

Public figures face criticism if they start slacking off. Politicians, sports players, and performers--we expect them to give it all they've got. They all had to work hard to get elected, chosen for a team, or to land a part in a play. But once they're there, if they slack off, we give them a hard time.

This danger threatens us all, even if we don't go public. We work hard for our hopes and dreams, but we don't always keep up the effort. When you fall in love with someone, you do your best to get married. When you interview for a job, you convince the company you've got what it takes. But once we've achieved our dreams, we face the temptation to work less hard. We can get by with less; we don't have to impress as much. Our relationships and our work can grow slack; so can our faith.

One reason Matthew wrote his gospel was to bolster the faith of Christians growing slack. In the sermon on the mount, you can bet Matthew wanted those sunshine Christians to listen up at the part about salt and light. In the story, Jesus is motivating his new recruits in discipleship, but you can hear him talk through to the next generation, to some old hands who had grown slack. Salt is a great preservative, unless it's lost its flavor. Light provides life for all, unless you cover it with a bucket. While he inspires the new disciples, he scolds the experienced ones: "Your faith will produce powerful results, unless you neglect it."

Sometimes we cruise along very well with our faith, but other times, it seems like something's missing--like the old fire isn't as bright, or like the salt has lost its tang. It may be time to ask a few questions: Am I praying regularly? Do I have a community of friends in faith? Am I trying to learn more about my religion? Is serving others a regular feature in my life?

If we've slacked off, the flavor and the fire can return when we recommit ourselves to faith.