

Outline

Share the Love A Stand Alone Service Emphasizing a Day of Communitry with a Valentine Theme

You know what I really enjoy? I enjoy a good meal. And one of my favorite meals? I love a good, thick, juicy steak (Prime Rib or Filet Mignon, I am not picky.), with a nice sized baked potato next to it (yes, Dr. Jeff – slathered in butter and sour cream), and maybe rounded out on the side with a fresh crop of green beans. Sort of like this – (someone brings me out a plate with just those ingredients on the plate – of which I will sit and enjoy for a few minutes).

Now, I like my food with a little spice to it. So I will usually add a lot of pepper to my foods, for I like pepper (pepper food). And I usually enhance its flavor with a bit of salt (salt food). The interesting thing about salt is that, used sparingly, it really enhances the flavor of the food. It makes steak steakier, my baked potato potatoier, and my green beans green beanier. MMMMMMMM...this is good. Hungry? I know I am. And I am really enjoying this.

Well, this all reminds me of exactly what Jesus said our purpose as a people, and I guess you could say, as a church is in this world. He talked about that purpose in one of his very first teaching times – something that we have all heard called *The Sermon on the Mount* found in Matthew 5. I love Matthew 5 for it really gets to the heart of what Jesus is all about and what He says we should be all about: being salty! Look at what He says:

Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be **salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth**. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage. Matthew 5:12 TM

That is what humanity, God's Creation, is supposed to be about. We are to be to each other and to this world what this salt is to this wonderful dish I am eating right now. We are the enhancement of God in this world, the seasoning that allows others to get a tangible flavor for who God is. The salt brings out the trueness of the flavor of whatever it is enhancing. That is what God says our purpose in this world is – we are made in His image and we are to spend this entire life that He has given us discovering who He made us to be and how His likeness is represented within us and live that out in amazing authenticity – or saltiness.

We have a really fun small group (We call them LIFE Groups in our church) called the *No Strings Attached LIFE Group*. Their whole purpose for existing in our church is to live out this passage that I am showing you right here and to allow others to really get a feel for who God is and how we are related to God in this world. Far too often, society only thinks that God is a big “meany” who is down on everybody and waiting to whack us all with his “No Fun Hammer,” rather than a loving God that exists to, like a perfect father, encourage us to the fullest life we can possibly have. I would like a couple of members of *No Strings Attached LIFE Group* to come to the stage and tell you a little more about them and their purpose and how it applies to this principle from the Bible (**Ron Loveitt and Denise Pado– 3 Minutes - stage left**)

Now, back to the idea of salt. There is another interesting aspect about that verse. It says if we lose our saltiness, how will people taste godliness? A friend of mine challenged me on this part of this verse a while ago, saying that salt cannot lose its saltiness. You see salt is a chemical compound made up of two chemical elements, sodium (NA) and chloride (CL). They are best friends with a tight bond. Sodium and chloride love to share their one electron and the result is table salt. The only way for salt to lose its pungent saltiness is to be diluted in water – even then though it still retains its salty nature, but is very diluted, less enhancing. It certainly still gives off a salty presence, but it is nothing I want near my Filet Mignon. (I will pour some salt in a glass of water and start to use that salt water to flavor my meat.)

You see, Jesus wants us to use who we are in our purest form to bless this world that we find ourselves in. He created us quite specifically to be able to enjoy life and to be able to generously use our gifts and

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abilities to also help others enjoy life. When we ignore who He made us to be or when we dilute our thinking with media driven world views of self-centeredness and selfish grabbing for ourselves, when we choose to become stingy with our gifts, our resources, our time, and our money, we dilute the unique individual for bringing out the God-flavors of this world. Others of us simply try to be something we are not. That is what I really hate about watching the early auditions of American Idol. There is a whole group of amazing people who think their whole worth is based on becoming something God never gifted them to be. The best advice on the show is often given to these people when Simon, Paula, and Randy encourage them in what they might be gifted in and then tell them to pursue it with all of their energies. For them, and us, the problem is often in finding out how God has gifted us and racing after it with gusto. I would like to introduce you to another member of the [No Strings Attached LIFE Group](#), Michelle Richter. She as well has a great desire to really influence this world with the saltiness of God in her life, but found her way to this group in a meandering kind of self discovery that was led by several stops in ministries where she was not impassioned or gifted. ([Michelle Richter – 2 minutes – Stage Right](#)).

If this salt illustration is not working for you, and for some people who Jesus was teaching, it must not have been cutting it, so he said, Let me put it another way for you:

Here's another way to put it: **You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world.** God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—**shine!**
Matthew 5:14-16 TM

Excuse me, just one more bit of this delicious steak. MMM....That is good. Anyway. Jesus put it this way. He made us to be a light in a dark world. In a world full of sin and pain and selfishness and hatred, Jesus said that our purpose as people, as a church, is to be a light to show the way to the Truth of God and His existence. Why is it that it so often seems that people know more what Christians are against than what they are for? Why are we as churches so often known for sharing the hatred of man's sin rather than sharing the love of God grace? Should we as Christians be spending our lives trying to get to know who God is – you better believe it! It is often our laziness of not really doing our homework and finding out what the truth is that leads us to very ugly actions like rejecting people, hating certain groups, and slamming specific sinners, especially the ones who struggle with sins that we don't! That is not what God called us to do.

Look at the passage: God wants us to get to know Him, and once we realize how generous and loving and passionate He is, to proclaim that life-giving truth of His love and forgiveness and acceptance to the whole world as a useful light that shines out in darkness and helps a lost and weary traveler make it home. **Darkness is penetrating (kill all lights at this point.)** It is impossible to function well in darkness. Can you function? Yes. But it is very difficult. If I asked all of you to come up here and get a free hundred-dollar bill from me right now, you would be hard-pressed to do it. We would end up with smashed toes, bruised shins, a few choice words that should never be uttered in church, and a lot of frustration. Most would eventually just give up and no one would find me (for I am very cheap and I would keep moving so you could not find me to get my 100 dollar bill.)

But light is also very penetrating. Light is a useful tool to help guide those that are in the dark to just the right path. Now, I can't hide my 100 dollar bill from you and all of you could get to me to get it. (Just an illustration – there are no 100 dollar bills that will be injured in this illustration by losing their cozy home in my comfortable pocket and making their way to your very cold, heartless pocket.) My light in the darkness is a welcome, warm, comforting tool that you can find solace in, for it leads the way. That is what God wants us as Christians to be in our community. He wants us to be lights in our community leading the way for everyone to find true Community. As a matter of fact, we, like Jesus, must be intentional parts of our communities. We come together to build a community of encouragement and purpose called Ni River to celebrate the common element who creates community within us each week – God! And as we celebrate Him and encourage each other to love Him with all our hearts (Jesus called this the Greatest Commandment), we learn to love each other as He loves us (Jesus called this the 2nd

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Greatest Commandment). Then we spur each other to go out into the Community to uplift and support our communities with the tangible love of Jesus. Around here at Ni River we call that *Communistry: Building Community with each other in Jesus' Love to uplift and support our Community in Jesus' Love*. I would like to ask two more members of the *No Strings Attached LIFE Group* to take the stage now. This is Doug Richter, who loves to use his gifts in creative ways to influence this great community of Fredericksburg with the Communistry of Ni River and God. (Doug – 2 minutes - stage right)

Finally today, I guess I would ask what are you doing to be salt and light in our great community? That is your purpose according to Jesus' teaching. He finished talking about this part of his lesson to us with very specific instructions of just how to do this – how to shine as a helpful light to the truth of God's love in society. Look what He says:

I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—**shine!** Keep open house; **be generous with your lives**. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:16 TM

How are you shining with the generosity of your life? It's a scary thing to open up to others, but you know, when you do, it encourages them to open up to you and to God, for they figure, if God can love you as screwed up and lost as you are, then they might just have a shot. If we as Christians will just concentrate on God's voice in our own lives, obeying His wonderfully positive, maturing and Fleeting Thoughts in faith, knowing that He loves us too much to let us stay the same, rather than worrying about everyone else, we might just have the opportunity to be the God enhancing salt in the life of someone else.

What if we just chose to Shine God's love with our life and quit worrying about whether it would get us ahead in life? What if we quit competing for opportunity and chose to trust Him with the outcomes? What if we chose everyday to make a positively tangible difference in the societies within which we function? What if we chose to live out Communistry in our homes? How would our little corners of the world change? I'll bet there would be no lonely people sitting outside our churches refusing to come in because they fear rejection. I'll bet there would be a lot less angry God-haters because they were rejected because of their differences or their unapproved lifestyles. I'll bet if we just acted as Jesus asked us to do: taking responsibility in our own lives for the two Greatest Commandments, and loved people right where they were in life with no expectation for change, I'll just bet we would have to build bigger churches and atheism would die out because of a lack of proof.

I would like you to think about that for the next few moments. I want to have just a few moments where you can, right where you are, spend some time in prayer asking God to forgive you for your lack of saltiness and Communistry in your life. I would love for you to simply ask Him to speak to you through your Fleeting Thoughts about His desires for Communistry in your life.

Then, I am going to ask us simply to commit that desire to Jesus in a time of fellowship with Him around the serving of Communion. Communion is simply the obedience to Jesus asking us to remember His last supper before death that He used as an illustration of His great sacrifice of life for us. While a reader is reading the story of communion, simply choose to eat the bread and drink the juice as a remembrance of God's ultimate Communistry Gift and Sharing of love with us as humans, the sacrificing of His Son to pay the penalty of death for sin. Jesus died so that you did not have to die in your sins. The perfect person died, then rose from the dead to conquer the power of sin that steals the love from us. While we participate in this time of remembrance, use it to commit to living out that love you were created to live out. Ask God to forgive you for not sharing the love, for rejecting his gift of love. Ask God to live His love in you today and through this week. Ask Him to help you be salt and light.

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Communion Scriptures

Reader 1

Let me go over with you again exactly what goes on in the Lord's Supper and why it is so centrally important. I received my instructions from the Master himself and passed them on to you. The Master, Jesus, on the night of his betrayal, took bread. Having given thanks, he broke it and said,

Reader 2

This is my body, broken for you. Do this to remember me.

Reader 1

After supper, he did the same thing with the cup:

Reader 2

This cup is my blood, my new covenant with you. Each time you drink this cup, remember me.

Reader 1

What you must solemnly realize is that every time you eat this bread and every time you drink this cup, you reenact in your words and actions the death of the Master. You will be drawn back to this meal again and again until the Master returns.

Reader 2

You must never let familiarity breed contempt.

Both

Amen.

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