

Whose 'Little Light' Is Shining?

Today's Scriptures makes me think of the camp song, "This Little Light of mine; I'm gonna' let it shine."

<p>MATTHEW 5: 14-16 (NRSV) <i>"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that</i></p>	<p><i>they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.</i></p> <p>JOHN 8:12 (NRSV) <i>Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."</i></p>
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Matthew has Jesus saying, "You are the light of the world." John has him saying, "I am the light of the world." So, here's my question: whose "little light" is the light of world? Is it Jesus' light; or is it ours?

I think the answer is, "Yes!"

I think I can build a case that Jesus built his ministry on the prophetic writings of Isaiah, in particular, the passages that are called "Servant Songs", and even more specifically, the "Suffering Servant" Songs. And, if we can anchor his life and ministry there, then we have a hook on which we can hang our understanding of his use of the metaphor of light.

ISAIAH 60:1-3 (NRSV) *Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.*
² *For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.*
³ *Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

"Arise, shine because your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."

Your light and the Glory of God are one and the same. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world"; and he said the words I often quote as a benediction at the closing of a worship service, "You are the light of the world. ... Let your light shine so that all people will see your great works and give God glory."

"Rise and Shine!" I hated those words growing up. That's how my mom awakened me in the morning. I never was a morning person. "Rise and Shine!" Where did Mom get all that energy that early in the morning? And can't she figure out it's not contagious? I'm reminded of another camp song, "You Can't Be a Beacon If Your Light Don't Shine!" I'll rise. I'll get up; but I won't shine. My bulbs burned out.

Sometimes I feel my spiritual bulb's burned out, too! Maybe that's what's contagious: we're a burned-out people living in a burned out culture.

Burnout—it's real. It has major consequences. It leaves you empty, discouraged and exhausted, with little energy left for God or your family or your community or yourself. Sometimes we just have to replace that burned out light bulb. Here are five ways to open our lives so "our light can come; and the glory of the Lord can rise upon us":

1. Get away. Jesus' disciples were tired, and he invited them to "*Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.* —MARK 6:31, NASB

You don't have to use vacation days or drive far away to take a break. You just have to be intentional and systematic: schedule time for nothing but to recharge your batteries. Our schedules and calendars pretty much dictate our lives; so, put in your schedule. Pick a place close by to relax and simply seek God's presence: a community park, a pool, a hammock or rocking chair, a quiet corner of an ice cream or coffee shop, a book store or library, or a spot by the water. You might even bring some music or a journal.

If you like to be active, try going on a hike or bike ride, kayaking, taking a one-person picnic, gardening or painting. Getting away doesn't have to mean a change in your physical location, as long as you're getting away from daily stresses to spend time with God.

2. Be still. *Be still, and know that I am God.* —PSALM 46:10A, NASB

Taking time to "be still" may be harder today than ever. So much screams for our attention in this fast-paced, digital world. Elijah heard God in the form of a "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12). If we don't intentionally (there's that word again): if we don't intentionally make time to turn down life's noise and be still, we could miss God's quiet message to our hearts.

If you aren't intentionally setting aside one day a week—or even part of a day—to rest and worship, now is a good time to start. [Notice: I didn't say set aside time to "go to church." My ego wants you here; and I truly believe we benefit greatly by participating in the fellowship and giving ourselves to the act of corporate worship. Make time, somewhere, to be still—and worship.

3. Listen. *A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.* —PROVERBS 1:5, NASB

When you pray, do you do all the talking? Maybe we don't hear God because we don't listen. Sometimes God speaks to us in a still, small voice. Other times, He sends a meaningful message through a person or experience—a movie or a book or a song or an incident in the checkout line at Wal*Mart. Yet, worry, stress and a growing "to-do" list can clutter our minds and keep us from listening. Which is why #1 and #2 are so important: Get Away and Be Still. And Listen

4. Meditate. *But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and*

night. —PSALM 1:2, ESV

Meditation is an act of listening. There are so many thoughts crowding our minds that it can be hard to focus. We're pulled in every direction, with this person or that thing demanding our attention. But then we come to a verse like Psalm 1:2, which tells us to meditate on God's Word. How exactly do you do that? especially with such a hectic schedule?

Many of us equate meditation with that great sculpture, The Thinker by Auguste Rodin: a man sitting on the world with his elbow on his knee and fist under his chin, contemplating the universe. That's one valid image of meditation.

Another form of meditation is practiced by many Asian cultures and religions. Its purpose is to empty the mind and the soul. But the form of meditation many find most helpful is far from just taking a seat, thinking and doing nothing. It's not passive, nor powerless. It is actively reflecting, considering, pondering and contemplating a verse of scripture; a poem; a song. It is an active, deliberate effort to do something involving both mind and heart. And to follow this with action.

(Meditation) is learning to think of God in the busyness of real life.

Here's a starting place: Paul concludes his letter to believers in Philippi saying: "*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things*" (PHILIPPIANS 4:8).

That can be done while driving, while eating, working, taking a walk...

And each step builds on the previous: Get Away, Be Still, Listen, Meditate, and, finally:

5. Be present. *But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."* —LUKE 10:41-42, ESV

Find yourself going through the motions or so frazzled you can't really enjoy a special moment? As the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10 reveals, we can't afford to be so busy or distracted that we fail to hear God's voice, experience His presence, or respond to His goodness.

Has your light gone out? You're so busy you can't find the light switch? Too busy? I use that excuse, too; but, I know I make time for what's truly important to me. I allow the rest to invade my soul. Not everything I do—every social obligation or recreational activity or noble cause or civic responsibility is more important than my spiritual and mental well-being and the health of my relationships. When I'm frazzled and frayed like a broken rope, I lose effectiveness in every phase of life.

"Arise! Shine!" is a cruel wakeup call to one whose bulb is burned out.

Bill Hybels has a wonderful book that addresses the problem of the "too
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busy" generation. It's called *Too Busy Not to Pray*. It's even out on audio books.

And these five ideas about renewing your light come from a website I discovered this week. I've just touched the surface today. It's rich in spiritual guidance, and I recommend it and Hybels' book for those whose light has grown dim, or even burned out. Prayer Slide

<https://billygraham.org/story/5-ways-to-replenish-a-burned-out-soul/>