

A few years ago, a study came out about children and their self-esteem in relation to the messages they hear.

“Psychologists suggest that for every negative message elementary-aged children hear about themselves, they need to hear ten positive ones to restore their sense of self-esteem to where it had been previously.” (Lose, David. “Salt & Light,” Workingpreacher.org).

Words have a powerful impact on children.

If you call them bad or stupid or unlovable or shameful long enough, they will internalize those characteristics as being integral to their identity.

In the same way, call the child good or useful or dependable or important or helpful, they will grow into that identity as well.

Now, I know this study was done with young children, but I can't help but think that adults are very similar.

We rise or lower to the levels at which other people hold us.

In our place of work, if our boss has low expectations and doesn't expect much, I suspect that we perform lower than if we have a boss who believes that we are capable and expects us to excel.

I have been told that when working with staff, the ratio isn't quite 10 to 1, but more like 7 to 1.

Adults need at least 7 affirmations for every constructive criticism in order to keep morale high.

The idea that we can berate people or criticize them into doing better, is not true.

Or, they might perform better in the short-term because their actions are fear-based, but the true way to motivate and inspire someone is to applaud what they are doing well,

to affirm that they *can* do what you are asking them to do, that you know they are capable of making a difference.

Having others believe in us helps us believe in ourselves.

With the support of others, we are able to not only believe that we are capable of doing something challenging or accomplishing a difficult task, but more importantly, that what we are doing matters.

Being told, yes, you are what is needed in this moment to do something that incrementally changes the world,

or makes a difference in someone's life,

that gesture of support and confidence can be a true gift when received from someone else.

It does not matter what you have been told, whether you were in gifted or regular classes, what your IQ is, what your salary is, where you did or did not go to college, how many awards you did or did not win, whether you were or were not your parents' favorite child.

Everyone, everyone, everyone, has something to offer that the world needs, and that is what today's scripture tells us.

Jesus is in the middle of his famous Sermon on the Mount, and he doesn't say, if you work hard, you will be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

He doesn't say, if you pray a lot and repent a lot, you will be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Without any qualifiers, he simply states, you are the salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world.

As beings who each have the divine spark within us, we were born this way.

There's nothing we have to do to earn our light or our saltiness, we matter and we have something to contribute, just as we are.

One important quality about salt and light is that they don't exist for themselves.

I looked up all the ways in which we use salt, I found about 14,000 uses, believe it or not.

But I noticed that whether it's used to flavor food or it's put on the roadways or used to preserve food, or used in industry, salt never exists for itself.

It always exists to improve or assist that which it is interacting with.

Take food, since that's probably the most common way we use salt, it's never the main ingredient.

It's not flashy, it's not the main ingredient, you can't see it, but it is still very important.

I am sure we have all eaten meals and you could immediately tell it wasn't there, after taking that first bite.

It is needed improve the food it's mixed in with.

And the same goes for candles or lights, they don't exist for themselves simply to be illuminated.

They exist to give light to others, to allow us to see the things around them.

Salt and light are no good if they're not interacting with the world.

My saltshaker sitting on my counter is not helping to improve my food; the bag of salt sitting in my garage is not making my driveway any safer.

And as Jesus says, the lamp hidden under a bushel basket is useless because it's not illuminating anything.

We too, if we are going to be salt or light, have to engage with the world around us, with the people around us, in order to have any impact.

If you have the chance to help someone or to speak out in defense of them or to lift someone up when they are struggling, these are all opportunities to be salt and light.

And each time you miss an opportunity, regardless of the reason, you are hiding your light under a bushel basket, you are being as useful as the salt in the shaker on the table.

Our job is to help people be better versions of themselves, so we have to seize those moments.

We each need 7-10 affirmations for each critique we receive.

So be someone who offers affirmations all the time, look for the good people are doing, name it.

I think you will have a more profound effect that you realize.

After all, a little salt goes a long way.

You don't need much to flavor a whole dish.

Likewise, one positive comment or compliment can make one person's entire day.

I know that lots of people struggle with self-esteem issues and feelings of inadequacy.

Another beautiful thing about sharing our salt or light with the world is that we have the privilege of telling others that they too have something to offer, that the world needs their flavor.

In lifting others up, my hope is that we will have ripple effects, and those people whom we have affirmed will stand a little taller, with a little more confidence, and will spread the love and kindness that's been extended to them, by you.

As I said before, Jesus doesn't have any conditions for being salt and light, we all are it, by our very nature.

Our job is to trust that truth, to not doubt Jesus.

I know we all have our moments where we think to ourselves, Jesus couldn't possibly have meant me, Jesus was mistaken.

I am pretty sure there's an asterisk at the end of that scripture, and the fine print says that Jesus is talking about everyone except me.

But if you think this, you would be wrong.

Jesus didn't exclude anyone.

Each of us has something the world needs, and we are called to draw each other's gifts out of each other, by lifting them up, by celebrating what each of us does well.

The truth is that we rise or fall to the standards others hold us to.

I believe that if we commit ourselves to applauding what others do, they will become better, brighter versions of themselves.

God has blessed us with the opportunity to celebrate one another so that we might have the confidence to boldly and proudly share our light and salt with the world.

I hesitate to use the word proud because it's associated with being a sin, but it's okay to be a little proud, I think.

It's okay to say yes, I have something to offer my family, my job, my community and the world.

I have some salt to flavor all the different tribes I intersect with.

And the thing about salt is that you know if it's not there.

All those places where you engage the world, something would be missing if you weren't there, and it's your job to let others know that something would be missing if they weren't there.

See how this works.

Our church, it would be different, a little more bland, a little less flavorful, if the 6 people who joined today weren't part of our church.

Each of them has something to offer our community and we are blessed by their contributions.

With their light on the lampstand for all to see, they help us shine that much brighter.

So go forth, focused not on where you are lacking, but on what you are doing well, looking not for what others aren't doing, but for what they are doing, and name what you see.

You will find that you'll not only have a positive impact on those around you, but you might be changed in the process.

By helping others see their own light, yours might just burn a little brighter as well. Amen.