

Sheltering Wings
Small Group Lessons on Community

Bible Study

SHELTERING WINGS



THE CHURCH: A COMMUNITY OF SALT AND LIGHT

A Three-Session Discussion Outline for Small Church Groups

INTRODUCTION

In His Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus spoke metaphorically about our role as His followers. In Vs. 13, He said, “You are the salt of the earth” and admonished us not to lose our “saltiness” - our influence for Him. And in Vs. 14, He said, “You are the light of the world” and told us not to conceal our light as Christians but to let it “shine before men” by our good deeds, which He said would bring praise to our Father in heaven. Clearly then, our Lord has called us, as Christian people and churches, to be “A Community of Salt and Light” amid the unsavory darkness of the world.

As a rule, each Christian community (church) of every place and every time should assess and make every effort to practice what it means to be salt and light in its own current setting - within the Christian community and the local community. This discussion outline is meant to aid that process.

This three-session outline is designed to be a catalyst for group discussions about the basis, the means, and the benefits of “A Community of Salt and Light.” It is intended for small church groups such as Sunday School and Bible classes, home Bible studies, and discipleship groups within the broad age range of older youth through adult.

The core of this outline is the conviction that, according to the Bible, God formed the church to be the community of His children on earth - those who believe in His Son Jesus Christ, who confess Him as Savior and Lord, and who are committed to following His principles in daily life. Through Christ’s church on earth, God blesses His people with many benefits of community. He also transforms the surrounding local/secular community for Christ by means of the salt and light of His people.

This outline focuses on Colossians 3:1-17, a concise yet highly instructive New Testament text in which the Apostle Paul wrote volumes in a few words about Christian community. A few additional Bible passages are also cited, and all Bible quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

A Word to the Group Facilitator

Please feel free to adapt and enhance this three-session outline for your group. For example, pertinent historical and cultural information from Bible reference works on Colossians could be added in the **READ THE TEXT** section. Further, your own observations and experiences, as well as your own open-ended questions, will make the discussions more fitting for your group.

In addition, included with this outline is a list by session of suggested, relateable “Developmental Assets” for young people. You may wish to address some of these during your discussions. The superscript numbers in each session outline correlate the discussion subject matter to a related Developmental Asset. More information about the 40 Developmental Assets is included.

Finally, make certain that the prayers offered in the **OPEN THE MEETING** and the **PRAY FOR THE GROUP** sections are focused and fervent.

SESSION I: The Basis of Christian Community

SESSION II: The Means of Christian Community

SESSION III: The Benefits of Christian Community

Suggested, Relatable Developmental Assets For Young People

Healthy communities build healthy families AND healthy families build healthy communities. Thank you for participating in the Sheltering Wings study during October's Domestic Violence Awareness and Prevention Month. YOU are the key to ending domestic violence and promoting healthy relationships and healthy communities!

One of the best ways to prevent abuse is to set up current and future generations with a strong foundation of life experiences that eliminate risky behaviors that lead to abuse.

Sheltering Wings' Prevention and Education Program is designed around the 40 Developmental Assets. The 40 Developmental Assets Framework, created by the Search Institute, identifies the positive life experiences and qualities that young people need in order to grow into successful, thriving, and contributing members of their community.

The discussion guide for each session includes questions related to the 40 Developmental Assets. The superscript numbers correlate the discussion subject matter to a related Developmental Asset (outlined below).

Session I: The Basis of Christian Community (Colossians 3:1-4 and 11)

Asset 14: Adult Role Models (Boundaries & Expectations)

Asset 16: High Expectations (Boundaries & Expectations)

Asset 19: Religious Community (Constructive Use of Time)

Asset 30: Responsibility (Positive Values)

Asset 34: Cultural Competence (Social Competencies)

Asset 38: Self-Esteem (Positive Identity)

Asset 39: Sense of Purpose (Positive Identity)

Asset 40: Positive View of Personal Future (Positive Identity)

Session II: The Means of Christian Community (Colossians 3:5-14)

Asset 14: Adult Role Models (Boundaries & Expectations)

Asset 26: Caring (Positive Values)

Asset 30: Responsibility (Positive Values)

Asset 33: Interpersonal Competence (Social Competencies)

Asset 35: Resistance Skills (Social Competencies)

Asset 37: Personal Power (Positive Identity)

Session III: The Means of Christian Community (Colossians 3:5-14)

Asset 8: Youth as Resources (Empowerment)

Asset 9: Service to Others (Empowerment)

Asset 14: Adult Role Models (Boundaries & Expectations)

Asset 15: Positive Peer Influence (Boundaries & Expectations)

Asset 17: Creative Activities (Constructive Use of Time)

Asset 33: Interpersonal Competence (Social Competencies)

Asset 39: Sense of Purpose (Positive Identity)

Read the next page for an overview of the 40 Developmental Assets Framework.

40 Developmental Assets

Assets: Explained!

Developmental Assets® are positive factors within young people, families, communities, and other settings that research has found to be important in promoting the healthy development of young people.

Think about each one and set a goal for how you can apply it.

EXTERNAL ASSETS

The supports, opportunities, and relationships young people need across all aspects of their lives.



Support

Young people need to be surrounded by people who love, care for, appreciate, and accept them.



Empowerment

Young people need to feel valued and valuable. This happens when they feel safe and respected.



Boundaries & Expectations

Young people need clear rules, consistent consequences, and encouragement to do their best.



Constructive Use of Time

Young people need opportunities – outside of school - to learn and develop new skills and interests with other youth and adults.

INTERNAL ASSETS

The personal skills, commitments, and values they need to make good choices, take responsibility for their own lives, and be independent and fulfilled.



Commitment to Learning

Young people need a sense of the lasting importance of learning and a belief in their own abilities.



Positive Values

Young people need to develop strong guiding values to help them make healthy life choices.



Social Competencies

Young people need the skills to interact effectively with others, to make difficult decisions, and to cope with new situations.



Positive Identity

Young people need to believe in their own self-worth and to feel they have control over the things that happen to them.

THE CHURCH: A COMMUNITY OF SALT AND LIGHT

SESSION I OF III

The Basis of Christian Community

OPEN THE MEETING

Strong Churches - vital communities of salt and light - are essential! They enable Christian individuals and families not only to survive spiritually, but even to thrive in times of extraordinary cultural upheaval. Churches are also the essence of God's strategy for influencing entire civilizations for good and for Christ. God intends churches to be vibrant, salt and light communities of Jesus' followers who consistently live out the gospel in their relationships with each other and with those in the world.

In this session, discussion will focus on the basis of community - beliefs, values, and ideals which strongly unite Christians to Christ and to each other in the church, the salt and light community of faith.

Pray for your discussion.

READ THE TEXT

Paul's letter to the Church in Colosse is one of his four letters written during his imprisonment in Rome in the early 60s of the First Century AD. At the time Paul wrote, Colosse was a city in economic decline, filled with many pagan religions and having a large Jewish colony. Colosse had wide diversity and a deeply divided culture, not unlike ours today. The verses to be read set forth some of the beliefs, values, and ideals of the faith which form the basis of Christian salt and light communities.

Read Colossians 3:1-4 & 11 to the group, or have it read aloud.

DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. What are your first impressions of this passage?
2. What does it mean to be "raised with Christ?"³⁸ How does this happen? (See Romans 6: 4-6).
3. Where is Christ "sitting" right now? How and when did He go there? What is He doing there?
4. In these verses, identify the shared Christian beliefs, values, and ideals mentioned by Paul.⁴⁰

5. According to Vs. 11, what place should individual ethnicity, tradition, and social class have in the Christian community?³⁴ How is Vs. 11 salt and light to the large community?³⁹

APPLY THE TEXT

1. For about what percent of your day is your mind set “on things above?”¹⁶ Why is this hard?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being weak, and 5 being strong), rate the strength of the basis of our church community.¹⁴
3. From the list of shared beliefs, values, and ideals that you identified in Question 4 in **DISCUSS THE TEXT** above, which is our church’s greatest strength? In which do we need to improve?
4. For those aspects of our basis which need improvement, where and how do we begin?³⁰
5. What do our shared beliefs, values, and ideals have to do with being salt and light in the world?³⁹
6. In what “salty” and “shining” ways can we bear witness to our basic beliefs, values, and ideals in our local community? At your work? At your child’s school?

APPLY THE 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

1. How can the adults in our Christian community be “salt and light” to youth in the local community?
2. Do adults in our church display healthy behaviors that we want our youth to emulate?

PRAY FOR THE GROUP

THE CHURCH: A COMMUNITY OF SALT AND LIGHT

SESSION II OF III

The Means of Christian Community

OPEN THE MEETING

Every community must have a strong basis - a solid set of common beliefs, values, and ideals - in order to thrive. The community of Christ is no different. In Session I, the discussion focused on some of the basic beliefs, values, and ideals of the church community as set forth by the Apostle Paul in Colossian 3:1-4 & 11. To review, Paul mentioned the following in those verses:

1. Christians have “died” with Christ.
2. They are “raised with Christ.”
3. They are “hidden (protected and kept) with Christ in God.”
4. Their minds are oriented to heavenly things “where Christ is,” instead of to earthly things.
5. They live in anticipation of Christ’s return - His appearance in glory.
6. They are not identified by their early distinctions; instead, “Christ is all and in all.”

With these as the basis, this session will focus on the means - the behaviors and practices - by which communities of Christ are salt and light to the world. In Colossians 3:5-14, Paul specified behaviors and practices Christians must (1) “put to death,” (2) “put off,” and (3) “put on” to be salt and light for Christ.

Pray for your discussion.

READ THE TEXT

The ungodly behaviors and practices which Paul commanded the Colossian Christians to “put to death” and to “put off” were pervasive in First Century Colossian culture, just as they are in ours today. And the salt and light virtues or assets that he told them to “put on” are as salty and radiant today as then.

Read Colossians 3:5-14 to the group, or have it read aloud.

DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. What did Paul tell the Colossians to put to death in their church community in Vs. 5-7?³⁵
Why?
2. What effect(s) would the presence of any of these have on being salt and light in the world?³⁰



3. In Vs. 8-9, what were the Colossians to put off for the sake of being salt and light?³⁷
Why these?
4. Is there a difference between “put to death” and “put off”? If so, how would you explain it?
5. From Vs. 12-14, list and expound on the salt and light assets Paul told the Colossians to put on?³³

APPLY THE TEXT

1. Is there anything in our Christian community that should be put to death or put off?³⁴
Be specific without being personal!
2. Which of the above are most detrimental to our salt and light? How should we deal with it?
3. Of the salt and light “put ons” in Vs. 12-14, in which are we strongest?³³ Weakest? Why?
4. What impact could our practicing these salt and light “put ons” have on the local community?²⁶
5. How does it benefit our local community when we “put off” harmful things like what Paul listed?

APPLY THE 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

A key component to Healthy Adult Role Models is consistency and intentionality.

1. As adults, are we being intentionally consistent with youth in our lives? How? If no, why not?
2. Do our youth see us (the adults around them) as always “salt and light”? Sometimes, “salt and light”? Rarely “salt and light”?

PRAY FOR THE GROUP

THE CHURCH: A COMMUNITY OF SALT AND LIGHT

SESSION III OF III

The Benefits of Christian Community

OPEN THE MEETING

The first two sessions covered (I) the basis of Christian community - shared beliefs, values, and ideals which unite the members to Christ and each other, and (II) the means of Christian community - positive, salt and light behaviors and practices by which the community is to function as well as harmful, negative behaviors and practices which give rise to community dysfunction. Also discussed were the current condition of your community of Christ as well as some steps for strengthening it. The final session will concentrate on the benefits of a well-based, properly functioning, salt and light community of Christ.

Pray for your discussion.

READ THE TEXT

A strongly based, properly functioning community of Christ, as God designed it to be, is appealing beyond words! Christ's church on earth is God's gift of a revitalizing oasis of calmness and accord amid a vast wilderness of worldly restlessness and discord. What God intended the salt and light community of Christ to be for First Century Christians in Colosse, He also intends it to be for us today.

Read Colossians 3:15-17 to the group, or have it read aloud.

DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. In this passage, identify as many benefits of a salt and light Christian community as you can.¹⁴
2. How can Christians usher in the "peace of God" to the local/surrounding community they live in?³³
3. How does the "word of Christ" benefit the Christian and local communities?¹⁵ And why do you think Paul emphasized singing it?¹⁷ (See Ephesians 5:19.)
4. What did Paul mean, "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus"?⁹ (See I Corinthians 10:31.)
5. Briefly describe the portrait of the community of Christ painted by these verses.

APPLY THE TEXT

1. Does the peace of God “rule” in our church community as well as in our hearts? Is there a link between His peace ruling in our hearts and His peace ruling in our community? If so, describe it.
2. In our church community, how does the role of the word of Christ (the Bible) match up to Vs. 16?
3. On a scale of 1-5 (not so well-very well), how well does our church community “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,” i.e., think and behave in agreement with who He is and what He wants? Explain your rating. Also, how is doing all in His name salt and light to our community?
4. Is our church community a thankful community? How can you tell? Can those outside tell?⁹
5. What difference(s) would it make in our surrounding local community if our church community evidenced more of the salt and light attributes of Vs. 15-17?³⁹

APPLY THE 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

1. Do the youth in our church have enough opportunities to serve?
2. Do we have adults mentoring youth in areas of service?
3. Do our youth feel that they are an important part of the church?
4. How do we foster individuality and creativity in the church?
5. How do we support youth in the local community in this way?

PRAY FOR THE GROUP

Make this final prayer time special - perhaps with a prayer circle or singing a Christian hymn or chorus.