

The Light that Is Great within Us

He said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? (Mark 4:21).

This question posed by Christ reminds us what He has done for us. Therefore, we wish to honor that light by setting it to shine in our lives. This Home and Family section presents the thoughts of believers about how we can let the light of Christ that abides in us shine freely in this world.

A City on a Hill

Ruth Kiviahde

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid” (Matt. 5:14). I have thought of this Bible verse many times throughout my life. The Holy Spirit shines brightly from believers as we simply live our lives. We do not need to confess our faith in words for our faith to be noticed. I have multiple experiences that validate this.

We moved to Flagstaff, Arizona with seven children. This was an area with very few believers. The school my children attended had no other believing children. Each day I would send the children on the school bus with a prayer, “Please God, keep them safe and give them strength to be believing children in school.” When we went to parent-teacher conferences, the third grade teacher started the conference with a multitude of questions on our parenting style and methods. We were confused but answered all her questions. After mulling over our answers, she tells us how our third grade child is different. He had qualities that she wanted to instill in her own children. She decided the difference between her parenting style and ours was we had a job list at home. She decided she will start giving her children jobs at home. What she did not understand is she was seeing a child who is raised in a home where the Holy Spirit is.

Another example is in my work life as a nurse. At one point in my working career, I had the opportunity to work on a unit with six other believing moms. I had one coworker pull me aside to tell me how much she loves working with the people from our church. She felt like each one of us had an aura of peace surrounding us. Again, she was seeing the Holy Spirit in us shining brightly.

We have been blessed with twelve children to raise here on earth. This fact alone speaks loudly on how different we may be from our neighbors, coworkers and those around us. Large families can bring comments that are negative in words or tone. A positive comment in return, with a smile, has turned the conversation around. At the grocery store with four preschoolers: “That’s a cart full.”

“Yep, a cart full of love!”

At work when a co-worker finds out the size of our family: “You are crazy!”

“It’s crazy fun!” Speaking positively about our families to those around us is important. It is another way for the Holy Spirit to shine. God has blessed us with churches, camps and believing escorts. These are great places to go to for strength and support.

Believers and believing families are a light to the world. Often, without words this light can shine. We go through each day doing our earthly calling: working, raising children, attending school and community functions with Christ in our hearts. The Holy Spirit within us does not go unnoticed.

Do Unto Others

Ruth DeLacey

I am sure you are familiar with “Do unto others as you would like others to do unto you.” This is the golden rule which originates from the Bible. One place is in Matthew 7:12: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” It is actually referenced three places in the Bible!

What does this mean? For a young child I would say it means treat others how you want to be treated. If you don’t want someone to hit you, then don’t hit them. Or, if you don’t like someone taking toys away from you, that is a good reason not to take things away from others.

I think as we get older the meaning can broaden to acceptance, accepting all people, even though we don’t agree with what they do. I worked in an elementary school for more than ten years. We were instructed and expected to make everyone feel like they belong, that they matter and are a value to the classroom and school. Everyone is there for the same reason – to learn no matter their age, size, color, behavior, family situation or any other way we might want to group people. We were challenged to see the similarities instead of the differences! We were expected to be compassionate and caring to everyone. I think this is important beyond the school setting. I think we should ALWAYS look at people with that lens!

If we are honest with ourselves, we wouldn’t want to be treated like we don’t belong, like we’re “less than” or strange or backwards. We wouldn’t want others to look at us with eyes of judgment and contempt. Rather, we would want an attitude of acceptance and compassion and validation. We would like people to care about us and our existence and what we stand for and where we come from. It is unacceptable by words or actions to make others feel they don’t belong or they aren’t good enough, just like we don’t want to be treated that way.

In fact, we should attempt to build those relationships and those bridges to others. The only way to have a true impact on others is through love, the first fruit of faith. And these connections are essential to one who may have an awakened conscience and longs to hear the sweet message of the gospel of forgiveness of sins. If we've built walls instead of bridges, this possibility that a seeking one would approach us may be less likely.

We ALL carry insecurities, we ALL have felt different in some way or other at some time in our lives. Many things in life can make us feel different. We can feel "different" if we aren't dressed like others or look like others. We can feel different if we are having a bad day or have worries weighing us down.

I remember feeling "different" in high school. I was the only believer in my school for many years, and I don't remember anyone treating me unkindly due to my religious beliefs. But by not participating in school sports or plays or joining school friends on outings to the movies or parties, I was and felt different. I can't imagine how difficult it would have been if I would have been teased or poked fun of.

We have so much to learn from each other. We are all unique in looks, actions and life experiences. Not just believers but everyone in the world is different! God made us that way. We not only look different, but we act different – and it is truly a beautiful thing!

When I observed children in the school setting see beyond differences and make allowances to include everyone, my heart would swell. I watched a group playing a game which included a nonverbal student. The others were able to understand what he was meaning through his few words and hand gestures with no awkwardness. And I have seen a group enthusiastically cheering for a teammate that was more of a hindrance than a help to a team. There were no complaints at his shortcomings, knowing he did his best! When I see this the emotion bubbles up and tears come to my eyes at the sheer beauty of it! My heart overflows with love for these kids that can embrace the differences and accept others for who they are!

Even people who choose to look different or act different in a way that is contrary to our beliefs need respect. Some people do make choices that are contrary to the Bible's teachings. I think it is good to remember their first and biggest sin is unbelief. If they don't have the Holy Spirit how can they gauge right from wrong? I don't feel that we have a reason to treat someone poorly, just because we are given the grace privilege to have our sins forgiven and they are not believing.

If we look at others with acceptance and love, think of the huge impact we can make in the lives of people around us! Even if we are different from each other, we can show them kindness – thus making the difference insignificant!

I believe this is a way we can be a light!

How He Became a Soldier of Christ

Nathan Muhonen

I met a soldier at my nephew Derek's wedding. Derek had served in the US Army as a soldier and a mechanic on the Blackhawk helicopters for six years. His best friend for those six years was now watching Derek's wedding before the eyes of God and God's congregation. This soldier, Matt, was later called into a different kind of service, to be a soldier in faith.

While Derek served in the military, stationed in Tennessee, God blessed him with a good friend whose name was Matt Sloan. Matt wasn't a believer at the time, but there was a mutual trust that Derek and Matt shared both in their call of duty and in their free time. Matt sensed that Derek was not comfortable partaking in the things of this world. Matt found more enjoyment hanging out with Derek in their free time rather than going with the other guys to the movies or bars where worldly music played, vulgar language was spoken and alcohol was consumed. God's ways are always far above our ways. Derek did not realize how God was using him to be a light in this dark world. Neither did Matt realize how God was preparing the soil of his heart to receive the gift of faith.

Time passed and Derek's six years of service to our country came to an end. And even though Derek was happy to return to civilian life, he would be leaving a good friend behind. But Derek and Matt promised to stay in touch and it wasn't long before Matt called Derek and said that he would be in Colorado on a training mission, close to Glenwood Springs. Just by chance Derek would be in Glenwood Springs at that time.

It was a happy reunion for them and a chance for Matt to meet many other believing young people. Another time Matt and Derek were able to meet in Montana when Matt was on another training mission. Again Matt was able to meet a large group of youth who believed. It was on this trip that Matt began to sense a level of peace and comfort within this group, a peace like he had never felt in other groups. Yet he himself did not feel the connection that they had. Matt grew up in a family that did not attend church services on a regular basis. He did not have great Bible knowledge. Yet he felt drawn to the believers.

During these months, Derek had begun a relationship with a young woman named Morgan. One thing led to the next and soon there was the announcement of Derek and Morgan's intentions to get married. Matt was not about to miss out on a close friend's wedding. He joined Derek's family on the weekend of the wedding and spent time with many believers from Colorado, Montana and Minnesota, among them young people he had met before.

At the wedding, Matt witnessed the vows as Derek and Morgan were joined together as one before God. It was a wedding like Matt had never seen before. He felt comfort in witnessing his close friend getting married surrounded by guests who seemed to be at peace. Matt watched as during the reception

young people gathered around the bride and groom and sang a farewell song wishing God's blessings to them.

This was the moment when I noticed Derek's young friend from the military standing back, away from the group of singers, taking it all in. I decided to introduce myself to him and maybe chat a little.

"What are your thoughts?" I asked him.

"It seems like everyone here is family."

"It is so. This is God's house and we are God's children," I replied. We were then able to visit about how the way to heaven goes through God's kingdom here on earth. Apostle Paul describes God's kingdom as a body wherein Jesus is the head and we are the other members of that one body, and there is only one body even as there is only one kingdom of God. Matt listened intently but did not receive the grace of repentance at this time, even though I did ask him. We exchanged phone numbers and hoped that we could meet again someday.

Then, maybe a month or two later when I was attending a meeting at the Rockford church on a Saturday, my mind thought about Matt. I sent him a quick text that said, "Hi Matt, how are you doing?" He quickly responded with a phone call and said he would love to talk but must leave on a training mission. He asked if I could please call him back in the evening when he will be off duty. I promised I would.

That evening came, and when Matt and I were able to visit, I didn't have to explain a lot of things because after a short amount of time I asked Matt if he would want to believe all his sins forgiven. He said, "Yes, that is what I want." I preached the forgiveness of all his sins forgiven in Jesus' name and precious blood. He then said, I can't explain it, but it feels like a big weight has been lifted off of me."

For the rest of the call, we talked about the new battle of faith that Matt will now begin and that will not end until he passes from this life into eternity. Matt understood two matters: He is a sinner, and he is in need of God's grace and forgiveness.

The gospel became dear to Matt as it is to all believers. We agreed that though the temptations and pleasures of this world are strong, there is nothing more desirable than to make it to heaven. And the Bible teaches us to "walk in the light as he is in the light, having fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sins." Now each time we talk our main focus is the way and the journey of faith and to comfort one another with the gospel.

Teachers Can Be Lights, Too

Brielle Muhonen

Early in my pre-service teacher education, I was placed as a student teacher at Little Mountain Elementary in Monticello, Minnesota. I wondered how it would be having believing students at the school. Would it be strange seeing children at church functions and in the classroom? Would it be difficult to maintain professional boundaries? How would I handle the inevitable questions that would come my way about my faith once fellow teachers figured out that I was a believer and that I knew these children through my church?

After multiple teaching assignments in various elementary settings within the Monticello school district, I saw how thrilled the believing students were to have me at Little Mountain Elementary, and the feeling was mutual. We shared a special bond, having similar experiences and the same beliefs. Their parents were happy that I was in their children's class as well. After the positive student teaching experience and as I was seeking a permanent teaching position, I knew that I would consider it an added blessing to teach in a school with believers.

I applied for a 5th grade teaching position at Dassel-Cokato Middle School, expressing my understanding of and appreciation for the large Finnish population in that district, being of Finnish heritage myself. During my interview, I was asked about my Finnish background, my time in Finland studying abroad and who my relatives were that lived in Cokato. This aspect of my background was clearly an asset to my job-hunting.

After being hired for the 5th grade position, I saw that my coworkers were familiar with the "Finns," as they affectionately call both us and the Apostolic branches in the Dassel-Cokato area, but they had many questions. I was soon asked many of those questions about our faith, traditions and the differences between the different Finnish churches. It was initially intimidating, but I was given the strength to be honest in confessing my faith. One coworker remarked that she had been waiting for years to be able to ask these questions. She was thankful to finally have someone she felt comfortable to ask.

Throughout my four years teaching, I have felt love and understanding from staff I have worked with. It has been a joy to be able to advocate for believing families. God has blessed me with a job that I love, coworkers who respect my faith and families who appreciate my background.

Though my current work setting isn't largely diverse in ethnicities, each of my students has a unique set of experiences and a fundamental need to belong. Along with my coworkers and my own teachers who have shown love and support to me, I also strive to do the same for all of my students. Just like us, all of my students long and deserve to be respected and accepted.

Questions for Thought and Discussion:

1. Sing or read the words to SHZ 560. How does the flickering candle relate to one's light in the world?
2. Believers may perhaps not see themselves as having much light to shine – why is this?
3. Lights in the Bible were often candles or lamps interchangeably. What does light symbolize?
4. Think of a time your light was almost out. What caused that light to glow brightly again?
5. The weakest light can still illuminate darkness. Discuss.