

THE DARKNESS ^{AND} THE LIGHT

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THE DARKNESS AND
THE
LIGHT

REFLECTING JESUS IN A DARK WORLD
FOLLOW-UP DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO: _____

DATE STARTED: _____

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The light
shines

in the
darkness

& the darkness has not
overcome it.

John 1:5



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GETTING STARTED

If you're holding this book, you (probably) recently spent a few days going through *The Darkness and the Light* study with your youth group. Maybe you did this during a *Disciple Now*, or a retreat, or at camp. However, you came to start your journey with *The Darkness and the Light*, this book will help you continue it.

Have you ever been in a really dark place? A place with absolutely zero sources of light? If we're honest, sometimes we get scared. There is another kind of darkness that surrounds us. It's the darkness of a world without good—a world without God.

There is darkness in the world. But there is a light, too. And not just any light. It's a light that is overwhelming, all-consuming, and perfectly pure . . . a light that refuses to be ignored. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). God's light drives away the darkness. His light drives out fear. God's light saves. "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

You're going to take a deeper look at each one of these concepts. Look at the next page to see how this Book works.

HOW THIS BOOK WORKS

Here are a few things you need to know to put this book to good use.

Start With This Advice

Whether you're super-committed and read your Bible each day or struggle to read a few verses a couple of times a week, the key to sticking with this through four weeks is commitment. Your routine may change, but your commitment to meet God each day has to be there. Tell yourself that whether or not you read this journal at the same time each day, or if you read it whenever you get a few extra minutes, you'll make it a priority in your daily life.

Have Your Bible Open

Resist the urge to ignore the spots where this Book will tell you to read a passage of Scripture. This Book is only a guide for the Book. The close relationship with God that you want only happens by reading and doing what's in the Bible. Have it open as you go through this Book.

Each Week Is Structured the Same, But Is Different

Each week's content works in similar ways. But each day is different. And there are a lot of different kinds of activities. Some will take 3-5 minutes, some 10-15. Some will ask you to look at two or three passages of Scripture; some will ask you to think about a concept. The variety will make it easier to stick with and help you learn in different ways that are suited to you.

What If I Miss A Day of Reading? Or Three?

Don't give up! Take this at your pace! The goal is for you to grow closer to God. If you miss a day or two (or four), don't throw in the towel. Pick this Book back up and start where you left off. You can do this! And by doing it, you'll show the world that God makes an incredible difference in the lives of His followers. So, hang in there! You've got this!

**Well, that's what you need to know to get started!
Turn the page to read the introduction to Week 1.**

WEEK ONE

INTRO

Before you start Week 1, read this short intro.

God is light.

The world is dark.

You've probably heard this a lot recently. And you'll hear similar stuff said throughout this book. So let's pause for a second and explain what that means.

When the Bible says God is light, it doesn't mean that God is ACTUALLY light. While there were times in the Bible where God chose to show Himself in ways that were associated with literal light, the Bible doesn't mean to say that God, the Father, or Jesus, the Son, is literal, actual light.

Similarly, when the Bible talks about the world being dark, with the exception of the Creation story in Genesis 1, it doesn't mean that there is a lack of actual light. It doesn't mean that someone has turned out the lights.

What the Bible means when it says that God is light is that God is good. And loving. And merciful. And holy. And that His goodness, and love, and mercy, and holiness (and all of His other characteristics) shine as if they were actual light. We can feel God's goodness. We can know His love. And they light up creation like a spotlight cutting through the night sky.

What about the world? According to how the Bible uses this concept, the world is against God. Where God's light is the light of His goodness, the sin and evil at work in the world are like darkness. Spiritual darkness. The darkness of the world is in opposition to the light of God.

But do you want to know the awesome thing? The darkness of the world cannot overpower the light of God. Not by a longshot. Over the next few weeks, you're going to learn all about the light of God and how it impacts your life and the world around you. This week will lay the foundation for all that you will learn.

Are you ready to jump in? Turn the page, and let's get started.

WEEK | DAY ONE | ONE

Begin this day's devotion by reading Genesis 1:1-5. It's printed below, but if you have a Bible handy, consider reading it there.

Genesis 1:1-5

[1] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. [2] The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

[3] And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. [4] And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. [5] God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Know this: God exists. He is real. He makes Himself known to us through the Bible. And in the very first words of this holy book, we see God creating the Universe. At the beginning of all things, God already was. He existed. He alone was able to create the world because He alone was before the world. That's pretty awesome.

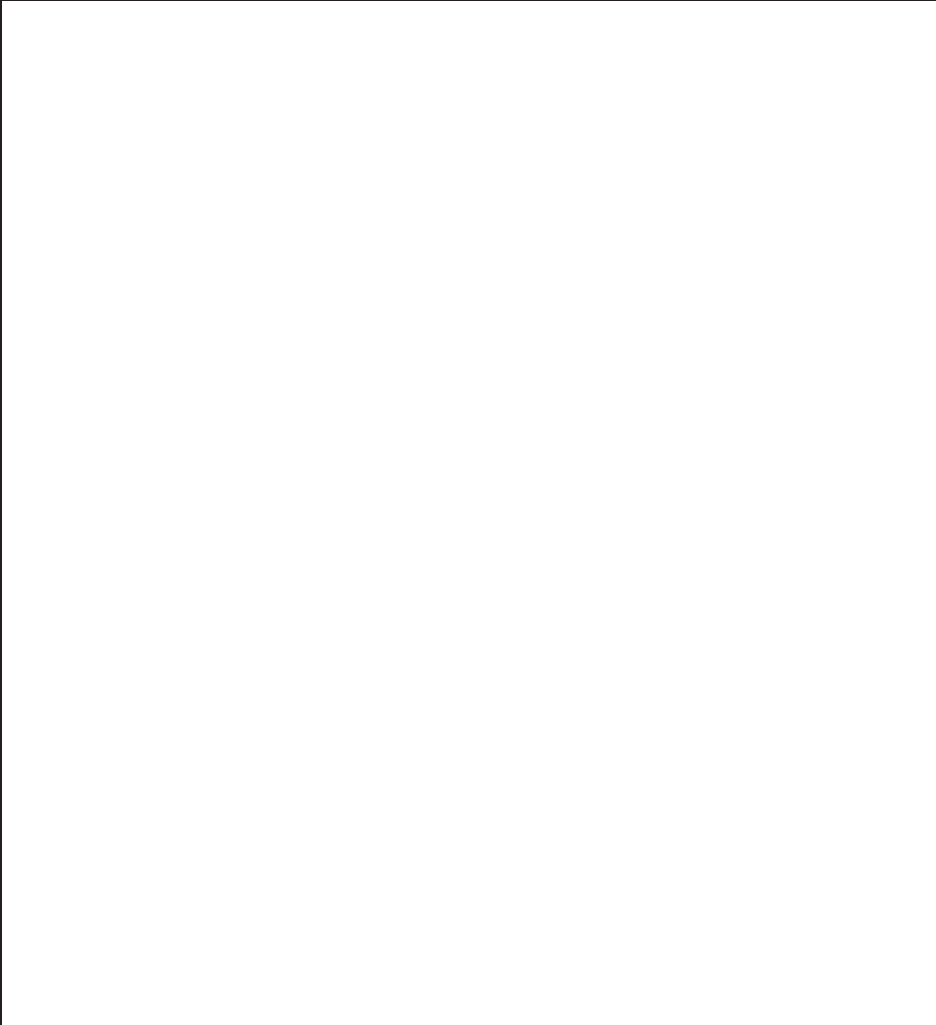
Now, look at how vs. 2 describes the world before God initiated creation. That is some pretty deep, pretty awesome stuff. Darkness over the deep? What does that even mean? How mysterious is that? But even as the darkness was covering all things, there was the Holy Spirit, "hovering" over the formless void.

Into this dark and lifeless expanse, God spoke light. Seriously. He spoke light. How does that even happen? Our finite human minds cannot begin to grasp all that this means. But we can grasp enough to know this: the Creator God spoke light into the darkness, and everything changed. The universe began. The cosmos was set in motion. Our world and eventually our lives were all brought into being. You exist because God wants you to be a part of His creation. But not just you: Flowers. Mountains. Waterfalls. Stars. Your family. Your pet. Creation exists because God saw fit for it to.

As you begin this four-week devotional on how God's light impacts you and the world around you, let's start by focusing on the world around you.

When was the last time you paused long enough to look around you at the majesty of God's creation and thanked Him for it? Maybe today is that day for you.

That's your challenge for today. Today, notice God's creation, specifically the light of God's goodness, as it's reflected all around you. Consider taking the space provided below to write down what you saw around you. Maybe even take the time to write a prayer of thanks to God for His mighty work of creation.



WEEK ONE DAY TWO

What is the nicest thing anyone has ever done for you?

That's a big question, isn't it? I mean, hopefully, you have a long list of awesome things people have done for you. But the funny thing is that pretty much anything anyone does for us is pretty great. Someone sharing their dessert with you at lunch? Makes your day. Someone driving from several hours away to visit you in the hospital? It also makes your day! It doesn't matter if it's big or small. Part of being human is how we're wired to respond to people showing us they care. We love it when people do nice things for us.

Take a moment and read John 1:1-13. This is one of the coolest passages in the Bible. Why? There's so much going on! First of all, you see John making a case for the Trinity right out of the gate. See, John was taking some creative license by calling Jesus "the Word." The Greek word *logos*, which means "word," is used to describe HOW God communicates. Jesus was the fullest expression of God's message of love and redemption for humankind. For this, and a few other reasons, John uses "the Word" to describe Jesus.

Yesterday you read Genesis 1:1-5. Genesis 1:1, the first verse in the Bible, says, "In the beginning, God . . ." John echoes that same sentiment with his words here in John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word . . ." As part of the Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit), Jesus was present and active at creation. That in itself should blow our minds. Jesus is God. Jesus was actively engaged in the creation of the world. And, ages later, He would become even more active in creation when He became a human being and lived on our earth, teaching us about the Kingdom of Heaven, and ultimately, through His death and resurrection, purchasing a right relationship with God for all who would believe. This is powerful. It is the most powerful truth ever. But that's not our focus for today.

For today's focus, pay close attention to verses 12-13. Here we see Jesus' mission and purpose explained. Jesus came to earth to make a way back to God for everyone who would ever believe in Him. Sin would no longer be a barrier between God and people. Jesus had conquered the darkness. Through His faithful death on the cross, He paid for the sins of all humankind.

In John 8:12, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Jesus came to earth and went to the cross because He loves us. Period. When we consider the most amazing things one person would do for another, this act of sacrifice by Jesus stands out as the most selfless gift ever given. Have you taken the time to appreciate the God who cared so much for you that He came to earth to save you?



Questions to Consider

1. In your own words, describe the gift that Jesus gives to all who believe in Him.
2. What role does your gratitude play in your faith relationship with Jesus?
3. What does it mean to you that because of His great love for you, Jesus gave you the privilege of becoming a child of God?
4. Today, spend some time in prayer thanking Jesus, the Light of the World, for His great compassion for you. Thank Him that He gives you life, not only here on this earth but for eternity with Him.



WEEK ONE

DAY THREE

When we think about WHY God chose to save us from the penalty of our sins, there are many ways to answer the question. But at least one of the reasons is so that we will shine our light in the same way Jesus did, with the same purpose and the same results. There is a transition from seeing Jesus as light to seeing us as HIS light. It's powerful when we understand our faith in those terms.

Pause for a few seconds and read Matthew 5:14-16. Jesus was the light of the world, and yet in Matthew 5, He looks at His followers and says that WE are the light. So often, we make the Gospel and salvation to be all about the eternity we'll spend with Jesus. That's a big part of it, and it's awesome. But part of why we have been saved is so that we will shine light in the SAME WAY Jesus did, with the same purpose and the same results. The light of God in us draws others out of the darkness. This is a huge part of our purpose as Christ-followers.

This is God's call on us as believers. It's not optional. He expects us to live in such a way that our lives light up the darkness and point others to Him. This doesn't happen by accident. We have to be intentional about living in such a way.

So, here's your task today: consider the call Jesus has given you and how you might express this in your life.

Matthew 5:16

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

In the space below, brainstorm SPECIFICALLY some very practical things you can do to shine your light. But not just in any old way. Write down specifically how these actions draw others to Jesus.

Ways I will shine my light

How these will point people to Jesus

Week One

Day Four

What does the word command mean to you? If I command you to do something, what does that say to you about how serious I am about what I am asking you to do? Is it optional? If I'm commanding you to do something, am I making a suggestion? Giving you a choice?

We know better. We know that a command is serious. A command is given with the expectation that it will be followed. Period.

Read Ephesians 5:6-14. This passage is a BIG challenge for us. It's about what taking faith and obedience seriously do for the Kingdom. Through Paul's words, God calls us to live as "children of light." And He gives us three commands that help define what it means to be a child of light:

- He commands us not to "partner" with darkness.
- He commands us to walk as children of the light, striving to know and do what God has for us.
- He commands us to expose the darkness.

So the question for you is, are you taking God's commands seriously? Are you making sure that your life isn't partnered with those who do not care to follow God? Are you striving every day to live as a child of God? Are you committed to exposing sin and darkness where you find it?

These are big questions. And how you answer them helps define the life you will live for God. Here's what you are to do for today. **See all that blank space on the next page? That's for you to write down your thoughts on how well you're pursuing these commands.** Think about what God expects from you, consider how strongly you're committed to it, and write down how this makes you feel. Write down what you need to do to get back on track with obeying God's commands. Write down a prayer to God, asking Him to give you strength to make it happen. How you use the space is up to you. But make sure you spend time giving God's commands some thought.



WEEK I // DAY 5

Read John 12:27-36. The interaction we see here is just before the Passover celebration in Jerusalem. These are the days leading up to Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. These moments are the last in Jesus' earthly life. When Jesus speaks, His words seem to carry extra weight from our perspective. We know what His audience didn't know: that these were His last days before His great trial, before He would experience the culmination of WHY He came to earth. What does Jesus say here? Let's unpack it.

First, Jesus expresses the same kind of hesitation about His coming death that He expressed in the Garden of Gethsemane. But just as He did in the garden, Jesus, the Son, humbly and obediently accepts His role in the great rescue plan that God had planned all along. Amazingly, God the Father audibly affirms Jesus' obedience in a voice that some in the crowd could even make out; those who couldn't make it out were blinded by their disbelief.

Next, Jesus refers to the victory over sin and death that His crucifixion and resurrection would achieve. The people, who had a misguided belief of what the Messiah's purpose would be, pushed back on Jesus' claims. They expected the Messiah to be a political ruler. We know that is not what Jesus' Kingdom would look like. Which sets up this powerful plea from Jesus that we see in verses 35-36.

In vs. 35, Jesus once again identifies Himself as "the light." What does He mean? He's not talking about LITERAL light. He's not saying, "Hey, I shine like an actual flashlight." He's using the metaphor of light to speak of the way that He shines the light of God's grace and goodness in an evil world. His warning to "walk in the light" while the light was still there was Him urging those who did not believe in Him to see Him for who He was: the Son of God come to save the world.

There is a powerful truth here in vs. 35. Jesus says that without the light of Christ, we are lost. We have lost our way. What a profound statement this is. We can think we have the answers. We can think we have a plan. We can think that our efforts are enough to navigate this life. But without Jesus, we are lost. Lost in our sin. Lost in our limited understanding of the future. Lost in our shortcomings. Only by knowing Jesus and living through Him can we truly walk in the light. So the question is, are you following Jesus in such a way as to experience the light that only He can offer?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Describe your relationship with Jesus. Are you a “child of light”?

2. How has knowing Jesus enabled you to walk through life while seeing clearly (as opposed to walking in spiritual darkness)?

3. How is your life being used by God to spread the light of His love to others all around you?

4. Go to God in prayer, bringing to Him any of your shortcomings or failures. Trust Him to shine His light of love and grace into your life, making you more like Him and giving you the strength to represent Him in all that you do.