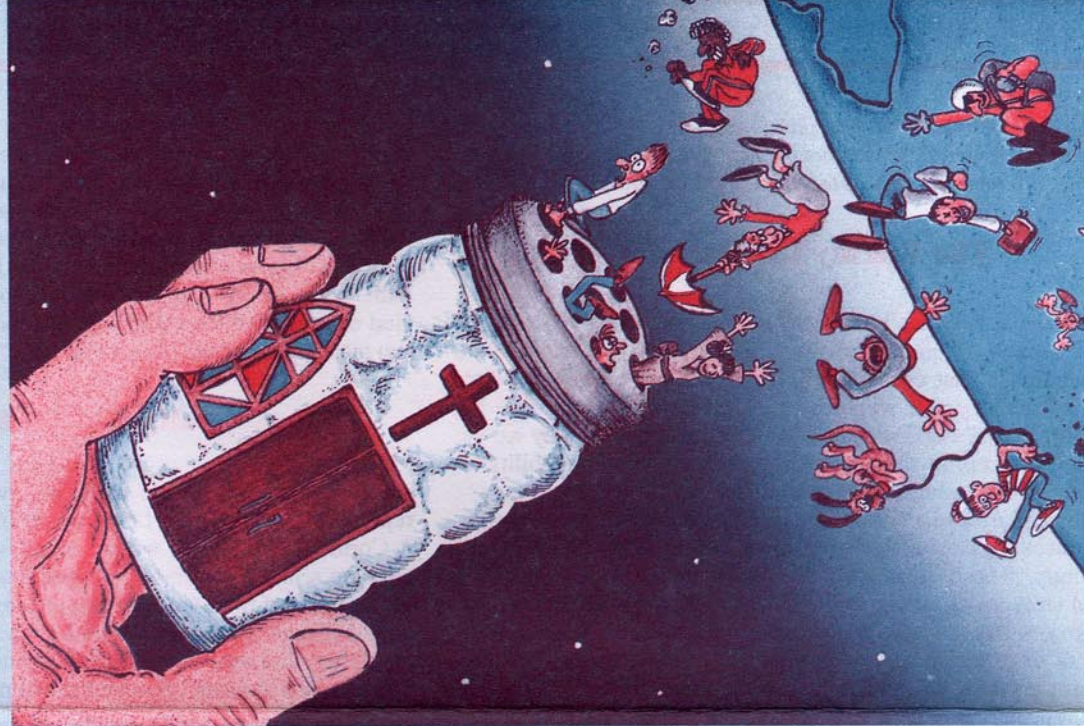


Pass the Salt!

by Melody Green



Seasoning An Unsavory World

into the streets as gravel to fill cracks – and so it's trampled under the feet of men, not to mention the feet of camels, goats, and dogs.

Saltless Christians are easy prey. They not only give the enemy access to their own lives, but to the areas of influence God gave them to faithfully steward. This means the principles God gave them to uphold within their families, jobs, and communities are left unprotected. The Bible says, "Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the lazy one to those who send him." God Himself has sent us forth with a message for the world. If we're too lazy to deliver it we're not only tasteless, we've become a source of irritation and grief to the Lord.

Jesus makes it clear that it's possible for Christians to lose all that makes them different from those they're trying to make better. Believers everywhere labor to stay unspotted from the world – but there are some whose faith has next to no influence on their general conduct. It doesn't even keep them from corruption, let alone make them a purifying influence. In this case, Jesus' words are very severe, "... if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men." It's totally worthless for God and man. Jesus gets even more graphic about the fate of tasteless salt when He says, "It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Lk. 14:35) Being useless for the manure pile is about as useless as you can get.

Once actual salt loses its flavor it's gone forever. But what about us? If we're meant to salt the world, yet we ourselves need to be salted, is there any hope? If you've lost your savor – and that's a question only you can answer – it's a very serious situation. Knives that won't cut, or lamps that won't light are failing – no matter how good they may look. It's a heavy thing to be failing your mission for God. If you are, carefully examine your relationship with the Lord and see where you're falling short – then take the steps necessary to make it right.

I don't think Jesus intended His metaphor about salt to imply that Christians can't regain their flavor. If you've gone flat, there's nothing to keep you from going to God in honesty, humility, and repentance. In fact, returning to the Source is your only hope. It's staying close to Jesus, especially in prayer and the Word, that keeps us salty and out from under the feet of men.

Out Of The Shaker

All around us things are decaying – from individual lives to areas of society to whole nations. It's time for us to get out of our shakers and tell the enemy to shove off! The Lord wants to use us to serve in new ways – for His glory and for the good of the world. I'm not talking about creating some kind of utopia where we have a perfect society. That will only happen when Jesus returns and sets up His government. Only then will every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. But as we anxiously await His return, let's conduct our lives in obedience to His Word.

God is doing new things in our midst – things that may not look like what He's done in the past. But we need to be a part of this move of God even though it may not look like we expect it to. Let's pray we don't miss it, or worse, mock it in unbelief. It's no accident we're alive at this time in history. Our generation has a unique destiny to fulfill. We have a window of opportunity before us – a period of time to get God's heart or miss His purposes. I think the Lord is tired of seeing His people play it safe. Many of us have been tucked away in church for the past 10 to 15 years – growing, getting grounded in the Word, and letting God build our character. We must continue in those things, but it's time to put it all to practical use.

God is raising up a generation of new leaders and just as Joshua carried on after Moses, God wants to pass the baton on to us. Our sacrificial service to the Lord is what will bring us up to speed, when like relay runners, we reach for the baton. As the salt of the earth we must purify, heal, preserve, and season. Let's rise to the occasion and do it with all our heart.

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Picture this situation. You're out to breakfast with friends and the waitress brings your eggs. You take a bite and frown as your eyes drift across the table looking for a small container with holes in the top. Maybe the container is round or square or shaped like a little duck – but whatever, it's out of reach. Being an avid Bible scholar, Job's desperate plea immediately pops into your mind. "Can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt? Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" As the conversation intensifies, you realize your eggs are not only tasteless, they're getting cold. So you catch someone's eye and interrupt saying, "Excuse me. Uh, excuse me please... but would you please pass the salt?"

We have all experienced the blessings of salt – on our eggs, our french fries, and in our chicken soup. Salt has come to the rescue all our lives – saving the bland, the tasteless or the just plain inedible. We usually think of it as seasoning, but that's not all it does.

Salt Of The Earth

In Matthew 5:13 Jesus told His disciples, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men." In those few words, Jesus tells us something about the function of His Church and the responsibility of those individuals who make it up.

As disciples we're the salt of the earth. We won't become salt, but according to Jesus it's the Christian state of being. When we became Christians, God had more in mind for us than just getting us saved. He wanted us to influence others – the whole earth – towards Him. He didn't say we were the salt of our church or our Sunday School. We're the salt of the earth – nobody salts their salt! To understand what it means to be salt, we need to know what salt is like, where it comes from, and what it does.

Why Salt?

Why did God call us salt? When He created smells He gave us about 14,000 different ones. But when He created tastes, He only made four: bitter, sweet, sour and salty. All flavors come from these four tastes. God didn't tell us we were the bitter, the sweet, or the sour of the earth. He called us salt on purpose. It wasn't an arbitrary choice. That means we need to pay close attention to the attributes and characteristics of salt.

Unlike diamonds or precious metals which are buried underground, salt is a very common substance. Tons of salt can be found in places like the Dead Sea and the Great Salt Lake. We get salt when salt water evaporates. In some places of the world, bulldozers heap up mountains of salt – more than anyone could use at once. When we say pass the salt we care more about what it does, than what it's made of. We just know that our eggs need help. But if we were to be exact we'd say, "Pass the sodium chloride please!"

Sodium Chloride

Common table salt is made up of two chemical elements that are very reactive and dangerous – sodium and chlorine. Sodium is a silvery white metal the consistency of hard cheese. If you drop a small chunk in water, the reaction creates hydrogen gas which is highly explosive. Chlorine is a greenish gas with a choking smell.

Enter a roomful and you'll be dead in seconds. So in salt, two dangerous opposites unite to make something good. When they combine, they even get a new name. God shows us His love by linking us to Him. Talk about opposites! By the way, salt crystals are shaped in perfect cubes. I won't speculate about why God named us after little squares – but He's got an interesting sense of humor!

Church Containers

Now this is where the church comes in. Each church is like a container of salt. The containers are different – small, large, fancy, or plain – but each is full of different amounts of salt. I have a large jar of salt stored in my pantry, but there's a salt shaker on my table for everyday use.

Now bear with me while I ask a simple question: How do I salt my eggs? Do I move the salt shaker closer to them? Should I sit the salt shaker on top of them? Obviously, I need to shake some salt onto my eggs because salt only works by direct contact. This is important. God called us salt because He wants us to be in direct contact with things that need salting.

A church container without holes is not a salt shaker – it's a storage jar. Perhaps we need to punch more holes in the tops of our churches and let Jesus shake us loose. Maybe this is part of the shaking God is allowing us to experience. He knows if we settle in and clump together we'll be useless. It's easy to get comfortable in our own little "Christian Club" and forget about being in direct contact with the world we're called to reach.

I want to clarify something here. It's important for every Christian to have a relationship with his local church and with his pastor. We all need structures of accountability. Our local church is where we're nurtured, challenged, taught, corrected, and encouraged. The church is where we grow and find fellowship. But "going to church" is a

means to an end – not an end in itself. Our vision must be much bigger. Our church should be our launching pad for winning the world for Jesus. It should be our home base – not our retirement village! Until the sheep, and the shepherds, understand this, we won't be able to rise to the occasion of God's call for this generation.

Salt Must Be Broken

When a clump of salt blocks the holes of your salt shaker, you break it up so it can be shaken out and used. We can't be used in rock form either. Often God lets us go through a breaking process so we can be used – a few grains at a time. Jesus was broken for us and we remember His brokenness when we take Communion. Wheat must be broken before bread can be made, and we must be broken before we can minister to a broken world. If we aren't broken we're probably creating a log jam in God's will somewhere. But God in His faithfulness wants us to flow freely as the salt of the earth.

Getting broken is never fun. Sometimes in the process we feel like we're being crushed. But here's an encouraging word. If you grind salt down to powder and put it under a microscope it will still be shaped in little square crystals – no matter how fine the powder gets. So even when we're broken we can be assured we won't lose our uniqueness or the distinctive mark of Jesus. In fact the smaller we get, the bigger He can be!



Salt must be broken before it can be used.

The Salt Balance

The salt balance in our bodies is delicate. If we have too much our body holds extra fluid resulting in swelling. This puts stress on every organ, especially the heart because it has to pump the extra fluid. This may cause heart problems resulting in the need for a "salt free" diet – which is not totally salt free because without enough salt, our body won't retain enough water. Then our blood pressure drops, we go into shock, and you guessed it, we die. So too little is as bad as too much. We can't live without salt, but a perfect balance is needed.

As the salt of the earth, we must be in the right place, at the right time, with the right amount. We all know too much salt ruins a good meal. Has the lid of your salt shaker ever fallen off leaving a mountain of salt in your soup? It's the end of your soup unless you're cooking for 500! Then you may need to add more. We need the right amount of salt to suit the occasion – a pinch for personal ministry, a cup for bigger projects. It's not a value judgement, but rather discerning just how much impact is needed to adequately salt the situation.

It only takes one person to share the Lord with someone or counsel a fellow struggler. If 20 people all tried at once it would be overwhelming – even damaging. But for a big march to City Hall you'd want as many salty friends as possible. Just *being* salt or thinking salty thoughts won't season anything. In big projects as well as small, we need to make direct contact!

What Does Salt Do?

SEASONS: Salt enhances what's good about our food and makes something acceptable that might not have been otherwise. As Christians, we're especially gifted with the privilege of being able to bring out the best in people and things. What a blessing to look for things that glorify the Lord – and affirm them in a way that encourages them to grow. If we're salty, the way we live and the things we say should make others thirsty for the reality of God they see in our lives.

Salt is the *only* common compound that dissolves easily in both hot and cold water. Jesus equipped us to minister to people who are hot or cold for God. And Jesus sets the example. One night He was reclining at the dinner table with a wide range of people – tax gatherers known for malpractice and extortion, sinners, and His disciples. The Pharisees questioned His ministry techniques, but He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick... I desire compassion, and not sacrifice, for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matt. 9:12,13) Jesus loved the lost and the found – but He didn't get the two confused.

HEALS: When I was a kid I had very bony knees and they were always skinned. This often resulted in blood poisoning. Since I grew up at the beach, the best thing I could do was go swimming. The salt water drew out the poison, cleansed the wound, and helped it heal. Some of you gargle with salt water when your throat is sore, or sit in a hot bath sprinkled with Epsom salts for aches and pains. There's something very soothing about salty water.

On the other hand, salt can sting. When we get sick and go to the doctor, pain is often part of the healing process. In order to be healed, a sin-sick person must experience the sting of truth. Someone once said, "The truth will set you free... but first it will make you miserable!" I'm sure we can all testify to the pain of realizing our own sins. Sometimes we feel worse before we feel better. But better we will be, as we walk in the reality of who we are, and who God is. Only then can we be healed.

Salt can also revive those who've fainted from their stressful journey in life. We need to pass some smelling salts under their nose and bring them back to consciousness! God wants us to wake up those lost in sin and revive His wounded warriors. Not by pouring salt in their open wounds, but by speaking the truth in a way that brings healing and hope.

PURIFIES: Salt is a purifying agent. God told Elisha to take a jar of salt to a poisoned spring of water and throw some in. Then Elisha said, "Thus says the Lord, 'I have purified these waters; there shall not be from there death or unfruitfulness any longer.'" (2 Kings 2:21) When God used salt to purify the waters of Jericho it was a miracle – just like when He uses us.

Just as Elisha didn't throw his jar into the poisoned waters, we obviously can't throw buildings at the world's problems. Like Elisha, we must sprinkle out some salt. We have buildings we call "the church" that may be beautiful, but they're only containers for what's really valuable. We all know it's not the buildings, but the believer who is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Beautiful churches are fine, but it's what's inside that counts.

God could have told Elisha to walk around town throwing salt down everyone's well, but He sent him to the root of the problem – the poisoned spring. God wants to send us to the root of many problems – and use us to purify the poisoned areas of society. These "poisoned springs" need to be purified so there won't be "death or unfruitfulness any longer."

PRESERVES: Before refrigeration, salt was used as a preservative. It was rubbed into meat to keep it from spoiling – or being corrupted with bacteria. Our Christian influence works in a similar way by restraining the corruption of the world – which if left unchecked, multiplies as quickly as bacteria on a hunk of meat.

When Jesus called us "the salt of the earth" He made a strong judgement about the state of society – and a lofty claim about what His disciples can do about it. You don't salt something that's alive. You salt



... but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men." Matt. 5:13

something that's dead to keep it from rotting. Jesus is saying that society, without His influence, is a carcass that's rotting away and disintegrating. We'll quickly say amen to that, but what about this: as His disciples we're to be rubbed into that rotting mass to season it, delay decomposition, and save it from falling to pieces under its own wickedness. My kids would say that sounds yukky. Sadly, so would most of us.

May I suggest that the *reason* we have so many problems in critical areas of society is *because* Christians have abandoned them and lost direct contact. We've retreated in fear of being "infected" instead of obeying God and doing our part to restrain the corruption. When God calls us anywhere we must operate with integrity, purity, honesty, and fairness. We're salt not only because we're bearers of truth, but because of the godly influence of our conduct and character.

We should conduct ourselves in a way that makes evil ashamed to show itself before us. Every person making right choices helps swing public opinion towards what is right – and every person who lowers God's standard in his own life, helps lower it in his community. Let's be

uncompromising examples – helping preserve our area of influence with godly principles. "When the righteous become great the people rejoice, but when a wicked man rules, people groan." (Prov. 29:2)

The Enemy's Tactics

For years, the enemy has had a very simple and effective strategy. He's told Christians, "You can do anything you want, as long as you stay in the church." That conveniently leaves the rest of the world to him. Also, in recent years, some areas of society have come to be considered "off limits" for Christians. Somewhere along the way we've come to believe that our involvement will tempt us beyond our ability to stick with God – or His ability to keep us.

The following are some critical areas of society in advanced stages of decay: Education, Business, Government, Arts and Media, Science, and the Family. These areas play a major part in influencing the thoughts and attitudes of society – which is exactly why the devil wants them for himself. The enemy, and those playing into his hands, have made some of us afraid to serve God in some of these areas – fearing that if we have anything to do with them we'll almost automatically fall prey to greed, power, lust, secular humanism, pride, or immorality. Obviously, those temptations are real, but we'll face them, and more, no matter where we are.

Life on earth is a battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Even being in Christian service, or the ministry, is no guarantee against falling into sin. The only thing keeping us is our relationship with God. God is faithful and "will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it." (1 Cor. 10:13) Being in God's will, and seeking Him continually will give us the strength to obey Him – and to flee temptation by the way of escape He *always* provides.

We must fear the Lord – but resist the enemy. That means we must resist the enemy's fear, as well. God has given us gifts to use for His

glory and the good of mankind. Living in ungodly fear may cause us to make wrong choices which will deeply affect, and often alter, our dreams, our goals, our ministry, and maybe even our destiny.

A Little Is A Lot

We see in Biblical history how over and over again, God used one choice grain of Holy Salt to make a difference. Esther preserved a whole nation of people by her obedience to God and teamwork with Mordecai. Moses stood in the gap and interceded for God's rebellious children and God didn't destroy them. And the lives of 276 people on a ship were spared because of one of God's obedient servants, our brother Paul.

The world around us is in desperate need because their answers aren't working. But God has an answer for every possible situation. And His answers work! Admittedly, there are some whose hearts are so hard they'd reject anything having to do with godly principles. Pharaoh is a

prime example. However, most people will respond to God's wisdom when it's presented in a way they can receive and understand.

We have many opportunities to bring God's truth into every level of society – even a few grains make a difference. A little salt makes a whole glass of water salty. We're told a large measure of faith is as big as a mustard seed. And let's not forget the widow's mite. What we have to give may not look like a lot to us, but only God can measure the eternal significance of our obedience. A little can mean a lot in God's kingdom.

Salty Ambassadors

To be the salt of the earth we must first view ourselves as representatives of the Lord wherever we are. We're told in 2 Corinthians 5:20 that we are Ambassadors For Christ. Ambassadors are sent to foreign nations and have the authority to represent the interests of their government, or king, to that foreign land. They do not change citizenship while they're there, but remain citizens of the nation that sent them. Their presence in that country creates a greater understanding between the two nations.

As we represent God's principles and character in all areas of society, we need to stay loyal to the One who sent us. If we don't, we lose our authority. Many of us who call ourselves Christians are more influenced by the world than it is by us. We need to stay red hot for God as we attempt to change a world that's frozen in sin. If we don't heat up the world, it will cool us down, and the enemy will continue to gain ground in dangerous proportions.

That's Salt!

So how do we go about being salt? Fifty years ago people were ashamed if anyone found out they were sleeping with their boyfriend or girlfriend. Today people are ashamed to admit they're virgins. Adultery was not generally acceptable and neither was using drugs, heavy drinking, cheating on your taxes, pornography, abortion, or teenage rebellion. We're salt when we take a stand for what's right. Imagine the star quarterback telling his teammates he's saving himself for marriage. That kind of locker room talk blesses God! Believers everywhere should be speaking out and saying things like, "I'm not going to lie to my mom or my boss or the bill collector. I think abortion is wrong. I don't take drugs. I won't cheat my employees or my employer. I'm faithful to my spouse. I don't lord it over my children. I'll practice godly principles no matter what everyone else does."

The first young woman Keith and I took into our home was pressured to lie to the IRS about her weekly amount of tips. Her employer said if she told the truth the other waitresses would look like liars – which of course, they were! He said he'd fire her if she persisted. As a single mom, Cindy needed her job, but she knew what she'd lose by cheating far outweighed her job loss.

We're often in situations that test our saltiness. Salty Christians won't compromise under pressure. They won't be silent when God wants them to speak, or take actions they know are contrary to His principles. And like Esther, they'll take risks and make bold moves – even in uncharted waters – when God asks them to.

Losing Our Saltiness

In the Middle East, salt is stored in buildings with dirt floors. The salt on the bottom loses its taste if it's on the ground too long. Once this happens there's no way to fix it. Then "salt" like this is thrown