

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

ACTIVATED

Vol 23 • Issue 11

THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

Letting it shine

The Formula

How to perform God's
work

The Christian Profile

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blossom



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

LIGHT VS. DARK

According to an allegory that can be found in various places on the internet, there was once a dark cave deep in the earth that had never seen light and couldn't imagine what it might be like. One day, the sun sent the cave an invitation to come up and visit. When the cave did so, it was amazed and delighted and wanted to return the kindness, so it invited the sun to come down to visit it sometime, because the sun had never seen darkness. But when the sun arrived and entered the cave with curiosity at what "darkness" would be like, it was puzzled, and said, "I don't see any difference!"

The world can seem a pretty dark place at times—a loved one going through a scary illness, a child struggling with bullying, a story on the news about a tragedy or natural disaster. Darkness can also enter our relationships through bitterness, resentment, the feeling of being misunderstood, or the refusal to try to understand. And sometimes we make poor choices or give in to our weaknesses, letting the darkness create rifts and wounds that can last a long time.

But what the story of the cave shows is that darkness simply cannot exist in the presence of light. The most oppressive darkness is helpless in the presence of the light. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it."¹

Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."² He also says, "*You* are the light of the world. ... Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."³

In these mirrored passages, Jesus, who is the light of the world, in turn calls His followers the light of the world. That's pretty awesome, but it's also a challenge. No matter how dark the world may seem at times, it is both our responsibility and privilege to shine His light into the darkest corners of the world, so that people everywhere can have the opportunity to see and come to know Him for themselves.

1. John 1:5 NLT

2. John 8:12 NIV

3. Matthew 5:14–16 NIV, emphasis added

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THE CHRISTIAN PROFILE



THE EPISTLE TO DIOGNETUS WAS WRITTEN BY AN UNNAMED CHRISTIAN TO A HIGH-RANKING PAGAN, probably in the late second century. Perhaps the earliest preserved explanation and defense of the Christian faith to a nonbeliever, it provides insight as to how early Christians viewed the world and their place in it. The attributes the author lists in chapter 5, “The Manners of Christians,” provide food for thought for us today. Excerpts from the J.B. Lightfoot translation state:

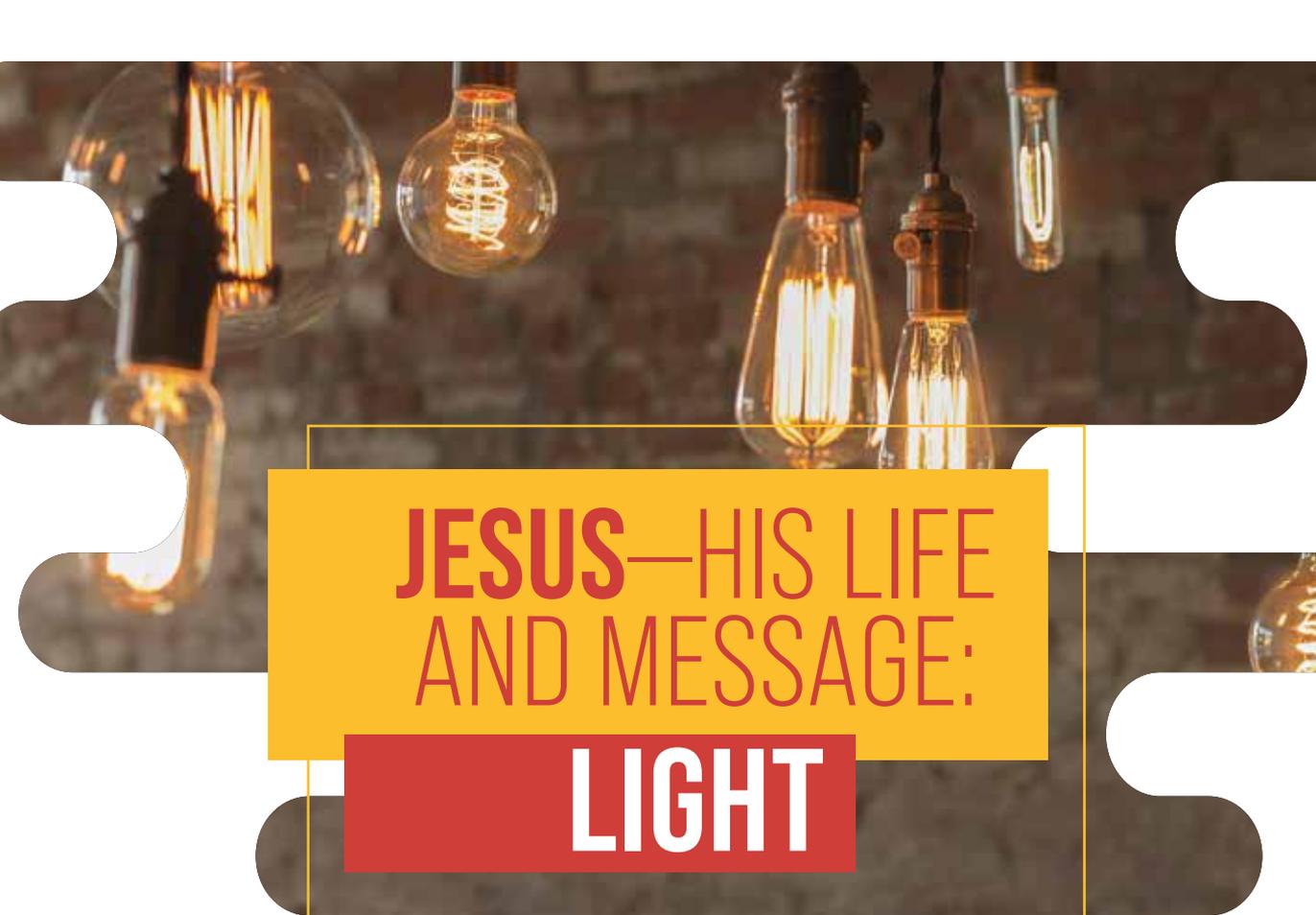


Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language, or custom. For nowhere do they live in cities of their own, nor do they speak some unusual dialect, nor do they practice an eccentric lifestyle. ... While they live in both Greek and barbarian cities, as each one’s lot was cast, and follow the local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life, at the same time they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own spiritual citizenship.

They live in their own countries, but only as aliens; they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign. ... They are “in the flesh,” but do not live “according to the flesh.” They live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws; indeed, in their private lives they transcend the laws.

They love everyone. ... They are put to death, yet they are brought to life. ... They are in need of everything, yet they abound in everything. ... They are dishonored, yet they are glorified in their dishonor. They are slandered, yet they are vindicated. They are cursed, yet they bless. They are insulted, yet they offer respect. ... When they are punished, they rejoice as though brought to life. ... Those who hate them are unable to give a reason for their hostility.

In a word, what the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians throughout the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, but is not of the body; likewise, Christians dwell in the world, but are not of the world. The soul, which is invisible, is confined in the body, which is visible; in the same way, Christians are recognized as being in the world, and yet their religion remains invisible. ■



JESUS—HIS LIFE AND MESSAGE: LIGHT

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

SHORTLY AFTER JESUS TAUGHT HIS DISCIPLES HOW TO PRAY,¹ He proceeded to speak about light in three short sayings. He started with a reference to physical light, and then moved on to speak of the light that is within us.

No one lights a lamp and then hides it or puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where its light can be seen by all who enter the house.²

The lamp spoken of could either be a lamp with a candlestick inside it or an oil-burning lamp, the latter being more likely. It would make no sense to light a lamp

and then put it in a place where its light would serve no purpose and no one would benefit from it.

Jesus and His message are associated with light throughout the Gospels.

The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.³

Elsewhere in the New Testament we read of light in reference to those who believe in Jesus.

Once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light!⁴

Jesus and His message—the Light—are not to be hidden. They are to be widely proclaimed through His ministry, through His disciples, and through believers across time. If the message is rejected by some, it's not because it's a hidden or secret teaching; it's that after hearing the message, the hearer has chosen to reject it.

1. See Luke 11:1–4.

2. Luke 11:33 NLT

3. John 1:4 NLT

4. Ephesians 5:8 NLT



Jesus followed with the second saying:

Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light. But when it is unhealthy, your body is filled with darkness.⁵

According to medical understanding in ancient times, the eyes didn't allow light to come in, but rather people had light within them and this light came out of their eyes, which caused them to see. Jesus' saying reflects this ancient concept. The hearers would have understood that Jesus was referring to the eyes as the source of light emanating from the body, which could be either healthy or unhealthy. If the eye is healthy, it indicates that the person is inwardly full of light, which the eye is emitting. However, if the eye is unhealthy and thus not emitting light, it shows that the person is full of darkness.

Jesus was speaking about a person's inner self, their spiritual condition. If the eye wasn't healthy, then the inner being of the person was dark, without any spiritual light—they were morally unhealthy. The healthy eye is understood as belonging to one who is focused on the good, whom God has filled with light.

You, Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.⁶

The people who rejected Jesus' message were those whose eye—their inner self—was full of darkness. Jesus then warned:

Make sure that the light you think you have is not actually darkness. If you are filled with light, with no dark corners, then your whole life will be radiant, as though a floodlight were filling you with light.⁷

He stated that the things which guide one's thoughts, life, decision-making, etc., need to come from the light; and therefore, people need to do all they can to watch that the light within them is true light, that they are spiritually healthy.

The light inside of believers will shine out, like a lamp that is lit. Those who believe in Him and His teachings, without any hardness of heart, are inwardly spiritually healthy, full of light. They will shine with Jesus' light in the same way someone in a dark room stands out when a light is shining on them.

There seems to be a progression in these three verses. Jesus is the light, placed where all can see. A person's spiritual health is determined by their response to the light. Those who take in Jesus' light will be spiritually healthy, and as such they will brightly shine and give off light. They will reflect the light of Jesus to others through the way they live and the love they show. This is contrasted with those who reject Jesus, whose eye is bad and therefore are full of darkness. The message is to embrace the light, to believe in Jesus. Those who have light within are able to be guided by God, make right choices, and be His light to others.

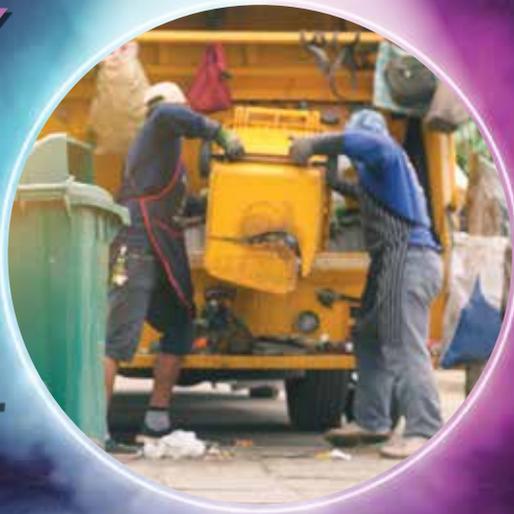
PETER AMSTERDAM AND HIS WIFE, MARIA FONTAINE, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE. ■

5. Luke 11:34 NLT

6. Psalm 18:28 NIV

7. Luke 11:35–36 NLT

A RAY OF LIGHT IN THE DARK



BY IRIS RICHARD

I WAS ON MY WAY TO AN IMPORTANT APPOINTMENT, which unfortunately was scheduled during the city's much-dreaded morning rush hour. If at all possible, I try to plan my day in such a way that I can skip being on the road during that time.

When I headed out the door, I hoped that it would be different that day, but to my dismay I soon got stuck in a slow-moving traffic jam. And to make matters worse, one of those old decrepit garbage dump trucks with an open back had pulled out of an apartment block right in front of me.

In Kenya, trash is a coveted commodity. Most discarded items still have value for someone, and recycling is done at the city's huge garbage dumps by people who live there in hovels and cardboard huts.

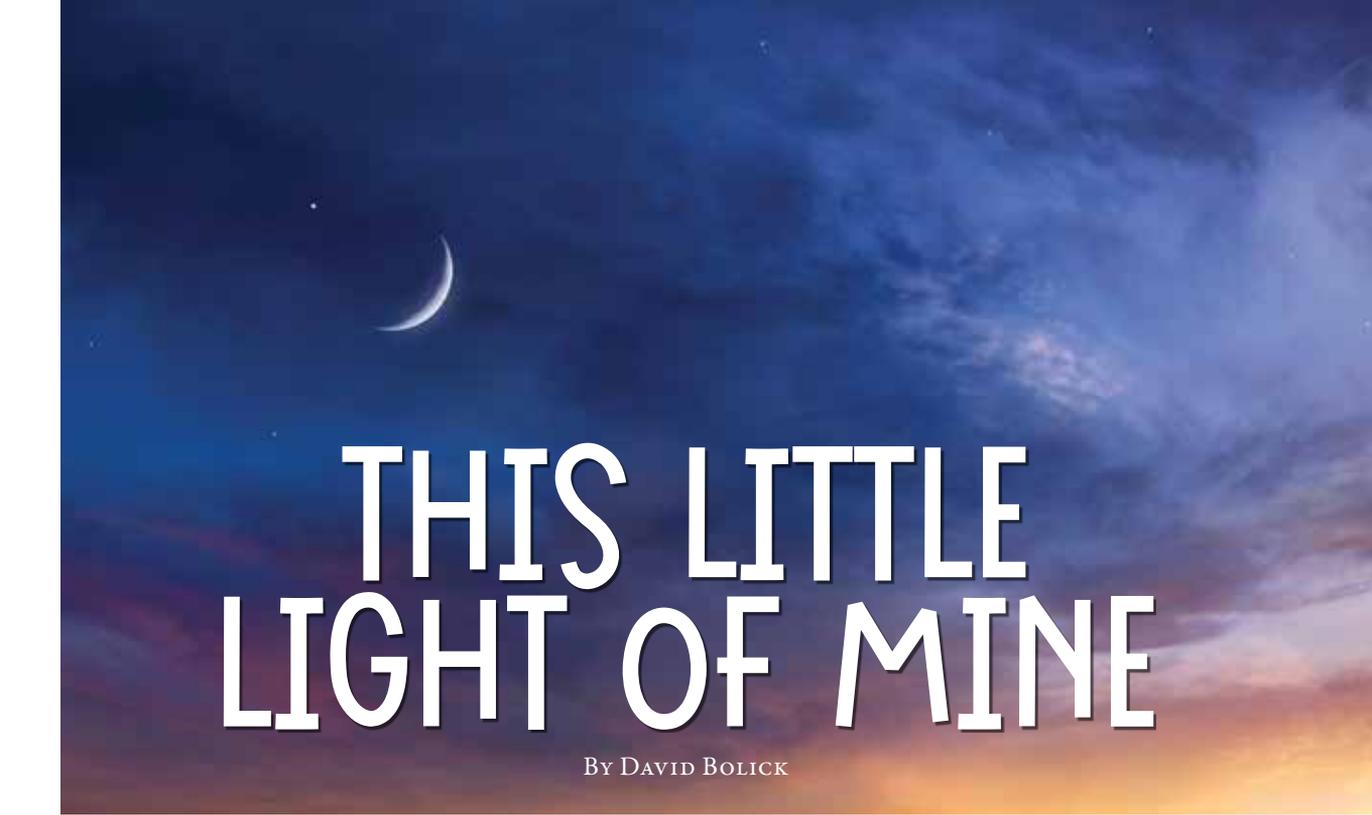
Most of the refuse-collecting vehicles are decades old, and the outside looks as dreadful as the contents. This truck was so old that it creaked loudly, spewed diesel fumes, and surrounded everyone in close proximity with a cloud of intrusive stench. As if someone had tried to make it a more pleasant sight, it was decorated with discarded toys, old shoes and bits of Christmas decorations that

dangled from strings off the sides. I wrinkled my nose and felt like swearing at the bad luck—not only the traffic jam, but being jammed behind the worst possible vehicle.

Then I noticed the three garbage collectors dressed in rags sitting in the midst of the heap of refuse on the open-back truck. One of the men was reading to the others from a large book—a Bible. Their faces held a serene expression, and they seemed to be quite oblivious to their awful surroundings.

As I sat in my car, watching this incongruent scene, it got me thinking about God. Despite the jam, praise began to form on my lips and lifted my gloomy mood. Soon the traffic jam dissolved and the truck turned into a side street. But the silent testimony of God's presence in the midst of refuse and trash, and how these humble workers had partaken of something divine, stuck with me. I drove on, happy to have left the traffic jam behind, but touched by what I had witnessed.

IRIS RICHARD IS A COUNSELOR IN KENYA, WHERE SHE HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEER WORK SINCE 1995. ■



THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

BY DAVID BOLICK

THE OTHER EVENING, my wife and I watched the sunset from our terrace, and we stayed until stars came out. As usual, the evening star was the first to appear. An hour or so later, it was still the brightest light in the sky on this moonless night, its steady gleam easily outshining the twinkling competition.

The evening star had an unfair advantage, of course, since it is actually the planet Venus, masquerading as a star. Like the moon, it emits no light but merely reflects light from the sun.

It struck me that if the moon and Venus can beam that brightly, as dull-surfaced and void of light as they are in themselves, I need not worry so much about my own spiritual reflective index—my degree of goodness or godliness, as perceived by myself or others. All I really have to do is be there to reflect God's light when He shines on me. That realization doesn't give

1. 1 Corinthians 13:12 KJV
2. See Romans 1:20.
3. Matthew 5:16

me license to let myself go and become a spiritual slob, but it's liberating to know I don't have to try to appear to be something I'm not.

That experience put a new spin on a phrase from a familiar Bible verse—"Now we see through a glass darkly."¹ I had always applied that to my perception of God and spiritual realities, but now I see that it also applies to how others see God reflected in me. No matter how I may try, I can't change my own nature any more than a planet or moon can transform itself into a star. That transformation is something that God does as He shines on me. I may not be the most brilliant, reflective surface, but His light is sufficiently bright to make me one of His stars.

SHINE ON

Light can only be seen as it is reflected by objects, but even a speck of dust, as small as it is, can sparkle like a diamond if it will get in the sunshine. If the dust weren't there, you couldn't see the light, and if the light weren't there, you couldn't see the dust. It takes both. The Creator is seen in the reflection of His creations.² So "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."³

DAVID BOLICK IS A LANGUAGE CONSULTANT AND TRANSLATOR, AND A READER IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH. HE LIVES IN GUADALAJARA, MEXICO. ■

LET THERE

BY KOOS STENGER

I HEARD A BEAUTIFUL TESTIMONY RECOUNTED BY DUTCH EVANGELIST CORRIE TEN BOOM. She told about a visit to a prison situated somewhere in the African bush. The atmosphere was dark and oppressive, and most of the inmates did not even have a roof above their heads and had to stay outside most of the time, shoved together in a mass of broken humanity. They were surrounded by barbed wire and nervous, armed guards with itchy fingers, who would not think twice about pulling the trigger.

There, in that wretched pit of despair, these men had to suffer for their crimes. Sometimes they sat unprotected under the scorching sun, while at other times they were being whipped by the lashes of a relentless rainstorm that caused their lean, gaunt bodies to shiver with cold.

She was an evangelist, and on the day of her visit it had just been storming. The place had turned into a giant mud pool full of suffering people with faces that showed despondent misery. Here, the word hope had lost its meaning. Telling these folks about the goodness of God seemed like a mockery. How could she tell these people that God was good, and that He was good *all the time*?

The powers of darkness are cunning, very smart in their wickedness, and extremely good at cultivating evil. In order to convince lost souls that God is a lie and that the only thing to look forward to is hell

on earth and hell in the hereafter, darkness seeks to immerse men in so much oppression and with such impenetrable gloom that all sense of right and wrong becomes meaningless. All that remains is a relentless struggle for self-preservation, where no acts of selfishness will be shunned.

That is the power of wickedness in the hour of darkness.

Corrie had been in prison herself as an adult woman, sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp for her family's brave decision to shelter Jews from the Nazis occupying Holland. So she remembered her own days of suffering and her struggles with the temptation to yield to the lie that God had forgotten her.

But He had not.

The very fact that she had joined in the fight to wash this world clean with the light of the Gospel was witness enough. But how could she convince these muddy, hopeless folks, who stared at her with empty eyes, of His great faithfulness?

What these folks need is joy.

It came to her in a flash of inspiration. This place needed joy. Real joy, the kind that comes from deep within. Supernatural joy. Not the joy of this temporal world, but the joy that builds a bridge into eternity.

And so she prayed. It was a simple prayer, but one with conviction. "Lord, fill me with such joy that it

LET THERE BE LIGHT

will spill out to these prisoners. This darkness is too deep for me, but You have overcome the world.”

She began to speak.

And just like that, joy welled up in her heart, and just as she had prayed, it touched the men in the mud. First one, then another, until at last it spread throughout the entire crowd. Hope rained down on these miserable men who for the first time understood why Jesus had come to this earth, and before long the whole wretched place was transformed. Not by the wisdom of man or the smart sayings of a skilled speaker. It was none of that. The Holy Spirit took over and kicked the darkness out.

When she was finished and had to leave, prisoners and guards alike walked past the barbed-wire fence, out of the prison, following their urge to wave goodbye to her in gratitude. Not a shot was fired and not a prisoner escaped. “Come back, dear lady,” they all shouted. “Tell us more about the King of heaven.”

And that is how we fight darkness. Not in our own strength, not by analyzing it or by finding ways to avoid it or outsmart it. But by letting the light in and letting God do what He is best at, which is clobering the darkness with the rod of His love. After all, when He said, “Let there be light,” He meant it, and there was light.

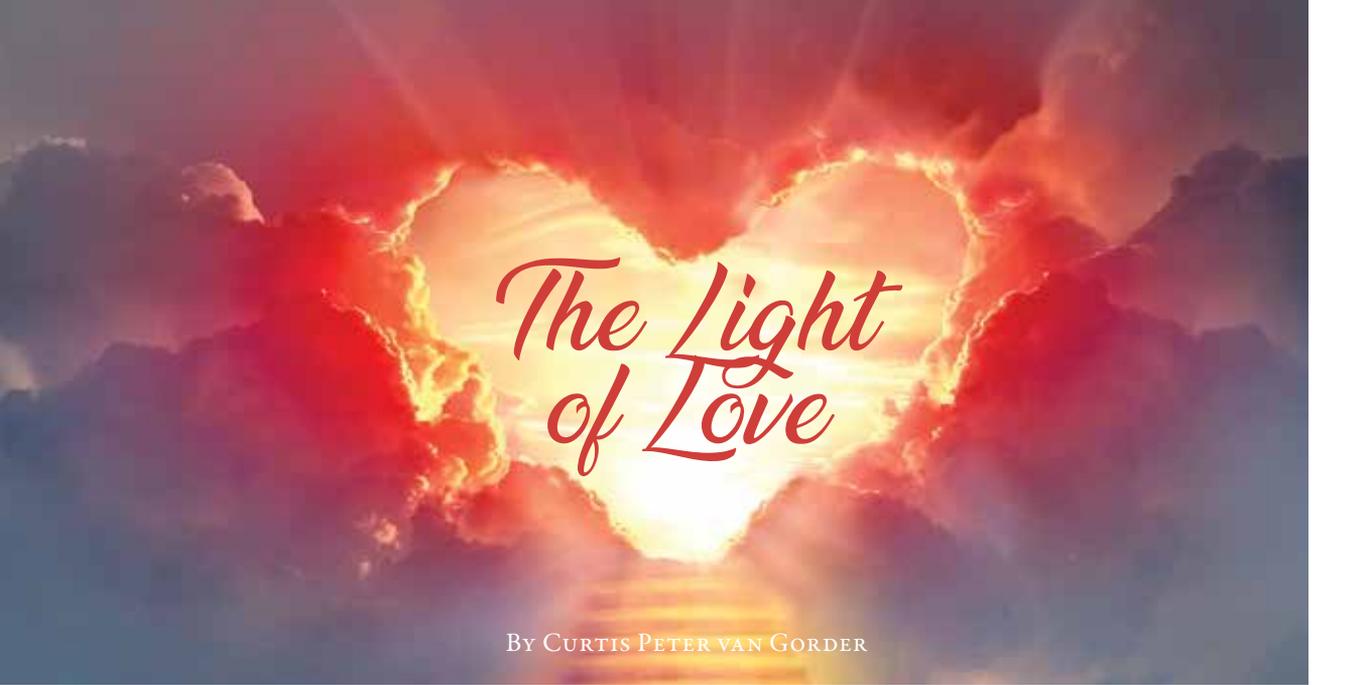
KOOS STENGER IS A FREELANCE WRITER IN THE NETHERLANDS. ■

“

You can let the light of joy in by inviting God’s Son, Jesus, into your life:

Dear Jesus, I believe that You died for me and that You love me. I know I need Your presence in my life, and I open my heart and ask You to come in. Forgive me for my sins. Thank You for Your free gift of everlasting life. Help me to love You and to share Your love, light, and truth with others. Amen.

“



The Light of Love

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

GOD'S WORD TELLS US THAT GOD IS LOVE AND THAT HE WANTS THE WORLD TO BE FILLED WITH THE SAME: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"¹

God's love is seen in action in the Gospels, in the way that Jesus lived: from healing the blind to raising the dead, from caring about children to washing dirty feet, from feeding the multitudes to teaching His followers, and finally, from dying on the cross for our sins to rising from the dead to give us hope that one day we will do the same.

When I was a wedding pastor in Japan, I discovered that the best way to sum up how newlywed couples should love one another is found in 1 Corinthians 13, which is sometimes known as the love chapter. It begins by telling us what love *isn't*—selfish, proud, or rude—then it goes on to tell us how love never gives up and never fails!

Many people tend to be skeptical of love until they see some kind of evidence. In 2009, George Vaillant, the

chief investigator of the Grant Study, which tracked 268 Harvard undergraduates for a period of 80 years with the goal of finding what makes us happy, stated that its findings could be summarized as "Happiness is love. Full stop."²

On another note, a book published in 2011 called *God and the Afterlife*³ has given us more evidence by interviewing thousands of people who had near-death experiences. When asked, "During your experience, did you encounter any specific information/awareness regarding love?" 58.1% of those volunteers said yes. Here is a sampling of their quotes:

"Love was everywhere. It permeated the afterlife. It was incredible."

"I was loved unconditionally despite my faults and fears."

"No human can ever love with the love I felt in that light. It is all-consuming, all-forgiving. Nothing matches it. It is like the day you looked into the eyes of your child for the first time magnified a million times. It's indescribable."

These firsthand accounts tell us a lot about God's love for each of us and how big it is! May we do our part to share His truth and love with others so they can know and experience it for themselves.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST⁴ IN GERMANY. ■

1. Matthew 22:37–39 NLT
2. Stossel, Scott (May 2013). "What Makes Us Happy, Revisited: A new look at the famous Harvard study of what makes people thrive." The Atlantic. Retrieved June 25th, 2017.
3. Jeffrey Long and Paul Perry
4. <http://elixirmime.com>



FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

BY G.L. ELLENS

NONON COULDN'T KEEP BACK THE TEARS AS SHE TOLD ME ABOUT HER SISTER'S DEATH. Her bicycle had hit a hole in the road, and Rani had flown off and landed on her head. She wasn't wearing her helmet that day. Despite being athletic and in good shape, one careless moment was all it took.

Of the two sisters, Rani was the cheerful one, the one with a caring heart. Nonon was more introverted and reclusive and considered herself "the dark one." That all changed in a second. Now Rani lay comatose in an ICU bed with Nonon at her side day and night, trying to encourage her and hold her hand. However, Rani never regained consciousness. Finally, the family realized they had to let her go...

Telling me about the accident and the ICU, I could see Nonon was reliving the grief and heartache all over again. The question "Why?" filled her heart and mind, but she had nowhere to turn for the answer. Raised a nominal Catholic, Nonon had converted to Buddhism to marry her husband. Now she wasn't sure what the truth was.

But now, her sorrow and grief were making her reach out...

I could sense it, but hesitated. I'd never had a deep conversation with her before. She knew I believed in Jesus, but she always took a sarcastic poke at anything I said about religion or faith.

I took a deep breath. "Nonon," I said, "There's a verse in the Bible that says 'Good people pass away; the godly often die before their time. ... No one seems to understand that God is protecting them from the evil to come. For those who follow godly paths will rest in peace when they die.'"¹

As I shared these words with Nonon, it was like a light went on in her soul. "Where is that?" she asked.

I opened the Bible app on my phone and showed her. She immediately motioned her mom to come over, "Mom, look at this!"

A little group of relatives soon gathered around as I read the passage aloud and explained what it meant. Everyone loved Rani. She was cheerful, bright, and always had something kind or loving to say. Nonon had looked up to her as the perfect sister. This verse explains how God sometimes calls people to Himself out of compassion, to protect them and take them away from evil or calamity. It was as if peace and rest had settled over everyone in the room. Finally, they understood why Rani had died and could find peace and comfort in a verse from God's Word.

Since then, Nonon has continued to stay in touch. Every day, I send her quotes and tidbits from God's Word, and she always responds with gratitude.

G.L. ELLENS WAS A MISSIONARY AND SCHOOLTEACHER IN SOUTHEAST ASIA FOR OVER 25 YEARS. ALTHOUGH RETIRED, SHE REMAINS ACTIVE IN VOLUNTEER WORK, AS WELL AS PURSUING HER INTEREST IN WRITING. ■

1. Isaiah 57:1-2 NLT

CONFIDENT CHILDREN

BY ALEX PETERSON

PARENTS WHO ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN'S PROGRESS AT EACH STAGE OF THEIR DEVELOPMENT, as nearly all parents are, need to realize what an important role a child's self-image plays toward that end. Children with positive feelings about themselves, who believe they can succeed, are far more likely to do so.

Children make their first judgments about themselves and their abilities in the context of their home. Parents can find opportunities every day to develop their children's self-confidence, which in the long run will help them grow into well-adjusted, well-rounded adults.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Parents are often amazed to discover how capable and resourceful their children are in solving their own problems, with a little guidance. All children encounter problems, and it is through dealing with such challenges that they learn problem-solving skills that are essential for success later in life. It takes time and patience to help children learn to solve their own problems, but it is a wise investment that will pay big dividends when the children get older, their problems become more complex, and the stakes are higher.

One tendency of parents is to be too quick to fix the problem or provide the answer. That may meet the immediate need, but it hinders the learning process. It's like the saying "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for life."

This is how God works with us. He could solve all of our problems with a snap of His fingers, but instead He



expects us to reason things through, consider our options, and do what we can before He will step in and do what we can't. He involves us in working out the solution and brings us along step by step, not to make life more difficult, but to help us grow from the experience.

INSECURITY ISSUES

No matter how much parents love their children and try to meet their needs, situations will come up that cause children to feel insecure, and insecurity is often reflected in behavioral problems.

Bad behavior needs to be corrected, but unless the parent understands what prompted it, the correction may hinder more than help. Bad behavior is only a symptom, so parents need to identify and work on the root of the problem, the underlying cause.

Depending on the age and maturity level of the child, try to help the child come to his or her own conclusions by approaching the issue from the problem-solving angle. By making a clear distinction between the problem and the child, and then involving the child in turning the problem situation into a learning situation, it is possible to build rather than undermine self-esteem.

Not all children misbehave when they feel insecure; some become withdrawn or underachieve. However the insecurity is manifested, the first step in rectifying the problem is to recognize it, and the second step is to go to work on the cause from a positive angle.

CULTIVATE MUTUAL RESPECT

Mutual respect strengthens the bond of love in a parent-child relationship. It also engenders unity, obedience, and appreciation.

Respect within a family is manifested through such things as consideration, understanding, thoughtfulness, a willingness to listen, and loving communication. And it works both ways; if you want your children to show you respect, show them respect.

Children learn by observation and imitate what they see. If lack of respect is the problem, it probably started with the child's parents, peers, or other influences such as TV, movies, or computer games. Minimizing such negative influences is half the battle; setting clear guidelines as to what's expected and then consistently upholding that standard is the other.

Ways that you can show your children respect include:

- **T**reating each child as an individual
- **B**eing sensitive to their feelings; putting yourself in their position
- **A**sking and suggesting, rather than giving commands
- **P**aying attention when they speak and hearing them out; not being too quick to provide your perspective
- **G**iving their ideas serious consideration; thinking in terms of how you can help their ideas to work



AVOID MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Sometimes it seems that children choose the worst possible times to misbehave, and sometimes it is not so much actual misbehavior as it is annoying behavior. When parents are under pressure, are preoccupied with other work or other thoughts, aren't feeling well, or are simply not in a good mood, that's bound to affect the way they interact with their children.

Avoid such confidence-shattering misunderstandings by catching yourself and putting the questionable behavior in context. "I would love to hear you sing that song again, but right now I need to concentrate on driving." "I have a headache, so I'm going to have to ask you to not do that right now." And if you don't catch yourself in time, an after-the-fact explanation and apology is helpful. By giving the child an opportunity to be part of the solution to your problem, you will have turned a potentially damaging situation into a positive one.

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Praise is a superior motivator. Children thrive on praise. It's often more important and more beneficial to praise a child for good behavior than it is to scold for bad behavior.

Be consistent, be sincere, and be creative—but be believable. For example, if the child tries to do something new with disastrous results, commend the effort, not the outcome. Or if the ill-fated attempt was meant to be a surprise for you, commend the thoughtfulness. Always accentuate the positive, and make the good memorable.

Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.—*Proverbs 22:6 NLT* ■



ENCOURAGEMENT

BY MARIE ALVERO

DURING A RECENT WORK EVALUATION, I was surprised to receive the feedback that my coworkers do not find me especially encouraging. This hit me hard, because I've always considered encouragement one of my strengths, and led me to some deep thinking about what encouragement really is. I realized I was good at "encouraging" people to do something my way, or see something from my point of view, but weak at offering praise that was not attached to an outcome I wanted to see.

What I learned by that insight is that it's easy to confuse encouragement with manipulation. Even without bad intentions, I may have sometimes given the impression that people needed to do something to please me, as opposed to being appreciated for who they are, today, without any improvement.

Once I recognized this trait in myself in a professional setting, I could see the effects of it everywhere else, and nowhere more glaringly than in my parenting. How often did my kids hear something like "You're getting better at that!" or "I know you can do it!"

These comments, while not demoralizing, are very different from "Your hard work today was amazing!" or "I love the enthusiasm you brought to the table!" There's no

qualifier in these statements, and they don't imply that I'd like them to "do even better."

I wish I could wrap this up by telling you that I'm now a modern-day Dale Carnegie, known by everyone around me for being incredibly encouraging, but the truth is, I still have a long way to go. Letting go of expectations, whether for my family, my coworkers or anyone else, is not easy. Sometimes it's hard to recognize that I have expectations, and I also worry that if I don't seem to have expectations, they will make less effort.

But last week, as I signed out of my work's internal messaging system, I told one of my coworkers, "I appreciate your enthusiasm, it inspires me to do my best!" And she responded with a bunch of happy emojis.

Then I texted each of my kids with something I liked about them *that* day, as they were. And I texted my husband too. They were a little surprised, but I hope they get used to it!

MARIE ALVERO IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO AFRICA AND MEXICO. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES A HAPPY, BUSY LIFE WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN IN CENTRAL TEXAS, USA. ■

THE FORMULA

BY NINA KOLE

THE TOPIC OF LETTING GOD WORK THROUGH US IS VERY DEAR TO MY HEART, as I find it encouraging when God chooses unexpected people to do His work, and then helps them to not only do the job, but to do it *brilliantly!*

Moses lamented that he wasn't a very good speaker, yet God chose him to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt. Speaking in front of a crowd is considered the number-one fear of the average person, the number-two being death. So Moses had to have a pretty big amount of trust in God to accept such a public job that was also fraught with so much danger. And sure enough, God came through for him!

The apostle Peter seems to have been a serious hothead at times. He often got into arguments and famously denied knowing Jesus right before He was crucified. But God used him to preach to thousands of people only a few weeks later. God often chooses unexpected people to do wonderful things through them, so that everyone will know it's *His* doing.

Some years ago, I made a trip to Paidha, Uganda, to teach Bible classes. I took along some Christian books and articles I wanted to use. One article I read to the students on this subject pointed out that “We sometimes try too hard, work too hard, and try to do everything ourselves. We must immerse ourselves in Jesus and let Him burn to light the way, because if we try to do that ourselves, we'll soon burn out.”



When I remember to take some time to include Him in my daily life, things work better, run smoother, and are less stressful.

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As you walk with Jesus, resting your head on His heart, you will learn to know His Word, His will, and His ways. You will want to obey Him, not out of forced compliance, but out of heartfelt connection. Your joy will abound as you remain in His love.—*Sue Detweiler*



I used to ask God to help me. Then I asked if I might help Him. I ended up by asking God to do His work through me.—*Hudson Taylor (1832–1905)*

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

FEELING WEARY IN YOUR SOUL?

When you're feeling burned out and overwhelmed, even the thought of your work or the problems you're dealing with is enough to fritz you. Your brain needs a rest.

That's why time spent in My Word is so important, because it is input for your mind, and your mind affects your attitude and your outlook. My Word and other inspirational writings enlighten your mind. As a result, you become inspired and positive, and you realize that My grace will help you to handle the load, the work, the problems, or whatever I allow to come your way.

I see your heart, and I know that your greatest desire is to accomplish good things. But true good will only be accomplished through Me and through My working in you. In order for My Spirit to work in and through you, you must have time with Me.

As you look to Me and draw your answers from Me, you will find that you can enjoy life and the work and responsibilities I've given you. As you put your trust in Me, knowing that I love you and want to bless you, you will find rest and peace for your soul. As you seek Me first, all these other things will be added to you, and you will find that your joy, love, and peace are being restored in full measure.

