

# Salt and Light - Living Out Your Family's Mission

## Introduction

This study explores Jesus's charge to His disciples in Matthew 5:13-16, where He declares them to be "salt of the earth" and "light of the world." We'll examine what it means for our families to have a kingdom mission and how we can live out our calling to bless the world around us.

**Central Thesis:** Every family should know and embrace its mission as salt and light—to do good works that cause others to give glory to our Father in heaven.

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## I. The Importance of Mission Statements

### A. Organizations and Their Purpose

**Key Principle:** Every organization needs to know why it exists and what it's trying to accomplish.

Examples of corporate mission statements:

- Amazon: "To be earth's most customer-centric company"
- Google: "To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible"
- Intuit: "To improve customers' financial lives so profoundly they couldn't imagine going back to the old way"

### B. Your Family as an Organization

**Critical Question:** Does your family know its mission?

**Reflection Points:**

- What does your family exist to do?
- What does success look like for your household?
- What are you trying to accomplish together?
- Would all family members agree on your mission?

**Application Exercise:** Whether you live alone, with a spouse, with children, or in a multi-generational home, consider sitting down to articulate: "What is our mission? Why do we exist as a household?"

**The Challenge:** Many families operate without ever defining their purpose. They exist reactively rather than purposefully, responding to circumstances rather than pursuing a defined mission.

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## II. Jesus's Mission Statement for Disciples

## A. The Context: Covenant Community

**Matthew 5:13-16** serves as Jesus's mission statement for His followers. But to understand this fully, we must grasp the covenant framework.

### Theological Foundation:

- When God makes a covenant with a people, He doesn't do so merely for them to receive blessing
- God's covenant people are called to **be** a blessing to others
- This pattern appears throughout Scripture from Abraham onward

**Genesis 12:2-3** - "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you... and **you will be a blessing**... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

## B. Israel's Calling (and Failure)

### The Original Design:

- Israel was meant to be salt and light to the nations
- By being who God called them to be, they would bless the world
- Their distinctiveness would attract the nations to Yahweh

### The Failure:

- Many in Israel lost their "saltiness"
- They stopped being distinct from surrounding nations
- They failed to walk in the good works God prepared for them

### The Remnant:

- Jesus addresses the faithful remnant—His disciples
- He's reconstituting Israel around Himself
- He declares: "**You** are the salt of the earth, **you** are the light of the world"

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## III. Salt of the Earth (Matthew 5:13)

### A. The Text

**Matthew 5:13** - "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."

### B. Understanding Salt

#### The Nature of Salt:

1. **Preservative function** - Prevents decay and corruption
2. **Flavoring function** - Enhances and improves taste

3. **Blessing by nature** - Salt doesn't have to "try" to be salty; it blesses simply by being itself

**Key Theological Point:** Salt accomplishes its purpose simply by being what it was created to be. It doesn't strive or perform—it just is.

### C. The Application to Disciples

**The Identity Statement:** "You **ARE** salt"—this is indicative, not imperative

Jesus doesn't say "Try to be salt" or "Work hard at being salt." He declares: "You are salt."

**What This Means:**

- By being recreated in Christ, we have a new nature
- Just as salt blesses by its nature, we bless by our nature in Christ
- We make the world better simply by being who God created us to be

**Ephesians 2:8-10 Connection:** "For by grace you have been saved through faith... For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God **prepared beforehand**, that we should walk in them."

**The Pattern:**

1. God saves us by grace (not our works)
2. God recreates us as His workmanship
3. God prepares good works for us
4. We walk in those works because of who we've become
5. We bless the world by being our true selves in Christ

### D. The Warning

**If salt loses its saltiness...**

**The Danger:** If we lose our distinctiveness, if we're no longer different from the world around us, we become worthless for God's purposes.

**Application Questions:**

- Is your household distinctive from other households in your neighborhood?
- Do the values, priorities, and practices in your home reflect kingdom realities?
- Are you actually functioning as salt, or have you lost your saltiness?

**The Sober Reality:** A family that looks, acts, thinks, and values exactly what the culture values has lost its saltiness. If there's no distinction, there's no preservation, no flavoring, no blessing.

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## IV. Light of the World (Matthew 5:14-15)

### A. The Text

**Matthew 5:14-15** - "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house."

## **B. Understanding Light**

### **The Nature of Light:**

1. **Illuminates by nature** - Light doesn't try to shine; it just does
2. **Cannot be hidden** - A city on a hill is visible; light naturally reveals
3. **Makes things visible** - Light exposes what's there, guides, provides clarity

**Key Theological Point:** Like salt, light accomplishes its purpose simply by being what it is. You don't have to tell light to shine—it's light's nature to illuminate.

## **C. The Application to Disciples**

**The Identity Statement:** "You **ARE** light"—again, indicative not imperative

### **What This Means:**

- Our nature in Christ is to illuminate
- We make the world brighter simply by being present
- We cannot help but be visible when we're truly living as God's people

### **The City on a Hill Metaphor:**

- Visibility is inevitable
- You cannot be a secret disciple
- Your household will be noticed
- The question isn't whether you'll be seen, but what people will see

## **D. The Illustration: Bioluminescent Bacteria**

**The Story:** In the Indian Ocean, satellites detected a glowing area the size of Connecticut (110 miles long). The source? Microscopic bioluminescent bacteria.

### **The Lesson:**

- Individual bacteria are invisible to the human eye
- But together, they created light visible from space
- **We are brighter together**

### **Application:**

- Your individual light might seem small
- Your household might feel insignificant
- But when families throughout a community shine together, the impact is astronomical

- God doesn't call us to shine alone—He calls us to shine together as His covenant community
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## **V. The Mission Statement Clarified (Matthew 5:16)**

### **A. The Text**

**Matthew 5:16** - "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

### **B. The Mission Defined**

**Here it is—the mission statement for every Christian household:**

"That others may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven."

**Breaking it down:**

1. **"Let your light shine before others"** - Be visible, be present, be engaged
2. **"So that they may see your good works"** - Do things that are observable and beneficial
3. **"And give glory to your Father"** - The end goal isn't praise for us, but worship of God

### **C. Good Works Defined**

**What are "good works"?**

Jesus intentionally keeps this broad and general. Why? Because:

1. **Different gifts** - You have different talents than others
2. **Different abilities** - You can do things others cannot
3. **Different resources** - God has given you unique opportunities
4. **Different contexts** - Your neighborhood needs may differ from others'

**The Point:** God has prepared good works specifically for **you** to do, leveraging **your** unique combination of gifts, abilities, resources, and context.

### **D. The Goal: God's Glory, Not Ours**

**Critical Distinction:** We don't do good works to receive praise for ourselves.

**The Right Response:**

- People see our works
- They wonder why we do them
- We point them to our Father
- God receives the glory

**Luke 17:10** - "So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

**The Wrong Response:**

- Doing good works for recognition
  - Seeking praise for ourselves
  - Making it about our righteousness
  - Taking credit for what God has enabled
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## **VI. Historical Examples: The Church Shining in Darkness**

### **A. The Third Century Plague**

**Historical Context:** During a devastating plague in the 3rd century, 5,000 people per day were dying in Rome alone.

**The Pagan Response:**

- The wealthy fled the cities
- People abandoned the sick
- Self-preservation ruled
- Fear dominated

**The Christian Response:** Bishop Dionysius wrote (260 AD): "Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ."

**The Result:**

- The church grew exponentially in the 3rd century
- Why? Because people saw these good works
- They asked: "Why would you risk your lives?"
- Christians pointed to Christ
- God received glory

**The Pattern:** The church has always shined brightest in the darkest times.

### **B. Contemporary Example: COVID-19 Response**

**TechFaith Hackathon:**

- Christians with technical skills gathered
- They identified problems created by the pandemic
- They used their gifts to create solutions
- They combined faith and ability to serve

**The Principle:** Whatever your gifts, whatever the crisis, there are good works God has prepared for you to do.

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## **VII. Practical Application: Living Out Your Mission**

### **A. Identifying Your Good Works**

#### **Questions to Consider:**

1. **What talents do you have?**
  - Technical skills? Artistic abilities? Practical know-how?
  - Teaching gifts? Hospitality? Administrative abilities?
2. **What resources do you possess?**
  - Time? Money? Space? Materials?
  - Connections? Platform? Influence?
3. **What needs do you see?**
  - In your neighborhood? Your workplace? Your school?
  - Among friends? Family? Strangers?
4. **What opportunities exist?**
  - What doors has God opened?
  - What situations are you uniquely positioned to address?

**The Instruction:** Use your imagination. Take stock. Look around. Then do good works.

### **B. Specific Suggestions**

#### **In Your Neighborhood:**

- Take food to neighbors
- Offer practical help (lawn care, repairs, errands)
- Provide encouragement and support
- Share resources generously
- Create community connections

#### **In Crisis Times:**

- Meet immediate physical needs
- Offer emotional support
- Use your specific skills to solve problems
- Be present in suffering
- Point people to hope

#### **In Everyday Life:**

- Practice hospitality consistently

- Mentor younger people
- Serve in your workplace with excellence
- Care for the vulnerable
- Advocate for justice

### **C. As Families**

#### **Teaching the Mission:**

1. **Make it explicit** - Write out your family mission statement
2. **Make it memorable** - Help everyone remember and embrace it
3. **Make it practical** - Identify specific good works your family can do
4. **Make it regular** - Build service into your family rhythm
5. **Make it theological** - Always point to God as the reason and source

#### **Multigenerational Application:**

- Grandparents can mentor
- Parents can model
- Children can participate at age-appropriate levels
- Everyone contributes according to their gifts

## **VIII. Theological Depth: New Creation and Good Works**

### **A. The Recreation Principle**

**Key Passage:** Ephesians 2:8-10

#### **The Theological Sequence:**

1. **Salvation by Grace** (v. 8-9)
  - Not earned by works
  - Gift received through faith
  - No ground for boasting
2. **Recreation as Workmanship** (v. 10a)
  - We are God's "workmanship" (ποίημα - poiēma, "poem," "masterpiece")
  - Created **in** Christ Jesus
  - We have a new nature, new identity, new purpose
3. **Prepared Good Works** (v. 10b)
  - God prepared these works beforehand
  - We were created **for** these works

- We "walk in" them (not earn salvation by them)

### **The Pattern in Israel:**

- God delivered Israel from Egypt (grace)
- God recreated them as His people (new identity)
- God gave them the Law to walk in (prepared works)
- By being who God made them, they would bless the world

### **The Pattern in the Church:**

- God delivers us from sin (grace)
- God recreates us in Christ (new identity)
- God prepares good works for us (mission)
- By being who God made us, we bless the world

## **B. Works and Grace**

### **Critical Balance:**

#### **✗ Wrong View #1:** Works save us

- Leads to pride, legalism, despair
- Denies grace
- Makes us our own saviors

#### **✗ Wrong View #2:** Works are irrelevant

- Leads to passivity, nominal faith
- Denies transformation
- Makes grace an excuse for sin

#### **✓ Right View:** Works demonstrate and express salvation

- We're saved by grace through faith
- True faith produces good works
- Works are the fruit, not the root
- We do good works because we're saved, not to become saved

**James 2:17** - "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

## **C. The Nature of Salt and Light**

### **Why These Metaphors?**

Both salt and light accomplish their purposes **by nature**, not by effort:

- Salt doesn't try to preserve; it preserves by being salt

- Light doesn't try to shine; it shines by being light
- Christians don't try to be different; they're different by being in Christ

**The Application:**

- Don't strive to "act Christian"
- Be transformed so you naturally live as Christ's disciple
- Let the new nature express itself in good works
- Trust that as you walk with Christ, you'll naturally be salt and light

**Romans 12:2** - "Do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewal of your mind..."

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## **IX. Addressing Potential Misunderstandings**

### **A. "Good Works" Are Not Mere Social Action**

**Clarification:** While good works include meeting physical needs, they're always connected to spiritual reality.

**The Distinction:**

- Social work aims to improve human conditions (good, but limited)
- Christian good works point beyond themselves to God
- We serve bodies **and** souls
- We meet needs **and** bear witness
- We're not just making earth better; we're revealing heaven

**Matthew 5:16 again:** "...so that they may see your good works and give glory to **your Father who is in heaven.**"

The works themselves aren't the end—God's glory is.

### **B. We're Not Earning God's Love**

**Reminder:** Good works flow from grace received, not efforts to earn favor.

**Motivation Check:**

- Are you doing good works to feel worthy?
- Are you serving to earn God's approval?
- Are you afraid God will reject you if you don't produce?

**If so,** remember: You're already salt. You're already light. Not because of what you do, but because of who God has made you in Christ.

### **C. Don't Manufacture Saltiness**

**The Temptation:** To try to be distinctive by creating artificial differences.

### **Examples of False Saltiness:**

- Being weird for the sake of being weird
- Adopting cultural peculiarities that aren't biblically mandated
- Creating unnecessary separations from non-Christians
- Being obnoxious or judgmental in the name of "standing out"

**True Saltiness:** Comes from actually following Jesus, embracing His values, living by His teaching, reflecting His character.

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## **X. Conclusion: Embracing Your Family's Mission**

### **A. The Mission Statement**

**For every Christian household, regardless of size or composition:**

"That others may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven."

**This becomes reality when:**

- We embrace our identity as salt and light
- We walk in the good works God has prepared
- We use our unique gifts, abilities, and resources
- We make the world better by being who God created us to be

### **B. The Challenge**

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. Does your family know its mission?
2. Would all members of your household articulate the same purpose?
3. Are you living distinctively, or have you lost your saltiness?
4. Is your light shining, or have you hidden it under a basket?
5. When people see your household, do they see good works that point to God?

### **C. The Encouragement**

**Remember:**

- You don't have to earn this identity—it's given in Christ
- You don't have to strive to be different—transformation makes you different
- You don't work alone—you're part of a community shining together
- Your small light matters—together we're visible from space

**The Promise:** When we walk in the good works God prepared for us, we fulfill our purpose. We become what God created us to be. We bless the world. And God receives glory.

## D. The Call

### Practical Next Steps:

1. **Articulate your mission** - Write it down as a family
2. **Identify your works** - What has God prepared for you to do?
3. **Take action** - Start doing those good works
4. **Point to God** - When people ask why, direct glory to Him
5. **Stay faithful** - Continue being salt and light consistently

**Remember the Pattern:** The church shines brightest in the darkest times. We're living in a moment where the world desperately needs salt and light. This is your time. This is your household's moment to fulfill its mission.

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## Discussion Questions

1. If you had to write a mission statement for your family right now, what would it be? How does it compare to "that others may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven"?
2. What specific "good works" has God prepared for your household to do? How do your unique gifts, abilities, resources, and context shape these works?
3. In what ways has your family "lost its saltiness"—become indistinguishable from the surrounding culture? What would it look like to recover that distinctiveness?
4. How do we balance doing good works and ensuring God receives the glory (not us)? What does that look like practically?
5. The third-century Christians risked their lives to care for plague victims. What equivalent sacrifices might God be calling us to make today?
6. How can we teach children to embrace a family mission of doing good works for God's glory? What age-appropriate ways can children participate?
7. What's the difference between "trying to act Christian" and "being salt and light by nature"? How do we cultivate authentic transformation rather than performance?
8. How should the fact that "God prepared good works beforehand for us to walk in" affect the way we approach service and mission?