

Shine the Light of Unconditional Love

Jesus, speaking to His followers, said ... *"You are the light of the world"* (Matt 5:14). That sounds reasonable, but what does that mean practically? So, now let us have a look at the practical, day to day meaning of 'shining your light'.

Matt 5:16 ... *"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."*

So now, what does that look like in practice? Being the light of the world. How will the "world" know and recognise us as being "light"? How will this draw them to Jesus and bring glory to God?

Well let's examine some scriptures and find our answer.

John 1:4 ... *"In Him (Christ) was life, and the life was the Light of men."*

1 John 5:11-12 ... *"And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."*

So, to start with, eternal life and light are found in Christ, and therefore in those in whom He dwells – the born again. So, when Jesus says, *"you are the light of the world"* He is referring to believers, those in whom He lives.

1 John 2:4-6 ... *"The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to **walk in the same manner as He walked.**"*

And what was the manner in which Christ walked? He walked in unconditional love. He laid down everything, faced scourging, rejection, beatings and bore our punishment so that we could live by His life – now and for all eternity.

And He tells us that we are to walk in the same manner as He walked. Listen to what He tells us, or rather, what He commands us:

John 15:12-13 ... *"**This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.** Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."*

John 13:34-35 ... *"A new commandment I give to you, **that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**"*

And how did Christ love us? ... **Unconditionally.** He laid everything aside and gave His life for us that we may have the light of life. Eternal life. Eternal Light.

So, I submit to you that that being the light of the world means walking in Christ, empowered by His Light and Life, which simply means operating in unconditional love. It is by a continual demonstration of unconditional love to those around us, no matter who or where, that the world will know we are

Christ's and will receive His love, life and light. So, it's all about letting Christ be seen in and through you in all you do and say!

So now, what does shining the light of unconditional love of Christ look like on a daily basis?

There are a number of examples we can consider, and from which we can learn.

1. Consider **Abraham**, as recorded in Genesis 12 - 22. God tells Abram to leave his country and go to a place God will lead him to. He obeys without questioning, and goes in faith. God also promised him a son, and after waiting 25 years, when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90 years old, finally Isaac was born. Then, to test Abraham's love and devotion to God, when Isaac was a young lad God asked Abraham to offer him up as a burnt offering. He obeyed, without questioning, and did as God asked – built an altar and bound Isaac up and placed him on the altar – with God stopping him a moment before he plunged the knife into Isaac's heart. Such was Abraham's unconditional love and obedience to God.

To show unconditional love to the people around us starts with absolute trust in, and love for, the One who is our life and our all, Christ. Abraham showed this by his absolute trust and obedience to God.

Everyone knows Abraham – the father of faith – because of his love for God and obedience to God's commands. Imagine the impact this had on young Isaac – to reinforce his love and trust in God. Imagine the impact on everyone else who knew Abraham, including you and me!

... Is God asking you to do something for Him, for which your obedience will demonstrate to everyone around your unconditional love and obedience to God.

What would your response be if God asked you to give up the very best and most precious thing to you, if that's what unconditional love towards God meant?

A true story – In their book "Peace Child" Don and Carol Richardson tell how they were missionaries to the cannibalistic Sawi people in New Guinea, risking their lives to go there, and how they managed through a tribal custom, where chiefs of tribes swapped their firstborn sons to keep peace between the tribes, to explain how God sent His only Son to us to bring peace between mankind and God. The result was a spiritual and social revolution. The Richardsons shone the light of unconditional love by going to New Guinea to share the gospel, knowing they could end up in the cooking pot! God gave His best for us, and in response, in return out of love we should give up our best for Him. It is through this kind of unconditional love that others will come to know Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

2. Consider **Joseph**, As recoded in Genesis 37-50. He was his father's favourite, and for this his brothers hated him and wanted to kill him but compromised and sold him to slave traders. As a result, he spent years in slavery and, unjustly, in prison in a foreign land. Never once do we see or hear Joseph complain. He just trusts God and lives accordingly. Ultimately, through God's hand and favour on his life, became prime minister and saved both the Egyptian and Hebrew nations from famine. When eventually he was reunited with his brothers, not once did he try and get revenge on his brothers, but rather he showed them unconditional love. Listen to his words to his brothers in Gen 50:20-21 ... "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present

result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones. So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.” ... That is the “light” of unconditional love!

Do you have family or others near to you, possibly work mates, who hate you, give you a hard time, and treat you unjustly?

If so, what is your response to them? Is it a demonstration of unconditional love and forgiveness? Does your “light” shine in those dark places?

Do you know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose ... to *become* conformed to the image of His Son. In other words, to love unconditionally as Jesus does.

3. Consider **Jesus and Judas**. In Mark 3:13-19 we see that Jesus chose Judas to be one of His 12 disciples, knowing from the very beginning that he would betray Him. In the Gospels we see how Judas betrayed Jesus. But never once do we see Jesus complain or try to do something to get revenge. He only offered love – unconditional love to Judas. Jesus treated Judas exactly the same as He treated the other disciples.

If you have someone who you know will betray you, or who has betrayed you in the past, what will your response be? Will it be one of unconditional love?

People are watching. Is your “light” shining?

4. Consider the **Macedonian believers** (Philippians) as recorded in 2 Cor 8:1-5. Paul asked the Philippian believers to participate in a collection for famine relief for the saints in Judea. And although the Macedonian believers were going through “a great ordeal of affliction” and “deep poverty” they gave “beyond their ability”, “in the wealth of liberality” and “of their own accord.”

This sounds like the early believers in Acts 2:44-45 ... “And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.”

How far does our love through generosity stretch? Until it hurts? What would your response be if God told you to give everything away to bless others? How bright is the “light” of your generosity?

A true story – something that had great impact on my life. My dad, missionary in Africa, giving our last bit of bread to a stranger. We were little kids and there was only one last little part of a loaf of bread left, no other food in the house. A tramp came up to the mission house and asked for food. Dad asked our mother to cut the bread and give it to the man. She did this and gave it to him along with a cup of black tea. There was nothing else to offer him. I remember standing there staring at the man while the last of our food disappeared. While he ate dad shared the gospel with him. After the man left, when I asked dad why he had given our last bit of food to the tramp his answer was from God’s word: Heb 13:2 ... “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Dad's unconditional love and obedience was rewarded by God – a few hours later a stranger, who had walked miles from their village to our mission house, brought us a chicken! That lady said that God had impressed on her the urgency and need to bring us the chicken. What love and obedience! I have never forgotten this example Dad set for us.

5. Consider the **Good Samaritan** as recorded in Luke 10:25-37. It wasn't the Jewish priest or Levite who went to the aid of their fellow countryman – it was a Samaritan – the enemy of the Jew. He put aside his travel agenda, his business meetings, to care for the injured Jew. He then left enough money with the innkeeper to make sure the man would fully recover.

The story of the Good Samaritan came from Jesus to reinforce what He meant when He said the following words: Luke 10:27 ... *"And Jesus answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself."*

Your "neighbour" is everyone – including your enemies.

How well does your "unconditional love" stretch when it comes to your "enemies"?

Remember Jesus words in Luke 6:27-36 ... *"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."*

The "world" in which we shine as "lights" includes the world of our enemies!

6. Consider the **Prodigal Son's father** as recorded in Luke 15:11-32. Here's a young man who basically did everything against his father's better judgement. He absolutely wasted his inheritance, his life – everything. He became a social outcast. Yet every day his father would wake up early and lookout over the horizon to see if his son was coming home. There was never one mention or moment where he expressed anger against what his son had chosen to do. He unconditionally loved that boy and longed for his return. When the son came to his senses and went back home, he was met by open arms and love – not a word of anger or "I told you so." Just love, acceptance and forgiveness!

Have you possibly got a family member, or someone close to you, who has or is kicking against every bit of sense and doing their own selfish thing, heading down the path of destruction? Are you angry with that person and letting them know you're not happy? Or are you expressing unconditional love and forgiveness in your prayers and actions towards them? Do they see your "light" shining in love, acceptance and forgiveness?

We could go on with many more examples, like Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit who went about doing good performing miracles and helping people come to the Lord, who was hated by and killed by the Council which included the High priest of the day. Listen to Stephen's words as he is being stoned to death from Acts 7:60 ... *"Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' Having said this, he fell asleep."* Sounds just like Jesus on the cross Luke 23:34 ... *"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."*

Or we could site Paul, called of God to bring the gospel to the Gentile world at great personal expense, and for his troubles was stoned almost to death, beaten many times, and unjustly imprisoned by the anti-Christ religious mob. Yet we never hear a word of anger, complaint, or bitterness coming from Paul – only unconditional love in all he says and does.

I would like to finally read out the definition of love as recorded in 1 Corinthians:

1 Cor 13:1-8 ... *"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.*

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

So, may we all be encouraged to be the "light" the world so needs, and let that "light", the unconditional love of Christ, be seen in and through everything we say and do with everyone around us.

Col 3:12-17 ... *"So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."*

I trust these few examples will help us to understand the practical side of being a "light" in this dark world. And remember, you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you!

So, let the "light" of God's love shine unconditionally in and through you wherever you are! Be the "light of the world." Bring the unsaved to Christ and glory to God.

Amen!