

6-SESSION  
BIBLE STUDY

BIBLE  
STUDIES  
FOR LIFE

Session 2: Leader's Guide

# DISTINCT

LIVING ABOVE THE NORM



MICHAEL KELLEY

 LifeWay  
Biblical Solutions for Life

## SESSION 2

# DISTINCT IN MY INFLUENCE

**The Point:** Make your influence count for what matters.

**The Passage:** Matthew 5:13-20

**The Setting:** As Jesus taught His disciples directly, and the crowds less directly, He addressed a variety of subjects. In the passage for this session, He highlighted the responsibility of His followers toward the broader society, namely to be salt and light. He also addressed accusations (because He didn't heed the misguided religious interpretations and implications of past generations) that He broke God's law, perhaps even seeking to destroy it.

### QUESTION #1

***What flavoring or spice could you not live without?***



**Optional activity:** Supplement Question 1 by bringing a number of common spices and flavorings to the group gathering. Bring what you have in your home or purchase a few of the more popular options—hot sauce, cinnamon, curry, mustard, salsa, and so on. Encourage group members to pass items around the group and discuss which they like best with different foods.

**Note:** If you really want to make a splash, consider bringing plain crackers and chips and allowing group members to sample the different spices and flavorings for themselves.

**Video Summary:** Christians aren't meant to simply be in the mix of the culture or just to stand out in the mix; we're meant to influence the world around us. As Jesus continued the Sermon on the Mount, He gave some illustrations of how this influence happens. He called us to be salt and light. Just because we are in the world, doesn't mean we shouldn't use our influence to be distinct from the world.

WATCH THE DVD SEGMENT FOR SESSION 2. THEN USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS TO TRANSITION INTO THE STUDY.

- Consider what a normal day looks like for you. What are some ways you can be in the world but not of it?
- In what ways might you better prepare yourself for the opportunities God has built into your daily schedule for you to be a distinct influence? Be specific.

## THE POINT

*Make your influence count for what matters.*

## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I'm convinced very few people in the world really like trail mix. We say we do, but most of us really only eat trail mix for one reason: the M&M's®. Trail mix offers a way to eat candy and feel healthy at the same time, since the ingredients are all mixed together.

Like a bag of trail mix, believers in Christ are mixed into the world. And like the candy in the trail mix, Christians must retain their distinctiveness even while mixed into all other kinds of life situations.

I've noticed a funny thing about trail mix. Even though all different kinds of things are in the bag, they all end up tasting just a little bit like chocolate. The sweetness has flavored everything else. Like that sweet chocolate, Christians aren't meant to simply be in the mix of the culture, or even to stand out in the mix; they're meant to influence the world around them.

As Jesus continued the Sermon on the Mount, He gave us some illustrations of how this influence happens.

## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER TO READ ALOUD MATTHEW 5:13-20.

### **Matthew 5:13-20**

<sup>13</sup> "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled on by men.

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden.<sup>15</sup> No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house.<sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.<sup>17</sup> “Don’t assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.<sup>18</sup> For I assure you: Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all things are accomplished.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches people to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

**Response:**

- What’s your initial reaction to these verses?
- What questions do you have about these verses?
- What do you hope to learn this week about how you can truly make a difference with your influence?

***The Law or the Prophets*** (v. 17)—Shorthand for the Old Testament. The prominence of the books of the Law (Genesis–Deuteronomy) and Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.) made it a suitable abbreviation.

***Not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter*** (v. 18)—The Greek letter iota translates the Hebrew letter yod, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. The Greek term *keraiā* (stroke) means “horn” or “hook” and refers to small, decorative marks added to Hebrew letters.

TURN THE GROUP’S ATTENTION TO MATTHEW 5:13.

**Matthew 5:13**

God intends for us to stride through life with confidence, retaining our uniqueness as His people while influencing those around us. To illustrate this, Jesus likened His followers to salt.

- **Salt seasons.** It's amazing what a pinch of salt can do to bring out the flavor inside food. Similarly, when Christians exert their influence in the world, we season the world with the gospel of Christ. Throughout history, we see how this has happened as followers of Jesus have contributed to the overall good of cultures and societies. God has used His people to extend His love to the world in amazing ways. In fact, most major social innovations—health care, education, and programs to assist the poor and hungry—have been the result of Christians “seasoning” the environment in which they live
- **Salt preserves.** People in Jesus' day used salt to help preserve their food. Salt kept the food from going bad and enabled it to last longer. When Christians exert their influence in everyday situations, they keep the world from getting worse than it already is. Christians display integrity, goodness, honesty, and joy; in doing so, they hold up a society whose trajectory is headed lower and lower.
- **Salt makes you thirsty.** Salty food makes you crave water to quench your thirst. Whether people sense it or not, they are thirsty for something more. When Christians exert their influence and display the goodness and joy they have found to be uniquely satisfying, it salts the palate of everyone else. Suddenly, they become more aware that something is missing in their lives. When people in the world see how followers of Christ respond to life, what the believers have in Christ—and the difference it makes in their lives—rises to the surface. And it makes people thirsty. Christians in turn are ready to show them the way to Jesus, the fountain of life that never runs out (see John 4:14; 7:37-38).

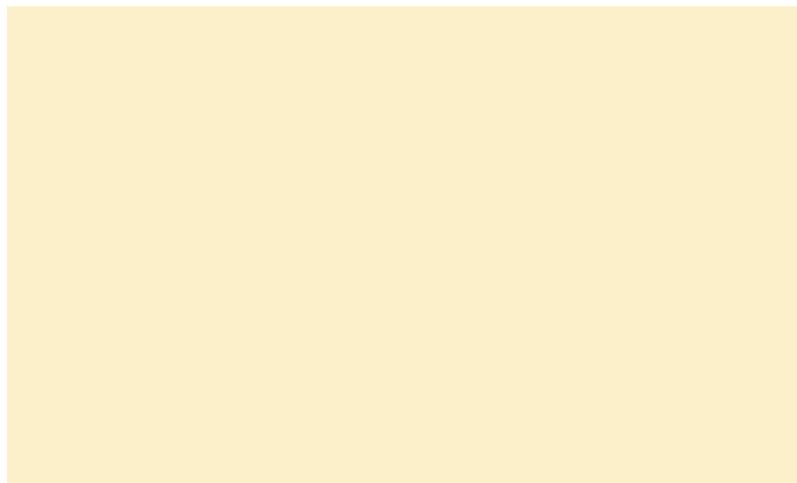
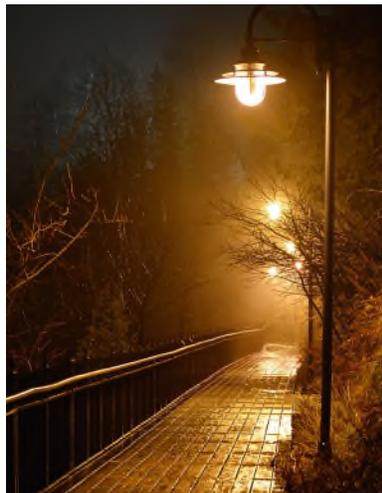
## **QUESTION #2**

***Salt flavors and preserves. How do Christians both preserve and improve culture?***

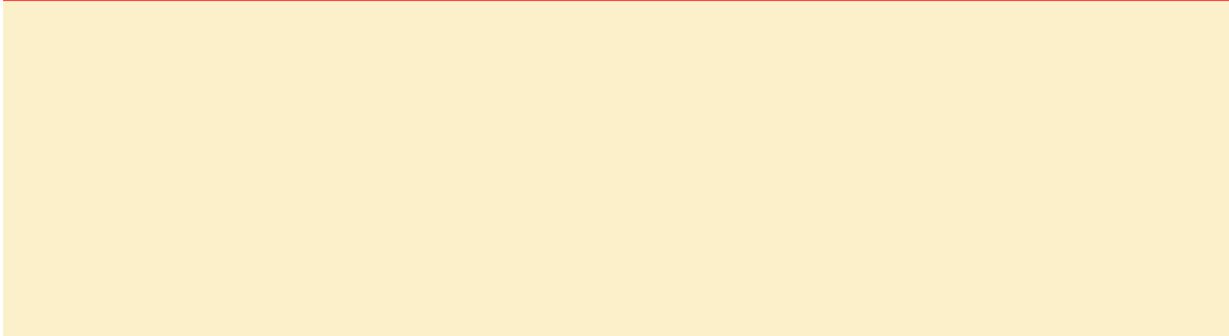
they can have on culture by retaining their uniqueness as His people while influencing those around them. **Optional follow-up:** What are some specific ways God uses us to make people thirsty for Him?

# LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*How do you picture serving as the light of the world? Select one of the following images that best represents what it means for you to shine the light of Christ. Or, use your journal to draw your own.*



*What obstacles prevent you from shining the light of Christ more brightly?*



## **Matthew 5:14-16**

Jesus told His followers, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). But why did He choose to compare Himself to light? Consider the purpose of light. In that day and time, light wasn’t meant to decorate a house; no one had a lamp sitting around because it looked pretty. Light was about utility and work; it existed in a limited supply, and it was important that people make the most of the time while the light was still shining. That’s because only in the light can we really see and know the true nature of what’s before us.

When you light a lamp in a darkened room, you get immediate clarity. Without the light, mystery, apprehension, and even fear controls the scene; you can’t truly identify where or what anything is. But light reveals. It shows us the truth about what otherwise is hidden in darkness. That’s exactly what Jesus does.

Jesus exposed a lot of things that had been in the dark for a long time. He shined the light on the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of the day. He refused to accept half-hearted devotion to God. He called sin “sin,” and He extended love and truth with His whole self.

In these verses, Jesus extended the idea of lighting the world to His followers. Like Him, His followers are meant to light the world—and to light it brightly. As weary travelers look with hope to the bright and warm city on the hill, so the world should look to Christians to tell the truth and welcome them warmly into God’s kingdom.

But God’s light and truth are not always easy. With light comes truth, but the truth is not always comfortable. Being the light of the world means we must stand for truth even when others pressure us not to. Jesus was the light, and it cost His life. We shouldn’t be surprised when being the light costs us, as well. Jesus warned against the temptation to dampen the bright light within us

### **QUESTION #3**

***How do we shine our light in a way that brings glory to God and not ourselves?***

This question is designed to help group members actively engage the Scripture text and then interpret, in their own words, what life application of this passage looks like.

## **Matthew 5:17-20**

When Jesus burst onto the scene, people had a lot of questions about who He was and what He came to do. He wasn't like any teacher they'd heard before. He performed miracles. He associated with the kinds of people that were generally considered off limits. And He taught with authority.

In that day and time, a teacher would establish his authority by boasting about his résumé. He would announce who his teacher was and what that rabbi said about an issue. In contrast, Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said ... but I tell you ...." (See vv. 21-22, for example.) Jesus is authoritative in and of Himself; He doesn't need anyone else to establish His credibility. Jesus is His own résumé.

At the same time, Jesus said, "not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all things are accomplished" (v. 18). Jesus didn't replace the written Word of God; He fulfilled it. That's because the law was never intended to be the means to make people right with God. Instead, it was always meant to point people to Jesus.

### **QUESTION #4**

***When has the Bible sparked your ability to live as salt and light?***

This question invites members of the group to share their personal testimonies of ways they have been able to apply the scriptural text to their daily lives. ***Optional follow-up:*** What are some key disciplines that help you obey God's Word?

Verse 20 can seem confusing. How can we have righteousness that "surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees"? We can't. But Jesus did, and He gives it to us. When we receive Jesus' righteousness, we are changed on the inside. What's left for us, then, is to live out the change Jesus has brought to our hearts. We do this through our loving obedience. Those who live out this grace-filled change are like salt. And light. They influence others by visibly demonstrating what Jesus has done in their hearts

## QUESTION #5

*What's one step you can take this week to live as salt and light in your community?*

Your goal for this question is to help group members think through practical ideas for how they can live distinct in their influence. Encourage them to be specific in their responses and to push beyond the most obvious answers.

Note: The following question does not appear in the group member book. Use it in your group discussion as time allows.

## LIVE IT OUT

How will you serve as salt and light in your world this week? Consider the following suggestions:

- **Pray for the darkness.** Christians often complain about the darkness in our world—but that accomplishes nothing. Instead, commit to praying each day when you encounter elements of society that need to experience the salt and light of Christ.
- **Don't go it alone.** Identify a believer in Christ whom you respect—someone who uses his or her influence in a positive way. Ask to meet with that person to help you follow Jesus more closely.
- **Speak up.** Look for a chance this week to speak directly about the gospel at a place outside your church or Bible study group

We're all mixed together in this world, which means everyone has the chance to influence everyone else. The question is how we'll use the opportunities we've been given. Choose to be salt and light.

**Pray:** Ask for prayer requests and ask group members to pray for the different requests as intercessors. As the leader, conclude by praising God for granting you, and the members of your group, opportunities to serve as salt and light in your community. Ask for wisdom and direction as you seek to take advantage of those opportunities this week.

*My thoughts*