Sulfa Drugs and Streetlights

Salt and Light · Matthew 5:13-16

Read it. Talk about it. Live it.

Small Group Guide

Sulfa Drugs and Streetlights

BASED ON MATTHEW 5:13-16

Overview

In this sermon, the pastor challenges believers to understand their role as salt and light in a world that is increasingly fragmented, distracted, and disconnected. Drawing from Matthew 5:13-16, where Jesus declares that his followers are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, the message calls every believer, young and old, to take personal responsibility for preserving values, building relationships, and actively shining their faith into the spheres of influence God has placed them in.

Key Takeaways

1. Salt is more than flavor. It is preservation. Jesus did not call his followers to simply add a little seasoning to the world around them. The metaphor of salt points to something deeper, the idea of stopping decay and rot. Just as sulfa drugs were developed to fight deadly infections, believers are called to be an active, life-preserving force in their families, communities, and culture.

2. Cultural shifts demand intentional response. Every generation has faced change. The rise of social media and handheld technology after 2012 produced a documented spike in loneliness, depression, anxiety, and suicide among young people worldwide. The church must understand these shifts and respond with intentional, relational ministry rather than retreating from culture.

3. You cannot grow the kingdom by accident. Influence does not happen passively. The pastor made clear that reaching your community requires putting down distractions, noticing people, and making deliberate choices to invite, connect, and speak. The kingdom grows when believers are purposeful about sharing what they carry.

4. Young people are not the future of the church. They are the present. The adults and elders in the room are relying on the next generation to reach their peers. No pastor or youth leader can walk the halls of a school and do what a student can do simply by being present and willing.

5. Patterned behavior shapes the next generation. What you do consistently, how you respond under pressure, how you worship, how you reach out, all of it is being observed and absorbed by the children and young people around you. Preservation of faith across generations is not accidental. It is the result of lived example.

Discussion Questions

OPENING QUESTION

Take a few minutes to get the group talking before diving into deeper content.

- When you were growing up, who was the person in your life that most clearly modeled what it looked like to live out their faith in everyday situations? What did that look like practically?

SECTION ONE: UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL SHIFTS

The pastor walked through generational changes in technology and communication, noting that social media fundamentally altered how people connect and that isolation has become a default setting for many people today.

1. In your own experience, how have you seen technology or social media affect the depth of relationships in your family, neighborhood, or workplace?
2. The pastor described his grandfather Virgil, who would go to the coffee shop and genuinely connect with everyone around him. How easy or difficult is it for you to initiate that kind of unplanned, unhurried conversation with people outside your church community? What gets in the way?
3. The pastor said, "When you've been starved for so long, you don't know you need it until someone brings it up to you." How does this apply to people in your community who may be spiritually hungry but have no framework for recognizing that hunger?

SECTION TWO: TAKING SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The pastor challenged believers to reclaim their spheres of influence and to see themselves as the medication their culture needs.

1. Matthew 5:13 describes salt that has lost its savor as being good for nothing and thrown out. In your own spiritual life, have there been seasons where you felt like you had lost your effectiveness or your edge? What contributed to that, and what helped restore it?
2. The pastor said that Christians ought to be pursuing careers in education, government, journalism, and influence, and that by stepping back from those spaces, believers have handed the shaping of culture over to others. Do you agree with that assessment? How does that challenge or affirm the decisions you have made about your own career or calling?

3. He stated, "Christlike values interjected into culture, taking Christ and putting him into your culture, will stop hell." What does that look like in a practical, everyday sense for someone in your specific context, whether that is a school, a workplace, a neighborhood, or a family?

SECTION THREE: APPLYING FAITH IN YOUR SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

The pastor used the image of a candlestick to describe how light is meant to be placed where it can do the most good, not hidden away.

1. The pastor said, "You're not called to grow a church. You're called to grow the kingdom." What is the difference between those two things in your day-to-day life? Does that distinction change anything about how you think about your responsibility to the people around you?
2. He challenged the group: "If a neighbor comes to you and says our electricity went out, do you have a flashlight? Are you going to hide it?" When it comes to the spiritual resources you carry, what makes it easy to share them in some situations and uncomfortable in others?
3. The pastor spoke directly to young people, saying that their peers are looking back at the adults in the room for permission to worship, to believe, and to reach out. If you are an adult or parent in this group, what specific permission are you giving or withholding by the way you live your faith publicly?

SECTION FOUR: PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. The pastor said, "What you do every day gets logged in the minds of your children and your grandchildren. What you speak in moments of tension gets flagged in their little hearts." As honestly as you can, what patterns are you currently modeling for the people who are watching you most closely?
2. He closed with a challenge to the elder millennials and older adults: "When it comes time to worship, I challenge you to outrun these young people." Beyond worship, where is one area of your spiritual life where you need to stop waiting for someone else to go first?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to work on between now and your next group meeting.

For individuals:

- Identify one person in your life who appears isolated, anxious, or disconnected. Make a deliberate effort this week to reach out to them, not with an agenda, but simply to be present and to notice them.
- Audit your own use of technology this week. Ask yourself honestly whether your habits are helping you connect with people or helping you avoid them.
- Set aside time each morning, even briefly, to seek the presence of God before engaging with your phone or your day. Let that become a pattern rather than an occasional practice.

For parents and grandparents:

- Have one meal this week with no devices at the table. Use that time to ask your children or grandchildren genuine questions about their lives, their fears, and what they believe.

- Let your children see you pray, not just at scheduled times, but in moments of real need or tension. Let them see what it looks like to actually depend on God.

For young people:

- Identify one friend, classmate, or teammate who you know is struggling. Pray for them by name every day this week. Then look for a natural opportunity to simply be a consistent, caring presence in their life.
- Think about the career or path you are considering. Ask yourself whether that path puts you in a position to influence your generation for the kingdom of God. Talk to a trusted adult or mentor about that question.

For the group together:

- Pray specifically for the young people in your church and community by name. Ask God to give them courage, to protect them from isolation, and to make them bold in their faith.
- Consider organizing a simple outreach or point of connection in your neighborhood, something that requires showing up in person and meeting people where they are.

Closing Prayer Focus

As you close your group time, pray together over these specific areas:

- That God would restore a hunger for his presence in your homes and families
- That the young people in your church would be filled with boldness and clarity about their calling
- That every person in your group would become more intentional about noticing and reaching the people immediately around them
- That your church community would be salt that preserves and light that guides, not just within its walls, but in the schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods where its members spend their daily lives

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