

People Who Make a Difference

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February 9-10, 2008

How A Christian G.R.O.W.S. (Spiritual Growth Series)

Matthew 5:13-16

I want to begin by telling you the story of a man named Mel Trotter. He was born in 1870. He was the son of an alcoholic bartender and he used to tend bar as a child when his father was too drunk to work. At the age of 17, Mel had followed in his father's footsteps and he became a thorough-going alcoholic, losing job after job because of his heavy drinking. At age 21, Mel got married. And then he spent the next six years in a downward spiral of drunken binges, and continual promises to his wife that he would stop drinking and that he would change.

If any of you have ever lived with an addict, you know this pattern. Mel would remain sober for a few weeks and then get drunk again and then plunge back into the pattern of self-recrimination and remorse and promises to stop, and then go right back to drinking again. For those of you who live with abusers, you have seen this pattern. For those of you living with drug addicts, alcoholics, pornography users, gambling addicts, or womanizers, you have seen this pattern.

Not even the death of his 2-year old son stopped his race towards the bottom. One day he returned home after a 10-day drinking spree to find that in his absence his little boy died. His wife was sitting there holding their baby boy inconsolably weeping.

Mel left his wife at the funeral home and went out and drowned his sorrows at a local saloon. He then hopped a freight train to Chicago. He got off the train on a bitterly cold, blizzard night in January. He had no money and so he sold his shoes to buy a drink. And walking barefoot, Mel planned to throw himself into Lake Michigan to commit suicide.

That's when Christ stepped in and intervened in Mel Trotter's life. As Mel stumbled down VanBuren Street, a young man was standing outside the Pacific Garden Mission. He stepped forward to keep Mel from falling to the ground. This young man's name was Tom Mackey. He gently put his arm around Mel and helped into the mission. He sat him down into a chair where the mission superintendent was preaching to a group of men, who were very much like Mel Trotter. The mission superintendent looked at Mel Trotter and said, "Jesus loves you, and so do I. He wants to save you tonight. If you want to receive some prayer, put up your hand right now and let God know that you are willing to make room for him in your life."

In a very simple response, Mel Trotter lifted his hand. Christ entered his life. And miraculously Christ saved him from alcoholism in that moment.

Mel went back to his wife. He obviously had changed. He went back to work and earned enough money to pay off his debts. Every evening, Mel would go back to that city mission and eventually began leading services there. He preached to men who needed to find Christ just as he had. Over the next 40 years Mel Trotter helped to establish 68 rescue missions across the United States. Through the work of these missions, thousands and thousands of men and women found freedom through the power of Jesus Christ.

Despite the fact that Mel Trotter became famous establishing all of these missions in cities across America, his message remained really simple. He would preach on skid rows and the seediest parts of cities across America: God loves you in the midst of your deepest failure and your darkest sin. God loves you. And God's love has the power to change you. He can heal even the most ruined life.

You know, when Mel Trotter was stumbling down VanBuren Street in Chicago, barefoot, planning to kill himself, there wouldn't have been 1 person in 10,000 who would have said this wreck of a man, this stumbling, homeless, what many people might call a derelict, would one day be the instrument that God used to rescue thousands and thousands of other people. When Mel Trotter was walking in a Chicago blizzard without shoes because he had sold them for a drink, no one would have said, "Here's a man who is going to make a huge difference in this world."

I've been doing a series on spiritual growth over the last month or so. And in this series that I've called "How A Christian G.R.O.W.S.", I've said to you that God wants you to be able to wake up on January 1, 2009 and look back on the year 2008 saying, "2008 was a really good year for me in terms of my spiritual growth." Maybe 2008 was a hard year circumstantially; maybe there were financial problems; maybe there were health problems, but God wants each of you to wake up on January 1, 2009 and say, "I'm a better person today than I was a year ago on January 1, 2008. I'm kinder; I'm acting more like Jesus; I'm freed up from habits and addictions that dogged me for years. I'm different today than I was a year ago."

I've used the acronym G.R.O.W.S. as a simple shorthand for kinds of things we Christians need to put in our lives in order to spiritually grow.

G.R.O.W.S.

G=Giving

R=Relationships

O=Outreach

W=Worship

S=Spiritual Disciplines

A few weeks ago, I preached on giving.

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I do hope that you will take these messages seriously and those of us who have not yet developed a regular consistent habit of financially giving to the Lord would begin that practice. And those who say, “I am giving, but God really spoke to me about giving more; giving away my excess rather than spending it self-indulgently,” would do that.

For the last couple of weeks, Stephen Van Dop and Julia Pickerill talked about relationships.

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Today, I’m going to focus on “O” – Outreach, following up on that Mel Trotter story.

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I’ve called today’s talk “People Who Make A Difference.” Let’s pray.

Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. 14 “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

As I said, if you are a follower of Christ, it is God’s intention that you spiritually grow and become more and more like Jesus – that you learn to love like Jesus, that you learn to forgive like Jesus, that you learn to give like Jesus. God wants us to grow up before we get old. And becoming a Christian is not just getting your ticket stamped for heaven while you continue to live a hellish life here on earth. God wants each of us who are

followers of Christ, to taste a little bit of heaven right now experiencing something of his goodness, something of his love, something of answers to our prayers. He wants us to experience a little bit of heaven right now.

Part of experiencing God's Kingdom is becoming a person who makes a difference in Christ's name for other people in this world. God doesn't want you and me to simply occupy time or occupy space. God wants you and me to make a difference in this world. That it really meant something that you and I walked through this life. That we made a difference for good and for God. Don't you want to be a person whose life really counted for something?

So Jesus says this in Matt. 5:13-16:

Matthew 5:13-16

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Salt and light are two of the most common things you would find in virtually every household across the world. Certainly, everyone used salt and light in Jesus' day. He must have watched his mother, Mary, using salt in her kitchen. In those days before refrigeration, salt wasn't used so much for flavoring as it was for preserving. Mary would have put salt on fish and salt on meat or left them to soak in salty water in order to preserve the fish or meat. And Mary would have lit oil lamps when the sun went down.

Why does Jesus use these images of salt and light? He is talking about his followers making a difference in this world. And he essentially says,

To make a difference, we followers of Christ must be radically different

Matthew 5:13

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

If you want to make a difference, you must be different. Or as Mahatma Gandhi, who was an admirer of Christ, although not a Christian, said,

You must be the change you want to see in the world.

You want to live in a loving home? Be loving. Want the place where you work to have more integrity, be absolutely clean and full of integrity in all of your dealings. You, Christian, you follower of Christ, are to be as different as salt is from decaying meat or decaying fish that it would be rubbed into. You Christian ought to be as different as light is to darkness, or as we would say today, as different as oil is from water.

One of the main reasons why we followers of Christ don't make much difference in the world is that we aren't that different from the world. The apostle Paul warns us against not being different in Romans 12:2:

Romans 12:2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

You've heard the story, I'm sure, about how you can boil a frog to death. I don't know who actually discovers these things. But apparently, if you throw a frog in a pot of boiling water, it will immediately leap out because the water is so hot. But if you put a frog in cold water and slowly raise the temperature, the frog becomes acclimated to the rising temperature and it will literally boil to death before realizing that the environment around it is changing.

Friends, we followers of Jesus can become acclimated to a world that is boiling us to death.

My wife, Marlene, and I were walking around Easton recently. We were commenting about how sexually charged all of the posters were. When I said to Marlene, "Look at this!" we were standing in front of a shoe store and there was a poster of several women displaying shoes. How do you think they displayed the shoes? They had several naked women, covering up their tops with their arms, and the shoes were displayed on the women's bare shoulders.

Now, that is certainly something that I do when I go into a shoe store and I want to see if a pair of shoes looks nice. I take my shirt off and put the shoe on my shoulder and look in the mirror.

If this seems normal to you, to display shoes by putting them on the shoulders of a naked woman, then you, my friend, are the frog that has been boiling away in the pot way too long. I mean, could you imagine the marketer that thought of this? They said, "Well, we've got to get sex into an ad for shoes, but how can we do it? If we just put shoes on a woman's feet, well, that's not very sexy. Let's put the shoes on a woman's bare shoulder."

If we are going to make a difference, we Christians cannot lose our discomfort or our capacity to be shocked by the moral decay around us.

Several decades ago Martin Luther King, Jr., said this:

But there are some things in our social system which I am proud to be maladjusted and to which I suggest that you, too, ought to be maladjusted. I never intend to adjust myself to the viciousness of mob-rule. I never intend to adjust myself to the evils of segregation and the crippling effects of discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to the tragic inequalities of an economic system which takes necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes. I never intend to become adjusted to the madness of militarism and the self-defeating method of physical violence. I call upon you to be maladjusted...the world is in desperate need of such maladjustment. Through such maladjustment we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man into the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.

Don't conform. Let me ask you a personal question: Are you maladjusted to the world around you? Or do you find the world a pretty comfortable place?

Well, here's the second thing:

To make a difference, we followers of Christ together must be radically different

Jesus says in Matthew 5:13-14:

Matthew 5:13-14

13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

These statements are often read individualistically – that each of us is to be salt; each of us is to be light. That's true. But the statements also need to be understood corporately. We together are salt and we together are light.

You know, there are lots of different ways that people make decisions to become followers of Jesus. There is what we might call personal evangelism; one person, a family member, a wife or husband, a parent or child, a sibling, someone in your family, a friend, colleague, or coworker, a fellow student, a roommate talks with you about Jesus. Many people become followers of Jesus through the individual witness of another person that they know.

And then there are literally millions of people around the world who become followers of Christ in what Billy Graham calls "crusades" or mass meetings in stadiums. Jesus preached the gospel to crowds of people. And this has been a pattern throughout history. There were great mass evangelists back in the 18th century like George

Whitefield and John Wesley. And in the 19th century there were great evangelists like D.L. Moody and Charles Spurgeon. And in the 20th century there was Billy Sunday and Billy Graham.

But along with personal evangelism and mass evangelism, one of the most under-emphasized ways that people come to know Christ is through what I call “church evangelism.” It is the witness of God’s people simply functioning as God’s people.

In 1 Peter 2:5 and 9 we read this:

1 Peter 2:5

you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Every church is called to be a worshipping, witnessing community. Every church ought to want to know God better and then to make him known. In the verses we just read from 1 Peter 2 we see that worship leads to us witnessing which leads to people worshipping. Let me read to you a wonderful email that I received this week:

Dear Brother Rich,

I'll try to be brief, but I thought you would appreciate the punch line of this story. I'm a preacher at “blank” Church of Christ and I have appreciated your teaching over the years. I just wanted you to know that.

Yesterday, I had lunch at Skyline at Shrock Road and as I was leaving the owner and a few people were having an animated discussion with a fellow who looked to be about 75 years old. I won't go into detail because it is rather lengthy, but the upshot is that the old fellow, expressed that he belonged to a local Catholic church but everybody there was a hypocrite. He argued that the only reason people believe in God is because they don't want to die. I took it all in, and as we walked outside he and I and another fellow began a dialogue. The old fellow, was really good natured as he expressed his viewpoint. It was just obvious he thinks Christians are really misguided and gullible.

I had met a fellow for lunch who is also a preacher and as we stepped outside with the older man we continued the dialogue. The preacher I had met for lunch went into a five minute defense of God and the Bible. It was as if he was teaching a class. I was embarrassed because it was obvious that he was more interested in winning an argument than touching this man in Jesus name. I let him go on until we departed at which time I walked the old fellow to his car. I explained to him that I agree with him on several points and in our conversation, I

think it became clear to him that I was interested in him rather than defending God (who, we know doesn't need to be defended).

I asked him if he was agnostic and he said, "I guess I'd have to say I am, but I pray every night just to cover my bases." I asked him if he thought Jesus was a historical figure and he said, "yes, and that Jesus was a good guy." I lovingly explained the CS Lewis point that Jesus didn't leave that option open to us. Finally, I encouraged him, in his nightly prayers to just tell God that he was seeking the truth and that if He was real to reveal himself to him. I asked him his first name and he told me it was "Ron". I told him I wanted to be able to pray for him by name.

All that leads up to the punchline I thought you would appreciate. As I was walking away he said, to me, "What are you? A member of the Vineyard?"

It says a lot about your ministry that when an agnostic perceives that a believer genuinely cares about him, who comes to his mind? The Vineyard. I'm glad for the positive face you are putting on Christianity in central Ohio.

Serving with you,

Isn't that a great email? You know, one of the major ways we help people to come to know Jesus is by folks watching the way we Christians relate to each other. When Christians relates to each other as Christ would want us to, it is an amazingly powerful witness. One author said, "Christians need to look like what they're talking about." Our life together gives credibility and substance to the message we're holding out to the world.

One of the great texts that communicates this is 1 John 4:12:

1 John 4:12

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

God is invisible. No one has ever seen him. All that human beings have seen are glimpses of his glory. And this was a great problem for the nations surrounding Israel in the Old Testament. They made fun of the Jews. They said to the Jews, "What kind of God do you have? You can see our gods. Our gods are made of stone. Our gods are made of gold. Our gods are made of wood. Come to our temples and we'll show you our gods. Our gods have hands and feet, ears and eyes. Where's your God?"

Throughout the Psalms the Jewish people were responding to the taunts of the nations, "Where's your God? We can't see him." And today we face the same taunts regarding war, Christian faith in an invisible God. People who are raised with a scientific worldview saying, "I just find it difficult to believe in a God that I can't see or touch or hear, or smell." Maybe some of you struggle with this. How do you know there really is a God

when you can't see him or touch him? People say, "let me first see God and then I'll believe." How do Christians answer the challenge of God's invisibility?

God solves the problem of his invisibility by sending his Son into the world. John 1:18 says this:

John 1:18

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

And so then Jesus said in John 14:9:

John 14:9

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

In Christ God didn't remain invisible. He came to us as a human being in a form that we could touch, see, and hear.

But some people say, "Well that was 2000 years ago. How does the invisible God make himself visible today?"

John, the author of John 1:18 tells us the way we make God visible today in 1 John 4:12:

1 John 4:12

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

God is love. And it is as people see God's love in action in the community of God's people that people say, "there's God. I'm beginning to believe that there is a God in this world."

Many of you know that I was raised in a Jewish family. I never set foot in a church until I was 18 years old for any reason – not for Christmas, not for Easter, not for a wedding or a funeral. I never set foot in a church building. And by the age of 18 I was a thorough going atheist. I didn't believe there was a God. I thought the whole discussion about God was silly; that science had disproved the existence of God.

And then I met a young woman named Marlene at college. She was a Christian. Many of you have heard me tell this story. But one of the ways that God showed himself to me was simply by watching Marlene, who was a Christian, interacting with her Christian friends. I used to have lunch with Marlene and she would have a number of her Christian friends eat with us. There was such a radical difference in the way that these Christians related to each other compared to the way my friends and me related. There

wasn't the sarcasm or cynicism. There wasn't the one-ups-man-ship. People were encouraging. They were kind and generous to each other.

These Christians made a difference in my life and helped me believe there was a God by together being different. You know, people are watching us Christians – for good or bad, people are watching us. When we relate well to each other, folks say, “Maybe there is a reason to believe, maybe there is a reason to hope, maybe there is a God that I can connect to, maybe I need to investigate this person named Jesus Christ.”

And then, third:

To make a difference, we followers of Christ must recognize how necessary we are

The Romans had a saying that there was nothing more useful and necessary than sun and salt. Jesus is saying there is nothing in the world more useful, or more necessary than you who are followers of Christ. What extraordinary dignity Jesus gives to us, his followers.

Do you understand what Christ is saying? He is saying the world can get along without a lot of things. But the world cannot get along without Christians. Families, neighborhoods, schools, the media, and the arts – no place, no group, no legitimate human endeavor can do well without you Christians. You are as necessary to the health and well-being of the world as salt and sun.

Why are we so necessary? Why is the follower of Christ so useful? Some of you remember from high school physics there was something called the Second Law of Thermodynamics and entropy. What entropy means is that all systems tend toward chaos and disorder. It is the tendency of energy systems to run down. The universe, according to the law of entropy gets more random.

I think this is the scientific description of creation under the curse of sin. Things tend towards decay. Things tend towards degeneration. Things tend towards disorder. Look at the backseat of your car. Look at your desk. Look at the floor in your closet. What you are observing is the Second Law of Thermodynamics at work. Things tend to move from order to disorder in a fallen world.

When Jesus calls us salt and light he is communicating something about the nature of the world. Left to itself, the tendency of the world is to decay or spoil like meat. Left to itself, the world grows darker.

Left to itself, the world decays like meat left outside. Left to itself, the world grows darker and more confused. We lose clarity about what is good and what is bad. We praise moral perversion and we make fun of moral purity. Left to itself, the world is vulnerable to the latest fad, the latest marketing scheme, buzz words, and psycho-babble.

You want an illustration of the tendency of the world towards decay and darkness? Listen to the counsel given to 14-year old girls from a magazine titled *YM* (which stands for Your Magazine). It is a young teen girl magazine. Maybe some of your daughters read it.

Now I will make this a multiple choice test. A 14-year old girl writes in and says:

My boyfriend isn't affectionate. We've only kissed once in 7 months – 3 months ago. I am miserable with him, but I know I am going to be miserable without him. What do I do?

- A. Stop basing your relationship on getting physical.
- B. Maybe the guy has manners, respect him for it.
- C. Before ending it, try to kiss him.
- D. Where are your parents?

The actual advice given to Lauren, who is age 14 and from Ohio, was, of course, C.

- C. Before ending it, try to kiss him.

The columnist added:

Not to make light of this, but three months is a long time to go without a follow up move. Nothing says that guys are solely responsible for hooking up.

How about this one:

I've been developing feelings for one of my girlfriends. The thing is, I am a girl too. I want to tell her, but I fear she doesn't feel the same way and our friendship will be ruined. Plus, students at school will harass me (I've already been teased for liking another girl). What should I do?

- A. Sexuality is very confusing at your age. Ask your parents what they think, and perhaps they can help you find a counselor or pastor to talk to.
- B. Have respect for the feelings of the other girl. While you may be confused about your sexuality, thrusting your confusion onto another girl is wrong.
- C. Join your school's gay-straight alliance, or find a local gay community center. You need more non-judgmental people in your life.
- D. Where are your parents?

This question is from Michelle, who is 15 years old and lives in Ontario. And, you guessed it, "C" was the given advice:

- C. Join your school's gay-straight alliance, or find a local gay community center. You need more non-judgmental people in your life.

The columnist said:

The possibility of ruining the friendship is high whether you are gay or straight, but sadly the world is a homophobic place and there is a chance your friend will get weirded out. Mention that you know a girl that is interested in her female friend. If she doesn't freak, it is a good sign for you to go for it.

This is the adult counsel for a young teenager: Go for a lesbian relationship! Go for it!

Do you know the only people who are surprised by moral decay, or by darkness in the world are people who do not know their bibles? In Paul's letter to the Romans in chapter 1, we read not about the ascent of mankind, but the descent. We read not about inevitable evolution, but about our devolution. We read not about human progress, but human regress.

Why don't we Christians have a greater impact on society? We look around and we see all of this decay and deterioration. There is crazy immoral counsel in every magazine and newspaper. There is racial injustice. There is social injustice. There is violence. The poor get ripped off through payday lenders. There is sexual promiscuity, abortions, domestic violence. Who is to blame for all the problems in the world? Why is the world the way it is?

Our habit is to blame everyone other than ourselves. But you know, if your basement is dark, there is no sense in blaming your basement. That's what happens when the light is not turned on. The question that you ask, if the basement is dark, is: "Where are the lights?" And if the meat goes bad, there is no sense in blaming the meat for its decay. This is what happens when you leave meat out. The question is: "Where is the salt?" And if society becomes corrupt like a dark basement or rotting meat, there is no sense in blaming society for what's going on. That's what happens according to the Bible when we sinful human beings are left unstrained and unchecked.

The question to ask is: "Where are the Christians? Where is the salt and light of Jesus?"

Sometimes we're put in situations where we don't know what to say, we don't know how to answer people's questions. We feel like we want to have an impact, but we don't know how to have an impact.

And fourth:

To make a difference, we followers of Christ need not be numerous

Jesus gives such encouragement to us telling us to remember how powerful his life is through us. In Matthew 5:13, he says:

Matthew 5:13

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

Jesus is such an amazing encourager. He says: You, Christian, can arrest the decay in the world.

Why does Jesus call us salt? Well, in the ancient world salt was primarily used as a preservative. Wherever the world has not had refrigeration, people have used salt to keep meat wholesome and to prevent spoilage. A little bit of salt rubbed into meat can have an amazing impact of preserving the meat.

It is easy to grow discouraged when we think about how few we Christians are, that we are the only Christians in our departments, or in our workplaces. How you might stand alone in your family. Maybe your spouse is not a Christian, or your parents do not follow Christ. Maybe you are the only Christian in your entire extended family. Have you ever felt totally insignificant as a follower of Christ compared to the size and scope of what you are up against?

When I taught at OSU, I was sometimes overwhelmed by the size of the university. I used to pray for God to visit the college that I was teaching in and in some of the other departments. Some of you who are down at OSU, maybe you feel overwhelmed by the hostility of some of the professors to your Christian faith, or the opposition you might be receiving from some departments or administrators, or in your dormitory or fraternity. Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed, friend, as you look out on the decay in our city? Do you feel overwhelmed as you look out on the darkness in our world?

Jesus is giving you and me a word of encouragement. He is saying: You do not have to be bigger than the opposition to arrest the decay. The mass of salt doesn't have to be as weighty as the mass of meat into which the salt is rubbed. A little salt will preserve a much larger piece of meat from decaying. Remember who Jesus is talking to when he said these words. He is talking to a small insignificant rag-tag bunch of uneducated disciples who were up against the whole Roman Empire and the whole religious establishment. Jesus is saying: You lonely, isolated, tiny Christian grain of salt, do you know that whenever you refuse to laugh or even smile at a racist joke that is told in your work place, or by a family member, you keep things from decaying further?

You insignificant Christian grain of salt, when you practice forgiveness and mercy, when you choose to take the high road in your family that is wracked by broken relationships and fighting. You, Christian, can bring healing to your whole family system. When you one, single, solitary Christian grain of salt stand up for your faith in a place where it is hard to do that, the whole polluted atmosphere of that place can change. You Christian can be a fresh salt air, the ocean breeze blowing through a smoke-filled room.

When one single person manifests peace and confidence in Jesus Christ in a situation where everybody else is panicked and hopeless and despairing, the salt is going to do its work. You are keeping the world from despair. Be encouraged. You are the salt of the earth. Be encouraged.

I recently met a new member of the church at Starbuck's. She has a very significant position in government. She was sitting around with a top government official in our state along with members of his executive team and the people began bashing Christians. She said it was common place on this executive team to pass negative comments about Christians. But this woman knew her identity as salt and light and she stood up in the room and said, "Look, I've had it. This kind of talk would be completely unacceptable if we applied it to gays, or Hispanics, or Jews, or Muslims. In fact, if the kinds of things you're saying about Christians were said about any other group, you would immediately be fired." She said, "I'm a Christian and I find your discussion to be entirely inappropriate and offensive."

I said, "Good for you! Well done!" You are salt and you arrested the decay in that office. Really, you created an environment in which it will be easier for other people to be Christians because you stood up and made a difference."

See, you don't need a lot of people to influence an office or a family. My friend, Jim Wallis, said in his recent book, "*The Great Awakening*",

Majorities normally don't change things; creative minorities do, and the majority just goes along in the end. As anthropologist, Margaret Mead, famously said, 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.'"

What can one person so? Let me suggest something to you. On your way into the auditorium this morning, you were handed a fold-over card that is an invitation to this church. Will you take that out? Now, I would like to give an assignment to those of you who consider yourselves part of the Vineyard. I rarely give you homework assignments, but this one time let me swing back to my years as a professor at OSU. I want to give each of you a homework assignment for this week. And I'm going to ask you about it next week. This week I'm going to ask you to hand one person who doesn't presently attend Vineyard this card and ask them to attend church. Just one person. One friend at work. One person in a coffee shop. One fellow student or neighbor. This week we could have thousands of invitations to Vineyard Columbus for next weekend. We can make a difference. Jesus encourages us that making a difference is our calling as followers of him. We are salt and light.

And finally:

To make a difference, we followers of Christ must permeate society

Friends, you are called to act as salt and light. The world needs you to act – to get out of the saltshaker and to get on top of the light stand. The world needs you, follower of Christ, to act. Matthew 5:15-16:

Matthew 5:15-16

Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

You know, we ask the wrong question all the time. We look out on Iran or Afghanistan and we say: “What’s wrong with these folks?” There is so much violence in Central Asia. What’s wrong with these folks – with their oppression of women and the repression of freedom?

The question is not what’s wrong with these folks as you look out on different parts of the world. The question is: “Where are the Christians?” Why have so few Christians chosen to be missionaries to Muslim countries? Why do churches spend so little on world missions? Do you know that we Americans spend more on dog food every year than we do on world missions? If something is wrong in the world, we need to ask: “Where is the salt? Where is the light?”

We look at Hollywood and Christians often complain about the violence, the gratuitous sexuality, and the obvious pro-abortion, or pro-euthanasia, or pro-premarital sex messages in so many movies. What’s wrong with Hollywood is the wrong question. The right question is, where are the Christians? Where is the influence of the church on Hollywood?

We look at inner-city neighborhoods and see the decay, the gangs, the drug abuse, the crimes, the hopelessness, the joblessness. We say what’s wrong with this neighborhood? That is the wrong question. The right question to ask is where are the Christians in the inner city? Where is the salt and the light?

Again, when meat goes bad, we don’t blame the meat. As John Stott rightly asks, “Where is the salt? When a room is dark, we don’t curse the darkness, we turn on a light.”

By the grace of God, there are so many hopeful signs in America right now that Christians are beginning to get it. There are many young Christians flocking to Hollywood right now wanting to make a difference. In 1999 Barbara Nicolosi, who was a nun turned into a movie executive, founded Act One to cultivate aspiring Christian screenwriters. Over the last seven years, she has recruited 300 Christians to come to Hollywood and she’s taught them how to write screenplays based on Christian moral values, such as the sacredness of human life, the idea that good and evil aren’t equal, and the notion that you are never forced to choose something evil.

Christians understand that film is shaping our culture. It is movies that have been shaping our understanding of life and its meaning. Christians have been, up until now, absent from the discussion. But the hopeful thing is that Christians are beginning to get involved.

I believe we need efforts like Act One here locally. We need young Christians penetrating the arts community in Columbus. We need Christians penetrating the business community here in Columbus. We need Christians penetrating the court system and politics and journalism here in Central Ohio.

There are hopeful signs. I see hopeful signs across America in our inner cities. When the church chooses to leave the city and races out towards the country, what do you expect to happen other than decay? But if the church chooses to act as salt and light, things can change. That is why I am so encouraged that this church has in this last year opened up our community center to offer educational programs, ESL programs, parenting classes, addiction recovery programs, free legal clinics, free medical clinics, after-school programs for young people, and an early childhood center that is opening up next month.

We can make a difference. Jesus encourages us that making a difference is our calling as followers of him. We are salt and light!

People Who Make a Difference

Rich Nathan

February 9-10, 2008

How A Christian G.R.O.W.S. (Spiritual Growth Series)

Matthew 5:13-16

1. To make a difference, we followers of Christ must be radically different (Matthew 5:13)
2. To make a difference, we followers of Christ together must be radically different (1 John 4:12)
3. To make a difference, we followers of Christ must recognize how necessary we are (Matthew 5:13, 14)
4. To make a difference, we followers of Christ need not be numerous (Deuteronomy 32:30)
5. To make a difference, we followers of Christ must permeate the society (Matthew 5:15, 16)