

Changing the World Starts with Me
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When I was a young mother and still trying to get a handle on all that comes along with parenting three very energetic boys, I came across a website called FlyLady.net. This site would send daily emails with manageable tasks to undertake to help gain control of a chaotic life and clutter. The first task every day, no matter what, was “Shine Your Sink.” The premise was simple, do this one thing right—prove to yourself you can do it, see what a difference this one thing makes, and it will give you the strength to take on the other projects that are still to be done. Small things can make a big difference.

Our world is in a great deal of chaos. Decades, actually centuries of racism, sexism and wrongs done have come to an ugly, festering head. Nationalism is on the rise. People are suspicious and critical of anyone who is different and/or doesn't think as they do. It seems to be a never-ending downward spiral.

Christ calls the church to be a catalyst for change and healing in the world. More than that, Christ calls each of his followers, because the church is the body of believers not the buildings we gather in, to be change agents in the world. What difference can one person make? What difference can you make? What difference can I make?

We are salt and light.

SALT AND LIGHT – MATTHEW 5:13-16

Take a moment to ready **Matthew 5:13-16**, carefully.

Notice the verbs at the beginning of verses 13 and 14. Jesus says to his listeners, “You are salt. You are light.” This is not something that is passed or something yet to be, it is now and ongoing. I would go so far as to say it is expected of Christ's followers.

For what purposes do we use salt? _____

Salt is used to season and enhance the flavors of food. Salt is used as a preservative to keep foods from spoiling. Salt is used as a cleansing agent, to kill germs and therefore aid in the healing process.

Salt can also be a bit of a tricky thing. Too much and your recipe is ruined, any of us who have ever mixed up Tablespoon and teaspoon can attest to that. Too little and the recipe is bland and flat.

Consider Paul's words in **Colossians 4:5-6** (read them now).

Christians have developed a reputation for being intolerant and judgmental, not what Jesus modeled for us at all. What guidance does Paul provide to the believers in Colossae? _____

If we are to affect change in the world, grace *must* be our seasoning of choice! It is as critical to sharing God's message of love and hope to a hurting and dying world as salt is to most recipes.

Consider the properties of light.

Along the way, I have learned that in science darkness is not measured, instead what is measured is the absence of light. Any amount of light disrupts the darkness.

When I was a kid my parents took the family to visit some caverns and we took the tour guided by a park ranger. We went deep into the caverns and when we were in one large chamber, the ranger instructed us to be still and he turned off the lights. It was dark! He told us to put our

hand in front of our face. It was impossible to see it. Then, he lit a single match and the darkness was broken.

Consider your life, and your sphere of influence. Every one of us have people that we have an opportunity to affect, none of us lives in a vacuum. It may be a neighbor, a family member, a grocery store clerk, a building superintendent, children, grandchildren, spouse, colleague... Write down 2 names, we will come back to this: _____

Something for us to consider...if the world is such a dark place, perhaps it is because the church, Christ's followers, is not doing what we are called and equipped to do...or more correctly perhaps the church, Christ's followers, is not being what we are called and equipped to be.

SAVED TO SERVE

Christ did not die on a cross and resurrect merely for our personal benefit. At the opening of his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, Pastor Rick Warren says this, "It's not about you!" I would suggest this sentiment is at the heart of our theology of service in The Salvation Army, and it is in fact at the heart of God's mission and call for the church, again Christ's followers not the buildings in which we gather.

In the book, *Invitation to a Journey, A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, M. Robert Mulholland defines spiritual formation as "a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others" (p12). Two pieces of information are key.

First, we need to be "conformed to the image of Christ." **Read Romans 12:1-2.** According to Paul's words in these verses what are we to do? _____

We must surrender ourselves to God, to cooperate with God fully. And, we have to stop doing what we've been doing, "Do not be conformed to this world..." (negative perfect tense in the Greek means we are to stop immediately and not do so any longer). Do you find yourself engaged in racist or sexist conversation? Laughing at the jokes? If not purposely engaging, do you purposely disengage when it comes in front of you? Do you join in the angry polarizing political rhetoric – on either side of the debate? If so, perhaps it's time to ask God to help you stop being a part of the problem, to stop conforming to a world ruled by hate and darkness.

And then, we have to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. The present perfect tense is at play in the Greek, we are to be transformed now and as a continuous action moving forward. This is not a one-time shot; it is a moment by moment occurrence of submitting our will to God's will, our mind to God's mind, our hearts to God's heart. Then, and only then, love will become the ruling force in our days.

Secondly, we have to make ourselves available to be used by God "for the sake of others." It has always been God's plan that God's people will be actively engaged in bringing heaven to earth. Back to the metaphor of salt and light that Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount. Salt left on a shelf just takes up space, lights left extinguished do no one any good. God has made us to be salt and light, in order for there to be any effect on the world, we have to be activated. We have to become a part of the recipe. We have to allow our lights to shine –remember the Sunday School chorus, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine..." Becoming a force for God's love means putting ourselves out there.

Back to those two names you wrote down earlier. Look back at them.

I'm going to show my age here...when I was a kid there was a shampoo commercial for Faberge Organics. The tag line was basically, I told two friends and they told two friends, and so

on and so on and so on. I love numbers, so I'm going to be a bit of a math geek here. If you double \$.01 every day for a month, on the last day of the month you will have \$10,737,418.24. See where I'm going here...if you will invest in two people and bring God's light into their darkness, and they tell two friends, and they tell two friends, and so on...light breaks through the darkness. That cannot happen if we sit on a shelf.

What positive steps can you take this week to make a loving difference in the lives of those two people you named: _____

A PRAYER FOR PEACE – MY WILL ALIGNED WITH GOD'S WILL

In closing I leave with you a Prayer of Saint Francis, allow God to use it to shape your heart and to empower your living.

Peace Prayer of Saint Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

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