



# EVERLASTING

JOHN 3:16

## Everlasting: Called

### Large Group Talk 4

**Objective:** In the last lesson, students learned about why Jesus had to die and rise again. They saw how faith in him is the only path to eternal relationship with God. But that's not the end of the story—it's the beginning. In this lesson, students will discover the calling Jesus places on our lives and a few important instructions for how to influence our cultures. He asks us to be like salt: distinct from our surroundings and demonstrating the radical life God wants for us. And he calls us to be like light: displaying the good news of Jesus within a world of darkness. If we become too much like our culture or hide ourselves from others entirely, we are avoiding our calling that started when we began following Jesus.

#### **Introduction:**

**Say Something Like:** *Have you ever hiked or climbed up a mountain? You push yourself to the limit, always moving toward the peak above you. Many things hold you back or make you want to give up: exhaustion, thirst, soreness, frustration. But as the pinnacle above you gets closer and closer, you somehow find the energy to strive forward. Finally you make it to the summit, only to realize that this isn't actually the top of the mountain—it's a false peak. This shorter summit blocked the actual peak from view, and you still have a long way to go.*

*The last lesson about the moment we follow Jesus was probably powerful. You may have renewed your commitment to worship him as the only Lord of your life, or maybe even placed your faith in him for the first time. That's fantastic! There's nothing quite like first discovering the freedom and love of Christ. Yet some people act like that's the end of their journey. They celebrate as if they've reached the summit, but they're actually standing on a false peak. The moment you first follow Christ is a milestone—perhaps the most important moment of your life. Unlike a false peak, which can be completely demotivating, it enables you to start the real adventure God has in mind for you. It's only the beginning!*

**Illustration Option 1: After 'The Biggest Loser.'** If you've ever watched the NBC reality television show "The Biggest Loser," you know that each season ends with one person standing on a stage, showered by confetti and applause. Comparison shots show the winner's dramatic weight loss. Often, they look like a completely different person. This is a moment of triumph for the winning contestant, but it's not the end of their work. In fact, it's more of a starting point.

Most of the show's contestants have discovered the hard way that their new lifestyles can't just end when the show is over. Nearly all of season 8's contestants have regained significant weight since leaving the show. Some weigh more now than they did when they started. The celebration at the season finale marks the beginning of a new life for these contestants. They must choose on a daily basis whether they will continue living into that new life or drift back into their old habits. You can read more about the challenges faced by former contestants on "The Biggest Loser" in this article:  
[www.nytimes.com/2016/05/02/health/biggest-loser-weight-loss.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/02/health/biggest-loser-weight-loss.html?_r=0)

**Illustration Option 2: Gym or Spa?** The moment we start following Christ, it's as if we're given a membership to a new life. But many people are confused about what type of membership it is. They think that, by giving their lives to Jesus, they've signed up for membership at a spa. These people expect their lives to get easier. They think they'll be pampered and that all their troubles will disappear in a puff of smoke. But that's not what membership in God's kingdom really looks like.

It's closer to a membership at a gym. We follow Jesus so that we'll grow and transform in dynamic ways. We're put through struggles to develop our spiritual muscles. That may not sound like a lot of fun. Most of us would rather spend a day at the spa than a day at the gym. But ultimately, the gym is more rewarding.

**Say Something Like:** *Following Christ may not be comfortable or easy, but it is far more satisfying than a purposeless life. God develops us into mature disciples to fulfill the things he made us for in the first place. What are those purposes? Remember back to the first lesson—God made us to love him, to glorify him, and to bless the world by sharing his will.*

*In Matthew 5, Jesus tells his followers they will change the world. (He's right: Because of Jesus' earliest disciples, we are still talking about Jesus 2,000 years later!) He tells them to do two things in order to accomplish this, using everyday symbols to explain why. Let's take a look at this passage together.*

**Read Matthew 5:13–16:**

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

## **Teaching: Called**

### **1. World-changing**

**Say Something Like:** *We'll dig into the salt and light part of this passage in a minute, but first I want you to notice the scale of what Jesus is talking about. You are the salt of the entire earth. The light of the whole world. Not of your home or your town or even your country. Jesus enables you to influence the entire world, all of creation, and all people.*

*Jesus would never say that you can't make a difference. He is telling a small number of people that the whole world needs them. Jesus calls people back into relationship with the Father for a very important reason: so they can serve the world. We too are called, like the first disciples, to be world-changers.*

**Illustration: The Cruise Ship Church.** Do you ever think about what people from ancient times would think if they saw a cruise ship today? For them boats were vital to life—for fishing, transport, and battle. The sea was dangerous; it should never be taken on unless there was a good reason.

But over time, our relationship with boats has changed. Boats used to serve practical purposes, but now many of us only use boats as giant floating amusement parks. Ancient people would no doubt be confused—maybe horrified—to see us doing something that seems so frivolous.

Do you think people can treat God's kingdom like a cruise ship? People in the early Church gave their time, energy, and lives to spread the good news of Jesus. But many of us are content to use church like a cruise ship, a place to be comfortable and entertained. If we don't listen to Jesus' call to be world changing, we can become like people on a cruise ship going nowhere.

**Ask:** What is one way you've chosen to be comfortable instead of world changing?

**Say Something Like:** *God made us to make a difference. Sin got in the way of that purpose, but Jesus died and rose again to remove that hurdle. How ironic would it be if he did all of that only for us to ignore our purpose after giving our lives to him? To ensure that we are the world changers we were saved to be, Jesus calls us to be like salt and light. He warns us against two easy ways we can lose our power to make a difference.*

### **2. Salt of the Earth**

**Say Something Like:** *First, Jesus calls his followers to be "salt." Just as in cooking today, salt played a large part in the cuisine of Jesus' day. But unlike today, salt wasn't just sprinkled into dishes to give them a little flavor. They caked salt onto food to*

*preserve it and keep it safe for eating, to marinate meats, and to season fresh food. Salt made food edible.*

**Illustration: The ‘Chopped’ Mistake.** Show a clip from the show “Chopped” or talk about its premise. Say something like: “On the show ‘Chopped,’ talented chefs have to work quickly with difficult ingredients to create meals for tough judges. In this environment, you might think the biggest struggle would be working with crazy ingredients like stale birthday cake, or preparing an entire meal in just 20 minutes. But one of the top judges on “Chopped” says the biggest mistake comes down to just one thing: salt.

Here’s what judge Geoffrey Zakarian says about the dishes he’s tasted on the show: “Nobody puts salt and pepper in their food. Amazing. Shocking.” Salt is simple, but so, so powerful! It can make or break a dish on “Chopped,” and according to Jesus, it can change the world!

(More of Geoffrey Zakarian’s interview can be found here. <http://blog.foodnetwork.com/fn-dish/tag/geoffrey-zakarian/page/3/>).

**Say Something Like:** *Salt is often one of the most important ingredients in a dish, no matter what else is in it, because of what salt does. While salt has its own distinct taste, its most important role in a dish is to draw out other flavors. Salt adds its own flavor and draws out the best of what is already in a dish.*

*That is what Jesus says we should be: the salt of the earth. We can draw all the best flavors out of God’s creation. As individuals, we should live the life that God called us to in Christ. Together, we should love each other and God in a way that shows how great life can be. At its best, that’s what followers of Jesus have done. They have produced great art, cured disease, healed broken communities, called people out of addiction and despair, and reconnected lost people to God.*

*But Jesus warns that we can only do that if we stay salty. If we revert to the patterns of life we lived before we knew Jesus—if we fail to love others, if we don’t work on our relationship with God, if we look just like our surrounding culture—then we are useless.*

**Illustration: Road Salt.** If you live in a place that gets really cold, then you know there’s another use for salt. It can be thrown out onto the ground to absorb water and keep roads and sidewalks from getting icy. Can you imagine scooping up a handful of road salt and putting it on your French fries? No one would ever do that! Why? Because road salt absorbs water and dirt and other things as it sits on the ground. Would you want your fries to taste like asphalt? If we start to look too much like the people around us, we will lose the things that make us distinct and draw people to the life Jesus wants for them. Jesus says that salt that loses its salty flavor is no longer useful to cook with. And if we aren’t flavored with the markers of a God-honoring life, we’re less like cooking salt and more like road salt.

**Say Something Like:** *We can't be salt if we aren't salty. We can't change the world if we haven't been changed, or if we go back to the way we lived before following Jesus. The call to be the salt of the earth is a call to live for Jesus without falling back into our old way of life. It's a call to bring out all that is great in the world God created by showing how Jesus is unique.*

### 3. Light of the World

**Say Something Like:** *Second, Jesus calls his followers to be "light." He says that his people are a city on a hill that shouldn't be hidden. This is light like the lights in Las Vegas, or the bat signal. Remember from the last lesson that Jesus describes himself as light. So when he says that we should shine light into the world, you can probably guess what light he's talking about. We are to live out our lives in view of others and in a way that inspires others to join us in the light of Jesus.*

**Illustration: The Lighthouse.** Followers of Jesus are like a lighthouse in a storm. Take a look at this animated short called *Lighthouse*. In it, a group of townspeople must come together to direct a ship away from a terrible fate: (<http://www.shortcharlie.com/Liberty-Mutual-Lighthouse>)

**Say Something Like:** *People in our world are like the ship in the storm, desperate for hope and searching for something to guide them. Just as we were, they're pummeled and tormented by the effects of sin. Jesus says they are looking for him, and they'll find him when we shine his light into the darkness.*

*That's where Jesus' second warning comes in. We shouldn't hide the light we have. It can be tempting to stay "salty" by removing ourselves from culture. We may be tempted to completely avoid people who don't know Jesus and live lifestyles we don't like. Many followers of Christ have only friends who also follow Christ. They spend most of their free time in church or with other followers of Jesus. This is what Jesus warns us about in this passage.*

*We should remain faithful to Jesus and stay salty, but we must do this while engaging openly with a world that needs him as badly as a lost sailor needs a safe place to land. We must be willing to step out into the world and shine Jesus' light at school, on our sports teams, and anywhere we have influence.*

### Putting It All Together:

**Say Something Like:** *As we wrap up, let's connect these dots. We've learned that we can and should influence the world for Jesus. That's why we don't go straight to heaven when we start following him. Jesus gives us two important instructions to fulfill this purpose. We should stay faithful to his teachings and live a life that brings out the best in the world he created. And we should live out that faithful life in full view of the world, connecting with people we might want to avoid and seeking relationships with others who need Jesus.*

## Large Group Talk 4: Called

*We do all of this because Jesus has saved us, changed us, and empowered us with his Spirit to influence the entire world.*

**[Speaker note:** The following questions will be discussed deeper in the small group lesson]

**Question 1:** What threatens to take away your “saltiness?”

**Question 2:** Where is God calling you to shine the light of Jesus?

**Looking Forward:** Let the students know that this is the final Large Group lesson. Be sure to give them any instructions they might need to go from here.

*\*LeaderTreks recommends watching all video clips and visiting all websites in this lesson before sharing them with students. These links are optional and not required in order to lead an effective large group talk. Websites often change, and links may not always have the same result. LeaderTreks will do its best to keep them updated and fresh; however, in the event that they do not function properly, we cannot retain responsibility.*

*\*\*Any reference within this piece to Internet addresses of websites not under the administration of LeaderTreks is not to be taken as an endorsement of these websites by LeaderTreks; neither does LeaderTreks vouch for their content.*