

Let Your Light Shine
International L.L.L. Convention Theme 2007
Michigan District L.L.L. Bible Study 2008
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“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your Good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:16

Jesus told us that we should be “lights” to the world. His followers were not to be hidden, but were to be beacons. That is why the logo for this convention was a lighthouse. Duluth, Minnesota, where the convention was held, has a large harbor on Lake Superior, and right at the mouth of that harbor stands a big black and white lighthouse. A lighthouse is there to save lives. It shines its light so that people can see which path leads to death, and which path leads to life and safe harbor. That is the calling of every Christian, to shine, so that others around them may see how to escape sin and death, and find life and safety in Jesus. Lutheran Hour Ministries shines the light of the Gospel to countless souls throughout North America and around the world. Your financial and prayerful support of this “shining” is important.

Truly, this “shining” is YOUR shining. But we shine not only by supporting Gospel ministries, we must also shine in our everyday encounters. This devotional guide is to help you think about, and prepare yourself for, this very personal shining that each of us must do. May God help us to be better lights shining for Him in a very dark world.

I. People Love Darkness!

An old story tells of a desert nomad who awakened hungry in the middle of the night. He lit a candle and began eating dates from a bowl beside his bed. He took a bite from one end and saw a worm in it, so he threw it out of the tent. He bit into the second date, found another worm, and threw it away also. Reasoning that he wouldn't have any dates left to eat if he continued, he blew out the candle and quickly ate all the dates. Many prefer darkness and denial to the light of reality.

1. Read John 3:16-21. What is the fear that keeps people in darkness? What is the fear that keeps you from admitting something you did wrong? What are we really afraid of? What is there to “love” about darkness?

2. Read Romans 1:18-32. “Their foolish hearts were darkened,” says Paul about people who do not want to come into the light, so that they are controlled by what (v. 24)? Have you ever done something you knew was wrong? (Sharing is option on that one!) Why might people be so willing to “approve of those who practice these things” (and “heap abuse” on those who don't I Pet. 4:3-5)? What role does social or peer pressure (or media pressure) play in keeping people in darkness?

3. Read Ephesians 5:1-20. How is living in darkness described here? What is the future for people who live in darkness (v.6)? Why does Paul say, “for you were once darkness, but now you are children of light” (v.8)? What does that mean? How do people in darkness find light (v.1-2, v. 20, and check I Peter 2:9-10)? What is this light? Why do we need to be very careful how we live? Why would he have to tell us that?

In 1997 the Russian space station MIR suffered one problem after another, everything from colliding with a cargo ship to oxygen shortages. At one point five of the eleven gyroscopes that kept the space station oriented toward the sun simply shut down. In order to keep the station from spinning out of

control, the crew had to then shut down the remaining gyroscopes. The purpose of the gyroscopes was to keep the space station in the best position for its solar panels to soak up energy from the sun. To lose the gyroscopes, meant the loss of precious power. Since the fall of the human race into sin, our gyroscopes have been damaged, so that we too naturally tend to veer away from God and toward darkness. But without God, there is a loss of power, purpose, direction, and life itself. To love darkness is to love death. We need God, and He answers that need. He gives us His Son who won forgiveness and life for us. "In Him was life, and that life was the light of men" Jn. 1: 4.

Prayer: Lord, my heart is attracted to darkness and I sometimes find darkness difficult to leave behind, but I pray that for Jesus sake, who lived and died for me, that I might walk out of darkness and live with You in the light of your love and walk in the light of obedience to your will. Amen.

II. God Calls Us Into His Light!

A couple took their son, 11, and daughter, 7, to Carlsbad Caverns. As always, when the tour reached the deepest point in the cavern, the guide turned off all the lights to dramatize how completely dark and silent it is below the earth's surface. The little girl, suddenly enveloped in darkness, was frightened and began to cry. Immediately everyone heard the voice of her brother: "Don't cry. Somebody here knows how to turn on the lights." In a real sense, that is the message of the gospel: Even when the darkness seems overwhelming, there is someone who knows how to help us, who can help us, who has helped us! He shines in our darkness!

1. Read Isaiah 9:1-7. What does "walking in darkness mean" (v. 2)? Have you ever spent some time walking in darkness? What was it like? Who are our "oppressors," what is the "yoke that burdens us," which God promises to destroy (v. 4-5)? He will destroy them as in the day of Midians defeat do you remember how Midian was defeated (Judges 7)? Who did the fighting, who won the victory, Gideon or God? When did God fight for you? What did He free you from? How does that help you?

2. Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-18. How do we come to "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (v.6-7)? How does God "make his light shine in our hearts" (you might review what your catechism says about the means of grace, like God's Word and Baptism)? What does Paul mean by saying we carry this treasure around hidden in "jars of clay"? What happens to clay jars? What happens to our bodies (v.16)? What happens to the "contents"? Why then do we need never "lose heart"? If you can live with such confidence, even when life is not going well, what will be the result (read 1 Peter 3:14-15)?

When Charles Colson visited with President Borja of Ecuador about starting a Prison Fellowship ministry in his country, he was surprised when the President told him about the time he too had spent in prison. He had been involved in the struggle for democracy in Ecuador and when the military cracked down, he was arrested. Without trial, they threw him into a cold dungeon with no light and no window. For three days he endured the fear and darkness. Just when the situation seemed unbearable, the huge steel door opened, and someone crept into the darkness. Borja heard the person working on something in the corner. Then the person left, closed the door, and disappeared. Minutes later the room was suddenly blazed with light. Someone, perhaps taking his life into his hands, had connected the electricity to the broken light fixture. "From that moment," said Borja, "my imprisonment had meaning because at least I could see." More important than the light we see with our eyes, is the light the Christ brings to our hearts, giving our lives the understanding and meaning only He can give.

Prayer: I thank you Father for calling me to faith in my Savior, Jesus Christ. You have brought me out of darkness into your marvelous light. Help me to proclaim your praises with my life and with my words. Amen.

III. We Reflect His Light

In 1996 the U.S. auto industry celebrated its one hundredth anniversary. In observance, Chicago Tribune auto writer Jim Mateja selected what he called the "10 Cars that Made a Difference." These were vehicles that made the most significant contributions to the development of the automobile up to the present time. Especially if you are using this study with a group of men, who tend to be car experts, try beginning this session by having them offer the cars they would put on this list. Write them on a black board or piece of paper. Then compare them with Jim's list: 1. 1896 Duryea Motor Wagon first car manufactured from the same design (13 of them), 2. 1901 Curved Dash Olds first mass-produced car (425 in the first year), 3. 1908 Ford Model T "Tin Lizzie" the world's best selling car, 4. 1941 Jeep helped win WWII and forerunner of the sport-utility vehicle, 5. 1949 VW Beetle by 1973 overtook Ford Model T as the world's best-selling car, 6. 1953 Chevrolet Corvette, and 7. 1964 Pontiac GTO just really cool cars, 8. 1964 Ford Mustang set first-year records in sales, and created a cult following, 9. 1984 Chrysler minivan replaced the station wagon, 10. 1986 Ford Taurus by 1992 the industry's top-selling car.

Like these cars, each of us is called to make a difference in our world. We are change agents. God calls us to be salt, light, ambassadors for Christ. He wants each of us to leave our workplace, family, neighborhood, church a better place than when we came.

1. Read Daniel 12:1-3. Compare it with Philippians 2:12-18. What do you think "those who lead many to righteousness" means? Where are these people "shining"? Where are the children of God "shining" in Phil. 2? What is the "word of life" they hold out? Look carefully at vs. 15-16 to see where the shining comes from does it come from being "blameless and pure, without fault," or does it come from "holding out the word of life"? Why is that important?

2. Read Isaiah 60:1-3. Compare this with John 8:12 (and perhaps John 1:1-14). Who is the light of the world? Why does He call Himself that? Our light has come, but in Is. 60 who is to "arise and shine"? What does that mean?

Chris Edwardson, a medical doctor in Dallas, Oregon, recounts the time a judge came to his office. "I asked him what he was really in for because his leg cast didn't need to be checked. He said, "I just thought maybe you could give me a reason to live." He broke down and cried. I then told him about Jesus and that He can make all the difference. The judge accepted Jesus that day. Later I asked him what prompted him to tell me that. He said, "When you walked into the room, I saw something in your eyes that told me you had what I wanted. Something told me you knew the answer to life. I look into men's faces all day long, judging the truth. I could see that you believed with all your heart that what you were telling me was true. It was enough to convince me I needed it."

Prayer: Father, You have shined your grace and forgiveness into my life, now help me to reflect the light of this love in all that I do and say, so that I might have an opportunity to hold out the word of life, the word about Jesus, to others. Amen.