

A 5-part course exploring what it means to be a Light for Christ and how we might develop a personal Rule of Life.

Shining as Lights

Session 4

REFLECT the Light



Study Group
80 mins



Individual
45-60 mins



**THE DIOCESE
OF SHEFFIELD**
Renewed | Released | Rejuvenated

Lights for Christ

**“I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”**

ISAIAH 49:6



SHARE: what is your story?

As usual, we begin by looking back to how we ended the last session (and encouraging conversation for those studying in groups). Have you tried adjusting anything since then to bring more balance to your daily life and walk with God? If so, what was that like? Did you learn anything from it?

To help move our thoughts towards today’s Bible passage: can you remember from the past an occasion when someone needed to wake you up (perhaps because you had overslept and were going to be late)? Or maybe an occasion when you had to wake someone else up for that kind of reason? If an experience comes to mind, what impressions and reactions did it provoke? How did you feel in the end: confused? Or glad? Or cross? Or...?



HEAR: what does the Bible say?



Read Ephesians 5:8-20

This letter from Paul encourages the Christians in Ephesus to realise who they really are, what God has done for them and what their calling is in everyday life. The first half of the letter helps them explore the riches of God’s saving grace; the second half looks at how to live wisely and well, as the church and also they relate to their neighbours.

In this chapter, Paul has been calling these Christians to live distinctively in their communities, particularly in handling their relationships and desires. Now he tries to capture the imagination and motivate people with a vivid image: “the fruit of the light” (v9). We know that light is not a plant that grows crops or fruit which can be harvested; but light is essential to ripen crops and plants – so in that sense, light does indeed produce fruit.

Elsewhere Paul uses the picture of fruit to help understand Christian character, talking about “the fruit of the Spirit” (can you name the nine virtues he mentions? Have a look at Galatians 5:22). Jesus also teaches about behaviour in terms of good and bad fruit (Luke 6:43-45). But in addition, Jesus speaks of fruitful harvests to depict more and more people believing in him, as his word takes root in their lives (Luke 8:4-8; John 4:35-42). Sometimes Jesus’ words may suggest both conversion and character, holy lives as well as new believers (John 15:1-8). The two go together: as Christians gradually and steadily develop godly character and behaviour, it changes our lives and also impacts other people, those in the church and those beyond it. Fruit is often both nourishing and attractive.

Try some of these questions, to help you dig deeper into these verses.

- Which verse or phrase catches your attention? What do you think it is saying?
 - When faced with a culture whose values and priorities seem different and alien, one temptation for Christians has been to withdraw from involvement in the world. What does this passage say about that?
 - Is deciding what is the good and right way to behave in our daily lives always straightforward? Compare verses 10 and 11.
 - The challenge and encouragement to “be filled with the Spirit” (v.18) is in the present tense, which suggests continuity – literally “keep on being filled with the Spirit”. This is not a single event, but an ongoing process: continually turning to God to receive God’s gracious presence and power – which then refreshes and equips us for daily life and witness. Does this surprise you? Does it ring true in your experience?
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INVOLVE: what does this passage say to you?

- Think about someone God has used to plant and grow faith in you, or perhaps in others. What was the impact of that person's character, seen in their attitudes and actions? And what place did words, explanation and teaching have in the process of growing faith?
 - Verse 14 gives a phrase which may come from an early Christian worship song, perhaps sung at Easter baptisms. Does it say anything about your situation and calling in everyday life? What kind of responses does God's 'wake-up call' prompt - in yourself and also in people you meet day by day?
 - In your daily life, when do you feel most strongly aware of a radical, 'light verses darkness' difference between the values of Christ and those of today's world? How are you best able to reflect Christ's light and bring light to others in those moments?
 - Can our thankfulness (v.20) be part of our witness to others?
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NOURISH: something further to chew on...



Listen to the audio recording by Bill Goodman '*Brightly Shone the Moon that Night*' – online or download.

Transcript...

The steep slope and high altitude were taking their toll; I paused for breath in the darkness. I glanced at my watch: 2 am. Looking up, I noticed that the Moon had risen; it hung in the clear night sky, two-thirds full, casting a shadow at my feet. Gratefully, I turned off my inadequate head-torch and continued climbing, picking my way through the rocks by moonlight alone. As the night hours passed Venus, the 'morning star', appeared as a bright pin-prick near the eastern horizon, promising the coming of dawn.

The Moon produces no light of its own. It's not even a good reflector: dark grey rock, covered with matt grey dust - Venus, a planet shrouded in white cloud, reflects far more brightly. But the Moon is much closer to us, travelling alongside us; although very inadequate as a reflector, it still gave me enough light to find my way, light arising from a far greater source, awesome in brilliance. Perhaps there's something in that which can give us encouragement as we think about ourselves reflecting the light.

As I reached the summit, the sun finally rose, dazzling, above the horizon; now reflected light was no longer needed. We gazed in wonder as everything became clear; warming our chilly bones, rejoicing together.



Watch the video from Bishop Pete – either online or download.

Transcript...

One of the things I love about a candle flame, is the way that you can take a candle flame from a candle flame and leave the initial flame in no way smaller, in no way burning less brightly than it was before it replicated itself and from the new flame, you can take another flame and then another flame and another flame and suddenly you've got a whole host of flames, where to begin with there was only one and that one is still burning every bit as brightly as it was in the first place.

It's a remarkable thing that you can take a flame from a flame and leave the original flame not in any way reduced or impoverished and it seems to me that's how it is for those of us who are called to shine as lights for Christ in the world.

This week in the Shining as Lights course, we're thinking about what it means for us to be reflectors of the light of Christ what it means for us to be called to share the light of Christ and to pass on the light of Christ. The glorious thing about that is that when you pass on the light of Christ, your own light is in no way reduced no way impoverished you can pass on the light of Christ and still be burning every bit as brightly yourself as a light for Christ to the glory of God the Father.



EXPERIMENT: how will you live this out?

- If music is something that touches you, try singing some favourite worship songs during the week – or perhaps learning a new one. If you feel inhibited, this does not have to be done aloud or in public! The point is to nourish a joyful sense of gratitude, which will then shine out of us and share the light with others.
- Is there someone in your workplace, community or family who is particularly in your mind at present? If so, can you try doing something practical this week which could be a blessing to them?
- Can you pray for an opportunity this week to share a brief story from your spiritual journey with a friend or colleague? Perhaps you could also encourage someone to explore a resource, such as: 'Try Praying' – www.trypraying.co.uk. For other resources which can help you in sharing your faith, look at Church Army Resources www.churcharmy.org.uk.

- Is there a cause which is committed to supporting vulnerable and needy people (either in your community or further afield) which God has laid on your heart? If so, can you find a way to invest more of your time, money or skills in strengthening it?
- As we strive to care for creation and live more sustainably, what sort of contacts and conversations does this generate with those around us who are not part of the church? Where might this lead you in the days ahead?

Pray for yourself and others, particularly for whatever you have decided to try this week. Ask God the Holy Spirit to come on you afresh and be open to receive the presence, power and wisdom of God. Pray that Christ will use you to bring more light to people who need it.

Here is a prayer you might use to close this session, taken from Morning Prayer:

Blessed are you, Sovereign God,

ruler and judge of all,

to you be praise and glory for ever.

In the darkness of this age that is passing away

may the light of your presence which the saints enjoy

surround our steps as we journey on.

May we reflect your glory this day

and so be made ready to see your face

in the heavenly city where night shall be no more.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Blessed be God for ever.

Next Session

In the fifth and final session of the course, we shall focus partly on the Introduction to a Personal Rule of Life leaflet and the Rule of Life card. It would be good to have one available for each person involved. They can be downloaded on the web page for this session; paper copies are also available from Sheffield Diocesan Church House or from your church.

Session 5: LIGHT of the World

“For it is the God who said, ‘Let light 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 Jesus Christ.”