

SIMPLE FAITH

A Simple Counterstrategy: Shake and Shine

Matthew 5:13–16



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Influence . . . always a timely subject! We influence others when we direct them without exerting force over them. In numerous, intangible ways, we sway people's opinions and modify their lives. It's commonly called "impacting." Parents impact children. Teachers impact students. Leaders impact organizations, teams, and nations. The media impacts our thinking. But much of the impacting we see today is either negative or temporal. Power-obsessed people abuse their authority, relying on money, prestige, or even brute strength to get their way.

As Christians, we must focus on making a *lasting* impact for *good*—influencing others without resorting to force or other means of control. The crucial question is *how*? Jesus' answer in Matthew 5 is still the best. Though His words are familiar, we must apply them with greater diligence and more confident faith. They work!



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. How the World Reacts to Christians

Christians belong in the world, connected with our communities beyond the four walls of the church. God has placed us here. And yet, we recognize that our presence among nonbelievers poses risks. Jesus reminded us that many will hate or reject our beliefs and commitments (John 15:17).

We can expect persecution and tribulation during our time in this fallen world, because the world sits in the lap of the Evil One and because the world hates Jesus Christ.



Quotable

*People who are
salt and light
model God's grace
and help the lost
find direction.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. How Christians Impact the World (Matthew 5:13–16)

Our world is decaying, plunged into spiritual darkness. As a result, Jesus called His followers to spread the salt and shine the light. In other words, we need to work to stem decay in our world as well as bring light into the darkness of our world.



A CLOSER LOOK

Persecution: Its Nature and Effects

Many people these days believe themselves persecuted. Unfortunately, actual persecution often gets lumped in with perceived offenses, overly sensitive personalities, and simple disagreements. In the process, the meaning of *persecution* has been diminished and the hardship of those persecuted undercut. A more precise definition of *persecution* will help the term retain its power, while helping us not overreact to the little things.

Religious persecution involves the subjugation of a person or group due to their religious commitments. Christians receive persecution, then, when outsiders victimize us *because* of our commitment to following Jesus Christ. Christians suffering imprisonment for their faith constitutes persecution; Christian customers hearing store employees wish them “happy holidays” instead of “merry Christmas” does not.

Persecution comes to all kinds of people who are different in the world. Persecution comes to Christians when we are different *for Christ* in the world. We lack persecution for one of two primary reasons: 1) we are living in the world as those without Christ, or 2) we have removed ourselves from the world.

The first reason exposes a commitment problem on our part—we’ve chosen to live according to the ways of the world instead of the ways of Christ. When we act as the world does, fostering conflict, failing to show compassion to the suffering, and engaging in hypocritical behavior among other things, we blend in to such a degree that no one feels the need to bother with persecution.

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The second reason is less often discussed yet probably more insidious in the Christian community. Christians have taken to removing ourselves from the world, severing our connections with it, and thereby, removing the possibility of persecution. If we don't risk being in the presence of nonbelievers, we close off ourselves from the potential for persecution.

But Jesus expects His followers to be persecuted, meaning that He expects us to be the peacemakers, the compassionate, and the pure. He doesn't want us to cut ourselves off from nonbelievers the way that so many have. Instead, His expectation that His followers will be persecuted indicates that He wants us to live in the world, engaging with our neighbors and friends as we seek to make our communities better places.



LET'S LIVE IT

How should we best accomplish our “salt and light” calling?

- *Don't overdo it.* We shouldn't call attention to the fact that we are living as salt and light. We should simply live the life Christ called us to, which will, in turn, create a thirst in others. Don't talk about it. Just do it!
- *Don't hold back.* With our lives attracting the attention of others, we need to take on opportunities to make a difference in our world. We should find those niches in our communities where we can effectively help people and make the world a better place.
- *Don't worry about the few who resist.* Not everyone will respond positively to Christ. That's not something we can control. Don't allow yourself to get discouraged because you see some turn away. Remain faithful to spreading the salt and shining the light.

In what ways do you see yourself operating as light in the world, working to shine the light of truth and goodness into dark places? Where? How?



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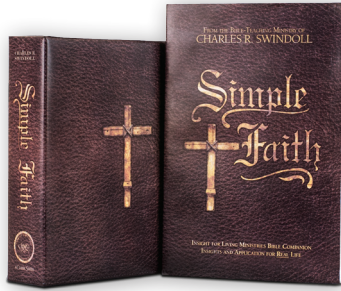
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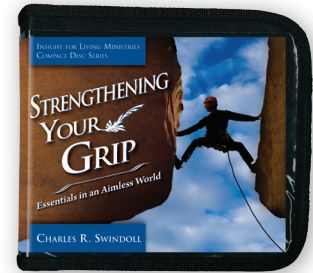
Tools for Digging Deeper



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