

Series: Life in the Body

Title: A Life Beaming with Light

Text: Ephesians 5:1-14

Proposition: Everyone can be a beaming light by practicing these behaviors.

Key Word: Behaviors

Tipp City has its annual “Mum” festival and the monthly summer community nights, where downtown or uptown comes alive with a party atmosphere. Likewise, during one of Jerusalem’s many festivals Jesus startled a worship service announcing, *“I am the light of the world, he who follows me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life.”* (John 8:12)

The Feast of Tabernacles featured a tradition known as the “Illumination of the Temple.” In the temple treasury stood four massive golden candelabras topped with huge torches. It is said that they were as high as the highest walls of the temple. There was a ladder for each, and young priests climbed the ladders to fill four 20 gallon bowls with oil. Eyewitnesses said that when the wicks were lit at evening, the huge flames illuminated all of Jerusalem.

While the Levites played songs of praise on their harps, cymbals, and other musical instruments, distinguished men danced around them with burning torches in their hands, singing. Can you imagine the smell of the oil, the heat of the smoking torches, and the shadows of the perspiring priests as they whirled about? This strange celebration commemorated the great pillar of fire that led the Israelites into the Promised Land. (Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 361 and Hughes, p. 164).

Early the next morning, with last night's smells still lingering in the breeze, Jesus proclaimed, "*I am the light of the world.*" The Jews knew exactly what he meant. It was as if he were saying, "I am glorious fire that guided your ancestors and lit up the night. I am the *Shekinah* glory that descended on Solomon's Temple. I am the light of the world, and if you follow me, you will never be in the dark again!"

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes it clear that followers of Jesus are beaming with God's glorious light. He reaffirmed Jesus' announcement at the Sermon on the Mount, "*You the light of the world.*" Jesus is the light, and by our relationship with Him, we are also a beaming light.

At the writing of this letter, many were aware of a life that rose above life's daily struggles and difficulties. They knew there had to be something more. But, it seemed that something was always pulling them in different directions, leaving them feeling helpless and caught in the middle. Hostile yet subtle forces warred within and outside of them. Differing priorities and perspectives divided their world. Many were looking for deliverance.

It seems to me that our world is not any different. Nations are increasingly hostile toward each other; communities are divided around issues of education, development, and the maintenance of the status quo. Churches are divided over core beliefs, the definitions of a true follower of Jesus Christ, and of sin. Families are divided by competing agendas, revival priorities, and the daily pressure to survive in a competitive culture.

Paul, a spiritual thought leader of his time, steps in to offer light and hope as a remedy for those struggling in anxious times. He describes our condition without Christ as one of darkness. But when the light of Christ shines on and within us, we are able to live without fear, and to walk in the light (v. 14). Isn't it true that we feel safer in light as opposed to darkness? So, the secret to living with faith in the midst of anxious times is to step out of the darkness into the beaming light.

Paul gives us some behaviors that beam with God's light. He encourages us to **pursue all the good we can.** v. 9. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement said it this way: "Do all the good you can." Next, Paul urges us to **please God and not yourself or others,** v. 10. Wesley simply said, "Love God." Finally, Paul calls us to **prune worthless pursuits.** v. 11. Wesley said it this way: "Avoid all the evil you can." Practicing these three simple behaviors will enable us to beam with God's light.

We have seen folks beam with such light. So, we're confident that such a life is possible for all. We're inspired by such witnesses and were drawn to it. In our better moments, we also admit that we have not always beamed with the light of a Christ follower. However, deep inside, we want to live with such radiance. We want to be faithful to God's loving ways. We want to be a healing influence, building others up, rather than tearing them down. We want honest conversations, patience in the midst of trials, loving acceptance, compromise, and shared vision. We desire forgiveness, changed lives, and new life. Yet, it seems that these behaviors can evade us, and sadly remain uncultivated.

John Wesley expected times like these. He also believed that everyone needs a power greater than themselves to live a life that beams with God's radiate love. He worried that new followers of Christ would hide their light under a basket, and would in his words become more a "child of the devil," than before they accepted Christ as Savior and Lord. (Journal from 8/12/1738 to 11/1/1739; Wesley's Works, Vol. 1, pg. 239)

He was aware that one could have taken all the right classes and have all kinds of support but could lose the power of God that translates into a beaming, radiate Christ-follower. So he took what he read in the Scriptures and particularly Paul's letters and condensed these simple rules or practices so that lives and communities could be changed. Let's take a better look at these three simple Behaviors that beam with God's light.

First, pursue all the good you can. v. 9. Wesley said, "Do all the good you can." Jesus himself modeled what it means to walk in the light. He had a heart for "the least of these." He took up a cross. He resisted the powers of oppression and evil. His plan included working with a "Helper" who would partner with us forever. His goals involved nothing short of establishing the kingdom of the highest heaven on earth.

Take Bea Gaddy. She was called the Mother Teresa of Baltimore because she fed the hungry and housed the homeless. Former president George Bush anointed her America's 695th "point of light." Family Circle magazine named her woman of the year. She survived poverty, hunger and homelessness -- "I know what it's like to hunt for food in a garbage can and eat out of a dumpster," she wrote.

She was a tiny, white-haired woman who was also larger than life. When word came that the 68-year-old had succumbed to breast cancer, Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley ordered that flags to be flown at half-staff. Maryland Gov. Parris N. Glendening praised Gaddy as "the beacon of hope for those who felt hopeless." Gaddy's annual Thanksgiving dinner fed the city. It required 80 tons of food, 30,000 paper plates, and 50 cases of aluminum foil, 2,000 pumpkin pies and 100 cases of sweet potatoes. More than 3,500 volunteers fed 20,000 people.

She converted her East Baltimore house into the headquarters of her Patterson Park Emergency Food Center, and she lived in the basement. She founded the Bea Gaddy Family Center for women and children, and no matter who called, or when, she had a bed or a cot, made up and ready.

'Just send 'em over,'" social services worker Sarah Matthews remembers Gaddy telling her, again and again. "'Just send 'em on over.' She never told me no."

Bea Gaddy refused to live in fear. She simply pursued what is "good, right and true."

Second, Please God and not yourself or others. v. 10 Wesley said, "Love God." We can accuse Jesus of many things but we can not accuse Him of not pleasing His father with His love. He learned early in His life that by staying close to His Father He would please His Father by fulfilling His mission of loving the world. Because he was close to His Father He was able to imitate His unconditional love. Paul wrote, "*Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us.*"

It's love that pleases God. It is treating the everyday people we come in contact with through out our lives, in the same way that God treats us. It is treating others fairly, and being honest, and kind with all persons. Above all, it is forgiving as God has forgiven us.

Tony Campolo had a hard time sleeping one night, so he got up at three thirty in the morning and went searching for an all-night coffee shop. He had found one and had ordered a donut and a cup of coffee when two prostitutes came in. They were loud and crude, and quite disagreeable company. Tony was ready to leave when he overheard one of the women say that the next day was her birthday.

Her friend sneered, "So what do you want from me? A birthday party? To which the woman replied, "Why should you give me a birthday party? I've never had a birthday party in my whole life." Now when Tony heard that, something clicked inside. He went over to the waiter and asked if the women came in every night, which they did. Then he asked if he could hold a birthday party for the one woman. Agnes. Well, the waiter thought it was a wonderful idea, and agreed.

Tony was back at the diner the next morning at two-thirty to decorate. He brought some crepe paper decorations and made a big birthday sign out of pieces of cardboard. He covered that diner from one end to the other. Somehow word of the party must have gotten out, because pretty soon the diner began to fill up with Agnes' friends.

At three thirty, Agnes and the other woman entered the diner. Everyone shouted, “Happy Birthday, Agnes,” and began singing happy birthday. Well, she was stunned. Her mouth fell wide open. By the time the waiter brought in the cake she was crying.

A little later Tony Campolo led the group in prayer. He prayed for Agnes and her salvation, and her friends. He prayed that her life would be changed and that God would be good to her. God was pleased that night because His light of love shined in the darkness through one man who knew and loved God.

Finally, Prune worthless pursuits or attitudes. v. 11. Wesley said it this way: “Avoid all the evil you can.” In other words, do no harm. It seems simple enough. Children learn to prune behaviors or pursuits that are harmful to others. And when we do it certainly changes our world. Most of us are familiar with the challenges of resolving complex situations and difficult issues. I have found that when I remember to prune any worthless thought or attitude, I have found that it saved me from a word or phrase I would have regretted.

I have also discovered that when I prune worthless attitudes, I am more poised to listen and discern the leadership of God’s spirit even in the midst of conflicting ideas. When I chose not to harm those who may disagree with me, I find that conversation, dialogue, and the discovery of new insights become possible. When I choose to prune worthless attitudes or pursuits I refrain from gossip about others with whom I disagree. I refuse to manipulate the facts in order to win the argument. I prune off the temptation to diminish those who disagree with me, because I see them as a cherished creation of

God. I realize too that I often need a power greater than my will to guard my tongue and my heart. It is not easy to abandon the way of the world which is quick to criticize, cut down, and manipulate the facts for selfish gain. It is not easy to follow Jesus in the pursuit of all that is good, right, and true. Jesus said that it is costly to follow him. In fact he said that we can not be one of his followers unless we are willing to give up all our possessions. For some this choice is too frightening, or too demanding, so they follow at a distance or not at all. But deep down, we want to follow him because we know that it is the only way that leads to life. Then we find we can trust the Lord for a power from on high.

My friends when we partner-up with Jesus, we can get on with the business of transforming a world of darkness into a world of light. Whatever our light shines on—if it shines clearly enough, consistently enough, and long enough, it will in the end transform us, then those all around us. Such a life beams with God. ²¹⁵⁴