

A Brighter Light



R. Herbert

SEVEN SIMPLE STEPS
TO HELP YOUR
CHRISTIAN LIGHT SHINE

A Brighter Light:

**Seven Simple Steps
To Help Your
Christian Light Shine**

By R. Herbert

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INTRODUCTION:

A Brighter Light

“You are the light of the world. A town built 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 others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14–16)

Most Christians know these words of Jesus well, but do we think of them as a command? If we look closely at the statement in his great Sermon on the Mount, we see that Jesus did indeed give them as a command to his followers. We are called to be a light to the people around us just as much as we are called to love and obey God.

Letting our lights shine is a basic Christian responsibility, but even though we realize our spiritual light is “reflected from Christ” (we will talk more about that in Chapter One), it can still be a little daunting, especially for those new to the faith, to think of ourselves as “lights.” We read the biblical stories of great men and women of faith and it may seem that we are truly still at the candle power stage compared to the powerful light God has shone through some of his servants.

If we do feel a lack of confidence in this regard, we should perhaps remember just what an effect a single physical candle can have. The light of an average wax candle can be seen at amazing distances – in clear dark conditions a candle can be seen at over three miles at ground level, and from an elevated position (remember Jesus’ words about placing the candle on a stand) you can actually see a candle much further. On a dark night, in fact, the human eye is able to see a single elevated candle flickering up to thirty miles away!

The point of this analogy is that if we allow Christ to work in our lives and to “shine” in us, we need never be concerned that our light is not bright enough, that we are not knowledgeable enough, good enough, or spiritual enough to shine. God supplies the light, not us, and sometimes even the smallest amount of light can be seen and be effective.

But if this is good news, there is more! Even if a small amount of light can make a difference – physically or spiritually – we all have the opportunity to make it possible for God to do more through us and to shine more brightly.

In fact, the Scriptures urge us to do exactly this – to shine even brighter and more effectively. We see this in the Old Testament where the book of Proverbs tells us: “The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, *shining ever brighter* till the full light of day” (Proverbs 4:18). In the New Testament, the apostle Paul tells us that this is at the very heart of our Christian calling: “We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with *ever-increasing* glory, which comes from the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Letting our lights shine is not just about us. The growth God gives us is not only for our sakes, but also to make it possible for us to serve, help, and be an increasing light to others.

Our key textbook on this subject must be the Bible, of course, but this short book examines seven simple ways in which we can avoid short-circuiting the light God desires to show through us, and to more effectively let that light flourish and shine. If we follow these principles we can better reflect God’s nature, better do his work, and better fulfill his desire in our lives. The more brightly we shine, the more the God we serve can help others through us. If that is your desire, read on.

PART ONE:
PREPARATION

1. Motivation: Shining for the Right Reasons

“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.”
(Isaiah 9:2 NLT)

These beautiful and well-known words of the prophet Isaiah refer primarily, of course, to the great light that the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, would bring into this world (John 1:4–5). But Jesus said that those who truly followed him would do the same works that he had done (John 14:12), and he commanded us to let our light shine also (Matthew 5:14–16).

The light that shone in Jesus can also shine through us – even if it is to a far smaller degree – to help those in a sin-darkened world in the same way. That is what the apostle Paul was alluding to when he wrote that “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). Amazing as it may seem, God has made it possible for us to reflect the very radiance of Jesus Christ in our lives if we are willing to do our part and let God work through us. But our motivation for this must be right.

First, we must realize that God does not need spiritual giants or superheroes to do his work. He calls us instead, to let his indwelling Spirit be evident in us and to shine through us quietly, as we live out our everyday lives. So we must put away ideas of individually changing the world through any brightness we may reflect. In fact, when we live as God commands us, the less we think about what we are doing, the better. Being overly aware of good deeds we may be able to do is never good. But that does not mean we should not prepare ourselves to do good, or be aware of things to avoid and things for which we want to strive.

Good Done Rightly

Naturally, we must always be careful not to do anything because we want to be seen doing good – just as Jesus warned:

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do... to be honored by others... But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret... And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray... to be seen by others... But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:1–6)

These words of Jesus cover both our interactions with God and with one another, and clearly show that our good deeds should be anonymous and unseen whenever possible. When our good deeds must be done in the open, we must do them only with the hope that God’s light will be seen and acknowledged – not that our own efforts will be advertised. Otherwise, we not only will not shine as we should, but we also will allow pride to stain what good we do, and God may well humble us before he chooses to use us further (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). The human tendency to do what is right for our own advantage applies to many areas of life. Paul had this in mind when he wrote regarding how we work:

obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord. (Ephesians 6:5–7)

An Attitude of Love

Another important aspect of our striving to do good that needs care in our attitude and approach is that of reward. Christians sometimes misunderstand the many scriptures regarding the reward God promises to those who serve him. The verses of Matthew 6:1–6 quoted above are a good example of such a scripture as this passage mentions God rewarding our good deeds multiple times.

God does reward our service to him and to others, but an expected reward should never be our reason for wanting our light to shine. The Scriptures mention God's rewards not in the way we might offer a carrot to a donkey to make it work, but to show God's fairness and his appreciation for those who love him (Hebrews 6:10), and to give us a hope that whatever negative things may happen as a result of our Christian service in this life, it will work out well in the end.

But our primary reason for good works should always be that they are done as a result of love for God and others. Otherwise, as Paul so memorably tells us: "If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). We must also remember Jesus' words that we should let our lights shine in order that others "may see your good deeds and *glorify your Father in heaven*" (Matthew 5:16). That should always be reason enough to do good, along with the simple desire to help others through the Christian love God gives us (1 John 4:7, 12).

Beyond these basic aspects of having a right attitude to letting our light shine, we should remember that even when we do what is right for the right reasons, the light we reflect may not be recognized for what it is. As Paul also emphasized: "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Although this is speaking

primarily about the spoken gospel message, it also applies to the light of our right actions as part of the unspoken gospel. But it does not matter if good deeds are not recognized as such. God is used to not getting credit for what he does! What matters most to him, and should matter most to us, is that our attitude is one of love, and that God's work of love gets done anyway.

We can be encouraged, however, that in a great many cases we find the opposite situation – the light of God shines through his people and is recognized as good in countless situations each and every day. God does not call us to a pointless or empty quest in telling us to let our light shine. If we do our part, he can and will work through us more times than we probably will ever realize.

2. Purification: House Cleaning

“put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.” (Romans 13:12)

“become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.” (Philippians 2:15)

The word purify is often used in the Old Testament to describe the cleansing that makes something or someone acceptable to God (for example, Exodus 19:10; Numbers 8:21). It is used in the New Testament in the same way – often with the connotation of ethical and moral purity (for example, John 11:55; Acts 21:24–26; James 4:8; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:3). But the idea of “purification” may seem strange to some Christians. “Aren’t we purified by Christ’s death?” they might ask ... “What more do we need to do?”

It is true, of course, that we are purified by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf. But that purification is only the beginning of our Christian lives. It is not a license to continue to routinely sin – as a great many scriptures show. We must, in fact, begin a lifetime of purification or “sanctification,” as theologians call it. The process of ongoing purification is guided and empowered by God, for it is “the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:11). But although God works in us to accomplish our ongoing sanctification, we have a very real part to play in the process.

Paul’s words to the Christians at Philippi – quoted at the beginning of this chapter –highlight our part in this process in saying we must “*become* blameless and pure” if we are to be lights to others. After setting out with the right motivation, we must purify our lives from ongoing sin. We may have been forgiven and cleansed from our past sins, but then we continue the process with

God's help. Paul made this even clearer when he wrote: "*let us purify ourselves* from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). As he explained further:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. (Ephesians 5:8–11)

The apostle John tells us the same thing: "now we are children of God ... All who have this hope in him *purify themselves*, just as he is pure" (1 John 2–3). Notice that what John says here is addressed only to believers ("we are children of God"), showing that making oneself pure is not referring to our original forgiveness and justification, but rather to our present and ongoing purification and sanctification.

It is vital that we understand this basic aspect of Christianity if we are to ever grow as God intends for us. It is also of paramount importance that we understand and seriously focus on purification if we are to be a light to others. No matter what we might think, no matter how "good" our good deeds may seem to us, if they are only outward and our lives are still full of sin, we will never be able to shine as God intends us to. In fact, we may be no better than the ancient Pharisees of whom Jesus said: "on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness" (Matthew 23:28).

As we will see in Part Two, nothing is more destructive to our ability to serve as lights than when others see clear evidence of darkness within us. But none of us is perfect and we must all work on removing sin from our lives. So how do we fulfill God's commands to begin to replace inner sin and darkness with the light of God? Fortunately, the Bible gives us clear answers. We sanctify

ourselves when we use the means God has provided for purification – and that is primarily his word.

Notice some scriptures that explain this. In his great sermon given to his disciples on the last evening Jesus spent with them, he told the twelve “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). We see that this cleansing was not final, but ongoing, in that later the same evening Jesus asked the Father “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). God uses his word to continue to purify us – just as Paul wrote: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17). “Every good work” includes, of course, being a light to others. The word of God purifies us in two ways:

First, God’s word defines sin for us and provides warning signs to keep us away from the pitfalls of sin. We see this in scriptures such as 1 John 3:4-6 “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness... No one who lives in [Christ] keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.” And many scriptures – from the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament (Exodus 20:1–17) to various lists of sinful behavior in the New Testament (Galatians 5:19–21; etc.), show us what constitutes the breaking of God’s law of love.

Second, like a mirror, the word of God shows us what is wrong with us – the spiritual blemishes and grime that do take hold on us and that we would not see without it. Seeing this “reflection” gives us the opportunity to strive to purify our thoughts, words, and deeds. But we must do our part in this, just as James tells us:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues

in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. (James 1:22–25)

So the process of sanctification is a mutual effort. God guides and encourages our hunger and thirst for righteousness and purity, while our efforts to seek God and learn his ways allow God to help us see what is right and to live accordingly. As God’s purifying work in our lives progresses, it shapes our thoughts, words, and deeds, and who we really are – as well as our ability to reflect the light of God’s purity and goodness.

We will never become as pure “as he is pure” (1 John 3:3) in this life, but this does not negate our responsibility to strive after the holiness God wants to see in us – and if we let it, the word of God enables us to do our part in avoiding sin. We will see how we do that in the next chapter.

3. Dedication: Better, Not More

In the last chapter we talked about the vital importance of purifying our lives if we are to ever serve as lights to others. Even if God is doing the actual shining through us, we still have to prepare. Like the wise virgins in Jesus' parable (Matthew 25:1–13), we need to obtain and store the oil for our lamps even if God ultimately provides the light! Now we will look at ways we can do that through our use of God's word – whether we are studying it, meditating on it, or praying for help to apply it – and we will look at each of these three areas in turn.

Study: The Lamp and the Light

We have already seen that one of the great reasons God has given us his written word is so that we can know right from wrong and be guided away from the sins that will hurt us and others. As the psalm tells us: “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path” (Psalm 119:105).

Once we deeply understand this fact, it may be our natural inclination to try to study the Bible more than we are already doing. If we were studying a chapter a day, perhaps we should be studying two, three, or more! But that is not really what we need to enable our lights to shine – we often need not more study, but better study.

For one thing, there is something of a law of diminishing returns when it comes to Bible study. The more we study the Scriptures in a given session, the less likely it is that we will be able to grasp its principles and lessons. Too much study in a limited period of time can just lead to the opposite of what we need – with one important point simply blurring into another.

The best way to improve our study is not to study more, but to study better – not rambling reading, but focused, concentrated, and dedicated study. Rather than reading a certain amount of the Bible

each day, it can be more profitable to read with a specific purpose in mind – to look especially for guidance and inspiration regarding pleasing God and helping others – and when possible, to read until we find something that speaks to us in this regard.

In the physical world, if we focus rays of physical light, they shine more brightly, and if we focus our study to let God show us how to grow and serve, we learn more deeply and can become brighter instruments in his hands. This may not be the only type of study we utilize, of course, but we need to be sure to include it in order to gain the specific knowledge we need to let our lights grow as effectively as possible.

It is also vital that we do not study so much at one time that we cannot internalize what we are reading. It is only with intentional effort to make God’s instruction part of us that we can fully do our part in avoiding sin. Just as the psalmist wrote: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11), we are empowered to remember and apply God’s instruction when it is “hidden” within us.

This does not mean that we keep God’s word secret within us. The Hebrew word translated “hidden” in this verse means to “treasure,” “keep,” “save up,” or “store.” We see these meanings in the translations “I have treasured your word in my heart” (CSB), and “I have stored up your word in my heart” (ESV). When we do that, the Spirit of God can more effectively guide us in remembering and applying what we have learned.

This is what the apostle Peter meant when he wrote of the Scriptures “We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). God’s word is a light and the more we internalize it, the more that light fills us and can flow through us.

Meditation: Growth Begins in the Mind

Many Christians faithfully study their Bibles on a regular basis, but do not profit from the study as much as they could because they jump immediately from their devotional study to the next thing on their daily “to-do” list. Most of us are so busy with the issues of everyday life that it can be difficult not to do this, but one of the benefits of studying less but better is that it gives us time to meditate and think about what we have learned.

Today, the word meditation can have “new-age,” oriental, or even mystical connotations, but most of these forms of “meditation” involve emptying the mind or filling it with a meaningless point of focus. Biblical meditation is nothing like these things (see for example, Psalm 119:97–98). This kind of meditation flows over from our study into our lives. It is active and focused and involves our thinking about principles we want to memorize and apply. We see this clearly in what God told ancient Israel regarding internalizing his instructions:

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 11:18–20)

Thinking about God’s laws and how we can apply them in specific areas of our lives is what these verses urge us to do, in whatever opportunities we have. Remembering and thinking about what we have seen in our study of God’s word not only reinforces our memory of it, but greatly helps us to apply it when we can and should do so. That is why David tells us that the righteous are those “whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night” (Psalm 1:2).

Prayer: The Power Source

No matter how much time we spend studying God's word, and meditating on its meaning, we still need God's help to be able to apply what he reveals to us in our own lives. We obtain that help through prayer, but as we said regarding study, the basis of spiritual growth and service is not always more prayer – it is often better, more focused prayer that we need.

Once we have seen things, through our study and meditation, that we need to change or want to improve, we should always take those things to God in prayer. If we do not, we run the risk of trying to change, and to live righteously on our own strength – something that is ultimately doomed to fail.

On the other hand, when we humbly show God that we are receptive to what he has helped us to see, and we ask for his help to accomplish those things, we guarantee success if we persevere in doing the best we can aided by God's help. But our prayers should be detailed and specific. It is easy to pray "Please God help me be a better person" or "Please make me a better light," but this is not very effective at all.

To make a simple analogy, would a bank manager approve a loan to us if we simply said "Please give me some money"? God wants to be involved in our spiritual growth in the same way that a banker would expect to be informed of issues regarding our financial growth or well-being.

The Old Testament contains a wonderful example of the principle of specific prayer. The ancient Israelites were commanded to make offerings of incense that were burned so that the perfumed rising smoke symbolized their ascending prayers (Psalm 141:2). But God did not command that the people of Israel simply throw incense onto the flames – he commanded that the incense had to be "finely ground" (Leviticus 16:12), just as our prayers need to be broken down into small and specific details.

Putting It All Together

Of course, our study, meditation, and prayer do not produce growth and spiritual light in us of and by themselves, but God gives us these spiritual tools to help us grow with his help. “Growing and glowing” in our Christian life is never about what we do, but always about what God does in us. And when we get specific about learning God’s will, about thinking how it applies in our lives, and about asking God’s help, we fulfill God’s desire to work through us so that he can, indeed, begin to use us as lights.

**PART TWO:
APPLICATION**

4. Integrity: Living in the Truth

*“Who may worship in your sanctuary, LORD?
Who may enter your presence on your holy hill?
Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right,
speaking the truth from sincere hearts.
Those who refuse to gossip
or harm their neighbors
or speak evil of their friends.
Those who despise flagrant sinners,
and honor the faithful followers of the LORD,
and keep their promises even when it hurts.
Those who lend money without charging interest,
and who cannot be bribed to lie about the innocent.
Such people will stand firm forever.”* (Psalm 15 NLT)

The words of King David in Psalm 15 remind us that God is a God of standards – that he expects us to live our lives according to his ways and not according to our natural human inclinations. David’s words are also a powerful reminder that if we are to be a true light to others and represent God’s ways to them, those high standards apply to us even more.

We can summarize the high standards God calls us to live by in a single word: integrity. To live with integrity means to live with sincerity, without deception or pretense, and to live consistently, to be the same under all circumstances. There are two simple reasons why our lives must reflect this kind of integrity.

First, we must understand that God himself is a God of integrity – and we are called to become like him. God always speaks the truth, of course, and is always faithful in living by his standards. Even when we fail God, his integrity remains – as the apostle Paul wrote: “if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself” (2 Timothy 2:13). God’s integrity is so evident that even the enemies of Jesus admitted to him:

we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. (Matthew 22:16)

Our salvation is based on God's grace, but that grace itself prompts us to live according to God's way of life (Ephesians 2:8-10), to strive to live as God lives. Jesus criticized some of the religious people of his day for not living with this kind of integrity:

You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. (Matthew 23:27-28)

Although this may seem like an extreme comparison, the principle clearly applies to all of us if our outward show of Christianity is in any way different from the people we are within.

The second reason we must have integrity (as we mentioned in Part One) is that if we do not, we will sooner or later be exposed. The old saying "your sins will find you out" is based on what the Bible itself tells us repeatedly: "Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out" (Proverbs 10:9); "The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity" (Proverbs 11:3); and "Righteousness guards the person of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner" (Proverbs 13:6); to give only three examples.

But the danger of our hidden sinfulness being discovered is not only that we may suffer as a result. Our ability to be a witness, to let our light shine before others, is also severely compromised, if not totally destroyed. Sadly, not a year goes by without some who teach godly living – sometimes famous pastors and other Christian leaders – being exposed as living differently from the way of life they proclaim. This is often seen by others not only as personal hypocrisy, but also as an indication that Christianity itself is a failed religion.

This situation is true for all of us. Even if we ourselves are not Christian leaders, our lives are still lived out beneath the magnifying glass of integrity that others view us through. That is why Paul told Titus: “In everything set them an example ... show integrity” (Titus 2:7). This does not mean that we need be overly concerned about others’ opinions of us, but that we should be continually conscious of what God thinks regarding whether our walk is helping or hindering others (Luke 17:1).

We cannot be a light to others just by going to church or reading the Bible. On the other hand, we effect others through our integrity – or lack of it – in countless aspects of our lives. That is why Paul wrote: “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27). We may not be accepting bribes, participating in immoral behavior, or living without integrity in similar blatant ways, but it is often the small physical things of life that people notice and judge us by.

For example, do we keep our promises – even if it is to our detriment (Psalm 15:4)? Do we refuse to listen to, or pass on gossip (Proverbs 25:9–10)? Is our speech always clean and free from impurity (Ephesians 4:29)? If we do not have integrity in such areas of everyday life, we cannot represent God’s light to others well. Living in integrity means each of us must exercise care in the small things in order to be a light for the big things (Luke 16:10–15).

Having godly integrity does not mean we become perfect, of course. As Christians, we still possess sinful human nature and sometimes fall to temptations, attacks, and weaknesses. Such was the case with many of the greatest of God’s people of the past (Moses, David, Peter, and many others come to mind). But falling occasionally is not the same as living duplicitously, unfaithfully, and without integrity, or allowing evil or compromise to continually live within us (1 John 1:8–10; 2:1–2).

When we “clean house” (see Chapter Two) as we turn to God, and as we continue to root out behavior that is not Christian, our integrity grows, and God delights to use us more and more. This is not simply our own accomplishment – rather if we are doing our part, God works through us to use the integrity he develops within us. So it is that Paul could write “Now this is our boast: Our

conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves ... with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace" (2 Corinthians 1:12).

Remembering David's thoughts on integrity with which we began this chapter, it is not surprising to read that David also prayed: "I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity" (1 Chronicles 29:17). David knew, as we should also, that God is always pleased to see integrity in his people, and always desirous to use that faithfulness to influence others. Indeed, David understood that God desires to surround himself with integrity – both now and in his future kingdom: "Because of my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever" (Psalm 41:12). In the same way, integrity should be a foremost goal in our lives – one that allows God not only to bless us, but also to bless others through us.

5. Responsibility: What Our Neighbors See

We have seen how vital integrity is in enabling us to reflect the goodness of God's ways. In the same way, the manner in which we fulfill our responsibilities in life has a great affect on how we – and the religion we follow – are perceived by others. The two areas overlap to some extent, but while integrity covers mainly ethical or moral issues of right and wrong, responsibility is a broader concept that may involve smaller but nevertheless important issues. For example, if we knowingly keep and do not return books to a library, this is an issue of integrity as we may be guilty of stealing. If we routinely do not return our books on time that is more an issue of responsibility, but we may still present a negative image to others by this behavior.

That the seemingly smaller issues of life are important in terms of letting our light shine can be seen in the very clear requirements that the New Testament gives for elders in the church. Writing to his assistant Timothy, the apostle Paul stated:

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not dependent on wine, not violent but gentle, peaceable, and free of the love of money. An overseer must manage his own household well and keep his children under control, with complete dignity. For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for the church of God? Furthermore, he must have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:2–7 BSB)

Paul also wrote about the deacons who served under the elders:

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued or given to much wine or greedy for money... Additionally, they must first be tested. Then, if they are above reproach, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, the women [probably deaconesses] must be dignified, not slanderers, but temperate and faithful in all things. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife, a good manager of his children and of his own household. (1 Timothy 3:8–12 BSB)

Notice that the requirements for these highly visible offices do not focus on spiritual activities such as lengthy prayer or Bible study, or even on good works – but what other people see. In every case Paul lists issues of integrity (for example, not slandering others) or responsibility (for example, supervising one’s children), that will affect how others see us and our religion.

While we may not be elders or deacons, it is important that we realize that the high standards Paul outlines for these individuals apply just as much to any Christian who desires to be a light to others. It is not that these are special rules only applying to a select few, rather they are principles that can apply to anyone who might represent God’s way of life. This is what Paul meant when he wrote that such individuals must “have a good reputation with outsiders.”

So how should we unpack what Paul wrote to see the full extent of how these principles apply in our lives? Responsibility is a huge area that touches on so many aspects of daily living, but we can apply the principles to any situation simply by examining our lives and asking ourselves straightforward questions.

For example, do we return things we borrow? Psalm 37:21 tells us frankly: “The wicked borrow and do not repay” and while this primarily applies to monetary loans, the principle applies just as much to a tool borrowed from our neighbor, or even that overdue library book someone else is waiting to read! And do we make restitution for things belonging to others that we damage or wear out? Numbers 5:6–7 includes such situations and shows that if we

do not, we are failing to show responsibility in this area whether we consider it a small one or not.

In the same way, if our houses are cluttered or dirty or our yards unkempt, our ability to shine is diminished (Proverbs 24:30–31 makes this clear). If we are frequently late to work, or do not do a fair day's work when we are there (see Colossians 3:23–24), even if we do not feel we are stealing, we are not fulfilling our responsibility properly and our ability to be a witness may be seriously hurt.

Perhaps the most important responsibility we can consider is that which we have to our families. Paul emphasizes the importance of proper parental guidance, as we saw above, and our responsibility to our children includes not just guiding and correcting them when necessary, but spending as much time as we can with them. It is also vital, of course, that we recognize and fulfill our responsibility to spend enough time with our spouses to keep our marriages healthy and growing. Responsibility also looks beyond our immediate families to care for and assist our parents as they age (Matthew 15:5–6; 1 Timothy 5:4; etc.).

The principle of responsibility applies to any area of life in which something is entrusted to us to look after in some way. First Chronicles 9:31 tells us that “Mattithiah, the firstborn son of Shallum the Korahite, was entrusted with the responsibility for baking the offering bread.” This person's claim to fame was that they were entrusted with something and fulfilled that responsibility. In our families, jobs, and every aspect of our lives, how we fulfill our responsibilities is often how people remember us, and whether our behavior is a light to others or not.

6. Activity: Shining through Giving and Serving

In the last two chapters we looked at areas that are vitally important if the light we reflect is not to be diminished. Now, in the final chapters of this book, we can focus on the most effective ways in which the light can grow stronger in our lives.

Two of the most important ways we can let our light shine are through giving and serving. We will look at each of these areas in turn, although they are really like two sides of the same coin and often cannot be separated. Notice how both are mentioned side by side in Jesus' summary of his ministry: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but *to serve, and to give* his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Paul also shows that giving and serving are vital parts of our opportunity to act as a light to others: "Because of the *service* by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God ... and for your *generosity* in sharing with them and with everyone else" (2 Corinthians 9:13).

When we give, we serve; and when we serve, we give; but giving often refers to physical material things that we have and give to others, while serving is often understood as the use of our time and energies for others; and we should consider both activities carefully.

Giving: At the Heart of Love

The Bible teaches generosity in the majority of its sixty-six books. We find this constant emphasis on giving throughout the word of God simply because giving is central to the nature of God himself – just as we see in the best known of all New Testament scriptures: "For God so loved the world, that he *gave* his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 ESV). In this verse the apostle John shows that giving defines God's love: he gives because he loves.

John also makes the connection between God's love and our giving in his first epistle: "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" (1 John 3:17). In the same way, we must always remember that saying to others, "I will pray for you!" may be an encouragement to those in need, but without tangible acts of love, our prayers can be empty – as James warned: "If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?" (James 2:16).

If we are really opening our hearts to others, we will also be opening our hands as a vital part of our Christian lives. In fact, the apostle Paul shows that our giving to help others is of true spiritual importance – just like the great qualities of faith and love:

Just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness, and in the love we inspired in you – see that you also excel in this grace of giving.
(2 Corinthians 8:7 BSB)

It does not matter if we have very little that we can give – as long as we do give. God notices and shines through giving at any level – as Jesus showed in his comments regarding the poor widow who gave a tiny offering – in her case all she had – out of her poverty (Luke 21:1–4).

It is interesting to realize just how pleased God is to see giving occur, and how often he uses it as a light to those who do not know him. In the story we all know of Cornelius – the Roman centurion who was the first gentile convert – we should notice that the soldier "gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly" and it was this that brought him to God's special attention as he was told by an angelic messenger: "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God" (Acts 10:1–4). It was through Cornelius' giving and devotion to God that many heard the word of God at that time (vs. 44) – and ultimately that God's truth spread into the whole non-Jewish world.

In some cases we may never know what effect our own giving may have, but if we give out of love for others, we can trust God to use the gift wisely. We need only use wisdom in choosing where, when, and how to give (see the free e-book [*The Way of Giving: Learning to Live Generously*](#) for information on these important aspects of giving). When we give to others, for example, through careful selection of missionary charities, even if we do not see first-hand the effect of the light shining in distant lands, we can know that the light was sent out, nevertheless. Considering the often-preferable nature of giving anonymously, that may be an ideal situation anyway – and our gifts are just as pleasing a sacrifice to God (Philippians 4:18), the Father of lights and gifts (James 1:17).

Service: The Many Paths of Helping

Like giving, genuine service can be a wonderful way for our light to shine, and sincere service can often be an even greater expression of love than giving because it involves sacrifice of the self (Philippians 2:17) in some way rather than the giving of our physical possessions. Serving usually requires us to part with our time – part of our very lives. As Paul wrote: “what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4:5).

In some cases the service we give to others may be only occasional – as in a “Good Samaritan” situation, or simply helping someone with a difficult task. It may be as simple and momentary as smiling and saying “hello” to someone who looks discouraged, or it may require an investment of more time and energy – as when we listen patiently to someone who is going through difficulties and we try to encourage them.

But if we want to serve others as Christ did (Matthew 20:28, Philippians 2:5–7), we should also look for opportunities to serve in a more continual manner. For some, this may be the ongoing care for their families or others, but if we do not have such responsibilities, we can always find ways to serve if we look for

them. Just as there are endless opportunities to give, there are often more opportunities to serve those around us than we can ever fulfill, so we must choose the ways we serve carefully.

One of the best ways we can let God's light shine is to help in spreading the gospel to others: either directly or in a support function – just as the New Testament tells us that some individuals preached the word and others helped them (Luke 8:1–3; Acts 6:1–7; etc.). But there are also dozens of ways we can give of our time to help and serve others and also be a light to them.

For example, we can volunteer with a charity or other organization that provides help and care for those needing assistance in some way. Many local organizations need volunteer help to provide services ranging from driving people without transportation to medical appointments to helping people with financial-related, computer-related, or other needed guidance. We simply need to consider what knowledge, skills, or aptitudes we have to see how we might help others – and if all we can offer is time, many organizations will gladly accept our help and many even train those who volunteer if necessary.

However we choose to serve, we should remember that true service must always be focused on the real needs of others. And we should realize that true service is not for the faint of heart. It can be time-consuming and tiring – especially if we already have a regular job that we work. But if we are willing to serve, God will work through us and we may be surprised at how much can be accomplished when God empowers us: “If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:11).

Even after we help people physically, we can still continue to serve them by praying for them - and the more we serve others the more we find that our prayers become focused on their needs rather than ours. But it is also true that the more we concentrate on the welfare and development of others, the more God can and will develop us personally. We grow the most not through self-focused spiritual exercises – helpful as these may be – but through the

outward focused work of love that we are all called to do. And that is often how we can shine the most brightly, too. Notice what the prophet Isaiah wrote: “if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday” (Isaiah 58:10).

Both giving and serving are vital parts of our opportunity to act as a light to others. As we saw above, this was clearly emphasized by Paul when he wrote: “Because of the *service* by which you have proved yourselves, *others will praise God ...* and for your *generosity* in sharing with them and with everyone else” (2 Corinthians 9:13). Perhaps more than anything else, it is in our giving and serving that the world may see Christ in us.

7. Humility: Light That Shines More Brightly

There is a final aspect to letting our lights shine that we must focus on and keep in mind: our serving must always be done in humility and never with a superior or “holier than thou” manner if we are to reflect Jesus Christ’s service. The Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi once remarked “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” Sadly, that was his experience, but if people of the world see the same humble and self-sacrificing love that Christ exhibited, and if we “serve one another humbly in love” (Galatians 5:13), they will be far more likely to be drawn to the light they see.

We said at the outset of this book that we must have the right motivation for wanting to shine more brightly with God’s love and character. This proper attitude must be something we live in continually, and it is through real and lasting humility that we maintain that right mindset.

This fact is seen in a number of biblical verses that link doing good and having a humble attitude. Most famous, perhaps, are the words spoken by the Old Testament prophet Micah: “And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Micah’s words make it clear that we must be more than simply righteous; we must be humble at the same time.

In the New Testament the connection is made even more directly by the apostle James: “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by *deeds done in the humility* that comes from wisdom” (James 3:13). Here we see specifically that our good deeds – and anything we do to let our light shine – must be done in humility.

This is important because many Christian books and sermons focus on one or the other – either good works or humility – but the Bible shows the two should never be separated. God hates spiritual

pride, and even most humans are turned off by those who do good works with an attitude of being pleased with themselves, or who act in a condescending or superior manner toward those they help.

This after all was the whole point of Jesus' parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector who both went to the temple to pray. While the hyper-religious Pharisee saw only his own good deeds, the tax-collector he reviled prayed in humility – more conscious of his own failures than any good he might be doing (Luke 18:9-14).

This does not mean that we must always try to maintain a kind of negative mental balance where we focus on our faults rather than what God can do through us, but a real attitude of humility must be there, nonetheless. The apostle Paul gives us good advice in this regard in his letter to the Philippians. Keeping in mind the following points that Paul makes can help us to maintain humility as we strive to let God's light shine more brightly through us.

1. We must always remember, as Paul tells us, that “it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13). We should always remember the simple analogy that no matter how brightly our light may shine, it is God who turned on the switch and whose Spirit provides the power! By the same token, we can never feel that we don't need to develop humility because we are not proud. As has been wisely said, “You can have no greater sign of confirmed pride than when you think you are humble enough.”

2. Paul reminds us that good deeds are not an excuse for lack of obedience in our lives. Even Jesus – whose good deeds were far greater than ours, of course – was still obedient in all things in his humility: “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death” (Philippians 2:8). As we saw earlier, lack of obedience always destroys our ability to be a light.

3. Paul also reminds us that we must “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). We must always be careful not to do things in order to appear righteous (another point we made in Chapter 1). Rather, as Paul emphasizes, we must do what we do out of love and a sincere valuing of the needs of others above our own.

4. Paul emphasized that whenever we serve others or do good, we should do so wholeheartedly and with joy rather than focusing on how our actions might impact us negatively. If we look at service through the eyes of our own pride, we will always find things to be unhappy about. As Paul wrote: “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault’” (Philippians 2:14–5).

Finally, we should not forget, of course, that humility is more than just an ongoing attitude regarding what we do right. Humility is often (if not always) the best response in situations where we realize that we have said or done something unwise or wrong. For example, saying “I’m sorry, that was not the best way to say that” when we have not expressed ourselves in love may sometimes require humility, but it is infinitely better than letting interpersonal conflict go unhealed. Humility regarding what we do wrong is part of letting the light shine through us, too.

If we truly make humility part of our lives, God will be able to use us without reservation, without holding back opportunities he might otherwise have given us to serve and help others. And, if true humility does begin to fill our lives, it may even be something that others see as part of the light God gives us. As John Newton, the great English clergyman and slavery abolitionist, wrote “I am persuaded that love and humility are the highest attainments in the school of Christ and the brightest evidence that he is indeed our Master.”

CONCLUSION: Shining More and More

“The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.” (Proverbs 4:18)

We saw in this book that God calls all Christians to grow in such a way that we can become increasingly effective lights to others. Our motivation for shining in this way must be to please God and to better help others, but the two goals are not separate and are directly tied to the destiny to which every Christian is called.

The more we please God, the more we can be a helpful light; and the more we help others, the more we please God. We see this in the beautiful and inspiring words found in the book of Daniel: “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3). Or, as Jesus himself said, “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear” (Matthew 13:43).

That is the true extent of the Christian calling – not just to be converted and to become churchgoers, but to become servants of God who work joyfully to serve as lights and to further God’s plan for us and for all his children. That is our true destiny, as Paul wrote – for God “has qualified [us] to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light” (Colossians 1:12).

If we are new Christians, we can ask God to help us become true lights. If we are established believers, we can ask him to make us better and brighter lights. With God’s help, all of us can shine with a brighter light – Always!

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