Improving Your Serve
Lesson 11
Matthew 5:13-16

The Influence of a Servant

In this study, we will examine the influence that disciples of Christ have on a corrupt world. This lesson will allow us to hang the “Portrait of a Servant” we painted in the last two lessons. First, let us stop and think about the spiritual condition of the world we live and reflect upon that picture. In his book, *Improving Your Serve*, Chuck Swindoll says that our world is a place where “aggression, rebellion, violence, cut-throat competition and retaliation abound,” not just politically but also in our personal lives. Swindoll suggests that the violence we see in the earth today is because we are selfish, stubborn, inflexible and most of all people of war. His assessment proves true when we turn on the TV, log onto the internet, pick up a newspaper, magazine or just listen to any random conversation. What do you hear? The echo of a society whose people seems to be indifferent to human loss and suffering; it is as if we no longer see one another’s need, pain or hurt. Just listen to these statistics on family violence in the American home in 2012.

- According to a study by the “American Bar Association” and the “Department of Justice,” nearly **1.3 million women** and about **835,000 men** are assaulted by their partner every year in the United States.

- According to a different study by the “Safe Horizon Organization,” **three million children** in the United States witness domestic violence every year with another **3.6 million abuse cases** reported each year.

- According to the “National Census of Domestic Violence Services,” in the state of Virginia on a single day in September **1,374 family violence victims** sought help from state and/or local agencies.

I. Spiritual Assessment of Our World

Additionally, Swindoll uses Paul’s warning in *2 Timothy 3:1-13* to summaries the corrupt conditions of today as “**difficult, depraved**, and **deceived**.”

1. What conditions according to *2 Timothy 3:1-7*, bring **difficult** or **perilous** times?
2. What does 2 Timothy 3:8-9, say about the depraved state of humankind in the last days?

3. In 2 Timothy 3:13, how does evil both deceive and be deceived?

Into this world of "unashamed depravity," Jesus introduces His Kingdoms citizenship manifesto by first defining, in the Beatitudes, the character traits of those who are citizens of His Kingdom. The "poor in spirit, they that mourn, the meek, the hungry and thirsty, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who endure persecution," are all noble traits; however, not necessarily desirable qualities and not seen as signs of God's favor. Yet, Jesus says those who possess these qualities are His disciples, and they are blessed, favored by God and are a part of His kingdom.

- Armed with poverty, grief, humility, and an appetite for righteousness, what kind of impact could these disciples have on a corrupt and desperately wicked, society like ours?

- How, does one who shows mercy, lives pure, seeks peace and bears oppression impact hostile behavior, opposition to authority, extreme destruction and unrestrained rivalry?
Given Paul’s description in 2 Timothy and the dangerous condition of our world in these last days, can the Church really make a difference? Jesus answers this question by telling his listeners that every committed Christian living the Beatitudes will have spiritual influence in an otherwise dark place.

II. Our Spiritual Influence

Jesus hangs His completed “Portrait of a Servant” on the walls of Matthew 5:13-16 by telling those who are His disciples that they have a responsibility to be “Salt” and “Light”; to be preservers and illuminators in a decaying and dark world. Listen to what Jesus says to the disciples who are now ready for service, ready to be in the world but not of it; those ready to be His agents of change, those equipped for the ministry of reconciliation, and those ready to influence the world for the sake of the Gospel. Jesus says to them, “You are,” not that you can be, you will be, or you should be. Jesus declares, “You are,” leaving no room for debate; for you being “Salt” and “Light” are not optional.

The Influence of the Servant is what we are: the “Salt” that prevents decay and the “Light” that dispels the dark. Spiritual influence is our very presence in the world to penetrate the hard exterior of sin and corruption and to overtake them with the “Salt” of the Gospel. In addition, when we get through, we are to radiate the Light of Christ in a way that will overwhelm the Dark and dispels it so that the world can see the Light. Spiritual influence allows us to pull away the veil that blinds the world to the Light of the Gospel. Let us examine Jesus metaphor in Matthew 5:13-16, of “Salt” and “Light.”

In verses 13, Jesus says, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

1. What are the characteristics of salt that made Jesus use it in this context?

2. What is Jesus saying about the influence of the believer in the world today, and does it affect our salvation?
3. Do you believe this verse has both corporate and personal application and how would you apply it?

In verses 14, Jesus says, “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.”

1. What are the characteristics of light that made Jesus use it in this context?

2. What impact does light have on its environment?

3. How do we make sure our light is not hidden?

In verses 15 Jesus says, “Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.”

1. Why would we not light a candle and put it under a bushel?

2. What is the purpose of putting your candle or light on a candlestick?
3. How can this candle light the entire house?

In verses 16 Jesus says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

1. What did Jesus mean by “Let your light shine” and what are the qualities that allow your light to shine?

2. What did Jesus mean by “they may see your good work?”

3. How does Jesus prepare us to perform good works?

Now, that the portrait of the servant depicted in the Beatitudes has been painted and the completed portrait is properly hanging on the wall of the servant’s personal spiritual influence. How do we maintain and strengthen the character traits necessary “to be” salt and light? The closing pages of this lesson suggests three, “I Am’s” for maintaining our personal spiritual influence: I am different; I am responsible; and I am influential!