

Four Gifts Devotional

By Sharon Stults

Week One-Five Days of Light

Day One

Verses: “Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow,” James 1:17 NLT.

“And Jesus spoke to them and said, ‘I am the light of the world,’” John 8:12 NLT.

To Think About

Have you ever noticed how much shadows move during the day? Like when you are under a beach umbrella or a tree? As hours tick by, you need to move, if you want to stay in shade.

James uses the idea of shadows to help us understand God.

- First, he says that everything good and perfect in our world is a gift from God. Things like all the lights of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars.
- After he gets us thinking about those lights, he tells us that God doesn’t cast a shadow that moves, like the sun does. Why does he say that?

I think he wants us to remember there are lights and then there is THE Light. In ancient times, people worshipped the sun, like it was a god. In this verse, James tells us that the sun, as big and powerful as it is, is only a light created by God, who is THE Light of the world.

People today still look for light, but they don’t look in the right places. They think that jobs, friends, houses, expensive toys, and other things will bring brightness to life. They do, for a while and then they will grow dim, like the sun does when it sets. They move and change because they are only created things. Only God, The Light, never fades and never shifts.

Prayer: God, forgive me for sometimes looking for light in wrong places. Thank you for giving me the gift of Jesus, the Light of the World that does not change or move.

***Just for fun:** As a reminder that we are lights in a dark world, adults and children might enjoy making these “stained glass” Christmas ornaments.*

<https://gluesticksgumdrops.com/stained-glass-ornaments/>

Week One- Day Two

Verse: “But you are God’s chosen treasure-priests who are kings, a spiritual nation set apart as God’s devoted ones. He called you out of darkness to experience his marvelous light, and now he claims you as his very own. He did this so that you would broadcast his glorious wonders throughout the world,” 1 Peter 2:9 TPT.

To Think About

One day, long ago, a very tall man bought a very tall hat called a stovepipe hat. Stores sold many stovepipe hats in those days. When large crowds gathered, stovepipe hats were perched on so many men’s heads, they looked like a sea of black tubes, bobbing about in the waves.

The man loved his hat and wore it whenever he left his home, wherever he went. Some people thought it was silly for such a tall man to wear such a tall hat, but he did not care. One sad day, the man died while he was at a show with his wife. After that, this man’s hat became special to all the people who loved him. It was so special, that the hat was placed in a special glass box and put in a special museum.

Why is this man’s hat in a special box in a special museum? What makes it different from other hats? That hat is special because it belonged to Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States.

Every Christ follower is special too, more precious than anything in any museum Why?

- The Apostle Peter tells us that we are God’s “chosen treasure.” Think about that. Of all the treasures in the world, God chose me and you to be his treasure.
- God looked into the darkness of the earth, pointed to you, and said, “I want that one to come and live in my light.”
- Lincoln’s hat is special to Americans because it belonged to him. Christians are special because we belong to God.

God calls us “priests who are kings.” The King of the Universe adopted us into his family. Jesus, the Prince of Heaven, is our brother. We are kings and queens in his royal household.

God is still looking into the dark places of earth to choose more people to be his treasures. Our job, as royal children, is to help people living in the dark, to see his light in us.

Prayer: God forgive me for the times I acted like a commoner, instead of heavenly royalty. Let my talk and my actions be filled with light so that others will want to be part of your kingdom.

Just for fun: A great way to remember 1 Peter 2:9 is by singing it. Chris Tomlin has a great version which you can listen to here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXr9CKViB0s>

Links for history lovers: https://www.si.edu/object/abraham-lincolns-top-hat:nmah_1199660
<https://www.history101.com/abraham-lincoln/>

Week One-Day Three

Verses- “For you know quite well that the day of the Lord’s return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. But you aren’t in the dark about these things, dear brothers, and sisters, and you won’t be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief. For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don’t belong to darkness and night,” 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 4-5 NLT

To Think About

My husband, Ken, and I adopted Bella the Labrabeagle, from a rescue group. Since she was all grown up, we thought she would be easier to train than all the puppies we raised before. We thought we knew all about dogs. We didn’t know Bella. We were not ready for Bella.

- We were not ready for Bella to jump on Mia, the cockatiel’s cage, barking and pawing. Neither was Mia, who flapped and screeched.
- We were not ready for Bella, who is quite short, to leap onto our kitchen counter and eat a whole stick of butter. Then puke it up all over the house.
- We were not ready for Bella to love chasing squirrels so much that she could drag Ken (who fell) down an icy sidewalk on his stomach, with her leash.

Bella surprised us those first months. She is now a sweet, obedient dog who makes us laugh every day. In those early days though, we were in the dark about Bella. Knowing stuff about dogs didn’t mean we knew everything we needed to know about Bella.

Just like we were in the dark about Bella, many people are in the dark about God. They think they know him because they know his name. They think they know him because they know Bible stories. Lots of people know about God but they don’t know him like you and me. They have not asked Jesus to live in their hearts yet, so there is a lot of stuff they don’t know about him.

The Apostle Paul says that Jesus is coming back to earth one day. In verse 5 he teaches us that since we belong to God, we are children of The Light. We are not in the dark about his return. We will be excited to see him because we are part of his family. We know he is coming.

The rest of the world will be surprised and not ready. For them, the return of Jesus, Paul says, will be like a thief sneaking into their houses. Can you imagine how scary that is? That’s how people will feel who aren’t part of God’s family. They will be frightened. We still have time before Jesus comes back, to share God’s light with them. Then, they won’t be surprised in the dark when Jesus comes back.

Prayer: God, I don’t want anyone I know to be surprised by the return of Jesus. Will you show me ways that I can share my light with people I know, who are still living in the dark?

Just for fun: *The Bible says laughter is like medicine for our hearts. (Proverbs 17:22) Here’s a fun video about a beagle that looks a lot like our Bella. He also surprised his owners. Maybe you can even use this to start a conversation with a lost friend or family member.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyOiPWufjwU>

Week One- Day Four

Verses- “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 2:14-16 NLT.

To Think About

In my teen years, I was a champion complainer. I worked on my skills every day.

- I complained about washing dishes with my brothers every night. My mom tried paper plates. I complained that my food soaked through the paper.
- I complained about working after school and on Saturdays in my family’s greenhouse business. On slow days when they didn’t need me, I complained that I didn’t earn money.
- I complained about my clothes. When my mom took me shopping, I argued with her most of the time.
- I complained about packing a lunch. My parents gave me lunch money instead. I complained about the school food.

Every day I complained. I’m sad to think about the people who heard me.

- My school friends who didn’t know Jesus.
- My younger brothers and cousins who looked up to me.
- Customers at the greenhouses.
- Teachers, coaches, strangers in stores.

When I complained and argued, it’s like I covered the light of Jesus inside me with a bucket. People saw the same darkness in me, that is in the world. Paul teaches that when we act ugly, we open a door for people to criticize us. That’s no good. God’s royal family must live clean lives, like “bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.” Complaints and arguments make our lives dirty and make a bad name for God’s family.

How are lost people going to find their way to the Light of the World if we keep covering it up with complaining and arguing? The challenge from Paul is hard. “Do EVERYTHING without complaining or arguing.” Not some things or most things. *Everything*. There will always be things to complain or argue about, but we are running out of time to show the light of Jesus to people who do not know him. He is coming soon. Stop complaining. Stop arguing. Be light.

Prayer- God please forgive me for complaining and arguing. Forgive me for covering up your light. Thank you for sending the Holy Spirit to help me be more like you. Holy Spirit, please show me where and when I am acting ugly. Help me to stop and make my attitude right and my words kind. I want to be a bright light in a dark world.

Just for fun- *The opposite of complaining is being thankful. Today, put a rubber band on your wrist. Each time you want to complain, gently snap the rubber band against your wrist. Then, say something you are thankful for. If you snap the rubber band a lot, it might be a good idea to wear it for a few days until God can help you lose the bad habit of complaining.*

Week One- Day Five

Verses: “This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. 7-But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin,” 1 John 1: 5, 7 NLT.

To Think About

The people of Utqiagvik, (formerly known as Barrow) Alaska began 65 days of night on November 18, 2020. Every year the town’s four thousand residents say goodbye to the sun in November. They will not see it rise again until mid-January. During the months of darkness, this arctic city becomes quiet. The darkness and cold keep people from gathering or playing outside. They move quickly between home, school, work, and the grocery store. After 5:00, most of the city’s streets are deserted. People stay huddled in their homes with windows boarded up to keep out the cold.

From May 11-August 18, the town of Utqiagvik will look completely different. For those months, the sun will not set on the city. These months are the town’s days of unending sunshine. Residents and tourists enjoy all kinds of outdoor activities, some of them at strange times.

- People can walk on a beach or fish by a lake at 11:00 p.m. and later.
- Tourists can take wildlife tours at strange hours, like 2:00 a.m. and see Baluga whales and polar bears.
- Folks can hike glaciers, kayak on rivers, or go backpacking at all hours.

The endless sunlight of May through August, in the Arctic, attracts tourists from all over the world. People want to be in the special daylight.

Let’s think of the body of Christ being like the town of Utqiagvik’ in May through August. The light of Christ should not rise and set in us. Jesus should shine brightly through every Christian, all day and all night, no matter what we are doing. Light invites people to be together. That’s why Paul says if we live in the light, we have fellowship, which is a fancy word for hanging out with each other. When Christians hang out together, there should be so much light, that lost people want to come near us, like the tourists come to Utqiagvik.

However, at the beginning of verse 5, are two important words, “but if.” Paul says, “ **But if** we are living in the light.” That means believers can choose not to. We can choose to behave like people of darkness. We can choose to cover up the light of Jesus with sinful words and actions.

Jesus is coming soon. We must live in the light so lost people can see it shining and find Jesus.

Prayer- God, will you show me places in my life where I am covering up your light? Forgive me and clean me up. Help me to shine with other believers around me so that lost people will see the brightness of Jesus.

Just for fun- Here’s a link to make your own floating Christmas candle to remind you to be light not dark. <https://bellalimento.com/2013/11/12/diy-holiday-floating-candles/>

