” God put into place, fooling ourselves into believing we know better what will work for us, and so decide to do things our way... we will find ourself on the outside of heaven!

Now let's take a look at another verse that again warns us of the danger with that way of thinking...

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”
Proverbs 14:12

That's pretty direct, isn't it. And there's more to consider too.

**When we're living in disobedience,
we're also living with a rebellious attitude!**

The reason God hates that is He knows where it will lead us. It foolishly leads us to usurp, discount, or even override God's will in our life... which leads to missing His “mark” and ultimate gift for us... to always live in His Kingdom with Him.

Our natural man though, makes it difficult for us to see it that way. But thankfully we can see that underlying rebellious nature and where it leads, when we take a closer look at Adam and Eve, and what led them to disobey God (sin). And in the last scripture (● 11) where we see a man, who in spite of all the good, amazing things he did, was turned away from heaven.

A SIDE NOTE: *It's helpful to see we also have good examples here of two different types of rebellion, which most of us unwittingly fall into. We can rebel “knowingly”, which is what Adam and Eve did—with full knowledge they made a choice. Or we can live in “passive” rebellion, which when we do, it's easy to deceive ourself, like the man with good works obviously did! Two completely different types of attitudes, but both led to the same heartbreaking result... they were separated from God and all that is good.*

Thankfully, for Adam and Eve, their condition was only temporary, while in this body. But the self-deceived man was separated from God for eternity.

That's well-worth thinking about, isn't it.

All three...

Adam, Eve, and the un-named man, revealed what was in their heart by their actions, which was to follow their own desire and will, and not submit themselves to God and His authority.

Notice how they all ignorantly treated His will as being less important than their own, and chose to ignore it (and God) so they could do what THEY wanted. And because their actions sounded so good and right to THEM, they expected the Great I AM (God) (the all-knowing one who made them and the universe) to yield to THEIR will! Just think of the audacity of that!

Did you notice, that is what Satan did? which got him and the angels who followed him, evicted from heaven. And to think... it's quite possible for us to ignorantly (or arrogantly) do the same!

I never thought before of how when I'm failing to do what God wants, I'm actually discounting or usurping him! Have you? But it's now clear; we are!

Along with me, you might be thinking... ***"How can we be so foolish?!"*** The answer to our foolishness lies in our birth, for we were born that way!

We're all born with a sin nature

Since the time Adam and Eve fell into sin, we have been born with that particular stumbling block, which is common to us all. Did you know that? If science could go deep enough, they would probably find it's encoded in our DNA!

It's true! We're all born with a built-in "stumbling-block", our sin nature. As crazy as it sounds, that's what it is. It's a willful, self-centered one too! All we need do to know it's true is watch toddlers at play when they want something from a playmate, that they decided is theirs.

We already saw in Lesson 2 how we're naturally blind to the things of God. Let's now take a look at this scripture found in Romans 3:10-12, which explains well this spiritually hopeless condition we are born with.

“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.”

That sounds pretty hopeless, doesn't it.

But then there's God

Our sin nature blinds us to Him, which keeps us in the dark about Jesus and His love for us. Because it does, we're not able to know how out of His perfect love and righteousness, He generously pours out His love and mercy on us. Thankfully...

He made a way that breaks Satan's dark hold on us, and made a way for us to be able to reach out to Him, giving us hope.

Enter Jesus, His Son and representative, to let us know we not only have a physical father, we can have a Spiritual one too.

Because of what Jesus did, He made it possible for us to overcome THE BIGGEST, most important stumbling block we were born with, our sin nature!

I love the way the Amplified Version of the Bible explains the powerful way God reached down to help us, through Jesus Christ. And then the verse that follows, tells us WHAT needs to happen for Him to remove those obstacles for us, which can hinder us as we follow Him! This tells us though, it's conditional.

I see five of the conditions in the first part of this verse. I recommend you highlight them in some way as you read these verses.

“Trust in and rely confidently on the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight or understanding. In all your ways know and acknowledge and recognize Him, and HE will make your paths straight and smooth [removing obstacles that block your way]¹⁷.”

Did you find all five? See the Footnote below to see what they are if you need to.¹⁸

I find this portion of scripture to be especially encouraging, for when we keep Jesus in His rightful place in our lives, we won't have to struggle nearly as much

¹⁷ Proverbs 3:5-6 AMP

¹⁸ The five conditional points are [1] “trust in” [2] “rely confidently on” [3] “with all your heart” (AKA, “wholeheartedly”) [4] “don't rely on your own understanding” and [5] acknowledge Him.

with stumbling blocks as we would otherwise. For He knows us in and out, and will prepare some straight and smooth spots for us, that might otherwise be too rough at this point for us to handle. ***We serve an amazing merciful God, don't we!***

Thinking about what He's done for us makes my heart rejoice with gratefulness. I hope you feel the same, for God truly deserves as much praise as we can give Him!

OK, it's now time to say plainly what might surprise you...

Good deeds can trip us up too!

*Out of love,
Jesus told the story of the unnamed man as a warning to be careful for us all... for any of us can get tripped up with the stumbling block of doing good deeds.*

That's not to say good deeds are wrong. On the contrary, God wants us to do them! The problem is unless we're doing them out of obedience to Him, they can deceitfully lull us into believing our heart is right with Him.

I can almost hear the questions being asked, "How then do we know what is God's will, and avoid being deceived, or deceiving ourself?"

**We do so by faithfully being in His Word.
The more are, and allow it and His Holy Spirit to change
our heart and character to be more like His, the less likely
we are be deceived!**

In our next lesson, we're going to find out more about stumbling blocks we're sure to run into from time to time.

7

Staying salty and bright! (Part 2)

"Don't let your light be dimmed. You were made to shine in the darkness!"

One last thing about sin...

It is no wonder in Ephesians 4:22-24, we're told to put off our old self (with its sin nature) so we can be made new in the attitude of our minds; and to put on our new nature, which was created to become like Jesus in true righteousness and holiness.



What we're seeing in this verse is it's telling us we personally need to take action. We are the only ones who can "put off our old self" so we can "put on our new one." This also connects to the stumbling block of "Self".

Think about this for a minute: can you name any sin that doesn't start with pleasing or appeasing "self" in some way? We can see how James explained this in his letter to the Church.

"But each one is tempted when BY HIS OWN EVIL DESIRES (his own 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..." James 1:14-16

I will never forget the time I realized there is no sin that doesn't start with "self". Can you think of one? **And did you know, stumbling blocks are tailor-made to cater to self?**

We now know too what sin is and is not. And how we can more easily overcome any stumbling block that gets in our way as we're following Christ.

Let's then take a look at things in our personal life that might be causing us to "miss the mark" with God—which can also, as James wrote, "give birth to sin," and hinder our salt from flowing freely and our light from shining bright.

Spotting those stumbling blocks

We're going to see how sin and stumbling blocks go hand in hand for they can cause a chain reaction. When we don't stay alert, they can first make us painfully stub our spiritual "toes" on them... which can then cause us to lose our spiritual balance or become disoriented, and stumble around in our faith.

It's a condition that leaves us wide open to spiritual deception and weak faith too. Sadly, as we're trying to restabilize our balance, it can also too often cause us to fall hard on our spiritual faces or keisters! But no matter which it is, when we're down, it can cause us to lose sight of Christ, as we're following Him.

In the natural, stumbling blocks might seem like they're not that big of a problem, but spiritually they definitely are. Unless they're removed, they can stop us from keeping our eyes locked on Jesus as we're following him, or they can dangerously hinder our faith, which can cause us give up on trying to follow Jesus all together.

A personal side note...

If you're not sure how to overcome the stumbling block of sin, you might want to check out, "Three Simple Steps for Overcoming any sin," by Ty Gibson, in our "Something More" Appendix section."

Most of our stumbling blocks can also be uniquely different than that of others, for we each are uniquely different in our areas of strength and weaknesses.

However, we do have one stumbling block that is common to us all, for it's part of our sin nature. It's kin to "Self"; we call it, "Self-Will". It's a deceitful attitude, which left unchecked, is guaranteed to lead us into the sin of disobedience and a "rebellious" nature too... which also interferes with our ability to overcome all other stumbling blocks that come our way!

But I don't just have good news, I have some great news! When we gain victory over this one stumbling block, the grip all others can have on us is greatly diminished too.

*We of course now understand that sin simply means to miss the mark. **But now we need to see how it means much more than that.***

Sin is not just a simple mistake or poor choice as so many of us like to think. Continuing to "miss the mark", especially willfully, has serious consequences. It reveals a rebellious nature, and weakens us spiritually and in our relationship with Christ.

While we're "sinning" (missing the mark) we may not realize it, but we're also foolishly rebuffing God and His will by our disobedience!

Don't be fooled...

It's part of our human nature to downplay some sins as being small and unimportant. That's a dangerous trap to fall into. For ALL sins, no matter how big or small, reveals a heart of disobedience. Think of it like this. Sin (singular) is the "heart" condition. And sins (plural) are merely the SYMPTOMS of it. It doesn't matter how big or small a sin-symptom seems to be to us. The CONDITION that caused it is the same.

Just a side-note reminder... the condition we're referring to is our sin nature.

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

"Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do, yet fails to do it, is missing God's mark of doing His will, and so is guilty of sin."

Did you get that? Highlight that first word, "Anyone". There's no avoiding it. It's talking about all of us, so that includes you and me, and anyone else who's ever been born.

We then need to pay close attention to that next part... **who knows the right thing to do—but doesn't do it.** "Who knows," is key. If we KNOW the right thing to do, but we choose not to do it, we're not only disobeying, we're also defying Him—knowingly usurping His will and authority in our life.

Some might even say we're foolishly thumbing our noses at God!

Let's now see what else we can discover about these tricky stumbling blocks that can lead us to sin!

The trickiness of sin...

came into focus for me while I was a young teen, thanks to my Pastor at the time, Rev. Gordon Francis. **One Sunday morning he drove this important truth about the innocent-looking side of sin, home for us by sharing his own personal experience.** His insight and transparency were so unique I never forgot it.

He shared about His own personal struggle with a potential stumbling block. It centered around the most popular magazine in circulation back then, "*Life Magazine*". It was a one-of-a-kind periodical that continues to be sought after by many a collector, even today.

If you had known him, you would understand why this particular magazine was such an important part of his life. Brother Francis (*“Brother” and “Sister” is what we respectfully called one another back then*) was a highly educated man, whom I remember as an intellectual with a wide range of talents, and unusual experience and interests for a minister.

He had very successful secular and ministry careers, and a wide range of interests before answering the call to full-time ministry at our small church, where he remained my pastor until I was married with a family of my own, and moved out of state.

Of course, I cannot remember his exact words on that memorable day, so will just retell the essence of what he shared with us.

I believe those of us who love to read can relate well to Brother Francis’ enjoyment of each new issue of the 20th century’s most popular, loved and read magazine.

Br. Francis shared how he would spend many an hour enjoying its well written stories and reports that covered a wide range of current events, subjects and interests from around the world. Its wealth of photos captured important moments in history, stories and information that helped satisfy his inquiring mind, and kept him in touch with the rest of the world.

While sharing, he thoughtfully assured any of those listening who enjoyed reading the magazine that there was nothing wrong with doing so—for them. But God had been pointing out that for him, it had become a spiritual problem. (I now realize it was a “stumbling block”).

He also made it clear that what can become a sin for one person, won’t necessarily become so for another.

God had been working on his heart to let him know he was spending so many hours reading the magazine with each new issue, it was taking too much time away from his family, God, prayer time, and being in His Word.

God had been working on his heart about that for a while, and of his need to give up his favorite magazine, at least for a while.

*He shared how that had been a very real struggle for him, but eventually did obey God’s prompting **for he didn’t want anything to come between him and God.***

From what we have been learning about stumbling blocks, if he had continued ignoring the Father's prompting, it would have become a sin in his life... not because reading the magazine was wrong or sinful, but because his unwillingness to walk in obedience to the Father, would have revealed a rebellious streak. And 1 Samuel 15:23¹⁹, tells us that God sees rebellion as the sin of witchcraft.

In light of the story Jesus told, of what happened to the man who did not do the will of the Father, Br Francis hit God's mark with that one, didn't he. I like to see it as he didn't just hit the target, he hit the bullseye right in the center!

I remember some in the congregation had thought giving up reading the magazine was carrying things too far. But he knew his own heart and why he struggled with the thought of giving it up. It had become a POTENTIAL, stumbling block in his life, which would have come between him and His personal relationship with God; and he knew what he PERSONALLY needed to do to remain in obedience to Him.

It didn't matter what others thought. It was between Him and God, for God knew his heart and his area of weakness, and so knew too what was best for him.

Thanks to Brother Francis' openness and willingness to share from his heart, I learned something vitally important about sin that day... a lesson I have never forgotten. And my respect for him as a Man of God and integrity grew much higher that day too!

My friends...

This true story shows it's not necessarily what we're DOING that is a stumbling block, or sin. Instead, it's our heart attitude that makes it a sin or not.

Let's now read that verse again....

¹⁹ *"For rebellion is as [serious as] the sin of divination (fortune-telling), and disobedience is as [serious as] false religion and idolatry."* [Amplified Version] ; Rebellion is an attitude that defies authority, which started from the beginning of creation with Adam and Eve.

“...to him who **knows** to do good (the right thing to do) and does not do it, **to him** it is sin.”

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

Let's now take the time...

to identify our own personal stumbling-blocks. Be open to what God is wanting to show you. Perhaps one or more of your stumbling-blocks is similar to the sneaky one Br Francis had to deal with. It's something that seems innocent, and might be for others, but for you it's causing you to give in to your own self-will instead of “doing the will of your heavenly Father.”

Let's not forget, it's good to write them down as we identify them so we can track how we're doing. So grab a pencil or pen, and your journal if you have one, or use the chart at the end of this session. You will find it's helpful to be able to refer back later to your notes as needed, to help you stay on track as you're following Christ and overcoming them.

It's also helpful to record how you're doing from time to time, for it's common to feel discouraged from time to time. Those times you are, it can lift your spirit when you're able to look back and see how God has been working in your life, and how far you've actually come!

A good way to start identifying our personal stumbling blocks is to think back to our section that talked about our guidance center, or “center”, in lesson 5 on page 40. Turn back there to review if necessary. Then ask yourself, “Who or what is truly guiding my life?” Or, “Who or what is the most important thing in my life, so everything I do centers around it?” And then ask yourself... ***“How does God feel about it? And Is it keeping me from becoming more like Christ, or being obedient to Him?”*** Be honest now. I know it's sometimes hard to get started on something like this, but hang in there. You can do it with His help.

Another way to spot our stumbling blocks, both personal and general, is by looking at the “BEs” we identified in lesson 5, along with the “*fruit of the spirit*”, then flip each around to its opposite meaning.

When flipped around, 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”. God warns us about this 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” do the opposite. They are STUMBLING BLOCKS that hinder us from doing His will and becoming like Him, which then cause us to sin.

The “works of the flesh”, which stem from our sin nature, not only cause us to sin, they also cause our spiritual “salt-shakers” to be plugged and God’s light within us to be dimmed!

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—but let’s ask God to shine His reveling light in our own hearts too, so we can be good fruit inspectors of ourselves, and better equipped to see the type of fruit WE are bearing.

Take the time to talk to God about each “fruit of the flesh”, or stumbling block you come across; compare it to your own attitude and behavior as you go about your day. Be honest; ask yourself, and God, if there are any hints of them in your life. If so, those are the ones you want to zero in on and write down on your own personal list.

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!

[illegible]

8

Salt and light meets the dark side!

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

Think about what the above statement means... especially as we're taking a hard look at the relatively new world of social media (SM) and God's light.

In the natural, the absence of light is what causes darkness to one intensity or another. The same is true spiritually. And since evil is attracted to the cover of darkness, it's turned SM into the dark side's corrupted playground!



I found the following simple statement on the internet, which describes well the conflicting condition of social media. The emphasis is mine.

"Social Media AMPLIFIES both the good and dark sides of human nature."

I'm sure whoever wrote it learned this 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 (like Facebook, Twitter, Tic-Toc, the dark web, and more) frequently brings out the dark nature of people. It's generally believed the reason why is because by its very nature and design, it's a world you can hide in.

A person can use their own name or a pseudo one, it doesn't matter which, for even if they use their actual name and photo, they know those who read their posts or responses are strangers and won't know who or what they are, or know anything about them, for they hide behind a cyber wall of protection... allowing them to freely let off hateful steam or to antagonistically dump on others. It

makes them feel powerful and safe to say or do anything they want without fear of threats, repercussion or accountability. Afterward, they can then easily blend into SM's mass of millions of people, which many take full advantage of.

That is how spiritual darkness operates in the Social Media world. .

“...The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”
John 3:19b

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

Yes. Sadly, it is indeed full of deep darkness. Even darker and deeper than most of us realize.

But...

Just like a mission field, the dark world of social media needs the light of Christ too!

What then would God 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... including on the internet, without being sucked in by its enticements, only to become a part of it!***

But the sad story is, far too many of us Christians 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.



When either happens, our light is suppressed or hindered from shining, so the darkness only gets increasingly darker and bolder!

How do we avoid getting sucked in?!

That's a question we should all ask ourselves, isn't it? For none of us are invulnerable to its temptations to either "try and fix" those you don't agree with, or to the lie, "no one will ever know if I..." You can finish that sentence based on the weakness you either fight or give in to if you believe no one will know.

To answer the above question, we can avoid temptation by keeping in mind WHO we're representing if we wear the name, "Christian."

As long as we faithfully keep Him in His rightful place in our mind and heart, our light will keep shining bright... and will shine even brighter at times when needed.

Look at this amazing verse of promise...

"And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." Daniel 12:3

When we are wise with His light, and in following His will... we can trust our light is going to keep us standing strong against the darkness and shining bright!

Where do we start?

Starting in lesson 3, we see that being salt and light is not a choice, for when we were born again, we were born with it being part of our new spiritual nature. The only question then is, ***"What kind of salt and light are we going to be? ...not only in our day-to-day life, but while we're privately connecting with others on social media too."***

When we become a Child of God, we're able to bear the Fruit of the Spirit instead of the acts of the flesh. But the choice of which kind to bear is ours. *Are we going to be the kind of salt and light that seeks to bear "good fruit", or are we going to continue living by our fleshly nature?*

By our attitude and conduct while online, Is Jesus 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 caught in the internet’s dark trap... or are they more like one who is shining God’s light of hope into the darkness?”

Let’s be honest with ourselves...

When we get on the internet, or link to any social media platform, we may not realize it, but to one degree or another we will be showing ourself to be God’s light, or we’ll be revealing our “fleshly” way of life. We will either be showing the Fruit of the Spirit that is at work in our life... or we will be reflecting “the works of the flesh”. You will recall we took a look at both in the previous lesson.

They are of course polar opposites, with all of us generally being somewhere in between the two extremes. Let’s then get real and try to see ourselves as God sees us while we’re online, 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!

To help us get a better picture of ourself, 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 too.

How do I rate? One a scale of 1 – 10, 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. _____

12. _____

Now add them up so you have a total, including any you might have added. The minimum number you should have is 10. _____

You're almost there: Now divide your total by the number of questions (you will have 10 or more) and write the result here. _____

Now put a mark on this scale where that number would be.

Flesh 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 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 His 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 as well!

But please don't misunderstand me. When we've been "missing the mark" of bearing good fruit in our lives, it's good to feel convicted of it. For God's conviction (not to be confused with "condemnation") leads us to repent and do what's needed to successfully get back on track with Him, and to keep moving forward toward our goal.

It's important to know and believe, God does not want us to feel CONDEMNED, for that that bit of 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 in our hearts so we can always remember it, and not fall into one of Satan's favorite traps.

"Conviction comes from God, and can healthily lead us to correction and victory. Unlike condemnation that comes from

***the enemy, Satan, and is designed to destructively cripple us,
which seriously hinders our ability to be like Christ."***

It's important to take seriously...

the fact social media

holds a unique lure. As we talked about before, unlike other forms of communications, SM is quite different. It gives the user anonymity, with little or no accountability for their attitude, words or actions. No matter what reason they give, too many feel it's okay to lash out at others, to verbally intimidate, whip or abuse whomever and whenever they like by name calling, swearing, using filthy, shocking language, threatening bodily harm... whatever enters their mind to do. Chances are good, it makes them feel superior to others, powerful and in control—and safe from well-deserved repercussions.

But they're being deceived in their darkness.

The hard-to-hear message for some is Christians are not immune to SM's lure either. We too for various reasons can become embroiled in its deceptive darkness to one degree or another.

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 who call ourselves Christians, and followers of Christ, participate in it too. When we do, we are also inadvertently defaming the cause of Christ with our un-Christ-like attitude and conduct.

***And we 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- or stumbling-block in the life of others!

Remember, the “sin” isn’t necessarily the deed, but it’s the attitude and motive of our heart when we know²⁰ we’re “missing the mark”, by choosing to ignore God’s will so we can follow our own

This is why when we get caught up in any sin—while on or off the internet—we need to be willing to face it, and see it for what it really 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 well what we’re to do...

“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 (from “missing the mark”). 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.”

Aren’t you 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 we need to keep in mind, His forgiveness is clearly conditional, which means we need to do something first. It tells us, **“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.***

Forgiveness is an amazing gift of God... but it’s up to us to accept and use it, to enjoy it’s benefits of overcoming our stumbling blocks so we enjoy life as the Father intended... as we are being His salt and light!

²⁰ James 4:17 – “So for one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, for him it is sin.”

9

THE KEY is love!

"Less of me and more of Thee."

If you jumped here before starting Lesson 1, you're in the right place. Before you get started, we want to give you a little introduction to THE Key to enjoying an enriched Christian life, to help you get started. We will let you know when to jump back to Lesson one. And then we'll meet you back here again as you're completing "BEING Salt and Light".



We can't stress enough, the importance of what the quote at the top of the page is telling us.

I first heard this simple saying as a child. Little did I know back then that it not only gives us **THE Key** to experiencing a fulfilling, satisfying life as a Child of God, it's also key to grabbing hold of things most of us seek, an ENRICHED LIFE. One that is full of hope, a joyful spirit, and peace of mind and heart that *nothing* can shake.

Yet like the rainbow, it too often seems to lie just beyond our grasp!

What keeps us from being able to grab hold of it is the "Me" part of the above quote. It's what the Bible calls our "natural man".

**What then can weaken the grasp of "Me",
so we can become more like "Thee"?**

That question is why I asked you to do the unusual, and turn here, to the back of the book, and read this part first.

This *Shake the Salt & Share the Light* guidebook can help answer that question, and more... so be watching for those things that will help weaken the grasp of “me” so more of the light of “Thee” (Jesus) can shine bright in your life.

And after we go through the study, this last lesson is also a good way to wrap up what we’ve been learning about being salt and light, what it means to be a Christian believer, and to follow Christ in our day-to-day lives.

In this wrap-up lesson, we’re going to be focusing on how to grab and hold on to this invaluable, *“Less of me and more of Thee”* key we mentioned in the beginning.

PLEASE NOTE, you will find this lesson is structured a little different than the others. It’s made up of more short, meaningful thoughts, to make it easier to chew on them for spiritual nourishment as we go about our daily lives.

It can also serve as a short resource in the future, if you find your relationship with God needs to be refreshed, or are having difficulty making “Me” less, so you can have more of “Thee.”

To get started, let’s take a look at just a few more familiar sayings that help us understand that with God, we do the unthinkable and *gain by losing*... a concept that’s the opposite of the world’s.

Throughout your day, and as you’re able, think about what these mean...

“The world tells us to live for self, while God tells us to die to self.”

“Stop living the world’s way, so you can start living God’s way.”

“With God, we gain by losing.”

“It’s only when we die to self that we are able to live life to its fullest as God intended.”

And I saved the best for last. John the Baptist was the first to speak this insightful truth, and voiced it well...

“He must increase, but I must decrease.” John 3:30.

Our new spiritual man and heart might agree with John the Baptist, but the truth is, there’s a part of us (our natural man) that rebels against the idea!

Some of us mistakenly believe if we truly die to self, then we're going to lose the essence of who we are, eventually losing our own personal identity. Or they fear becoming what some call, "a cookie-cutter Christian", and living a boring life of dos and don'ts... or they simply fight the idea we need to "die to self-desires" that can hinder our spiritual growth as we grow to become more like Christ.

I'm happy to say, none of those beliefs or fears are true. When the Bible and Christians are saying things like, "Less of me," or "die to self", or anything similar, it's important to know we're not talking about neglecting ourself so we can be more spiritual. That's an emphatic, "NO", to that way of thinking; for God wants the opposite. He wants us take care of ourself physically, mentally and emotionally, so we can be an empowered, much better version of the unique person he designed each of us to be.

However, our sin nature desperately fights against it. After we've been "born again" (we cover what that means in a previous lesson) our natural man with its self-will and sin nature will want to fight, sometime aggressively, with our new nature, which is able to help us "die" to our sin nature so we can become more like Jesus. We don't lose our unique self when we do... instead, we lose our corruptible sin nature!

Did you know the stronger our self-will, the more we're giving Satan a stronger footing in our life? God then has good reason for wanting us to let go of our "me" self, doesn't He.

When we do, we begin discovering we're not "losing" ourselves as we feared... instead, God is helping us become a much better version of ourself! A person who is also blessed to see and experience the abundant life God not only has for us, but for those we touch too by **BEING His salt and light!**

The good news is...

No matter who we are, or what we've done in the past, our Father's desire is for us to be able to have fulfilling lives of unshakable faith, trust, hope, joy and peace—in abundance—and be able to walk on top of the waves of adversity, instead of being overwhelmed by them. Much like Peter did when he walked on the stormy waves... as long as he kept his focus on Jesus!

If you jumped here to Lesson 9, as we suggested

we're going to stop here so you can return to Lesson 1, for the answer is interlaced though the scriptures and insights we will be covering in the "Shake the Salt &

Share the Light” lessons. You’ll also discover more about the special relationship we can have with Christ. We’ll be picking it up here again as you’re completing the study.

FOR THE REST OF US who are completing this study, let’s take a look at walking on stormy waves!

We too can “walk on stormy waves...”

when we keep our focus on Jesus. God made that possible for us when we have done what Jesus told Nicodemus we needed to do, which is to be “born again”. But we need to understand that when we became a child of God, our birth became known to our spiritual enemy too! And he doesn’t want us to be able to stay on top of the stormy waves of life! Instead, he wants us to be overcome by them, and “sink” into the darkness.

Let’s see what Peter says about that, in the letter he wrote to the Church. We find it in I Peter 5:8.

“Be sober [well balanced and self-disciplined], be alert and cautious at all times. That enemy of yours, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion [fiercely hungry], seeking someone to devour.”

I shared that from the Amplified version, so we see more clearly why Peter was warning us about Satan, and what we are to do to resist Him. That’s why it’s important for us to be spiritually balanced in our faith, and to stay alert, for he’s always like a hungry lion that is seeking out weak and vulnerable prey.

So, what can we do to spoil Satan’s plan to spiritually destroy us? How do we stay alert, without feeling fearful? And how do we become spiritually “well-balanced and self-disciplined” so we can experience, “Less of me and more of Thee”?

From what we’ve studied, we do that by protecting and nurturing our relationship with Christ, much like couples do in a healthy marriage; we do things that help us grow in our love, faith and trust in Him.

Now go back and reread what you just read, but this time as you read, chew a bit on what it’s saying.

This then leads us to the question...

“How do we nurture our relationship with Christ?!”

I believe...

this is one of those questions that for many of us, we know the answer, but for one reason or another hesitate to voice it. I wonder if that’s because deep inside we know if we voice it, it’s going to lead to the need of a commitment, or a life change of some kind. We might want to rebel at the thought, or it might scare us or make us feel uncomfortable. Those feelings are understandable; but please don’t let it stop you. For if you do, you will miss God’s greatest blessing and plan for you!

This is one of those reasons why Jesus told us these two “Love” commandments were so important, which are to... *“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’, and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”*²¹

In Lesson 5 we saw how the more we love, the more natural it is to be salt and light. The same is true here; the more we **love**, the easier it is let go of the fears and concerns that are holding us back from TRUSTING Him, so we can relax and enjoy God’s presence and touch on our life.

And when we love God like His Commandments tell us to, like a child, we want to please Him and be like Him, above all else.

We are now ready to answer the question, *“How do we do that?”* (To grow in our love, faith and trust in God, and have and protect that kind of relationship with Him.)

The answer is interlaced through the scriptures and the *Shake the Salt* lessons we’ve been digging into.

I believe it’s safe to say, we can boil it all down to three main things Jesus told us to do. “Become like a child.... Love the Lord our God with our whole being—

²¹ Luke 10:27 was Jesus’ answer to an expert in the Law who was trying to test Him.

body, mind and spirit.... And, do the will of the Father," by living in obedience to Him.

When we do, just like a loving spouse, we're going to naturally look for ways to know more about Him, to grow closer to Him, and to show our growing love for Him.

There are also three main ways we can do it too. By persevering to...

- 1. Become** a faithful student of the Word (the Bible).
- 2. Develop** a healthy prayer life.
- 3. Practice** the benefits of praise and worship.

We begin to love and appreciate Him more, and develop a strong bond with Him, as we get to know Him through **His Word**, and allow ourselves to be guided and changed by it and **His love**.

Our **worship** helps us tune out what's happening in our lives, in the world and around us, and tune in to Him so we can be blessed by His presence, and bless the Father's heart in return. I'm reminded of the song that tells us, *"Let's forget about ourselves, and worship Him... Jesus Christ our Lord."*

When we're able to do that, our natural man can no longer stand in our way of being able to sense the Lord's presence, and receive whatever we're needing at the time to refresh our spirits and renew our hope. And it makes us love Him even more too!

Our **prayers** and **obedience**, help us learn how to include Christ as a natural part of our lives, like we would a loving spouse. We talk to Him about how our day went, sharing and thanking Him for the good... and seeking his help, advice, wisdom and insight about the bad or tough situations. And share with him our concerns as we pray for others. When we do, our relationship with Him deepens along with our trust.

It is our **love** for God and His perfect love for us, that creates and grows the precious personal **relationship** we have with Him.

**No matter where we're at in our journey with Christ, our
"BEING salt and light" adventure has only just begun. For the
more we're BEING, the more we're BECOMING!**

When we love someone, our desire is to get to know them better. Their character qualities attract us, we want to be with them and we want to connect with them, don't we.

The same is true in our **relationship** with God.

**The more we get to know Him and what He is like,
the more we love Him... and the more we love Him,
the more we want to get to know Him...
and so the cycle of spiritual growth continues!**

Closing Thoughts



At the beginning of this study, I shared how my journey began with the words of Jesus, *"YOU (meaning you and me, those who have accepted Him and His message of hope) are the salt of the earth... the light of the world."*

Since I'm a visual person, those words had unexpectedly planted a strong desire in my heart to discover what that kind of spiritual "salt and light" life would look like when being lived out.

Little did I know with all that happens in life, my journey would take a little over four years of renewed vision, fresh insight and discovery, which seems to still continue as I continue my walk with Christ.

To imbed in our hearts the image of what a "salt and light" person looks like... all we need do is recall the stories we took a close look at during this study, like the woman at the well and her surprising encounter with Jesus. And the demoniac, how his life had instantly changed from one of destructive evil, to one that exuded life and hope, when he met Jesus and His disciples. Both their lives had been dramatically changed for the better, forever!

That is the first recognizable mark of a "salt and light" person after they encounter Christ and accept His good news: Their character and life are changed!

We see in a "salt and light" life...

a person who wholeheartedly loves God, and is learning what it means to love and value the Child of God their heavenly Father is helping them to be... which spills out in love and caring about others, and in loving obedience to Him. Their life and character can't help but show it too, for day-by-day, they are becoming more like Him!

Did you notice... that description sounds familiar, doesn't it. Do you wonder why? Take a look at these verses that describe a Christian.

"If a man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things pass away, and all things become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17

"If you love me, keep my commandments." John 14:55

"They will know we are Christians by our love." John 13:35

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart soul and mind, and love others as yourself." Luke 10:27

By focusing on being a "salt and light" person, without having to think about it, we're just naturally BEING a true Christian—an ever-growing, faithful believer and follower of Christ!

If you were to ask me what the biggest take-away from this study would be, I would have to answer, "The quote at the beginning of the last lesson, for it is key. We can never go wrong if we faithfully use them as words to live by. May there always be...

"Less of me and more of Thee!"

*"You are a chosen people...
God's special possession,
that (we) may declare
the praises of Him who called (us)
out of darkness into His wonderful light!"*

1 Peter 2:9

*We **ARE** "the salt of the Earth...
the light of the World."*

So let us shine!

Appendix

Something More

“Something More” isn’t just an appendix, it’s a helpful collection of short guides and insight that can help solidify your Faith as you follow Christ.

Each Guide can also be a short personal or group study too, if you would like to keep discovering more about your relationship with God and the Christian walk.

Feel free to contact us if you have any questions. And, *“may your journey be blessed with His grace!”*

The Secret Meeting (Jesus tells us we need to be “born again”) A-1

Three Simple Steps! (Overcoming Sin) A-3

What’s the big fuss? (“Relationship” or “Religion”) A-7

— The Secret Meeting —

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



Let's call him, Nic.

Nic was an important man, who was prominently wealthy and sat on what we might call the Supreme Court of his day, the Jewish Ruling Council. Most of his fellow Jewish leaders saw Jesus as just another trouble-making

itinerant teacher, who was gathering followers for 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 highlights of the story, and you can read the rest later for yourself.

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!

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 ↓ ↓ ↓

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!

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 →**



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](#)
- **Effective Prayer Life:** [Matt 26:41](#); [Luke 18:1](#); [Phil 4:6-7](#); [Eph 6:18](#); [Prov 15:29](#); [Heb 4:15-16](#)
- **Continued Growth:** [2 Pet 1:4-11](#); [3:18](#); [1 Pet 2:2](#); [Col 3:16](#); [1 Tim 4:15](#); [Eph 4:15](#); [1 Cor 13:11](#); [Col 2:6-7](#), [3:9-10](#); [Heb 6:1-2](#)

"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

What does it mean, to be "born again?"

Our new birth begins with HEARING about God's love and plan for us... then being convinced that the sin in our life stands between us and God, which leads us to hate our sinful nature & REPENT of it before Him. Then we do an about face in our life & character so we can FOLLOW JESUS, the one who made our new



Repentance and humble obedience are key to Growth

God didn't design conviction of sin and repentance to be a one-time act for the believer. Indeed not! He planned for us to do it as needed. (As shown on the right.) It's also the most powerful, freeing act we can do for ourselves and our growing Faith, for it helps us move forward in confidence in our relationship with Christ and leads to our Spiritual Maturity.

New Life . . . from Spiritual Birth to Maturity

God calls us to become ...

- Like Christ
- Children of God
- Peacemakers
- Lovers of Truth, God, and Righteousness
- Overcomers
- Full of wisdom
- Loving
- Faithful
- ...and more good things we too desire to be!



The Believer's spiritual growth cycle (above) is an ongoing process. The Holy Spirit (who's part of the Godhead) can guide us thru: our personal Bible study, thru personal prayer, thru the writings of mature Christians, thru worship, sermons & study groups, thru personal mentors and counselors. Our part is to faithfully maintain a humble heart that welcomes God's input into all areas of our life, and are quick to rightly respond in trust and obedience to His will.

Our "Spiritual Child" stage means we're a new Believer, which Jesus called being "born again" (See reverse side for story).

Small children we are often eager to explore our new life. As "Children" we are...

- **Teachable** & learning about the things of God—discovering who we are "in Christ".
- **Learning** and encouraged to grow in our Faith by the example & testimony of others.
- **Beginning** to take baby steps in learning what the spiritual life is like, and what it means to "bear spiritual fruit".
- **Stumbles** or "falls" a lot & so often need spiritual comfort, support, compassionate understanding or help from those more spiritually mature, to nurture us.

Do you want to mature well? → "...for as long as you practice these things (and they're increasing), **you will never stumble...**"

Read what "these things" are in [2 Peter 1:4–11](#).

As "Spiritual Youth" we need spiritual nurturing and mentoring by those more spiritually mature. But we're growing strong in our faith and beginning to accept responsibility for own spiritual growth.

As "Youth" we often...

- **Choose** to publicly acknowledge Faith in Christ thru Baptism.
- **Characterized** as teachable, but often "me" centered.
- **Begin** to Identify spiritual gifts.
- **Give in** to living a lot by feelings at times more than self-discipline.

As "Spiritual Young Adults" we accept responsibility for our own spiritual growth, decisions and choices. As "Adults" we'...

- **Move** from self-centeredness to focusing more on Christ and others.
- **Develop** desire to joyfully serve by encouraging & helping those spiritually younger, others, and the local church and community.
- **Explore**, practice, develop our spiritual gifts.
- **Spiritual life** becoming primary focus and not the physical world.
- **Increase** in spiritual fruit, personal prayer life and Bible Study.

When "Spiritually Mature," we're alert to opportunities to serve as able. Encourage, nurture, mentor, and teach others; are often seen as a "spiritual parent" by those we've helped grow in the Faith. Are faithful to personal prayer and Bible study and able to have a...

- **Christ centered** life & able to tell others about Him.
- **Support** others in the faith.
- **Utilize** spiritual gifts to serve as needed & encourage others to do the same.
- **Have** a sincere, growing love of Christ, the Word, and others.

When we are "born again"* and become part of God's Family...

Throughout our Life, our Heavenly Father continues to lovingly guide and correct us toward righteous living for our good.. because He wants us to be able to live life to its fullest! ([Jhn 10:10](#)) In response, our love, faith and trust in Him grows, and we are able to humbly surrender our will to His, enabling us to submit to Him in obedience. And the more we get to know our Father, the deeper and stronger our love and spiritual understanding of Him grows.



By Ty Gibson

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

*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.*

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Three Simple Steps for Overcoming Any Sin

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

Right now!

All you need do is appreciate, appropriate and act upon what already belongs to you in the person of Jesus Christ. You are guaranteed success in whatever battle you may be fighting, not because you are sufficient for the battle—you are not!—but because there are massively powerful provisions at your fingertips, in Christ.

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, author's translation).

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.

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What's the big fuss?!

Is my Christian Faith a Relationship or a Religion?

by Evelyn Alexander

The difference a word makes!

Religion:

"The belief in and reverence for a supernatural power or powers, regarded as creating and governing the universe.

"A particular variety of such belief, especially when organized into a system of doctrine and practice."

Relationship:

"The condition or fact of being related; connection or association.

"Connection by blood or marriage; kinship.

"A particular type of connection existing between people related to or having dealings with each other."

The personal relationship a Believer can have with Christ is the reason why many Christians reject the claim that Christianity is a religion, and passionately declare, *"Christianity is a relationship—not a religion!"* Which stance is right? That's a much-debated question, isn't it.

Let's first take a look at why some are adamant the Christian Faith is a religion while others insistently claim it's a relationship. by taking a look at the dictionary definitions in the side box. When we do, we find there's a distinct difference between the two.

We can see *Religion* is putting into practice a personal belief system about the supernatural world and God, while a *Relationship* is being related or connected to another living entity in some way.

A system is impersonal while a living entity is relational.

From these definitions, we can understand how from the perspective of those *without Christ*, Christianity meets the definition of being a religion. But hold on! Before you think, "Oh no it's not!" Note who thinks that way. It is the perspective of those who are *WITHOUT CHRIST*... not those who

have Christ in their life. Scripture tells us that Satan blinds the **unbeliever** to Christ, the Light of the world.ⁱ

*“The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they may not see the light...” Since they are not able to comprehend the reality of Christ that means they cannot see how anyone can have a relationship with Him. **And a religious system without a personal relationship with Christ at its center, is like any other religion with its own set of dogmas to live by.***

Jesus Christ makes the difference!

It’s true. Foundational to the Christian faith is Jesus. For those of us who have experienced the second birth and been “born again,” we’ve been “birthed” into His family and became a child of God, making an ongoing relationship with Him possible!

Just like children are physically born into this world and become connected to their parents by blood or adoption, a special bond of relationship exists between them for the rest of their lives. This is also wonderfully true spiritually when we experience our second birth. When we are born into the world of God’s Kingdom... we’ve become connected by the shed blood of Christ... and we develop a special bond with our Heavenly Father which no one will ever be able to break.

Being born again into God’s family, also makes it a natural RELATIONSHIP, which sets the Christian faith apart from the definition of a religion.

Sadly, from the unbeliever’s mistaken perspective, Christianity is just another religion for to them God or Christ never existed, or is dead, so a person cannot have a “relationship” with someone who doesn’t exist. To them it’s simply a foolish notion. In I Corinthians 6:14, the Bible tells us “foolish” is exactly how they see it too.

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Since those still living in darkness are unable to comprehend the presence of Jesus and spiritual things, this means they are unable to understand how the Christian faith is much more than a religion, for it’s centered around having a relationship with one who is still very much alive.

Yes, He’s still very much alive. For He was born and lived among us for a time before dying on a cruel cross to break the curse of sin that had separated us from God. And on the third day He was **resurrected**, proving He was sent by God and lived again among us as witnessed

by hundreds of people in the days that followed, until a few of His faithful disciples saw Him taken up into heaven, returning again to God's Kingdom to be with the Father.

No other religious faith is based on a relationship like this one.

So, can we now settle the question?

What do YOU think? Is Christianity a religion or a relationship? I believe we can now see it is both—**for it depends on what a person believes about Jesus Christ!**

After giving these definitions and scriptures deeper thought like we did, we can now understand why to those who HAVE NOT yet come to believe and accept Christ, it's just another **religion** to them... while it's a **true relationship** to those who are “born again”, who believe and accepted Him as both their personal Savior and the Savior of the world, and are committed to following Him.

CONSIDER THIS: *When talking to others about this question, and to avoid getting caught in a fruitless debate, it might be best to explain when Christ enters our life, he changes our own futile **religious** attempts to reach God into a very real, productive and special **relationship** by Him first reaching out to us!*

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:4

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

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