

What if... We Were the Light?

Philippians 2:12-18

PPT Title

What if We Were the Light?

Main Point: We should light up the dark places with the way we live our lives.

Key Verse: *Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.* - Philippians 2: 15b

Props: Cell phone that will light up

INTRO

Before we get started, I need some advice. I've noticed lately that it's a little too bright in my house. So yesterday I went to Home Depot. I walked past the "Lighting" section and tried to find the "Darking" section. I wanted to look at their "dark bulbs" but I just couldn't seem to find them. What should I do? (*Listen for answers.*) Oh, that's right. Now I remember: there is no such thing as a darkening machine. Things are naturally dark and it's only bright when there's a light source. During the day it's bright out because of the sun. At night, we have to use lamps and headlights.



Have you ever walked through a room at night with the lights off? What happens? Ouch! You will most likely stub your toe or hit your shin on something. You know what I do when I'm caught in the dark and I need to find my way? I whip out my...cell phone! **Show cell phone and make it light up.** This light doesn't seem to do much good out here in a bright room, does it? But even though this light is kind of puny, when it's really dark around me, that light seems really bright, and I'm really grateful to have it!



Today we're going to continue reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians. In the letter, Paul talks about light and darkness, but it's not the kind of light that comes from a cell phone. It's a spiritual light that comes from God. And it's something that everyone in this room needs to know about, so keep your ears wide open.

BACKGROUND

Last week we mentioned a certain holiday. Who remembers which one? Why did we talk about Christmas in October? Paul's letter described what Jesus did. He gave up His "rights" as God, and came to earth as a helpless baby. He served ordinary people, then died to take away our sin. Paul said we should have the same mind set—the same thoughts—as Jesus. Don't be selfish, thinking "I'm all that." Think of others as more important than yourself. Believe that other people are worth giving up whatever you "deserve". Do whatever it takes to lead people toward God.



IN MY ABSENCE

The next thing Paul writes to his friends is this:

Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. - Philippians 2: 12a



Paul was the first one who ever told the Philippian people about Jesus. He was their first teacher, their leader. They loved learning about God's kingdom and they soaked up everything he taught them. When Paul lived in Philippi with them, they followed everything he said. But at this time he was far away from them. And he was saying, "It's even more important to follow my instructions now." Why is that?



I think it's kind of like this: I'm sure your teacher at school has rules for her classroom. What are some of those rules? (*Allow kids to answer.* No talking without raising your hand, no looking on someone else's paper, etc.) So most kids probably follow these rules pretty well while she's in the room. But what if she has to walk down to the office for a minute? Does everyone still obey? The kids who obey then are the ones who have respect in their hearts. They want to do the right thing, no matter what. To them, it's not about how much they can "get away with" without getting in trouble. They want to do what's right. I bet the teacher would say it's even more important that you follow the rules when she is *not* in the room.



It was this way with Paul. He was telling his friends that following Jesus is a matter of the heart. It shouldn't matter if your leader is with you or not. Paul was no longer in Philippi to tell them every little thing to do (or not do). They would have to be self-controlled (Galatians 5:22-23). They could only do this if they were studying God's word and listening to His voice every day. They had to rely on God, not on Paul. And relying on God is a very good thing.

For Older Kids: When other people in Philippi looked at the believers they might even say, "You know, I thought those believers were just following that Paul guy. But now he's gone and they still live in this really special way—having a great time together, sharing everything, laughing, eating, singing. It seems they have a real relationship with this God of theirs. I want a relationship with the Creator of the universe! I'd like to live like that!"

Paul continued: *Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.* - Philippians 2: 12b-13

In the original language (Greek) verses 12 and 13 were one sentence; they go together. Paul told his believing friends to be sure to keep doing the good work (like loving others and telling people about Jesus). Here's the key: God's Spirit was inside of them, giving them the desire and the power to do good things! Because they believed in Jesus, God's Spirit gave them the "want to" and the "can do" to do God's will. Paul wanted them to take this really seriously because it's God's work! We wouldn't want to get in the way of God's power doing God's will!

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Now we'll see what Paul had to say about light and darkness.



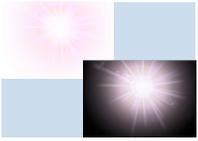
Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. - Philippians 2: 14-15

If you do what pleases God (and you're grateful instead of complain-y, and you get along with people instead of being argue-y) you will shine! Now, I can see that no one here is literally glowing. None of us has an "on" switch or a light bulb sticking out of our ear. What Paul is talking about here is the spiritual light I mentioned earlier.



God says that He is the Light (Isaiah 60: 19). 1 John 1:5 says, "God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all." Spiritual light comes from God, and spiritual darkness is wherever God is not. Darkness came to earth as soon as Adam and Eve sinned and were separated from God. Evil and sin separate people from God, so where there

is sin it is dark (Isaiah 59:2, John 3:19, Ephesians 5:11). But when we believe in Jesus, our sin is wiped away! We are no longer separated from God. God's Spirit lives inside of us. WE ARE THE LIGHT! Jesus told His followers, "You are the light of the world... Let your light shine in front of others. Then they will see the good things you do. And they will praise your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16)



If a room is already lit up, does it need more light? (No.) Where will a light do the most good? (In a dark place!) When Paul received the light of Jesus, he didn't need to stay where all the other believers were. He went to Philippi because it was a very dark place where no one knew about Jesus. When people saw Paul's light, they started to believe. So in his letter, Paul encouraged those friends to go into more dark places and shine their light. The more they shined, the more Paul was filled with joy!

JESUS' PERFECT EXAMPLE



Can you think of anyone else in the Bible who did this? JESUS did! He is the perfect example of this! Jesus was in heaven with God (John 1:14, 6:46; 1 John 1:1-2). Heaven is the brightest place there is, in every way. Did you know that there is no sun or moon in heaven? God's glory is so bright, it just lights up the place! (Revelation 21:23) But more important than light we can see is the spiritual light there. In heaven, there is NO sin. Since God is light, there is no brighter place than where God is.

Before Jesus came to earth, it was so very dark, spiritually. On earth, not one person was without sin (Romans 3:10). Everyone was filled with darkness. Sin was all around, causing hate, violence, sickness, separation. It was a very sad and desperate place. So Jesus left heaven to come to earth. Jesus didn't think of His own comfort or His own "right" to be in heaven. He brought His light into the utter darkness! Hundreds of years before Jesus came, the prophet, Isaiah, foretold it this way:

*The people who are now living in darkness will see a great light.
They are now living in a very dark land. But a light will shine on them...
A child will be born to us. A son will be given to us. He will rule over us.
And He will be called Wonderful Adviser and Mighty God. He will also be called Father
Who Lives Forever and Prince Who Brings Peace. - Isaiah 9:2, 6
(See also Matthew 4:12-17.)*

When Jesus went out to speak, crowds gathered because Jesus was so different than the dark world they lived in. He spoke truth and performed miracles. Jesus' light was so bright! Many people believed in Him and then they began to shine.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?



Can you think of a spiritually dark place (a place where God is not known or not welcome, where people live in sin, doing what they know is wrong)? Is there any place that you come across on a regular basis that is spiritually dark?

Sometimes we get discouraged by the dark places we find ourselves in. Those places make us feel uncomfortable and even lonely sometimes. But remember, those are the very places that need light the most. And the darker it is around you, the brighter your light will be!

Do not be afraid to take your light to a dark place. Remember that light takes away dark; dark cannot take away light! Think about it: When you leave a room, does your mom say, "Turn on the dark." No! She says, "Turn off the light." The dark doesn't have power over the light. The light source has power over the darkness. It's the same way spiritually (Romans 1:20). The Bible promises us that "The One who is in you is more powerful than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). That means, God's Holy Spirit who lives inside of every believer is immeasurably stronger than the devil who causes all the evil. And the good things that you do have more power than the bad things in the dark places.

I'd like to end with this story. (Teacher, if you have a personal story about being light in a dark place, please share it. Or, feel free to share Pastor Buddy & Jody's story.)



A number of years ago, Pastor Buddy preached on this same topic—being light in a dark place. After the sermon, his wife Jody was a little upset. She told Buddy, “I’m a pastor’s wife and I’m at church all the time. My friends already follow Jesus. I don’t really have any dark places to be light in.”

But a few days later, Jody told Buddy she signed up to play tennis on the local tennis team. Buddy said, “Oh, that’s nice. You’ll really enjoy that.”

“No,” Jody said. “I don’t enjoy it at all. I’m the worst player on the team. I signed up because I know there are women who don’t know Jesus on that team.” Do you see? Jody found a dark place to go to! Jody became friends with the ladies on the team. And as she got to know them, she was able to be kind and humble and generous, like Jesus. In time, those ladies noticed Jody’s light and some of them began to follow Jesus too!

Those ladies, and some of their family members, no longer live in the kingdom of darkness. They are in God’s eternal kingdom of light!

You never know who is out there in the darkness, waiting for you to come and shine God’s light. If you have a dark place in your life (it might be at your school or your ball team, it might be in your home or a neighbor’s house), pray for God’s power to make you a bright light there. If you don’t know of a dark place, pray that God would send you to one and make you shine like a bright star there!

PPT Main Point

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PPT Key Verse

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