

The Light Still Shines in the Darkness



2024 Lenten Devotions
By
Members of Bethany Lutheran Church
Rice Lake, WI

Introduction

“Into the Light” is a print of an original watercolor featured on the cover of this year’s devotional. This inspired watercolor was created by Leni Sovacool (member of Bethany). Here is the artist’s explanation of the painting:

“A young man stands on a deserted road and contemplates his life. Even as he stares into the unknown, there appears over his head, a Light which illuminates his path. He realizes that this is the Light of God...and suddenly he is not alone.”

This offering for the cover is only one of the many offerings throughout this booklet. Members of every age made submissions and you will find entries appropriate for all ages and abilities. Those who helped to put this together offer a prayer that it will inspire you to see the Light and be the LIGHT for others.



A Message from Pastor Arthur

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.
Psalms 36:9

Forces of Light and Darkness

In 1977, I was ten years old. In the same year, George Lucas released Star Wars. Later it was renamed, *A New Hope*. It was unlike any movie I had ever seen. My love affair with Star Wars has only grown over the years. I still watch those films and use them as examples in my confirmation classes.

In many ways, the storyline is nothing more than a space-based version of a morality play. Morality plays had their origin in medieval times. These stories were often one act plays that addressed the tension between good and evil. Star Wars is all about good versus evil. In Star Wars, evil is equated with the dark side of the force while good is equated with the light side of the force.

One of the reasons Star Wars has enjoyed such lasting power is how the viewer is invited to consider the force. Do we admire Luke Skywalker as he comes of age to be a light bearer of the force? Or are we drawn in by Darth Vader who has become a master of the dark side of the force?

So it is true with the Christian way and life. Question. Do we live in the light of God, or do we linger in the darkness of evil? As we begin our 2024 Lenten Journey, we confess those times when we fall prey to the darkness. But even more importantly, we strive to reflect God's light in our homes, workplaces, church, and communities. God bless you, light bearer.



Back in the very old days, before GPS, ships at sea were at risk because they could get lost and fall off course, possibly crashing into a rocky shoreline. Especially on a very dark, stormy night, they needed the bright beam from a lighthouse to navigate safely and steer their ship home. In a similar manner, Jesus shines his light to lead the way for you and me to follow. Think about how Jesus has guided you with His light and how you have guided others with your light, as you color this lighthouse.



Kilauea Lighthouse

Break open your words, let the light shine out, let ordinary people see the meaning ~ Psalm 119:130 (The Message)

The Light that Shines in the Darkness

God is at work in our lives giving us the word of light that shines in our darkness. I am so thankful that the Holy Spirit is working in our lives in “the one holy catholic church, the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” (Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed) Where there is darkness in our lives, there God’s word is breaking open and shining in, bringing new life. I experience this every day. When I am weighed down, choked in darkness by the effects of sin, the Holy Spirit comes with God’s word of forgiveness. I am promised, “your sins are forgiven.”

I am always eager to be in worship to hear these words of forgiveness that break open into the light of new life. Several years ago, I went in for a surgical procedure. I literally thought that I was going to die. As I was being rolled down the hall to surgery, darkness settled in like a dense fog. All of a sudden, the word broke through my anxiety and I remembered “Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7). I relaxed in the arms of Jesus.

There have been times I have felt abandoned. Darkness seemed completely to isolate me from all others. Then the word breaks through and shines in the darkness and I hear, “See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.” (1 John 3:1) This Lenten season is a time to listen for and have the word of God break through the darkness of our lives to prepare us for the new life in Christ.

Dear Jesus, Shine, shine in my darkness, shine in my life that your word might break open to me, the new life in you. Amen



Little Mama

She arrived in a taped cardboard box on the doorstep of the cat rescue and adoption center. A volunteer went to check the donation box and found it. Upon opening the box, the frightened kitten peered out. She was obviously young, but her belly was round and big. Another abandoned pregnant mama cat. But this wasn't a cat, it was a kitten, very pregnant.

After a visit to the vet, it was verified that she was no more than seven months old, having gotten pregnant around five months of age. A kitten having kittens, again. She went right to foster care, where she could birth her babies in quiet and raise them to three months, when they'd be spayed and neutered and put up for adoption.

Though she was but a baby herself, she produced five perfect, tiny kittens. While she had no experience in caring for her babies, her instincts kicked in, and she proved to be a wonderful mother. The babies survived, thrived, and were put up for adoption and all went to good homes. Little Mama, her new name, was now alone, spayed, and surrounded by 50+ other cats at the cat center. She was shy, underweight, but healthy, and waited for her own forever home. It didn't come, and she's there a year later, very patient, hopeful, and seeking pets and love and someone to give her a home.

Little Mama came to the right place to have her babies, and we, too, seek the perfect place for love and acceptance. Most of us head to a church to find the same. We know that Jesus is there to look after us and offer his love and forgiveness. As we head into Lent, we know what to expect. Jesus died an agonizing death for the sins of the world, was buried, and ascended into heaven. Because of this we are promised forgiveness of our sins. Easter is both sad and triumphant. Let us appreciate and rejoice in the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus!





Triple the Blessings!



Several years ago, my husband Larry and I took a late-night walk past the church I was serving in Stockholm, WI. Our nearby parsonage was surrounded by farm fields – oats, corn and alfalfa were everywhere we looked. Suddenly we noticed a few fireflies in the field around us and before our walk ended, more and more appeared, lighting up the hillsides – setting them afire with their glow.

To us, it looked like some sort of “Firefly Society” had called a nighttime meeting in our own backyard. We had never seen so many fireflies in one place – thousands and thousands of them – nor is it likely we will ever see such a miracle again. The brightness literally took our breath away, and we stood very still, not wanting to interrupt their beauty. No matter how we tried to describe it afterward, nothing could compare to actually experiencing it firsthand. It truly was a gift from God. The inner awe we felt lasted for years and years.

That leads us to a principle of “Light” as found in our scripture passage from the Gospel of Matthew 5:14-16.

“Jesus said: ‘You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one, after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.’”

This principle, then, is that God’s Light glorifies Him when others see and comprehend it. **We** are the lampstands that hold up God’s Light for others to see. And as Matthew points out, we do that in order to give glory to Him.

Like a prism, each one of us has the capability to refract the Light in lovely and various colors. Whether it is the brilliant Light of a glorious summer morning, or the muted Light of a cloudy winter evening, God’s Light never fades from our presence. Let us praise His Holy Name as together we step forward into His marvelous Light.



Scripture Text:
Matthew 5: 14-16

Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
~ Psalm 119:105

As I think about the meaning of this Psalm I realize this is central to my daily life. Thy Word is “Instructional” to me because my path in life becomes clearer by letting the light guide me. By attending church and listening to Thy Word, my path is clearer. Meditation results from attending church as one ponders the meaning of the message. An example we heard recently was asking ourselves whether we are more self-centered or more Christ-centered? Once we answer this question truthfully, we can then move ourselves to be more Christ-centered. This is a journey of self-reflection, not a one-time activity. To me, attending church on a regular basis is very much needed as I continue on my path to try and be more Christ-centered.

I need the light to guide me.



Monday, February 19

Jesus...said, 'I am the light of the world.' ~ John 8:12

Optional Bible Readings: Luke 2:1-20; Matthew 1:18-2:12

When Life Feels Dark...Shine Jesus' Light!

Even though they were just humble shepherds, God let them be among the first to see God's amazing light shining right here on earth! That dark night got brilliantly bright in a super way. (You can read the story in the above Bible readings.)

Shine Jesus Light: When you pray for friends or family members, you are asking God to shine God's light into *their* dark times. Or maybe you thank God for the way those people make your life glow! Fill this star with the names of people you can pray for. **What a bright way to shine Jesus' light!**



Adapted: "Stellar Faith
Bible Book"
Stellar VBS - Group Publishing

I was driving out in the country along the road where our lake property is located. It was October and it was 9:00 PM. At that time of year, the majority of the people that have cabins along the road are gone for the winter. On the other side of the road there is swampland and woods.

It was a cloudy night with a full moon. The clouds were moving fast in the wind and when you looked up at the sky the moonlight and dark clouds painted the perfect Halloween backdrop-eerie and scary especially out in the country 20 miles from town with nobody around.

Suddenly I came upon one of the resorts. Even though it was closed, the parking lot was well lit and provided comfort in the bright lights on a dark road, telling me I was ok. Just like those streetlights shining through the darkness, so does God's light shine through the darkness we may experience to light up the way and let us know we are safe.



God Is Light

*Lord, give me a warm heart,
a spirit that is bright...
let me see everything
through Your amazing light.
Let me see morning's dawn,
even when it's bleak.*

*Let me see your splendor
whenever You I seek.
Let me be grateful
for each new day given.*

*Let me be thankful
even when storm-driven.*

*Let me see the sunshine
even when there's rain.*

*Let me see the blue skies
even when I'm in pain.*

*Lord, keep my heart warm,
uphold my spirit bright...
so when the night turns dark
I'll see Your amazing light!*

by Deborah Ann Belka



For it is God who said, 'Light will shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. ~ 2 Corinthians 4:6

The Light Within Us

In Minneapolis, at Orchestra Hall, while attending a St. Olaf concert, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people mirroring adoration of Christ through their words and music. It was such a powerful immersion that I gasped. It was as though we all were in a special world of inclusiveness and the joy to be a member of this celebration was so unique. They were mirroring collectively who each of us is individually in the eyes of God. If only we could see each other that way all of the time - that God is here now and each of us is His beloved child. We have each been His beloved before we were born. We are all connected to each other. There are no strangers. We all belong. I have thought about that concert many times since then. We are all the beloved. God dwells in each of us.



Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may be innocent and pure as God's perfect children who live in a world of corrupt and sinful people. You must shine among them like the stars lighting up the sky. ~ Philippians 2:14-15

The word 'shine' (or light) is so appropriate to show God's love and guidance. The very function of light is to give sight, guidance (direction), security, hope and comfort. In this reading we are told about the darkness of the world, the corruption and the sin. It seems that our world has many people and situations that only create pain and suffering for its people. As Christians, we are to show God's caring love to others by what we say and what we do. Sometimes when we talk about 'God's Light,' I picture a big flashlight in my mind. Each one of us is a beam to reach out and share kind words and acts.

Heavenly Father, As we get to know and understand your love, help us to make our beams grow brighter and brighter and shine brightness into the darkness. In Jesus' Name. Amen



*That is why God says in the scripture, "Awake O sleeper, and rise up from the dead; and Christ shall give you light."
~ Ephesians 5:13-14.*

As I read that scripture, I picture the many prisoners cast away by society. Many or some will come to know God during this time and change their life around, becoming an instrument of God. We should judge no one, because we do not know what God wants to do with them. Don't try to put yourself in God's place, because we are not qualified.

Just in the state of Wisconsin there are 37 state correctional facilities, 18 of them state prisons. As of Oct. 2023, there are 344 people incarcerated for every 100,000 residents in Wisconsin. When you think of all those dark souls huddled on their prison beds you wonder what they could be thinking or even dreaming about. How many even have hope for a better life. That is when we need to pray for all the chaplains that work for the prison system. Praying that they are able to awake some of these dark souls and shine Jesus' light, giving some of these men and women hope for a better future with their Lord Jesus Christ, the light of the world.



*The night is almost over. The day of salvation will soon be here.
~ Romans 13:12*

Lent is a time of preparation to celebrate the Resurrection. As we experience Lent this year, here are some gems that may challenge us to reflect and may also offer some encouragement and hope. Many of these contemplations are taken from Richard Rohr's book Falling Upward.

- *"Human life is best lived from the inside out. Let's be God focused."*
- *"Justice is possible; It's not Just Us."*
- *"Grace is for the taking. It is a free gift from God."*
- *"Either God is in all things, or He is in nothing. It is our choice."*
- *"We are not here on earth to save our souls. That's already been done for us. We are already the Body of Christ."*

Grace and Peace to all of you.



*There are many who say, 'Who will show us some good?'
Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord! ~ Psalm 4:6*

I don't see well close up without a pair of "cheaters." Things are fuzzy and I strain to make out words. I am not totally in the dark without glasses, yet I can give myself a headache from trying to focus on what the book says. It is like that with me and God. I struggle to see Him in times of darkness in my life. The death of a loved one, the diagnosis of cancer to a dear friend, a disappointment in my life. Yet, I know through my darkest moments, God is with me even if I can't see him clearly. When I struggle to see him and give myself a headache, I need to remember that God can be my glasses and help me focus on him.

*Dear God, thank you for helping me see clearly and
focus on you when I'm in darkness. Amen*



But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. ~ Proverbs 4:18

As I read this verse, my mind visualizes a winding path, lined by green foliage and beams of soft light streaming through trees gently lighting and giving guidance for my journey. To me, the Proverbs "path" is the gift of life given to each of us. The light is the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God's love, and the light of Jesus with us throughout our life, which at times when our faith is weak, may be dimmed, because our faith is not leading us as strongly to make the best choices... and at other times rather brilliant when our faith is clearly leading us where we need to go and be.

As we seek to grow in our spiritual life the light grows brighter and the way of the path clearer. There is no promise that even when the path is brightly lit, that life will be without difficult times of hurt, pain, loss, struggles, temptations, and challenges of all kinds. But we always have the promise of God's love and presence with us to give strength, courage, hope and guidance on our path of life. I am reminded of a Bethany Choir favorite:

"WALK IN THE LIGHT"

Walk in the light, beautiful light,

Come where the dewdrops of mercy shine bright.

Shine all around us by day and by night,

Jesus, the Light of The World.



Having gifts that differ according to the grace given us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in his liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.” ~ Romans 12:6-8

Back in the mid 1930's, in the middle of the Depression, an Iowa farm boy felt called to be a Lutheran minister. He had worked as a farmhand for a few years, but he and his parents had very little money to afford college. Eventually, in 1938 with some support from his family (he always said, "Dad would have given me the shirt off of his back to help me go to college.") and the promise of a part time job, he enrolled at Wartburg College. He loved college life, especially the athletics, and was a three-sport athlete. Things went well until his sophomore year when he took Greek which was a requirement for seminary. After getting a "D" in Greek he feared that he would never be accepted into seminary and reach his goal of becoming a minister. Because of that and continued financial difficulties, he went to his football coach and tearfully told him that he was leaving college. His coach wisely pointed out that there were many ways to serve God besides being a minister and that with his love for athletics he should consider becoming a teacher and a coach.

He stayed in college and went on to become a successful teacher and coach as well as an active member of his church and community. He *"let his light shine"* in his teaching and coaching roles, by teaching Sunday School and confirmation classes, by sharing his abundant garden produce with many friends and other community members, and by his many community and volunteer activities. His faith was a central part of all aspects of his life and was evident in all he did.

My Dad was my best example of the many ways that a person can let his light shine.



Friday, March 1

Jesus...said, 'I am the light of the world.' ~ John 8:12

Optional Bible Readings: Luke 2:1-20; Matthew 1:18-2:12

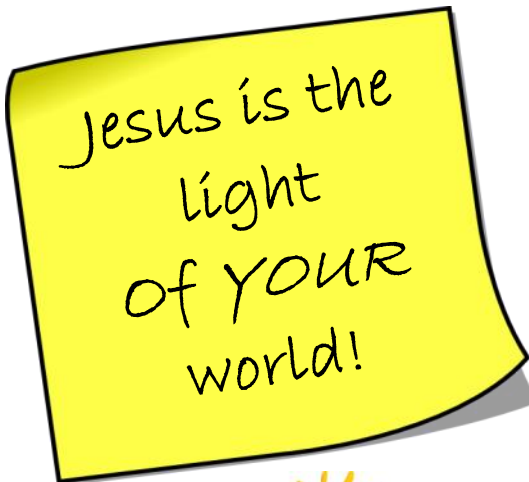
When Life Feels Dark...Shine Jesus' Light!

That star that Wise Men saw in the east—it was more than just another light. That star meant something big! It meant things were about to change. Something amazing was about to happen.

God sent God's son to be a light to a dark world— a world looking for hope. Are you looking for a bit of light and hope? Does life seem dark or scary sometimes?

Jesus is the light of the world. He shines love, hope, comfort, and peace when things around you seem gloomy. And you in turn around and shine his love to people in your world.

Shine Jesus' Light: On a sticky note, write "Jesus is the light of *YOUR* world!" Put that note on a light switch or near a lamp your family uses. Help remind everyone that Jesus' light—his hope and love—shines for everyone!



Adapted: "Stellar Faith
Bible Book"
Stellar VBS - Group Publishing

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not tell the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.
~ 1 John 1:5-7

My grandson used to be afraid of the dark. Darkness, for him the absence of light and not being able to see clearly, was scary indeed. He had to learn to trust. It's so hard to trust that all will be OK when we can't see what's around us. It's a lot like being lost, really. But we have to remember that Jesus is there, guiding us, if we walk with him in the light. We can be free from fear, knowing we aren't alone.

The word "fellowship" stands out to me here, too. We need to gather together, supporting each other, and shine our light to help guide each other. We know that our sins are forgiven. We do have darkness in us, but with God's help, we can all shine our light and banish the darkness.

Since I started coming to Bethany, I have been so impressed with how welcoming and kind people are. I have been included in activities and made to feel so welcome. And that really shows me that God's light is indeed shining brightly here.



Wow, how many times do we see God's light shine through the darkness??!! All we need to do is to have our ears, eyes, and heart open to what he says.

Just before Thanksgiving one of our daughters told us that her annual checkup had detected breast cancer. Surgery revealed that it had involved the lymph system, meaning more extensive treatments. It certainly stops you in your tracks and becomes all encompassing. Can there be light where I'm only seeing darkness now? Your emotions seem out of control, you hold on to each other, you cry, and the prayers start.

You talk to your friends and neighbors, and you know what the first thing they say is? "What's her name and I'll pray for her," and furthermore "I'm putting her on my prayer list." That light is starting to shine, and our part is to say, "Thank you" to God for putting all these people in our lives. It seems each prayer pokes a hole in the darkness and allows His light to show us the way. He never promised us an easy path, but he did promise us he'd never leave our side. The poem "Footprints in the Sand" leads us.

It's now mid-January and her treatments are starting with so much positivity. Will it be an easy journey? Probably not; it'll have rough spots and through these He will hold our hands. As we look forward to an Easter of family gathered and grateful, we can only say thank you to God for the light shining through what was once darkness.



I can't seem to shake my most immediate "light shining" in my life. No matter how petty or self-centered this might appear, to me it presents a powerful affirmation of belief and faith, when deeply needed. For over 25 years of my adult life, I identified as "spiritual, not religious." Finding my spiritual AND religious home returning to Bethany after so many years was a gradual process and enlightened by the example of so many selfless and pure of heart friends I have come to know sources of much Light in Action.

When asked for the devotion of "Shine the Light," I can only resource my limited experience. How profoundly was I affected?! I had misplaced my passport - last seen a couple years ago, and, as we are heading to Guatemala in early February for a Guatemalan Literacy Project, I've been very concerned. After going through several filing systems - California move, storage, previous residence, I was sure the passport was not to be discovered. A mantra came to mind - *"Little Lord Jesus, lost and found, please bring my passport back around."* While simultaneously thinking "silly" and "far-fetched," I was full of despair and running out of options. Christ has certainly enough significant prayers to answer to and why?? Who am I?

And yet, after 3 weeks, and deepening my request with heartfelt intensity, I asked again and again. Finally, in my most focused "ask," I looked to a remaining canvas box and discovered I had added PASSPORT to an "Important Docs" file. I relaxed in gratitude and bliss. Three or four hours later, I felt compelled to look at this "miracle"- and as I thought back on it, an unease settled in. As I searched the file, I realized a recent trip was missing from my recently found passport. Reviewing the photocopy of the document I noticed it was expired. Yikes! Despair set in along with thoughts of "I can NOT do this again. We are going to do good in the world, how can this be so impossible?!" And with a calming Grace, I once more did my "little Lord Jesus" mantra and immediately looked at an "empty" accordion paper file box between my file cabinet and the wall of my studio. I dragged it out, opened it up, found a couple of loose papers in the back, and in the front, lay my passport and my International Driver's License. Is this bliss and faith in action? Was the Light shining through my most distressing darkness? In my mind, a resounding yes.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for quietly shining the light, where and when your humble servant needed it most - to do Your service.



You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. ~ Matthew 5:14-16

This parable reminds us to let our light shine in this dark world. Live by reflecting the love and truth of Christ. Invite others to experience God's goodness and contribute to the redemption of the world. We as Christians are meant to have an impact on this world. That is why it matters so much that we do God's work that he gives us to do.

Each of our lives are a short window of time that we must shine the works of God. A brief period compared to the eternal life we receive in the amazing light of heaven. Don't miss a day to shine your light!



And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above and those who turn many to righteous, like the stars forever and ever. ~ Daniel 12:3

Have you noticed how much Lutherans love to sing? And now with our themes for the church year and Lent there are so many songs on shining lights. Here is the refrain from one of my favorites:

*Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory;
blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy:
send forth your Word, Lord, and let there be light!*

There are times when our congregation sings this song that you can just feel the spirit among us. There are so many times in Bethany you just can't help but see/feel the light shining. Another one of these times is in the narthex after church dismissal. The radiance in people's smiles is everywhere. But as it says in the song, to "flood the nations," our lights need to be carried beyond the doors of Bethany: to spread the light, to turn others to righteousness. Like it says in Daniel:

"...those who turn many to righteous, like the stars forever and ever."

*Heavenly Father,
Help us to spread the light and turn others to Righteousness.
Amen.*



Jesus Is Our Lighthouse In Our Darkest Storm

Have you ever felt like you're caught in the middle of a huge storm; and every time you're able to get your head above water just a little, a big wave consumes you and pulls you down deeper? You are not alone. During these storms of life, I am reminded of Mathew 14. There was a huge storm, waves were crashing, the disciples were scared and then they saw Jesus walking on the water towards them. The Lord said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Peter then said "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." Then Peter got out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Then Jesus reached out his hand and pulled him out of the water and said, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

I have been finding myself a lot like Peter in this passage lately. If you are like me, during these storms or when things are not going the way I hope in life I tend to get anxious. I feel thoughts of self-doubt or second-guessing creep in, and sometimes asking "why me God?" when things don't or didn't go the way I wanted or expected. I heard a devotional once that stated when you feel these things you're assuming God is going to fail and if the things happen that maybe you wished happen differently you are doubting his plan. If we have these doubts like Peter, we will continue to sink. The Lord calls us to get out of the boat and not be afraid. The Lord is our Lighthouse in the dark waters. He will pull us up when we are sinking. He won't lead us anywhere he knows we can't handle. God is our Lighthouse. His light will never go out, nor will it ever dim. When we are in a stormy sea, He will beckon us to Him, to safety! He is a firm foundation that no storm will ever move, meaning He will always be there and carry and guide us to shore.

*"In my wrestling and in my doubts
In my failures You won't walk out
Your great love will lead me through
You are the peace in my troubled sea
My Lighthouse, my lighthouse
Shining in the darkness, I will follow You
I will trust the promise,
You will carry me safe to shore."*



Searching for Light

Things can seem dark at times. Or we feel like we're living in shades of gray. But it is important to always remember that we can move toward the light of Jesus. Lent brings us this message through the black of the ashes on our foreheads to the light of Jesus being raised from the dead to give us a bright relationship with Him for all of eternity.

During the dark or gray times, it may seem that you are always searching for a brighter time. Those are the times when you need to pray and give it to God. He has a plan for us, just as he did for Jesus. Below, you can search for a few words that represent light in our lives and ways that we can bring light to others. But always remember that you don't have to search for the actual light in your life – it is always with you through the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Words can be found in any direction (including diagonals) and can overlap with each other. Use the word bank below.

FAMILY	D	Z	P	L	G	L	W	G	N	E
SHINE	P	E	P	C	A	I	A	Q	F	T
WARMTH	I	N	S	S	B	S	R	L	R	A
LISTEN	H	I	M	R	R	T	M	Q	I	N
FRIENDS	S	H	I	E	I	E	T	I	E	I
WORSHIP	R	S	L	Y	G	N	H	D	N	M
BRIGHT	O	U	E	A	H	J	J	L	D	U
SMILE	W	P	G	R	T	F	B	S	S	L
PRAYERS	R	C	A	P	W	Q	M	E	V	L
ILLUMINATE	T	S	F	A	M	I	L	Y	W	I



Then the Righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear and understand.
~ Mathew 13:43

This bible passage comes from the parable of the wheat and the weeds. In this parable, Jesus explains to his disciples that God has sown the world with the Righteous, those who belong to God. The Devil has sown the world with weeds, those who belong to the Devil. At the time of harvest, the Angels of the Lord will gather the weeds and cast them into the furnace of hell. The Righteous will be gathered and granted entrance to the kingdom, where they will shine as children of God the Father.

This parable tells us that everyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ is "born of God." Those who truly love God also love their spiritual brothers and sisters. We show this love for others through obeying God's commands. We are called as believers to conquer the sins and temptations of this world, through a relationship with God. When we walk with God, we walk in his light. God's light is used throughout scripture as good, truth, wisdom, and right living. We all must be the light that shines in the darkness for those that need us most.



Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee.~ Isaiah 60:1



Light, and the power it has, is incredible. The Lord, and the power He has, is incredible. There are so many times that we are wandering around in the dark. You can maneuver around and get through the dark but it always seems so hard. Everything takes more time and you can get many bumps and bruises along the way. When it is dark, you can make a lot of guesses about what you are finding and where you are going but you can never really be sure. When it becomes light, the world just seems to be an easier place to navigate. You feel more confident and are able to navigate much quicker. I see that in the Light of the Lord as well. When you live in a dark place it is scary, you often bump into things and feel unsure of where you are going. When the glory of the Lord rises upon you, you begin to live in the light. You have a sense of certainty and comfort of where you are going because he is lighting the way.

*Lord, we praise you for shining your light on the world. We ask that you bring the comfort of your glory to those who are living in the darkness. We thank you for hearing our prayers and helping us to rise up over the darkness.
In your name. Amen.*



The light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. ~ John 1:5

"The darkness of evil never has and never will overcome God's light."

When I read this verse, it brings a pleasant reassurance, knowing God has the power and the control to forbid evil to overcome His Son's perfect light.

We're invited by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the body and blood of our Savior, to share in Jesus's light. I am fortunate every day to see that happening in my fellow staff members, and in the fellowship of our beautiful congregation. This is how we as followers of Jesus Christ, share Jesus's light.

Father, thank you for your unending love, your perfect grace, your beautiful peace and your precious son Jesus Christ, through whom all things are made anew, and in whose name I pray. Amen.



You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light. ~ Psalm 18:28

Picture a tall, lovely lamp. In it burns a warm, glowing light. This represents our spirit filled with God's love.

At times the lamp flickers and burns low. We all experience times like this. A child or a grandchild is very ill. How we pray for healing and our bright light to return. We experience the death of a loved one. It may take a long time for our lamp to again glow with warmth but with God's help it will never go out and little by little with prayers for healing it will again fill with the light of God's love. Happy times with family fill us with joy and the light shines brightly.

We may use our lamp to help others through hard times. God's love shining through us can make a difference to friends, family, acquaintances.

Dear Lord, may your love shine through us and be a blessing to others. May we help turn darkness into light. Amen.



When I.....

When I look at the night sky, every star reminds me of you.

When I feel alone and broken, seeing the sun amongst the blue skies remind me of you.

When I feel cold and lost, the warmth of a fire and warm blanket remind me of you.

When I see a smile and hear laughter fill the air, they remind me of you.

When I hear a song and see a dance, they remind me of you.

Jesus, you are the stars in the night sky, the sun that turns the dark days into light, the warmth that surrounds, the laughter that fills hearts with joy and the music that moves our feet. Thank you for being the inspiration for a better tomorrow and providing the comfort of everlasting life. Amen.



Send me your light and your faithful care, let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. ~ Psalm 43:3

We are reflecting on this verse and devotional amidst preparing our house for weekend, overnight guests. Shopping for the right food, washing the sheets, cleaning bedrooms, setting out towels. All things to welcome those close to us. To enjoy each other's company.

In this Psalm, we reflect on the similar relationship we have with God. This is a personal relationship. We want to have that light left on for us. We want God's care. We want to go spend time where God lives.

In relationship with others, we offer care, comfort, our light and support. We seek that, too, in our relationship with God. As the theme of this year's overall Devotion Book, "The Light Shines Through the Darkness," we are reminded to cultivate and strengthen the relationships in our lives. Teachers and students. Parents and children. Husbands and wives. Neighbors. Strangers. And our relationship with God. In that relationship, we can reinforce our understanding of how to be in best relationships with others. And by continually offering ourselves in strong relationship with others, we are living our lives as God loves for us to do. Through relationships, we can be that light. We cannot control the darkness, but we can surely be in charge of our own light.

Lenten Blessings to All



Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. ~ John 8:12

If Jesus said that He is the “**Light of the World**,” what does that mean to me? To me it brings me **HOPE**. **Hope** for life with Him (Eternity/Resurrection). **Hope** to share His Word and His Story. **Hope** as I meet Him in Prayer. **Hope** of Forgiveness as I meet Him at His Table.

Right now, I’m looking at a nail made plaque, that was made by my Great Aunt Clara, many years ago, that says: “**HOPE**” together with a bunch of 7 grapes. I believe that this spells forgiveness.

Jesus came into this world as a **LIGHT** at His **BIRTH**, and again at **EPIPHANY**. Remember the **STAR** that the Three Wise Men followed to find Jesus. A **LIGHT** followed Him throughout His ministry as He preached, healed, taught, and fed His people. We are asked to share His **LIGHT** with those around us.

I (We) learned a song in Sunday School, for some of us so many years ago.

*“This little light of mine
I’m gonna let it shine
This little light of mine
I’m gonna let it shine
This little light of mine
I’m gonna let it shine
Let it shine, Let it shine,
Let it shine!”*



And we will do just that, as we are called to do -
LET HIS LIGHT SHINE!!!



For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light.” ~ Ephesians 5: 8

For Jesus’ disciples, the days and hours surrounding his passion and crucifixion could only be described as a time of darkness.

As I meditate on this verse from Ephesians, I recall last year’s presentation of the Lenten play, “I Am the Vine”. The flashback scene that comes to me is (the obviously risen) Jesus’ apparent gentle amusement at the efforts being undertaken to faithfully recreate the original scene, mood, and cast of characters when in fact Jesus was familiar with an equivalent cast of present-day characters and ministries which he went on to introduce.

We are not in the darkness experienced by the disciples. Even as we recall the dark shadows of that time before the resurrection, we as children of the post resurrection Light can rejoice and freely mirror that light to those we encounter each day.

Please Lord, wipe the dimness from our mirrors that we may be bright reflectors of your love. Amen.



Happy are the people who know how to praise you. Lord, let them live in the light of your presence. ~ Psalm 89:15

How do you praise God? Isn't it wonderful that we all praise God in our own unique way. Some of us are brave and bold. Some of us are quiet and reserved. Some praise God by doing acts of service for others while some praise God by having others serve them.

One of the interpretations that I read of this verse talked about people praising God collectively or as a Gathered People of God. What a great way to describe our Sunday morning worship at Bethany – people gathered to declare our love of God as a community of faith.

During this season of Lent, look for ways that you can praise God by helping the gathered people of God at Bethany.



The Light shines through the darkness. ~ John 1:5

Sometimes light is not appreciated or even noted unless there has been contrasting darkness present. In far northern Norway, where my father grew up, there is no darkness during the summer months as the sun never dips below the horizon. On our visits to see our family there, we sometimes take the constant daylight for granted and tend to under appreciate it. However, as the sun-less and dark winter ends, our family in Norway rejoices as they glimpse the return of the sun and it's light each spring.

Life can follow the same pattern! After what seemed like a long period of "light," this past year became quite "dark," with the deaths of two of my closest friends, the death of my mother-in-law, and life challenging illness in our family. Light overcame this darkness with the assurance that our departed friends and family have joined the host of saints in heaven. Light also overcame darkness with a God who answers prayers with medical care that succeeds against unfavorable odds.

The Gospel writer John describes Jesus as the Word and the Light. This Light, this Jesus, can overcome darkness and restore us.

Gracious God, We thank you for this most precious gift, the Light of Jesus, which is even more brilliant and stunning when we are surrounded by darkness. Keep us mindful that this Light overwhelms the darkness around us and within us. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. ~ Isaiah 60: 1-3

When I was young, my mom would sometimes wake us up in the morning saying “Rise & Shine.” Being raised on a farm we got out of bed right away. I used to say that to my kids when they were young. “Rise” (only to hear complaining). “Shine” (that didn’t happen very often in the morning). But they got up and before the day started, they were shining.

Our world today has so much darkness. It has become contagious and is spreading like wildfire. We need to get back to the light and that light is Jesus. Even more reason to rise & shine. Jesus died to save us. And look at how we repay him. I’m not very proud of some things in my past but I think we all have some things that we aren’t proud of. I do know that I have been forgiven, but still, I am a work in progress. We all need to shine, and we really can’t do that without Him.

I recently was given a diagnosis that I wasn’t expecting. No cure, just maintain. Talk about darkness falling over me. Sure, I could have shut down and asked why God let this happen to me. But instead, I made the choice to say, “why not me? I’ve got this and I’m going to shine through it. No matter what!” So, rise every day and push through the darkness. Shine everyday as the Lord your God would want you to even though it may be hard. There is always a reason, be it great or small. All things are possible.

There’s a light at the end of the darkness, and it shines for all the world to see. It will shine on your heart if you let it. I was blind when it finally shined on me. May you find peace today in whatever you do.



Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.~ Ephesians 5:14

What a beautiful passage this is. I find it to be a great reminder. We live with evil around us, bad things go on, temptations and negativity on a daily basis. Therefore, I ask the Lord in my daily prayer, that he fill me with the Holy Spirit, to guide me and put me where I can serve him in the best way possible for the given day. With this guidance I find that my day falls into place, and I am aware of Christ using me and I shine because of Him.



Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ~ James 1:17

Heavenly Lights

As some of you know, I am hiking the Ice Age Trail with eight of my friends. My day started at 4:00 am. We plan our hikes, and then we adapt to changes and obstacles that come before us.

We traveled 4½ hours south on this Saturday in January, and snow suddenly appeared! This was not our typical beautiful WI snow... it was “sand snow,” so each step was slippery, and **slow**.

Due to high elevation and slippery snow, we knew we were going to eventually be walking in the darkness. We hiked 5 hours, and darkness set in. The last hour was pitch black, and there was no Moon out to light our way, not even a star peeking through. Cold, tired, damp, and exhausted, we hiked on in the dark, as winter camping is not on any of our “bucket lists.” Our group got split up into two groups. Cold, tired, damp, and exhausted, we hiked on in the dark.

I was in the group that was taking pictures, and we were behind by a ½ mile. We looked frantically for the “yellow blazes,” using our headlamps. We spotted a headlamp coming towards us!

A heavenly light was coming our way. My friend Joy was coming back to make sure we got on the correct trail to the parking lot. Are you blessed with a friend like Joy, who is a heavenly light in our dark world? Yes, **YOU do** have a friend like Joy...a Heavenly light in our dark world.

It is God our Father, and HE is your guiding light!



*Send me your light and your faithful care, let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place
where you dwell. ~ Psalms 43:3.*



Saturday, March 23

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give Glory to God. ~ Matthew 5:16

Optional Bible Reading: Acts 8: 26-39

When People Need Help...Shine Jesus' Light!

God put Philip in the right place at the right time to help someone—in the perfect way! Philip got to shine Jesus' light by helping a man understand God's Word. God used Philip to help someone else start a friendship with Jesus.

Shine Jesus' Light: Think about how God can put you in the right place at the right time to change someone's life! Write or draw a picture in the space below of a time you think God put you in the right place at the right time to help someone.



Adapted: "Stellar Faith
Bible Book"
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Today's Bible Verse: *Numbers 6:24-26*

In these Old Testament Bible verses the Lord God is promising Israel that He is uniquely with them and that He would also bless (unmerited favor) them with protection, sustenance, and guidance during their journey to the promised land. In other words, God is showing a great example of His tremendous and incomprehensible love for His people. He expected them to reciprocate that love with obedient faith (belief and trust).

Even though Israel failed to respond many times to God's love (an 11-day journey became 40 years), His blessings of grace and mercy far exceeded Israel's sins. Thankfully, God's plan of salvation endures.

Now, when we fast forward in the New Testament we see God extends His love for all people by sending His only Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in a fleshly body as a humble servant to die on the cross to pay for our sins, was buried then raised on the third day in power and glory defeating Satan, sin and even death!.

There is no greater blessing of God's everlasting love than through our Lord Jesus Christ, our blessed hope and salvation. He wants us to receive His love and blessings then extend them to each other.

Thank God today and every day for His everlasting love. In Jesus' name. Amen!



Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous person. ~ Psalm 112:4

Psalm 112 is one of the wisdom psalms and offers wisdom on the virtues of godly living. The psalmist proclaims that not only are the righteous blessed with might, abundant wealth, and residences of their own, but such graciousness extends also to their descendants. Yet with righteousness comes the responsibility to serve as a light in the darkness to others. The godly also show grace, mercy, and compassion towards one another. These are attributes of God.

It would be easy to see how one might conclude from these few verses that God has blessed the righteous with material blessings and good health because they were faithful. However, if we read verse 4 more closely, we find that there is more to virtuous living than being on the receiving end of God's benefits. The shadow of darkness looms in the background. One possible interpretation is that although their righteousness—their fear of God and delight in God's commandments—endures forever, the godly are not without adversity in their lives.

But what a powerful promise! Just as night passes into dawn for the gracious, compassionate, and righteous child of God, dawn comes even on the worst nights of deep spiritual darkness. The Holy Spirit reminds us that even in those worst times of cultural decay and decadence, darkness will not rule forever. Darkness cannot stay where Jesus' disciples reflect the character of the Light of the world and shine as Jesus' lights in a dark world.

Holy and loving God, help us shine Your light of holiness and Jesus' light of hope to those trapped in darkness. O God, please forgive our sinful failures. Please cleanse us and create a pure heart in us. We want to live an upright life as your gracious, compassionate, and righteous child. We don't want to dim or diminish your light as it shines through us. Help us shine your light on those around us. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.



Tuesday, March 26

Shout with Joy to the Lord, all the earth! ~ Psalm 100:1

Optional Bible Reading: Luke 19: 28-40

When Good Things Happen...Shine Jesus' Light!

It was so good for the disciples (Jesus' friends) to hear people praise and celebrate Jesus! They didn't understand everything Jesus did, but they knew he was special. Jesus shined God's love, wisdom, and forgiveness in everything he did. Spending time with Jesus challenged the disciples to shine, too. Jesus even challenged them to do things that he did-like serving and forgiving others. Even though they were just regular people, they could reflect all the good, amazing things Jesus did...and give praise him.

Shine Jesus' Light: Every time you see a light (the moon, a streetlight, even the light in the refrigerator), think of something good God has given you. Thank God for that thing out loud, right then and there.



Adapted: "Stellar Faith
Bible Book"
Stellar VBS - Group Publishing

That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it. ~ John 1:5

When I read John 1:5, I believe one of the most important lessons we can learn from the scripture is that light is the source of goodness. In today's world, we see and witness a lot of darkness and tragic events. We can overcome this darkness by simply being a servant of God by completing simple tasks that often will lead to bigger tasks.

One of my very favorite songs is "Always Stay Humble and Kind," by Tim McGraw. The lyric of this song starts by saying, "You know there's a light that glows by the front door, don't forget the key's under the mat..." We all could turn our light on by our front door, and let it glow and show goodness and kindness. I believe we can be a servant of God and let our light glow by visiting a friend or loved one, volunteering, giving blood, holding a door open for someone, or simply picking up garbage on the sidewalk. It does not take a lot of effort to make the light glow bright in your life or others.

Let's make it a goal to try to be the light that shines God's love, through the darkness.



The Light Shines Through the Darkness

My Dad and his family were 100% Finnish. My grandparents were immigrants who came to this country and settled in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. My Dad, his brother and sisters all attended the Finnish Lutheran Church. My grandparents only spoke Finnish. One of the first Finnish words I came to understand is “Sisu.” I think this concept helped my family find light during some pretty rough times as they struggled to assimilate to the United States.

Sisu (See-Sue) is a term described as being integral to understanding Finnish culture. It is held by Finns to express their national character. Sisu is extraordinary determination, courage and resoluteness in the face of extreme adversity. An action mindset which enables individuals to see beyond their present limitations and into what might be. Taking action against the odds and reaching beyond observed capacities. A universal capacity for which the potential exists within all individuals.

Sisu was the light that helped my family make it in this country. My guess is that Jesus embraced Sisu and that the light (Jesus) provided and provides is a welcoming path for many of our brothers and sisters (neighbors) from other places in this world. The Light comes in many forms: a warm smile, a handshake, a helping hand, food, and shelter. Sisu, shines through the darkness.



Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. ~ John 14:1

Optional Bible Readings: Mark 16: 1-8; John 19-20

When People Are Sad...Shine Jesus' Light!

Jesus died as a sacrifice for the sadness and sin in our lives — the wrong things we all do. He'd never done anything wrong, so he took the punishment for our wrongs. And then he did the most amazing thing ever. Jesus beat death. He did that for me, for you, for every person on the planet. Now that's something to celebrate!

Shine Jesus' Light: Jesus comforted people in their sadness—and you can shine Jesus' light by being there for a sad friend, too. Tell these words to someone with a hurting heart: “Jesus is a forever friend!” Remember, Jesus is a friend who helps you live your life.

**WHAT A
FRIEND WE
HAVE IN
JESUS!**



Adapted: “Stellar Faith
Bible Book”
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For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth. ~ Acts 13:47

At first reading, this verse if read by itself, seems like a weight that will come back to smack me upside the head if I somehow fail to accomplish it. But that isn't so. When I recall all that God promised and accomplished in Jesus, I then recognize that His Love, His Grace, His Provision makes my being a Light; a delightful experience. Yes, I know, some may not like that Light, some may hate me for being so enthusiastic and spirited, but He's got that covered too.

His Word, all of it, is True and will accomplish Everything He has Purposed. Romans 8:28-29 is a great reminder. When His Spirit fills and leads us, Life is as God recognized in the garden: "It is Very Good."



When the depth of Lent pulls on my heart, I remember these famous words from the Messiah's Hallelujah Chorus:

*“For the Lord God omnipotent reigned.
The kingdom of this world is become
the kingdom of our Lord,
and of His Christ, and
He shall reign forever and ever.
King of kings and Lord of lords.
He shall reign forever and ever.
Hallelujah.”*

Let the ‘light’ shine in your heart this Easter and every day of the year.



Acknowledgements

“Never doubt that a small group of people can change the world—indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”

—Margaret Mead

Although this devotional may not change **the** world—it may change **your** world as you read it and meditate upon it.

This booklet was compiled and edited by members of a small study group that have been meeting since 2020 via Zoom. We have come to know one another, pray for one another, and study with one another. WOW (Words on Wednesdays) has used meditations from the Center for Action and Contemplation (cac.org) and books focused upon spiritual growth as a basis for our own growth. We would love to share that experience with others—or see other small groups form around faith development. Questions? Contact carolhakala@gmail.com

Our special thanks to the staff at Bethany for all that they do to support, lead, and inspire projects like this. Thanks to the members that made contributions. But most of all thanks to a God that shines in us and through us!



Upcoming Events

Lent Schedule

- ♦ February 14—Ash Wednesday
- ♦ February 21—Change of Season
- ♦ February 28—Change of Habit
- ♦ March 6—Change of Circumstance
- ♦ March 13—Change of Heart
- ♦ March 20—Change of Plans

Services will be offered at noon (12 p.m.) with a lunch to follow and 6:30 p.m. with a meal served before at 5:15 p.m.

Holy Week Schedule

- ♦ Passion/Palm Sunday, March 24 at 8 & 10 a.m.
Breakfast in Fellowship Hall 8:30—9:45 a.m.
- ♦ Maundy Thursday, March 28 at noon & 7 p.m.
- ♦ Good Friday, March 29 at noon & 7 p.m.
- ♦ Easter Services, Saturday, March 30 at 5:30 p.m.
- ♦ Easter Services, Sunday, March 31 at 8 & 10 a.m.
Breakfast in Fellowship Hall 8:30—9:45 a.m.

Summer Vacation Bible School

June 10—13, 1:00 p.m.—4:30 p.m.



