

## YOU SHINE AS LIGHTS

- A. Introduction: The single most important thing you can do for yourself is to become a regular reader of the Bible, particularly the New Testament. We're working on a series aimed at helping us overcome challenges that often keep people from regular effective reading.
1. By regular reading I mean reading the New Testament everyday (or as close to that as possible) and reading each book from start to finish in as few sessions as possible. Don't worry about what you don't understand. Just keep reading.
    - a. The purpose of this type of reading is to become familiar with the text because understanding comes with familiarity, and familiarity comes with regular repeated reading.
    - b. Among other things, regular Bible reading will change your perspective which will change your priorities. This new perspective and changed priorities will affect how you deal with life and lighten the mental and emotional load of life's challenges.
  2. Recently we've focused on the fact that this new perspective is an eternal perspective. An eternal perspective recognizes that there's more to life than just this life and that the greater part is after this life.
    - a. An eternal perspective realizes that everything we see (or experience) in this life is temporary and subject to change by God's power either in this life or the life to come.
    - b. An eternal perspective recognizes that the joy ahead (in the life after this life) far outweighs the pain and struggles of this life. An eternal perspective knows that eternal things (things that will outlast this life) matter most.
      1. II Cor 4:17-18—Paul the apostle had an eternal perspective that enabled him to view his many hardships as temporary in comparison to forever. He knew the end result would far outweigh his present troubles. Consequently, his troubles didn't weigh him down.
      2. Paul got this perspective by looking at unseen things. There are two kinds of unseen things—things we can't see because they are invisible (such as Almighty God with us and for us) and things we can't see because they are future (yet to come). The only way we can see the unseen is through the Bible, the written Word of God.
    - c. An eternal perspective understands that the world the way it is right now isn't the way God created it to be because of sin. An eternal perspective recognizes knows that God's plan to have a forever family on this earth is presently unfolding and will ultimately be completed.
      1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin and make it possible for sinners to be transformed into sons and daughters of God. He will come again and restore the earth to a fit forever home for God and His family. Eph 1:4-5; I Pet 3:18; John 1:12-13; II Pet 3:10-13
      2. Then all, who throughout human history, have put faith in the revelation of Jesus given to their generation will be reunited with their bodies raised from the grave to return to earth to live with the Lord forever—God's plan completed. I Cor 15:21-24; Ps 37:11; Matt 13:41-43; Rev 21-22
  3. Last week we began to talk about how you balance an eternal perspective with living a regular life. What does it look like to live with an eternal perspective? We have more to say in this lesson.
- B. In this series, we've made reference several times to a statement Paul made that this world in its present form is passing away (I Cor 7:31, NIV). Paul understood the big picture—the fact that this earth will one day be renovated and restored for God and His family of redeemed sons and daughters.
1. Last week we looked at the context of his statement because it gives us insight into balancing an eternal perspective with living a regular life. You will recall that Paul wrote these words in the segment of a letter (an epistle) where he was dealing with issues related to marriage. I Cor 7:1-40
    - a. As Paul gave practical instruction about how to handle life issues, he made it clear that Christians must live with the awareness that this life is temporary and we are only passing through this world as

it is. When we have this perspective it influences our priorities and affects our behavior.

1. Remember what perspective is. Perspective is the power to see or think of things in their true relationship to each other (*Webster's Dictionary*).
  2. Paul reminded his readers that living this life matters, but there is something that matters more—God's unfolding plan for a family. And what matters most is that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus so that they can have a part in the family and have a life after this life.
- b. Note the context of Paul's statement. I Cor 7:29-31—Now let me say this, dear brothers and sisters: The time that remains is very short, so husbands should not let marriage be their major concern. Happiness or sadness or wealth should not keep anyone from doing God's work. Those in frequent contact with the things of this world should make good use of them without becoming attached to them (NLT), for this world in its present form is passing away (NIV).
1. In the context of ordinary living, Paul made reference to not letting anything keep you from doing the work of God (not money, emotions, marriage; etc.). We think of working for the Lord as serving in the church or being in ministry. But that's a limited view. Whatever it means to do the work of God, it must be something that all human beings can do no matter when or where they were born or what their life circumstances are.
  2. Jesus said: This is the work of God, that you believe on Me and let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven. The most important thing any of us is believe on Jesus and then shine the light of the Lord in our little corner of the world. John 6:28-29; Matt 5:16
  3. Note that in I Cor 7:19 Paul pointed out that whatever you do, whatever your circumstances, "the important thing is to keep God's commandments" (NLT). What are His commandments? The apostle John wrote—And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us (I John 3:23, NLT).
2. Consider other statements Paul made as he addressed practical issues in his letter to the Corinthians. In this same chapter he told believers: So, dear brothers and sisters, whatever situation you were in when you became a believer, stay there in your new relationship with God (I Cor 7:24, NLT).
- a. When we read the entire thought, we find that Paul exhorted his readers: If you're married, don't seek to be free from it; if you're circumcised, don't try to reverse it; if you're a slave, don't seek to be free (I Cor 7:17-20).
  - b. Paul wasn't saying you can't get a divorce or promoting circumcision. Nor was he advocating slavery. Paul was emphasizing the point that whatever your circumstances are, keep an eternal perspective. Don't be too attached to this world as it is. Remember the big picture.
    1. v22—If you were a slave when the Lord called you, the Lord has now set you free from the awful power of sin. And if you were free when the Lord called you, you are now a slave of Christ. God purchased you at a high price. Don't be enslaved by the world (NLT).
    2. What kind of work for the Lord can a slave do? Paul gave instruction in Col 3:22-24. A slave can have the right priorities (the most important thing is that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus) and the right perspective (I work for the Lord and He will give me my reward—forever life with Him on this earth made new).
  - c. It's been infused into many of us through a 21<sup>st</sup> century western world version of Christianity that we each have a destiny (meaning what we do in this life) and that we must work for the Lord (meaning have a ministry or work in church). But if you were a regular reader of the Bible you would see that that is not the language of the New Testament.
    1. Most of us have to go to work, take care of the kids, maintain a home, pay bills—and end up living a mundane life. Then we struggle with guilt that we aren't doing enough for the Lord.
    2. In the context of putting "into action God's saving work in your lives" (Phil 2:12, NLT), Paul

wrote: You are to live clean, innocent lives as children of God in a dark world full of crooked and perverse people. Let your lives shine brightly before them. Hold tightly to the word of life (Phil 2:15-16, NLT).

A. Paul also wrote: Eph 5:8—Once your life was full of sin’s darkness, but now you have the very light of our Lord shining through you because of your union with him. Your mission is to live as children flooded with his revelation light (TPT).

B. Eph 5:8—For though your hearts were once full of darkness, now you are full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it (NLT).

C. If we were to keep reading what Paul wrote following Eph 5:8 we would find that he wrote these words to husbands, wives, parents, children, slaves and slave masters—everyone.

3. Let’s reexamine Paul’s statement about his perspective in II Cor 4:17-18—For our present troubles are quite small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever (NLT). Note that Paul said our troubles produce eternal results.

a. The Greek word that is translated produce means to work fully or accomplish, and by implication, to finish. There are several aspects to Paul’s statement. First, if we stay faithful to the Lord, no matter what troubles come our way, we will make it to the life after this life.

1. But there’s more to it. Many of Paul’s troubles were directly related to preaching the gospel—the hardships of travel, the pain of persecution; the responsibility of the churches; etc. But he knew that the troubles were working or producing eternal results.

2. Note some statements Paul made about his many troubles: So, when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your benefit and salvation (II Cor 1:6, NLT). All of these things are for your benefit (II Cor 4:15, NLT). I am willing to endure anything if it will bring salvation and eternal glory in Christ Jesus to those God has chosen (II Tim 2:10, NLT).

b. Maybe you’re thinking: Of course Paul’s troubles produced eternal results. He was an apostle. But I’m an ordinary person. What will my life do? The Bible gives many examples of ordinary people living mundane lives, but unbeknownst to them, God worked it into His plan for a family.

1. Consider these examples. In each case, an individual performed ordinary tasks that were woven into God’s redemptive plan. I Sam 20:35-40—Jonathan’s arrow carrier was involved in communicating a life saving message to David that saved his life, but the boy didn’t know it. I Kings 17:1-7—Someone baked the bread that kept Elijah the prophet alive during a famine. Elijah still had to confront Baal worshippers and rid the land of idol worship. Matt 21:1-11—Someone raised the donkey Jesus rode into Jerusalem in fulfillment of prophecy (Zech 9:9).

2. The Bible makes it clear that God is able to use the events of life and cause them to serve His purposes. The following statements are made in the context of God’s plan for a family.

A. Eph 1:11—In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will (NIV).

B. Rom 8:28—And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them (NLT).

1. Almighty God is able to use the circumstances and events of life in a fallen world and cause them to serve His ultimate purpose—a family of sons and daughters with whom He can live forever. An eternal perspective recognizes this fact.

2. He is able to bring maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to the most people possible as He works genuine good out of genuine bad. (For an in depth discussion of these points, read my book: *Why Did This Happen? What Is God Doing?*)

C. Sadly, much of the popular Christian teaching in the western world makes it seem as though God’s primary purpose is to make this present life the highlight of our existence. The whole emphasis is on how to make

this life prosperous and successful. However, if you are a regular Bible reader then you know that is not the emphasis of the New Testament.

1. God isn't opposed to people to being prosperous or successful. The problem is that this concept is a 21<sup>st</sup> century western world idea. A huge portion of the world has no access to upward mobility or financial abundance like we do in the western world. (This doesn't mean that God won't meet their needs, because He most certainly will. The point is that much of the teaching we hear in this country is way out of balance. Lots of lessons for another time).
    - a. These non-biblical ideas are not only counterproductive, they can actually be destructive. They create false expectations about what God will and won't do for us, which leads to disappointment when the supposed promises go unmet, when we expect Him to do what He has not promised to do.
      1. This disappointment results in anger at God or frustration with self. What's the matter with me? What am I doing wrong? Why am I not flowing in the blessing? God doesn't love me.
      2. These ideas lead to misplaced priorities and leave Christians unprepared to deal with the harsh realities of life in a fallen world where troubles come to us all.
    - b. So much teaching is based on single verses taken out of context with an entire doctrine built on that verse. But if you aren't a regular reader of the New Testament, then you don't know that.
      1. Here's a sample: We are more than conquerors and can do all things through Christ. Speak to your mountain and it will move. Jesus came to give us an abundant life. Passages such as these have been misinterpreted to mean that if you do and say the right things, you can keep troubles away or quickly get rid of them if it comes. (many lessons for another day)
      2. There's no such thing as a problem free life in a world damaged by sin. Jesus said that in this world we will have tribulation. In this world moths and rust corrupt and thieves break through and steal. You can do everything right and things still go wrong. John 16:33; Matt 6:19
  2. Regular Bible reading gives you an accurate view of life in a fallen world. There's no way to avoid life's hardships. But we're only passing through, so it's all temporary and the best is yet to come.
    - a. In many situations the victory comes—not from your trouble ending—but from being able to rise above it mentally and emotionally because you have proper a perspective and proper priorities. You realize that in comparison to forever, this is not such a big deal.
    - b. Do you know the context of Phil 4:13—I can do all things through Christ? When Paul wrote these words he was in a Roman prison. He had already been in Roman custody for over two years and faced the possibility of execution.
      1. During his imprisonment, Christians from the Greek city of Philippi sent Paul a financial gift to help him out. Paul wrote back in part to thank them for their support and made this statement:
      2. Phil 4:11-13—Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need (NLT).
        - A. Paul faced his challenges with the certainty that God would get him through and that God would cause it all to serve His eternal purposes. This perspective lightened the load.
        - B. Paul wrote to the Philippians: “(I want you to know that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ” (Phil 1:12-13, ESV).
- D. Conclusion: We have more to say next week, but consider one more statement Paul made just a few verses before he called his troubles momentary and light: II Cor 4:7—But this precious treasure—this light and power that now shines within us—is held in perishable containers...so that everyone can see that our glorious power is from God and is not our own (NLT). Regular reading will help you shine your light more brightly.