

REIMAGINING THE
GREATEST
CALLING ON EARTH

#LiveFully



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CHAPTER 1:
SALT
LAUNCH VIDEO



chapter 1 | **Salt**

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CHAPTER 1: SALT



As a kid, I was a really good basketball player. In fact, people often called me the next Michael Jordan. Well, maybe no one ever said that, but among my peers I was always one of the best. At my middle school, the eighth grade basketball team was the only official sport sponsored by the school, so at thirteen, I was destined for athletic glory. Along with other perks, making this team would secure my spot on the popularity wall in the main entrance of the campus.

Now to be clear, I wasn't content just to make the squad. I was going to be the star. I longed to lead the team and win a championship, impressing all the cheerleaders along the way. As my eighth grade year approached, I tried out for the team and made it. Michael Jordan, remember? After tryouts, we moved into daily practices, and as expected, I was named a starter for our first home game. Everything was lining up perfectly, just as I had envisioned. It was going to be glorious.

I wish I could tell you that all my dreams were fulfilled that season, but that would be a huge lie. To make a long, sad story short, it was the most disappointing year of my young life. I never became the star, and although my team made it to the championship, I watched the whole game from the bench.

Well, most of the game. I did get put in for the last forty-five seconds—a “courtesy call” for us benchwarmers to taste the action while honoring the players who actually participated in the game. My coach was trying to make a kind gesture, but for this insecure player, it was about the most humiliating thing he could've done. It was the icing on the terrible cake that had been baking all year, and in that moment, my emotions got the best of me. Right there, in front of the same cheerleaders I dreamed of impressing, I started to cry. Somehow I managed to dribble the ball down the court with tears dribbling down my face. But those forty-five seconds were an eternity.

What was so frustrating about the whole season was the fact that I didn't lack the talent or skill. During our practices, I was always one of the best performers. If I only played in the games like I practiced after school, I would've had a great year, perhaps even leading the team like I had dreamed.

But talent or skill wasn't the problem. My issue was confidence, or the lack thereof. I couldn't put it together on game day because I was consumed with fear, of letting people down, looking stupid, and failing. I had no confidence, and because of it, I never stepped into my dream of middle school greatness.

Now I don't open with that story so you'll feel sorry for me, although I appreciate all the sympathy. I share it because at some level, all of us know what it's like to struggle with our own confidence. I was an extreme case, but we've all doubted ourselves or questioned our self-worth from time to time. And specifically within the church, I believe insecurity is oftentimes a major obstacle to a life of faith and fullness. God invites us to be characters in the world's greatest story, so we hear, but many times we're hindered by feelings of inadequacy or fear. We struggle to believe that we're capable of living a powerful life for Jesus. The Bible declares that we're "God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works." (Ephesians 2:10 NIV) But sometimes we're not even sure if we're worthy of God's love or concern. This was my story. As a young follower of Christ, I remember thinking, "How am I going to change the world when I can't even get past myself?"

In response to these confidence issues, particularly in America, many Christian leaders have emphasized the importance of knowing how much God love us. Countless books, sermons, and other resources have focused on answering that fundamental question, "Who am I?" with the truths and promises of God's word. This is obviously a great response to these struggles, and knowing our God-given identity is foundational to living with confidence and purpose. But there's another side of the coin for living fully with God, one far less emphasized or understood. It's what this book is all about, but before we get there, let me share about my friend, Stephen.

STEPHEN

For the last two years, much of my free time and weekends were spent working on this book. I'd go out early in the mornings and stay out all day long. One thing I realized is that when writing a book, you eat many lunches alone. After a (potentially) productive morning of writing, lunchtime sneaks up fast, and you want to grab something quick so you can return to the grind. For me, an introverted, only child, the solo lunch is not a bad thing at all. I actually kind of like it.

One day, after writing all morning, I walked into a new restaurant for lunch. I assumed I would eat alone, but as soon as I confirmed "just one" with the hostess, a stranger at the counter immediately invited me to join him. I learned his name was Stephen, and he was definitely not an introvert. We ate together, but our conversation didn't stay at the surface level. He opened up about his childhood in Pennsylvania, his rough teenage years, and why he ultimately decided to move down south.

Eventually he asked me what I did for a living, so I told him that I was a pastor. This is usually where things get weird. Upon hearing I work in the church, many respond by either giving me an awkward, smiley compliment, or they turn very serious, like they've just been found out. Some will even apologize for using profanity earlier in the conversation. That always gives me a good laugh. But Stephen wasn't awkward at all, and he was quick to tell me that he was raised in the church. He shared that he believed in God and tried to follow him, although he was also quick to admit he hadn't been very good at it. Seeing his openness, I decided to ask him a pointed question. "So what do you think God wants to do with your life?" He paused, and then smiled, admitting, "That's what I'm trying to figure out."

At age twenty-seven, Stephen really didn't know what to do with his life. "Thirty is the new twenty, right?" he asked. He'd always worked construction for his father's company, but this wasn't what he wanted to do long-term. He loved writing song lyrics, but wasn't sure if that would ever be more than a hobby. Sitting there at the counter, one thing was pretty clear: Stephen felt

stuck.

So what's God calling you to do with your life? When pressed with this question, I think many of us feel like Stephen. We're kind of trying to figure it out. It's hard to see how our unique personalities, passions, and past experiences come together for a life of following Jesus. Our day-to-day existence can feel fragmented as we manage all of life's demands while also trying to keep God as our first priority. The Scriptures reveal that God "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine." (Ephesians 3:20 NIV) But what if we're not imagining much to begin with? Just surviving the daily grind of life can be hard enough as it is. How can God do "immeasurably more than all we imagine" in our lives if we aren't imagining a great calling in the first place?

I'm convinced that many times our confidence issues are directly connected to our calling issues. We can hear about how much God loves us everyday, and that's great. But without clear direction for how we fit into his plan on the earth, we'll always struggle. Without a solid grasp of our role in the world, we'll naturally focus back on our selves, getting stuck once again in our own pride or insecurity. We don't just need to know our God-given identity. To live with confidence, we desperately need vision for why we're here. If we're going to live fully, we must re-imagine our God-given calling on the earth.

NICKNAMES

So with all this in mind, I want to talk about nicknames for a moment. You can't deny that we love to give nicknames, not just to each other, but to describe entire groups of people. For example, "Beliebers" are the millions of people, mostly young females, who follow every move and tweet that Justin Bieber makes. The Cheeseheads are the great people of Wisconsin who adore their Green Bay Packers football team. And the hippies were, of course, those who rebelled against society, traveled the world, and rallied for peace and love in the sixties.

Most likely you've been given a nickname, whether it's one of endearment from a family member, or one of embarrassment,

given by your friends after a humiliating incident. Some people have ones that they love, and others have ones they don't. Unfortunately I fall into the second category. Back in high school, I was given the nickname "Greaseball" because of my "greasy" complexion. You know, acne and stuff. What's worse about this nickname is that it was given to me by one of my best friends.

Despite my own negative experience with a nickname, I've definitely seen more positive examples. At their finest, they highlight what makes a person unique, capturing a distinct quality they possess. We call our friend, Matt, "Diesel," because his ambition and passion for life never stops, just like those old diesel cars that never seem to die. I call my five-year-old daughter Amyra "my little planner" because she's a natural leader who loves to make plans and invites others to join her. This name highlights one of her qualities that I love and appreciate the most.

Whether you have a nickname you love or hate, the good news is that there's an incredibly positive nickname that Jesus calls all of his followers. And this nickname is the place we'll start our conversation about living fully and re-imagining God's calling for our lives. Before we can change the world in Jesus' name, we need to come to grips with a name that Jesus gives us. Ready? Okay, here it is:

You are the salt of the earth.

Matthew 5:13

Jesus calls his followers *salt*—as in the stuff that sits on the kitchen table. Doesn't that blow your mind? Okay, so it might not immediately impress you, but stick with me. I guarantee it's one of the most extraordinary nicknames you'll ever receive. Taken seriously, it provides a foundation for living with uncommon clarity and confidence. *We're created to impact the world in greater ways than we've imagined.* And to rediscover this truth, we will begin by examining those little white granules.

FLAVOR

Let's start simple. What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of salt? I think of chips, specifically Mexican tortilla chips. One of the reasons I love Mexican restaurants is the constant influx of chips and salsa. "Save your appetite for the meal," I tell myself. Then suddenly a new basket appears and my hand goes into autopilot, chip-to-mouth, chip-to-mouth. But to really enjoy those chips, one ingredient must be added. Salt.

We know salt provides a flavor we love. If you're trying to be healthier, it might be a love-hate relationship, but salt has a savoring quality that brings bland food to life. Rice isn't flavorful, but add salt and you've got yourself a great side to some chicken, which is also probably seasoned in salt. It's not difficult for us to understand this flavoring role.

So when Jesus calls his followers *the salt of the earth*, one implication is that we are to be the flavor that brings bland living to life. We're meant to live the most joyful lives on the planet, bringing our joy into everyday situations and circumstances. As the salt of the earth, we should throw the best parties, have the greatest traditions, and build the healthiest families. Our relationships should be the richest: full of laughs, tears, and everything in between.

If God is the author of joy and pleasure, it only makes sense that his people would experience those things in the most profound way. The joy we exude should be obvious and attractive to others. As the salt of the earth, people who don't follow Christ should be drawn to the quality of life that we live. But sadly this isn't often the case for the Christian community as a whole. In fact, many people don't associate churchgoers with joy, excitement, or passion at all. If anything, we're known for the opposite—with a reputation for being rigid, strict, or flat-out boring.

GET OUT OF THE SALT SHAKER

For all the ways salt adds flavor to our food, from chips to rice

to the blandest chicken, it does no good if it remains inside the saltshaker. We know this when it comes to preparing food, but when it comes to *being* “the salt of the earth,” we need to clarify. Christians cannot be the salt of the earth unless they are willing to go out and interact with the world around them. We can’t bring joy into the world if we never engage with the mainstream culture surrounding us. Jesus did not call his people “the salt of the church,” yet many Christians rarely spend time with people who don’t follow Christ. I don’t know about you, but this is personally convicting. It’s so much easier to just huddle with people from our own churches or groups, only spending quality time with those who think and believe like we do.

But to live like this is to forsake our role as the “salt” and instead become a subculture. We stay in a “Christian salt shaker” that lives for itself, creates stuff for itself, and impacts only itself. This salt shaker subculture is also usually out of touch with the popular ideas and questions of mainstream culture. Many look at the church from the outside and consider it naïve and irrelevant to the real world. And in many situations, their assessment is accurate.

THE PURIFYING AGENT

Although less obvious to us today, the next quality of salt is no less significant to what Jesus meant when he called his followers “salt.” During his life on the earth, before electricity and iPhones, salt was needed for something much more basic and essential than flavor. Those listening to Jesus would instantly know that salt was vital for preservation. Without this quality of salt, their food would rot and meals would be skipped. We don’t give this much thought in our modern world, but salt has a purifying, cleansing property that was essential to preserve people’s food before refrigerators.

As the salt of the earth, we’re called to be a purifying, preserving force in the world. Jesus opens the way for his followers to live the most pure, righteous, and morally grounded lives on the planet. With direction from Scripture and the power of God’s spirit, we can live lives of deep integrity. We should be radically

committed to living rightly, not just for our sake, but for the sake of the entire human race. At larger societal levels, we should work against the industries and systems that disrespect, even dehumanize fellow human beings. I have a friend who works for an international organization that frees women out of the sex trafficking industry. They enter dangerous situations week after week, fighting against this social ill to bring freedom to those in modern captivity. This is just one example of being the purifying salt of the earth.

Unfortunately, when it comes to living lives of integrity and character, some statistics reveal little difference between Christians and the rest of the population. Marriages in the church seem to be crumbling at a similar rate to those outside of it. Many in the church are bound by the same addictions and struggles as those outside of it. In a nationwide study, 85% of non-Christians ages 16-29 describe Christians as “hypocritical” because they see this inconsistency between our actions and what is preached in our churches.¹ To add to the problem, some pastors and priests have committed atrocious acts that are broadcast worldwide. For all these reasons, people are led to question, “Why should I follow Jesus if the lives of his people are just as broken as anyone else?”

Living a pure, righteous life is more than just saying “no” to certain attitudes or behaviors. As purifying salt, followers of Jesus should be primarily recognized for what they contribute to the world instead of what they are against. But in the same study previously referenced, the most common adjective that young non-Christians used to describe Christians was “anti-homosexual” at 91%. Just chew on that for a second. Of all the words that people could use to describe followers of Jesus, the most common one is profoundly negative. For “anti-anything” to be the most common adjective describing God’s people is just wrong. Period.

VALUABLE

We live in a broken, often brutal, world that constantly assaults our self-worth. Sometimes the people we’re closest to, like family and friends, cause the most damage. Further, damaging lies

pour into our heads from popular media and entertainment. We're bombarded with images of flawless models and celebrities amounting to an unattainable level of perfection. Compared with the airbrushed magazine covers, it's no wonder so many don't feel attractive enough.

In a different way, many find themselves assaulted by the guise of the "American Dream." There is enormous pressure to perform and achieve at work. Paychecks become the measuring rod for success. Self-worth dissolves with comparisons to the neighbor next door, all leading to the question, "Am I good enough?" After the financial crisis in 2008, many men and women not only lost their jobs, but also a deep sense of personal value and confidence.

In dealing with these struggles, life can feel like a self-worth roller coaster, full of ups and downs. In one setting, we may feel great—our self-worth high and strong. Perhaps we feel like we're the most attractive, the most outgoing, the funniest, or most intelligent. Whatever it might be, we feel good about ourselves because in this setting, it feels like we have something to offer.

Yet when our personal value is based on others, it's only a matter of time for it to come crashing down. The moment we get around someone who's "better" than us, we free fall. Insecurity rushes in because suddenly we aren't the most attractive, the funniest, or the smartest. Living a life on this roller coaster is exhausting, but many people, including followers of Jesus, ride it daily.

The final property of salt speaks directly into this issue of self-worth. Salt may be cheap and easy to come by for many of us today, but during Jesus' time on the earth, it wasn't an everyday commodity. It was extremely valuable, even used at times for currency. We take it for granted, but back then salt wasn't something to be wasted. By calling us the salt of the earth, Jesus declares our incredible value, inviting us to embrace an identity that transcends the ups and downs of the self-worth roller coaster.

LOSING OUR SALTINESS

Sometimes familiarity leads us to overlook great things. Back in

high school, our football team didn't lose a single game for three years in a row. At one point they were ranked as the #1 team in the entire nation. With such a successful team, you'd assume our student body was the most passionate, rabid fan section in the country.

And at first, we were passionate. Everyone painted up, gathered together, and came ready to yell and cheer the team on to victory. But as time passed, and the wins kept coming, it all became so familiar. The team kept excelling, but our enthusiasm waned and students stopped going to watch them. After several state championships, we took greatness for granted.

Likewise, as followers of Christ, it's very easy to overlook the powerful things he says about us. Somewhere along the way, these truths become so familiar that we lose sight of what they really mean. Isn't this true for the nickname "salt of the earth?" Maybe we've nodded our heads to it in Sunday school or heard it quoted in sermons and Bible studies. But to what extent do we live in this identity with deep conviction? After giving His followers their nickname, Jesus asks a few rhetorical questions.

But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

Matthew 5:13

This can be a harsh passage to consider, but these words of Jesus do reflect some truth about the situation we find ourselves in. In many American cities and towns there's no lack of church buildings. Depending on where you live, there may be a dozen within a few street blocks. But the question has to be asked, "What good are countless churches if they have lost their saltiness? What happens when they lose their value, flavor, and purity in the world?" Sadly, losing our saltiness results in the voice of the Christian community being drowned out by the mainstream world. The church gets metaphorically trampled underfoot while secular voices shape culture and set the standards for relationships, creativity and morality.

Although some of these realities are discouraging, there's

incredible hope. Jesus still names us the salt of the earth, giving us an identity as valuable people called to be the flavor and the purifying agent in the world. And he believes in us more than we'll ever believe in ourselves. If we're going to live fully, then coming to grips with this nickname is a powerful start. But the question remains: what do *you* think God wants to do with *your* life?