

The ONE  
YEAR®

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# Salt & Light

DEVOTIONAL

{ 365 inspirations  
to equip & encourage you to live  
out your calling in the world }

Chris Tiegreen



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*The One Year Salt and Light Devotional: 365 Inspirations to Equip and Encourage You to Live Out Your Calling in the World*

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## { Introduction }

WE LIVE IN AN AGE when some people believe religion in general or Christianity in particular is one of the most corrosive elements of society, while others believe it is one of the most constructive. We hear absurdly indefensible claims like, “Religion is the cause of almost all wars,” as well as overly confident claims that virtually all hospitals, homeless shelters, educational norms, traditional values, work ethics, democratic principles, and economic successes spring from Christian ideals. The reality is somewhere in between, but of course we as believers want to make the most of our influence and increase it. Scripture calls us to be the salt of the earth and lights in the world—preserving, flavoring, brightening, and warming both society as a whole and the lives of those around us. The Kingdom of God is exceedingly good, and we are to personify it and offer glimpses of it everywhere we go.

Some Christians seem to know how to do that naturally, winsomely, and effectively, while others act out of past wounds, get triggered by conflict, fight fire with fire, and try to win people to the Kingdom by vilifying them. In between, most Christians treasure their beliefs on Sunday but have no idea how to translate their private spirituality into their public interactions. And with good reason: Secular society constantly tries to marginalize faith. People want to cross this divide and make a difference but don’t know how. This devotional will suggest creative, nonthreatening, unembarrassing, and (most importantly) effective ways to make a difference.

In our efforts to be a positive force for the Kingdom, we may notice a frequent tension. On the one hand, God has set his people apart to be dedicated to him and conformed to his image. On the other hand, he sends us into the world to be involved and influential. We are “in the world but not of the world,” and emphasizing one of

those truths at the expense of the other leads to imbalance and irrelevance. If we are only set apart to God, we are in no position to make a difference; if we just blend in, we have nothing distinctive about us to make a difference with.

Much of this devotional is about maintaining that balance—keeping our “saltiness” flavorful and our light bright. This is much more than a matter of sharing our faith. Our goal is a lifestyle that begins deep inside and works its way out. The message of God’s Kingdom flourishes best in a climate in which Kingdom truths and values are present. The environment surrounding it matters. On many occasions, we as believers in Jesus will have to take the lead in establishing that environment. We will never establish the Kingdom in its fullness before Jesus returns—Kingdom fullness comes with the King—but we are nevertheless called to work toward it, to expand it, to partner with him to help it grow.

Throughout this devotional, you will see some of the same themes coming up again and again: the long view versus a short-term approach; a lifestyle that goes well beyond words; the need to embody the truths of God’s Kingdom and the character of the King; what it means to live in the true image of God; and how to serve as an agent or catalyst for God’s blessings. You will also find a prayer at the end of each day’s reading. These are simple prayers, and some of them may not seem very profound. But they don’t need to be profound for God to answer them; they just need to be prayed. If you will express them consistently or use them as prompts to pray deeper, longer prayers, you will find him answering them, sometimes in surprising ways.

That’s my prayer for you as you go through these readings—that God will encourage you, move you, and use you in surprising ways to bless this world with his wisdom, power, and love. You carry those blessings with you already, and your world is desperately longing to see them. May they overflow in your life in increasing measure each day.

# The Rising Light

*The LORD is God, shining upon us. (Psalm 118:27)*

FROM THE OPENING SCENE AT Creation to the eternal daytime of Revelation, Scripture is full of glimpses of light. We know the source of all light, of course: the Father of lights (James 1:17, ESV), who loves to bless his people with his goodness. Often this true light is reflected in the people who recognize it. After all, Isaiah called God's people to rise and shine with his glory (Isaiah 60:1-3), and Jesus told his followers not only that he was the light of the world (John 8:12), but that they were too (Matthew 5:14). In the darkness that surrounds us every day, God draws people to himself through human agents who shine with his brilliance.

But you already know we don't shine perfectly; that is painfully obvious. A quick look at history and the culture around us reveals that God's people have only made a mark on this world when we have demonstrated unusual wisdom, power, or love. These are core attributes of God, and our impact as agents of salt and light will necessarily involve at least one of these three. They make up the foundation of our faith and demonstrate something of who God is to those around us.

This is a high calling—higher than our natural abilities. But that's by design. Few people are impressed when we show ourselves to be as wise, empowered, and loving as average people. But when these divine resources flow through us from beyond ourselves, wonderful things happen. Others notice. We become testimonies to a larger truth than even our own finite eyes can see and minds can grasp.

Make this your mission. Seek the gifts that come from beyond yourself. Resolve to live in the light, to reflect the glory of your Father in ways that differ from typical human interaction. Getting there will be a process, but the journey comes with a promise—that God's light, shining in you and through you, will change this world.

*Father, fill me with the wisdom, power, and love of your presence. In the same ways I've received your light, let me reflect it for others to see. May the dawn of your glory rise in me and shine through me each day. Amen.*



# Be Fruitful

*Go and make disciples of all the nations. (Matthew 28:19)*

JESUS SENT HIS FOLLOWERS OUT INTO the world with a message, and both the sending and the message remain nonnegotiable today. No matter how much our society relativizes its versions of truth, how often people tell us to keep our beliefs to ourselves, or how skeptical others are of our faith, the imperative is still there. We should have no problem complying with the formal and informal rules of society and respecting the diversity of our culture and the people who compose it—but we still have a responsibility to be influential somewhere, somehow, in someone's life.

So how do we go about this? Some of us are bold in our conversations, while others' strengths are seen in examples of love and faith. Some of us emphasize apologetics and debate while others focus on works of mercy and compassion. And some of us seek demonstrations of spiritual power. Of all the many ways of reaching people with the truth and love of God, which are right?

Probably all of them, and some we haven't even thought of yet. The point is not which method is right—God created diverse personalities and distributed varying spiritual gifts—but whether we are intentional about our mission in the first place. People who rely exclusively on principles develop a relationship with principles rather than with God. As Jesus showed throughout his ministry, he works in different ways at different times. His character is not situational, but his ways are. And we are called to follow them attentively.

In the earliest pages of Genesis, God told the first couple to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and influence it (Genesis 1:28). Jesus' words to his followers are the spiritual version of that mission. How each of us goes out into the world will depend on Jesus' leading, but the imperative of going applies to all. Every believer is called to pursue a life of fruitfulness, whether we ever see the fruit or not. Set your heart on that mission in full confidence that he is with you and will lead, strengthen, and bless you wherever you go.

*Jesus, how do I fit into your purposes? Which corner of the world am I called to influence? How do you want me to represent you and your message? Show me, lead me, fill me. I say "yes" to your calling today and forever. Amen.*

# Foreigners and Nomads

*All these people died still believing what God had promised them. . . .  
They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth.  
(Hebrews 11:13)*

FOR THE FIRST THREE HUNDRED YEARS of Christian history, followers of Jesus were keenly aware of their alien status in this world. Our spiritual forebears lived in often-hostile territory among people who ignored or dismissed them and sometimes actively persecuted them. As believers in Jesus, they were no longer strangers and foreigners to God and his promises (Ephesians 2:19), but they were strangers and foreigners to the world and its ways. The citizens of heaven lived as exiles on earth.

That's not a new twist in the history of God's people. Exile is one of the first scenes in our story—fallen humanity driven out of Eden. The story line of redemption is a cycle of exiles and remnants: captives in Egypt and Babylon, wanderers looking for a place to live, returnees trying to rebuild the broken walls of their existence, hearts longing for their true home. Even today, we are told we are in the world but not of it—an ever-expanding righteous remnant growing into a vast, eternal Kingdom. As citizens of heaven living in occupied territory, we know that our story is not at its end.

That means we are living in two extremely important processes: (1) growing into the environment of heaven and learning God's ways; and (2) learning how to relate to and influence the world we live in. The two complement each other, but there is also tension between them. Will our spiritual growth separate us from our culture or engage it? Are we being sent into the world or delivered from it? Are we, as the saying goes, becoming so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good? Or, as it really should be, are we seeking heaven-mindedness in order to benefit those around us? These are questions foreigners and nomads have to ask. We have been loved, chosen, and called—and everything in our lives should be pointed toward demonstrating why.

*Father, teach me how to relate to your world and mine. Help me fulfill my calling. As long as I am a stranger in this world, make me an ambassador of your Kingdom. Amen.*

# Salt and Light

*You are the salt of the earth. . . . You are the light of the world.*  
(Matthew 5:13-14)

JESUS NEVER MINIMIZED THE ROLES of his followers. He never told them to have modest aspirations; never reminded them they were only human; never limited their potential as Spirit-filled, divinely aided beings. No, he called them salt and light—agents of seasoning, preservation, growth, and brilliance—sent not just to tell a story to the world but to help it flourish. John Chrysostom, a church father from the fourth century, understood these words as an elevation of Jesus' disciples over the prophets of old. Followers of Jesus are meant to preserve the new life given to them, Chrysostom preached, halting the world's corruption and shining divine light into every dark corner. To be salt and light is a high calling indeed.

But this calling comes with warnings. Jesus suggests the possibility of salt losing its flavor or potency and light being hidden and rendered ineffective. Salt is meant to be salty; light is meant to shine—not so they can be glorified, but because the world desperately needs what salt and light provide. Each believer in Jesus is designed, gifted, and called to meet needs. We are meant to be present and active without being ostentatious, effective without being overbearing, and influential without seeking power. That means that in some measure or another, you are on display.

As someone who claims the name of Jesus, you are called to season the world with your salt and shine your light into it. You may not want a prominent role, and you may not even desire the responsibility of bearing his name, for fear that you won't live up to it. But his name is given to you anyway, and for better or worse, you will shape his reputation in the eyes of others. Jesus' words to his disciples unapologetically commission them as agents of his Kingdom. They signal a high calling for all his followers—then and now—to be exactly what the world needs.

*Jesus, how can I ever live up to your standard? How can someone like me represent who you really are? Still, you have called me and equipped me. May I serve you well by serving the world you love. Fill me with power and light today and every day. Amen.*

# Knowing Who You Are

*We love each other because he loved us first. (1 John 4:19)*

**YOU ARE CALLED TO LOVE.** It's one of the fundamental truths of the gospel—God is love (1 John 4:8, 16); God sent his Son to us because of his love (John 3:16); and the Son sends us into the world in the same spirit (John 20:21). If we are to represent our Father well, we must know how to love, and we must demonstrate that love to those around us. Words, miracles, and knowledge are not enough; if we get everything right but forget to fill our works with love, we are nothing but noisemakers (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Loving others is a fruit of the Spirit and the core of the message we believe.

Even so, many Christians become so focused on trying to love others (and failing) that they forget where love comes from in the first place. We cannot reflect God's true and deep love without having fully received it first. If we try to, we'll only burn out. If our efforts to be selfless cause us to neglect our self, we'll have nothing to give. Before we ever know how to love, we have to know how to *be* loved.

Your ability to love the world depends entirely on the degree to which you see yourself as loved by the Father. Maybe you have thought it selfish to dwell on the Father's delight in you, but you have little to offer the world until you grasp this. We love because he first loved us. That's how it works. You can only share what you already have. If you haven't received supernatural love, you can't give it away. If you don't know how he delights in you, you can't delight in others in any way that transforms them. The best thing you can do for those around you is to bathe in the Father's love yourself. Only then will it flow out of you and draw others into his open arms.

*Father, let me see myself the way you see me. Open my heart to perceive the height, depth, width, and breadth of your love. Bathe me in your delight so I can delight in others with your love. Amen.*

JANUARY 6

*1 Peter 4:10-11*

## Where You Fit

*God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. (1 Peter 4:10)*

EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS BEEN called to love, serve, bless, and exercise his or her gifts. This is not news to us; believers talk a lot about calling and ministry within the church and beyond it. But how do we apply this general calling individually? How do we know where God wants us to be and what he wants us to do? Where do we fit in?

Writer and preacher Frederick Buechner addresses these questions: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, there is an intersection between your sense of purpose and the world’s places of need. Wherever that intersection is, you will find fruitfulness and satisfaction there. This calling may not always be easy, and the fruit may not always be evident—in fact, you almost certainly will face hardships and dry seasons—but you will be secure in your service. It will fit your gifts and desires.

The beauty of this balance between “your deep gladness” and “the world’s deep hunger” is that it remedies two spiritual distortions: the idea that serving God must always *feel* sacrificial and painful; and the idea that if you are satisfied, you are selfishly neglecting others. God’s will and yours converge to fulfill his purposes and satisfy your heart. Yes, his calling involves sacrifice, but it leads to joy, just as it did with Jesus (Hebrews 12:2). And though it is possible to spend one’s life seeking self, that does not mean *all* satisfaction is selfish. As so many psalms remind us, God is a fulfiller of hearts and a satisfier of desires. Where you fit in this world is the place where your heart was created to fit—in him, and for his glory. Find a need that you are delighted to fulfill, and you will discover your calling there.

*Lord, I will follow you wherever you lead. But in my service, lead me into joy. In my sacrifice, fulfill me. You have made me for a purpose; may my eyes always be open to see it. Amen.*

## In His Image

*Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ.  
(Ephesians 5:1-2)*

“I LIKE YOUR CHRIST. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” This quote, often attributed (probably mistakenly) to Gandhi, reflects a common objection about Christianity—that the behavior and attitudes of Christians are a poor reflection of Jesus. It’s an easy complaint to make, of course, but it isn’t the real issue. The big question about Jesus is whether *he* expressed the truth, not whether his followers do. If Jesus is admirable and praiseworthy in comparison to his followers, then why not believe in him? It makes no sense to reject him based on historical examples of Christians behaving badly. But many skeptics prefer to focus on Christian faults and avoid the Jesus question altogether.

Still, the criticism makes a point. Throughout the ages, far too many believers have represented a Father of compassion in a spirit of judgment or a Father of patience in a spirit of anger. We have turned the gospel into words and doctrines rather than attitudes of the heart. We have become so focused on teaching the truth that we’ve forgotten to live it.

This misplaced focus has hindered the spread of the Good News. Historically, the church has begun with evangelism and indoctrination, and then tried to demonstrate love, compassion, mercy, and grace. Jesus’ example turns the process around—demonstrating the *nature* of God before teaching about him. We were made in the Father’s image and are being restored into that very same image through Jesus—the exact image of God (Hebrews 1:3)—by the power of the Spirit. That means our primary objective above all else is to reflect the Father’s heart—to till the soil of God’s Kingdom long before we try to plant the seeds of our words into it. If you want your world to know your Father, be like him. Represent him well, and let your words follow.

*Father, it is often said that apples don’t fall far from the tree, and I want to be one of the closest—to reflect who you really are. Transform me in my deepest depths to exude your Spirit. Amen.*