

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 5

LIGHT of the World



Study Group
80 mins



Individual
45-60 mins



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OF SHEFFIELD**
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Lights for Christ

“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.”

-2 CORINTHIANS 4:6



If you are studying this course in a group.

In this 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 participant.

The last part – this time renamed ‘Establish’ – is particularly important. We suggest you give it twice as much time as usual, reducing time spent on the previous sections accordingly.

You can download the **Introduction to a Personal Rule of Life** leaflet and the **Rule of Life Commitment Card** from the session 5 web page or these are probably available as hard copies from your church



SHARE: what is your story?

As usual, we begin by looking back to how we ended the last session. Have you tried adjusting anything since then to enable you to reflect Christ’s light more fully? If so, what was that like? Did you learn anything from it?



HEAR: what does the Bible say?

Today we look at two Bible passages, with particular focus on the second one.



Read John 1:1-9 and 8:12

These opening verses of the fourth gospel, mysterious and majestic like their subject, show the creator reaching out to the creation. God chooses to speak and this expression takes human form (eventually identified as Jesus Christ, verse 17). With echoes of Genesis 1, imagery about light and darkness is introduced and will recur throughout the following chapters. Light illuminates, guides and exposes; all who hear these words are challenged to choose light rather than darkness.

‘The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood/overcome it.’ (1.5). The Greek word used here can have either of these meanings. Those who choose darkness cannot grasp the revelation which Jesus brings; God cannot be mastered by any human beings.

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

- John 1:6 refers to John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin. Why do you think he is suddenly mentioned here? What is the importance of his role?
- What do you think Jesus means when he offers everyone ‘the light of life’ (John 8:12; see also John 1:4)?



Now read Matthew 5:13–16

All four gospels present Jesus as a teacher, proclaiming God’s word. This collection of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew’s account, best known as the ‘Sermon on the Mount’, is full of practical and challenging guidance about daily life.

One of the images Jesus chooses here is of a lamp, which in his day would have had a burning flame. If placed under a bowl, the lamp’s whole purpose will be lost: the flame will be snuffed out and the room turn dark. Jesus’ presence and teaching ‘lights up’ his followers – not simply for their own benefit, but so that light is given to the world around them.

The Bible abounds in picture language, used in a variety of different ways, to stimulate our imagination. In this Shining as Lights course, we have used the image of ourselves reflecting light (the kind of picture Paul may be using in 2 Corinthians 3:18, although the meaning there is debated). Here in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus depicts his followers as a burning lamp which, when provided with suitable fuel and a flame, illuminates a room by radiating light. With either of these word pictures, the outcome is the same: God’s light shines and spreads through us into a dark world.

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

- Jesus uses more than one image here. How does his picture of a city (Matthew 5:14) reinforce what he is teaching and help us understand what he is saying about light?
- What might the ‘good works’ Jesus mentions look like? Have a glance at the rest of this chapter in Matthew to get some ideas.
- Doing good works sounds like something that will require effort on our part. Yet a lamp being refuelled and lit suggests action done by someone else. Is there a tension in this? How do you understand it?

- As the light shines, those good works produce some positive outcomes (Matthew 5:16). Where should credit and praise be directed?



INVOLVE: what does this passage say to you?

- John 1:6-9 talks about John being a 'witness' and 'testifying to the light'. What are the similarities and differences between his calling and ours?
- Do we ever feel tempted to be 'invisible' as Christians? What do Jesus' words in the passage from Matthew say to that?
- How do you feel about people 'seeing your good works' (Matthew 5:16)? What might be the result if they do?



NOURISH: something further to chew on...



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

Transcript...

Friends, this is the fifth and final little contribution I'm making to the Shining as Lights course, as we think together about Christ the light of the world and what it means for us to be ourselves lights for Christ in the world.

If you've watched the whole series of these little videos you may have noticed this candle sitting on the shelf behind me and I wanted to draw your attention to it this week. You see this candle needs some care and attention, the wick has grown down and the edges of the candle are too proud and there's very little of the flame standing above it. When we've finished I'm going to take a penknife and chop, trim the wax away from the wick and next time I light it, the flame will be standing proud and shining much more brightly than you saw it a moment ago. Maybe that's a little image that sums up what I hope Shining as Lights and your part in this course these past five weeks might be like for you.

The point is that we as lights for Christ, we need a bit of care and attention, we need a bit of TLC, we may need a bit of pruning away if we're to shine at our brightest for Christ and I hope as you look back over the whole of this Shining as Lights course, you'll be able to see that you've been able to pay some attention to your own flame. I hope you'll find you're shining still more brightly for Christ as a light in the world, to the glory of God the Father.

It is worthwhile at this stage to look at the baptismal promises again – from the Common Worship service of baptism:

In baptism, God calls us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

To follow Christ means dying to sin and rising to new life with him.

Therefore I ask:

Do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God?

I reject them.

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?

I renounce them.

Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

I repent of them.

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?

I turn to Christ.

Do you submit to Christ as Lord?

I submit to Christ.

Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life?

I come to Christ.



ESTABLISH: how will you live this out?

Previously we've called this section 'Experiment'. For this final session, we are changing it to 'Establish'. After experimenting with different possibilities in recent weeks, you may now feel clearer about what best fits you as your regular pattern of spiritual life.

- There are probably aspects of your current pattern which you value strongly and want to keep or even strengthen further.
- Is there also something which is no longer so helpful? Is it time to lay this aside, in order to free up some time?
- Is there something different which you want to add to your regular routine?
- You may like to re-read the Introduction to a Personal Rule of Life. Think about the three major areas of life it highlights:
 - receiving Christ's light as his friends
 - walking in Christ's light as his followers
 - reflecting Christ's light to those around us

All three are important. Do you have a good balance between the three?

You may like to do this in silence, or else listening to some quiet instrumental music (but played without visual images, as these can distract from thinking.)



Listen to the piece of music on the web page for this session. This is a powerful contemporary worship song by Tim Hughes. "Here I am to worship, here I am to bow down, here I am to say that You're my God."

Reflect about this on your own for a few minutes.

Lyrics

Light of the world	All for love's sake became poor
You stepped down into darkness	Here I am to worship
Opened my eyes, let me see	Here I am to bow down
Beauty that made this heart adore You	Here I am to say that You're my God
Hope of a life spent with You	You're altogether lovely
Here I am to worship	Altogether worthy
Here I am to bow down	Altogether wonderful to me Well, I'll never know
Here I am to say that You're my God	how much it cost
You're altogether lovely	To see my sin upon that cross
Altogether worthy	Well, I'll never know how much it cost
Altogether wonderful to me	To see my sin upon that cross
King of all days	Well, I'll never know how much it cost
Oh so highly exalted	To see my sin upon that cross
Glorious in heaven above	Well, I'll never know how much it cost
Humbly You came to the earth You created	To see my sin upon that cross



If you are studying this course in a group. Some discussion/sharing might follow here, either in pairs or all together.

Have a look at the Rule of Life card. If you choose to fill this out, it will be for your own benefit (although you may choose to share it with an individual or a group). Do you feel that would be appropriate for you now?

Share your thoughts and pray for yourself and others, in whatever ways you judge suitable.

Here is a closing prayer you might like to use, taken from Common Worship:

Lord Jesus, Light of light,
 you have come among us.
 Help us who live by your light
 to shine as lights in your world.
 Glory to God in the highest.
 Amen.