

Chapter 10

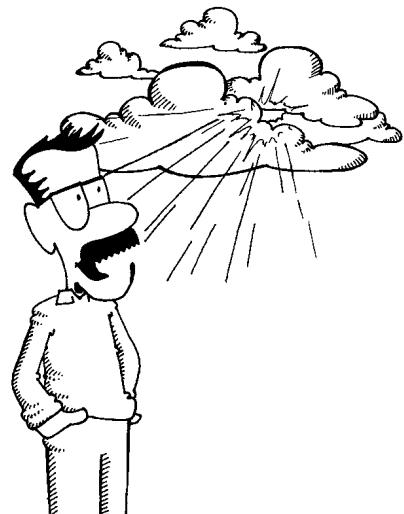
LETTING GOD'S LIGHT SHINE

In the beginning “*God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.’*” God saw that the light was good (Genesis 1:3-4). Light is so basic, so needed, and so wonderful. Light, like love, makes the world go round. We take light for granted until we are in complete darkness. Light is essential for us to get things accomplished and for life to survive. At times, even a small amount of light is all we need. The light from a small, two-watt bulb in a nightlight will keep us from injuring ourselves. We need light for many purposes, one of which is showing us the way.

As great as the physical presence of light is, the spiritual light God has given us is significantly greater. As God changes night into daylight, so He brings us out of spiritual darkness into His light. “*You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light*” (Psalm 18:28). God’s light enables us to live “life at its best.” We are a “chosen people” whose lives declare “*the praises of Him Who called [us] out of darkness into His wonderful light*” (1 Peter 2:9).

Jesus is the light. He is our power source. Without Him, we live meaningless lives without purpose. With Him, we have power to change our lives. In His light we can turn away from self-centered and self-indulgent lifestyles. He recreates us as selfless and generous people. As we live in His light, we have not “*. . . a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline*” (2 Timothy 1:7).

Through the Gospel, God brings our hearts and minds out of darkness. With His light He guides our steps. “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path*” (Psalm 119:105). God uses His light for our protection. “*For the Lord God is a sun and shield,*” wrote the psalmist (Psalm 84:11). With His light surrounding us like a shield, we are protected. Paul directs us to “*. . . put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.*” (Romans 13:12b). Jesus, “the light of the world,” has saved us. He promises, “*Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” (John 8:12b). As God’s redeemed



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people, we find courage in the words of Psalm 27:1, “*The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?*” God’s light outshines all other light:

- His light guides us . . .
- His light protects us . . .
- His light saves us . . .

Being a light means more than going to church. It means more than “busyness” in church work. Being a light means to share Jesus so others will come to know Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called **us** lights! He said,

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

What are we doing with the light God has put in us? Is His light that is in us shining through us, or are we blocking its path? Those who live “life at its best” hear, accept, and willingly obey God’s directive to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). Our lights are to shine in our homes and at our work places. Our lights are to shine in our neighborhoods. Our lights are to shine everywhere. God’s light shining through us is a testimony of what He accomplished for all mankind in Christ. The purpose of our light, Matthew wrote, is to point others to our heavenly Father so that He may be glorified. We are to be light so that people will have light for their way.

For us to be God’s lights does not mean that . . .

- we need to be successful business people.
- our lights will shine with money and affluence.
- our lights will shine with great athletic, musical, or oratory skills.

For us to be God’s lights does mean that we show the world . . .

- His love.
- His compassion.
- His unselfishness.



- His forgiveness.
- His love in our lives.

God calls us to be illuminating lights because we live in a spiritually dark world that desperately needs His light.

THE LIGHT OF LOVE (John 3:16)

To speak of love, we must begin with the source of love. “*God is love*,” John wrote in his letter (1 John 4:16). He also told us something about the extent of God’s love for His creation. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). Think of all the people in the world – the good and the bad, the just and the criminal, the atheist and the agnostic, the Hindu and the New Ager, the Christian and the hypocrite. These are the “world” for whom Christ was sent. Even if all would reject the Son, the Father would still give His Son, so great is the Father’s love for His creation.

Paul, too, emphasized God’s unconditional love. He wrote, “*But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8). This love exceeds the limits of our understanding. Our pragmatic minds weigh the cost against the prize: “*Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die*” (Romans 5:7). The great love of the Father, however, is extravagant, and perfectly timed: “*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly*” (Romans 5:6). He demonstrated the sacrificial nature of love.

God loves us not because we are lovable people, but because He can’t help but do so. It is His nature to love. God created us and gave us dominion over the rest of His creation. When our sin destroyed our fellowship with Him, the light of God’s love led Him to sacrifice His Son so that fellowship with Him could be restored.

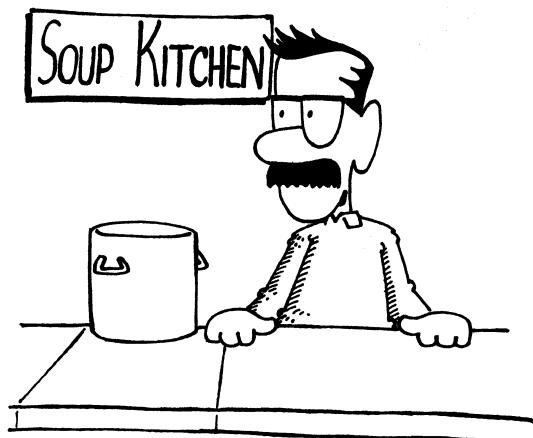
God created us for the purpose of sharing His love with all people. As parents experience pleasure in loving their children, God, in a much more profound way, finds joy in loving us. He knows each of us intimately. David, the Psalmist, wrote, “*O Lord . . . You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar*” (Psalm 139:1-2).

David proceeds in his psalm to describe how we cannot escape from God. Even if we try to hide from God in the darkness, the light of His love illuminates that darkness (Psalm 139:11-12). He sees how helpless we are, “. . . like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36), so He goes searching for us (Matthew 18:12-14). He reminds us how valuable we are to Him and that we are never out of His care. “*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the*

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ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29-31).

It is true that sin changed the course of God's creation. "*But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear*" (Isaiah 59:2). We don't deserve God's love, but we desperately need it! God provided a solution to the problem of separation that our sin created. "*God made Him Who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Paul asked the question, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword*" (Romans 8:35)? Then he hammered home the assurance:



all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:37-39).

Yes, "*God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them*" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Paul followed that sentence with a sobering exhortation to us, his readers: "*. . . And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us . . .*" (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

This, then, is what our response should be to God's great love for us. Just as He has chosen us to carry His light of love to the world. He demonstrated His love for us, so we show our love for Him in our actions. We reach out to others with that message of reconciliation so that they, too, may know the love of God and walk in His light. If we claim we have love, yet have no regard for our neighbors, there is no truth in us. God's love is contagious and will flow through us so we can be a blessing to others.

We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, Whom He has not seen. And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 John 4:19-21).

God surrounds us with people. Some are easy to respect, while others are difficult to be around. Jesus said, “*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you*” (John 15:12a). Jesus tells us that we cannot pick and choose whom we want to befriend and love. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we share the light of God’s love with others. Our awareness that God loves us will compel us to go out and love others.

- His light of love transforms our lives from self-centeredness.
- His light of love overcomes our self-pity and self-indulgence.
- His light of love fills our lives with compassion for others.
- His light of love fills our lives with purpose.
- His light of love fills our lives so that we point others to the Savior.



We read in Hebrews 12:2 that “*Jesus, . . . Who for the joy set before Him endured the Cross . . .*” Because of Jesus’ love for us, He left the safety of the carpentry shop and willingly went to the Roman cross so we could live “life at its best.” The Holy Spirit fills our hearts with gratitude and praise, so that we can gladly and joyfully serve Him with all that we are and have. “*I desire to do Your will, O my God*” (Psalm 40:8), we exclaim with the psalmist. His love for us produces the light of love in us.

Beautiful Savior, King of Creation
Son of God and Son of Man!
Truly I'd love Thee, Truly I'd serve Thee
Light of my soul, my joy, my crown.¹

Paul describes that life-transforming love:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

THE LIGHT OF CHARACTER (Daniel 1-6)

Through Word and Sacrament, we develop a more Christ-like character. Character is what we are. Character guides conduct and conversations, and, at the same time, the combination of thoughts, actions, and habits develops character. Character is what we are when no one is looking. Character is also doing what we must do even while we are being watched.

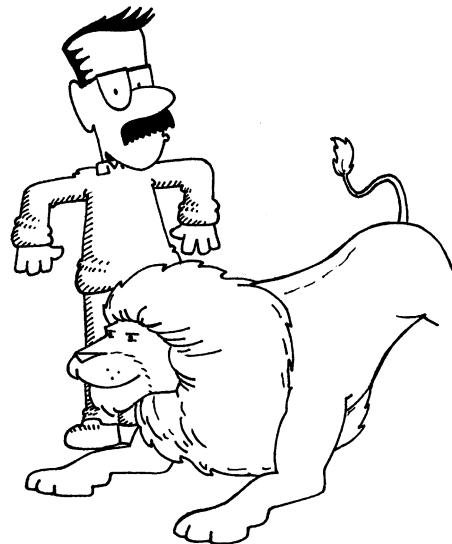
Daniel was just a young man at the time he was taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Immediately his character was tested as he was commanded to eat foods forbidden to Jews. We know that God gave him the victory. Daniel refused to eat the forbidden food and was found to be stronger and healthier than those who did not abstain. Daniel's character grew out of a deep, abiding, and uncompromising faith and trust in God.

More opportunities came (we would perhaps call them trials!) for God to strengthen his servant. The climax came when Daniel's jealous colleagues knowing his faithfulness to God, tricked King Darius into passing a law that no one could pray to any god except him. The penalty was being thrown into a den of lions. Daniel could have avoided all his problems had he just prayed in secret. Daniel however, had a lifetime of practice in being a man of character. He had always prayed, giving thanks to God, before his open window, facing Jerusalem. The threat of a few hungry lions would not deter a man whose character had been forged by his faithful God.

Certainly we admire Daniel and seek to emulate him, but he himself points us to his deliverer: "*My God sent His angel, and He shut the mouths of the lions*" (Daniel 6:22a). The light of Daniel's character shone even more brightly when he gave glory to God Who was his strength and Savior.

Charles Stanley, in his book *The Glorious Journey*, defines character as doing what is right because it is right.² As Christians we are motivated to do what is right in response to Christ's love for us. Christians will want to do the right thing even when no one is looking. In order to do that, God may have to put us in some critical situations, just as He did with Daniel.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches that our heavenly Father expects moral behavior from His people. Moreover, He expects that behavior to be motivated by proper motives and attitudes. "*Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds*



and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:12). God is looking for us to do the proper things not because we want to please others, but because we want to please Him. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “We are not trying to please men but God, Who tests our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:4b). As redeemed people, we strive to do right, because God deserves nothing less from us.

No one is born with character. The attitudes and habits we develop form our characters. We develop Godly habits through God’s power and wisdom working within us through His holy Word and Sacraments.

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him Who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love (2 Peter 1:3-7).

God’s grace continually gives us the strength to obey and to seek habits that are good. We are not perfect, yet God’s open arms through the Cross of Christ welcome us.

Those with Christ-like character will have a passion for Him. Oswald Chambers said, “Your priorities must be God first, God second, and God third, until your life is continually face to face with God and no one else is taken into account whatsoever.”³ The apostle Paul revealed his character in 1 Corinthians 2:2, where he wrote, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” Our focus is to be on Christ and not on outside attractions and interests.



life. Therefore, like Daniel, we should not seek to escape these tests. We need to

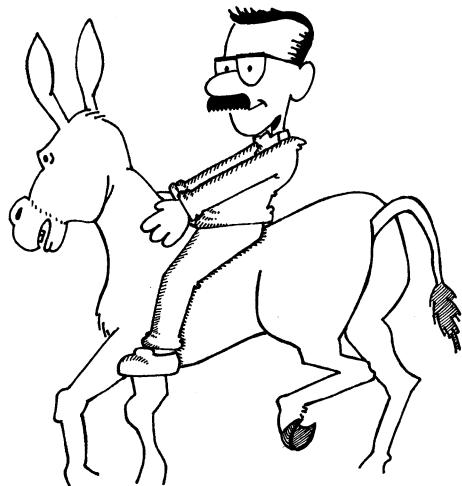
“ . . . we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Whom He has given us” (Romans 5:3-5). When we endure through the challenges we face, we have character. Our character is developed through faith that has, like Daniel’s, been tried, proven, and has withstood the tests of

remember the work God is doing in us through them. With faith-developed character, we will remain strong, consistent, and relentless. “*. . . but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint*” (Isaiah 40:31).

THE LIGHT OF COMPASSION (Luke 10:25-36)

“I see God in every human being. When I wash the leper’s wounds I feel I am nursing the Lord Himself. Is it not a beautiful experience?”⁴ These are the words of Mother Teresa, the embodiment of compassion in this century. For fifty years this tiny woman, compelled by Christ’s love, carried out the words of James 1:27: “*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*” Not every person is called to live exactly as Mother Teresa did, but we, too, can respond faithfully to the Christ who motivated her to live compassionately. “*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful,*” commanded Jesus (Luke 6:36).

To an expert in the law who was trying to test Him, Jesus spoke the Parable of the Good Samaritan. A man was beaten, robbed, and left for dead beside the Jericho Road. First came a priest, then a Levite, both of them passing on the other side of the road. They probably had their reasons for not stopping. Perhaps they were late for synagogue or afraid the perpetrators of the crime were still lurking nearby. Maybe they did not wish to become ceremonially unclean or were being careful not to “catch something.” Finally, along came, of all people, a Samaritan. Jews could hardly speak the word, much less be touched by someone of this despised race.



This Samaritan traveler, however, seeing the beaten man, “*. . . took pity on him . . . bandaged his wounds . . . took him to an inn and took care of him*” (Luke 10:33-34). Only after he had personally dispensed compassion did he leave the victim in the care of another. He promised additional financial support upon his return trip (Luke 10:35). The expert in the law concluded that the one who was the neighbor was the one who showed mercy. To this day, one who shows compassion is called a Good Samaritan.

Jesus spoke very strongly on the subject of compassion. In Matthew 26:31-46, in another parable, The Sheep and the Goats, He said that those who give food, or drink, or clothing, or who visit the stranger or the sick in the name of Jesus are

really doing it for Christ and will receive eternal life. Conversely, those who ignore the stranger, the sick, the poor, and the needy have deprived Christ Himself and “*will go away to eternal punishment.*” The one who is compassionate is honored, but judgment awaits the one who ignores compassion.

Love for and faith in Christ are exemplified by compassion to others. James exhorts us:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:14-17).

Not only must we see the physical needs of people, but we must look at others with spiritual eyes, as Jesus did. Matthew records that, “*When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd*” (Matthew 9:36). Jesus fed them (Matthew 15:32), He healed them (Matthew 14:14), and He longed “*. . . to gather [them] together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but [they] were not willing*” (Luke 13:34).

Compassion is more than an act of mercy; it is an attitude of life. It is another way that we can be light, directing the world to the Savior.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. What is required of you to be a light in the world today?
2. Describe how God has shown you the “light” of His love.
3. What is character? Are you born with character or do you develop it? Explain
4. Can compassion be learned? How?
5. How do acts of compassion relate with faith (James 2:14-17)?

THE LIGHT OF GRATITUDE (Luke 19:1-9)

One of the least respected, most disliked people in the Bible became, after an encounter with Jesus, one who is now held up as that light on a hill that Jesus told us we should be. His name was Zacchaeus. He was a tax collector, one who gathered money from his own Jewish people for the Roman government. Tax collectors were notoriously dishonest, most often demanding more than the law required so they could line their own pockets with the extra amount.

Very likely Zacchaeus upheld the reputation of his occupation. However, all that changed one day when Zacchaeus, hearing that Jesus was coming, had a

strong desire to see this Man everyone had been talking about. Unfortunately, Zacchaeus, being short in stature, couldn't see over the crowds. Being resourceful though, he climbed a tree for a perfect view. How embarrassing it must have been when Jesus saw him there and called to him. Everyone must have looked and giggled at Zacchaeus' undignified position.



When the Spirit of the Lord calls us, as He called Zacchaeus, we would do well to respond as Zacchaeus did. His hunger and thirst were great, and, sensing Jesus could satisfy it, he had no thoughts

of pride or position. His focus was on Christ. Jesus said, "*Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today*" (Luke 19:5). Zacchaeus was overwhelmed with gratitude, which showed in the words he spoke. "*. . . Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount*" (Luke 19:8).

Gratitude shows itself in thankful words and benevolent actions. You've heard the saying, "Put your money where your mouth is." It's a way of asking for proof of sincerity, and it could have originated with this incident with Zacchaeus. As evidence of his gratitude, Zacchaeus gave generously of what was most meaningful—his monetary wealth. "*Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost'*" (Luke 19:9).

THE LIGHT OF PERSEVERANCE (Luke 18:1)

Perseverance, tenacity, holding firm, never giving up—this is a quality we all admire. Most of us have heard or read Winston Churchill's immortal words during World War II when he told the English people that even though all of Europe might fall ". . . we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end . . . we shall fight in the seas and oceans . . . we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender..." It was a speech backed up by deeds as England, led by this unwavering leader, stood alone and persevered against a powerful enemy.⁵

"Perseverance counts much with God as well as with man," wrote E.M. Bounds, who went on to cite Biblical persons whose perseverance made history. If Elijah had ceased praying when at first he saw no raindrops, would Ahab, or anyone else, for that matter, have realized God's power over nature and the affairs of men? If Jacob had not spent the night wrestling with God, would he have been prepared to meet his estranged brother the next day?⁶

Perseverance in Prayer: Jesus told many parables, one of them to His disciples ". . . to show them that they should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1). The parable was about a widow who, time after time, pleaded with a judge to give her justice. The judge, although not moved by pity or a desire to have justice served, finally relented, saying, "Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming" (Luke 18:4-5)! Then Jesus added, "And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? I tell you, He will see that they get justice and quickly" (vs. 7-8a). Never give up is the message of this parable. Our heavenly Father promises that we will receive whatever we ask for in His name (John 16:14).

Perseverance in Faith: In the book of Acts, we read about the beginning of the Christian church, and throughout the twenty-eight chapters the author provides examples of those who persevered so the Gospel could be spread. Consider Peter

and John, who were called before the powerful Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish council and authority. The members of the Sanhedrin commanded them not to ". . . speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18). "But Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard'" (Acts 4:19-20). Following that bold statement, they met for prayer, asking for even more perseverance: "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your word with great boldness" (Acts 4:29). History tells us that they persevered unto death.

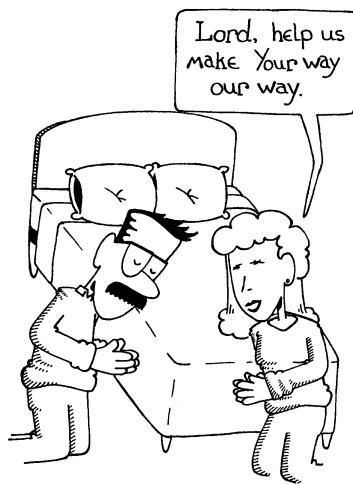


As Jesus' followers, we can find comfort and even joy in knowing that suffering for Jesus makes us more like Him. He is our strength and our rock, and He sustains us so we can live "life at its best." God sees our lives from beginning to end. Jesus said, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"

(Matthew 28:20b). He may lead us through storms at an early age so we can endure a hurricane later.

Steven D. Hower, in his book *Sharpening the Sword*, cites the example of

Martin Luther in a chapter called “Tenacity.” In persevering against attacks from the Roman church on his writings, Luther said, “I can’t take back what I have said in defending God’s truth. If I did, their sin and evil would increase their power.”⁷ The result for Luther was excommunication, and he lived the rest of his life with a price on his head, but God preserved Luther as Luther persevered for God.



THE LIGHT OF HUMILITY (Matthew 20:20-28)

Although the word “humility” does not appear in Matthew 20:20-28, we can certainly learn a lot about the subject through the situation. Put yourself

in the place of the Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17). Does it seem odd that their mother came to Jesus, asking Him to favor them with a special position in His kingdom? This plea was no surprise to her sons, for in answer to Jesus’ questions, they confidently, unhesitatingly replied, “*We can [drink the cup].*” The kneeling posture of the mother is humble, but humility was not the attitude of the self-assured sons.

In contrast, Jesus, the very Son of God, responded that He didn’t have the authority to grant the request, but that His Father prepared those places for those who would occupy them. His Father has prepared those who will take those honored places.

Matthew reports that the remaining ten disciples were “*indignant.*” Maybe they were indignant at the impertinence of Zebedee’s whole family, or maybe they were indignant because they felt themselves more qualified. Perhaps we’ve found ourselves with the same emotions.

Jesus got to the heart of the matter. He reminded all of us that we are not to give in to these self-serving human desires. To be first, we must be last. Then He uttered words with which no one can argue: “. . . just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Jesus never asks anything of us that He in His human flesh did not accomplish for us.

Christ spoke about humility, He thought with humility, and He humbled Himself. Philippians 2:6 tells us He “ . . . did not consider equality with God something to be grasped . . . ” He was God but did not clutch at His divinity. Verse eight describes what Christ did. “*He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*” The result of Christ’s humiliation is that God exalted Him.

Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

This is the humility James talked about when he wrote, “*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up*” (James 4:10). Humility is the acknowledgement that there is nothing good in ourselves; we are but “*jars of clay*” (2 Corinthians 4:7), empty vessels through which God makes known His grace. Jesus wore a servant’s garb before He wore a crown. “The root of all virtue and grace, of all faith and acceptable worship, is that we know that we have nothing but what we receive, and bow in deepest humility to wait upon God for it” (Andrew Murray).⁸

Humility, to be true, must be the essence of our lives: it is a quality we should desire. The Bible directs us to be humble. “*Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you*” (Romans 12:3b). God, in Isaiah 66:2, promises rewards for humility: “*This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at My word.*”

Psalm 37 contrasts the seeming prosperity of the wicked with the real, ultimate triumph of the meek. Verse one directs, “*Do not fret because of evil men . . . for they will soon wither.*” The thought is repeated in verses 10 and 11: “*A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.*” David, the writer of this psalm, although anointed king as a very young man, spent years hiding from Saul and evading his enemies. He had certainly learned that God did indeed abase the proud and exalt the humble. Through many trials and afflictions, God taught David humility.



THE LIGHT OF FAITH (Hebrews 11:23-28)

When God calls a person, He also supplies all that is needed to equip the person to fulfill God's plan. "By faith," we read in Hebrews 11:24, Moses renounced the wealth, power, luxury, and privilege accorded to the son of Pharaoh's daughter and chose instead to endure poverty, insignificance, hardship, and disgrace along with the people of God. Moses had observed faith in action first hand as the son of parents who "By faith . . . hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict" (Hebrew 11:23). Moses grew up in two worlds, but as a young man, his quick, impulsive nature got him into trouble, and he was forced to flee for his life (Exodus 2:11-15).

Still, he was content. He wasn't looking for anything when God came to him in a burning bush (Exodus 3). Moses was curious but not eager. He actually argued with God about the job that God wanted him to do; he tried to convince God he wasn't the man for the job.

He was right. He wasn't up to the task, but God was, and is, faithful. Just as God had used every event in Moses' past life to work out His plan, so later, back in Egypt, every step, every word, every act was orchestrated by God as Moses, along with his brother Aaron, followed. As Moses followed, he found the Lord to be faithful time and again. Through the plagues, while wandering for forty years in the wilderness, during the visits on Mount Sinai, and then surveying the Promised Land he would never enter, Moses learned that the God in Whom he placed his faith was always trustworthy.

Are we also asked to give up worldly treasure? Material wealth? Status?



Comfort? Does it seem too great a sacrifice? Are the rewards too intangible? What was Moses' reward? He gave up the wealth of the world to receive the "*incomparable riches of [God's] grace*" (Ephesians 2:7). God Himself wrote his epitaph:

Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all

his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).

As faith guided Moses, so it gives us the ability to see the earth's wealth for what it is—a temporal treasure, susceptible to moth and rust and likely to be stolen (Matthew 6:19). It guides us to.

"*For me to live is Christ; to die is gain,*" writes Paul. We can live with the truth—"for me to live is Christ"—but "*to die is gain*"? That comes rather hard—even to many Christians. The cross on Calvary didn't look like a triumphant sign, much less a gain! However, we know it was.

That instrument of death has become throughout the history of Christianity the key symbol and sign of our life and victory! As His people, we can live "life at its best" and say, by the power of the Holy Spirit, "*for me to live is Christ!*"

Then the light of Christ within us shines ever more brightly, growing from a dim candle to a beacon, leading others to the Giver of all good gifts, including this most vital gift of all—the gift of faith. "*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him*" (Hebrews 11:6).



ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

LIFE-ENRICHING

- Follows God's light
- Is concerned for Godly character
- Resists temptation
- Has high standards and expectations
- Pleases God
- Is a Good Samaritan
- Shows gratitude to God and others
- Perseveres
- Is prayerful
- Is humble

LIFE-DESTROYING

- Lives in darkness
- Is concerned for popular reputation
- Indulges self
- Has low standards and expectations
- Pleases man
- Is a priest or a Levite
- Is self-centered
- Lacks tenacity
- Depends on self
- Is arrogant

WRAPPING UP

Can people see God's light through us? Actions, words, and lifestyle are visible indicators of God's presence within our lives. Our character, compassion, gratitude, humility, perseverance, and faith reflect God's light when He is glorified and honored above all things. The Holy Spirit has placed within each Christian a light that can show others God's glory and majesty. We are to let that light shine. Our light may seem to us like a twinkling candle in a dark world, but God will use it and magnify it.

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). It is our purpose to reflect our Redeemer in the midst of an unbelieving world. By word and actions, we are to acquaint those around us with the wonders of His love and the redeeming power of His death upon the cross.

We live "life at its best" because the Spirit of God lives within us. When Christ is within us we are dead to sin, and our spirits are alive because of His righteousness. With Christ, we live confidently knowing that "*In all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose*" (Romans 8:28).

"If we walk in the light, as He is in the light . . .the blood of Jesus His Son purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). We are not to walk in the light of our own conscience but in God's light. When we walk in His light, things that are of darkness will hold no attraction for us.

Through Christ, our lives can be lights that don't flicker, fade, or glow dimly but with light that radiates bright intensity. He is the light of the world; He brings life to us all. In fervent gratitude, we are to hold up His light.

Hopefully this book has helped us and will continue to be an encouragement in our Christian journeys to live "life at its best." We do not take this journey alone, because God has promised to be with us wherever we go (Joshua 1:9). God wants good things for all of us, and we are to do all things in His name and to give Him thanks. To live life abundantly, we need to put our trust and faith in Him alone. In our walk with Him, He will be with us every step of the way until we "*win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 3:14).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. List some of the benefits that God's light has for you (Psalm 27:1; Psalm 119:105; Romans 13:12).
2. In the Sermon on the Mount, what did Jesus tell you that you should be (Matthew 5:14-16)?
3. What strength of character did Daniel show that caused the Babylonians to throw him into the den of lions?
4. How does you acquire a Godly character? How does character contrast with reputation? What undermines character? What builds up character?
5. What happens to your witness if you compromise the areas of character, compassion, gratitude, and perseverance?
6. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), what type of attitude did both the priest and the Levite show?
7. How did Jesus identify the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46?
8. How did Zacchaeus show his gratitude toward Jesus (Luke 19:1-9)?
9. What is your source of pride (Galatians 6:14; Luke 14:11)?
10. Can perseverance and stubbornness be confused?
11. What does 2 Corinthians 4:7 say about humility?
12. Explain/discuss the following: What does it mean that character is what you are when no one is looking?
13. Whom are you trying to please?
14. In addition to shining the light of character, compassion, gratitude, and perseverance, how else can you let your light shine to honor God?
15. Why aren't there more Mother Teresas?
16. Explain the following: What does it mean that God sees you through Christ's cross?
17. What makes it possible for you to please God (Hebrew 11:6)?

Notes:

¹ Commission on Worship, *Lutheran Worship*, (St. Louis, Missouri, Concordia Publishing House, 1982) 507.

² Charles Stanley, *The Glorious Journey*, (Nashville, Tennessee, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996) .268.

³ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, (Nashville, Tennessee, 1992), July 13.

⁴ "I See God in Every Human Being," *Detroit Free Press*, (Detroit, Michigan, September 6, 1997) 1.

⁵ Carol L. Thompson, “Sir Winston Churchill,” World Book Encyclopedia, (Chicago, Illinois, World Book, Inc., a Scott Fetzer Company, 1988), Vol. 3 (C-Ch) 547-548.

⁶ E.M. Bounds, “Perseverance,” *Herald of His Coming*, (Newton, Kansas, Gospel Revivals, Inc., May 1997) 4.

⁷ Stephen D. Hower, *Sharpening the Sword*, (St. Louis, Missouri, Concordia Publishing House, 1996) 135.

⁸ Andrew Murray, “Humility of Jesus,” *Herald of His Coming*, (Newton, Kansas, Gospel Revivals, Inc., July 1997). P. 6.