

Seasons

Theme based reflections and outreach actions in ministry groups
The Word - Inform - Pray – Reach out – Create - Celebrate



Light – Inspire in the darkness

The Season of Light

On light

Facts, figures and thoughts from Peter Heazlewood

Night and light

In the English language, the word 'night' rhymes with the word 'light'. As a songwriter, this is an absolute gift and yes, I *have* written more than one song that celebrates this rhyming relationship.

But the relationship between night and light is deeper than any convenient nuance of the English language. During this season, we have an opportunity to think about things of 'night' – or darkness, and how we experience or how we can bring about 'light' in those places.

We also have an opportunity to celebrate, promote and support people, organizations and things that *are* light – things that inspire us, that reflect the light of Christ, and that maintain and sustain those in darkness.

For the purpose of our Seasons journey, let's work on the basis that darkness (or night) represents things in our lives or in the lives of others that are negative. We talk about people moving through 'dark times', being in a dark place etc etc. In history, we hear of the 'Dark Ages' – an historic period of cultural and economic desolation. So, in the Seasons

journey, for us to work through a Season of Light provides for us opportunities to cut through the darkness, to shine light where there is none and to celebrate light and life-giving activities in mission.

Summer light

It is no coincidence that summer is the Season of Light. As the days warm up and we find ourselves sizzling in the summer heat, we also experience longer days. We adjust our clocks to observe 'daylight saving' and celebrate all those things we do in summer – spending time outdoors and enjoying the warm. Light has for us generally, the ability to brighten things up (so to speak) and it plays an important part in our lives.

Surfing the internet in search of resource/discussion material for our various Seasons reflections has led me to many interesting places. None more so than my search for content for the Season of Light. Did you know that there is a company (I think in Northern Europe) that markets what I gather to be personal 'light units' for use by people in places/countries where exposure to light is reduced for much of the year.

I gather that using the device, the user periodically has a 'light bath' to improve health, energy and wellbeing. The following dialogue comes from promotional material for these personal lights:

Our planet is one of the extremely few places in the universe that is so close to one star that its whole environment bathes in light. We rarely consider this fact as we go about with our daily lives.

Each human cell and every form of life on Earth synchronize their activity with the sun. But the sun is also a food source for every form of life: it's the energy that binds together all of biomass' important components, like hydrocarbons. As sun created biosphere and biomass, it has also created seasons and times of day, which give rhythm to nourishment and reproduction.

Hormones, neurotransmitters, inflammatory and growth factors, self-synchronized genes and many more yet to be discovered mechanisms regulate the functioning of living organisms. What all of them have in common is that their life cycle is repeated on a daily, monthly or seasonal basis. In other words, they are dependent on the availability of sunlight.

Starting from sunrise, all wild plants and animals are bathed in light. We can easily understand how intense that sunbath is by looking at how artificial materials get weathered down and washed out over time.

In the morning, light-sensitive central nervous system compounds also launch hundreds of reactions in human beings. The number of monoamines, the nervous system's most important neurotransmitters, increases. At the same time, hormonal regulation in different areas of our bodies is synchronized through chemical communication according to the rhythm, our activity level and other hormones in our body. Successful synchronization of these activities is a prerequisite for our performance and wellbeing.

Decreased amount of light and darkness activate “night hormones” or melatonin, whose level sharply increases at night and reaches the highest peak in the small hours of the morning.

Exposure to light pollution in winter or in the evenings can negatively affect wellbeing by interfering with the essential rhythm of metabolic events. Nausea and fatigue easily increase in artificially lit environments due to the lack of natural and bright light signals. The consequences can be severe. It is known that shift workers’ disrupted diurnal rhythm, which manifests in abnormalities of melatonin secretion among other things, predisposes them to a larger number of cancers. Disruptions of day and night rhythms are known to cause wide-ranging problems on metabolism overall: it disturbs blood glucose control, worsens fat levels as well as increases blood pressure, obesity and mood swings.

The list of negative consequences is quite long. These well-known symptoms only tend to increase as wellbeing and life balance get disrupted.

Existence of light for us is self-evident. Therefore, we often forget its central role in our own wellbeing and for all life on the planet.

So, it would seem that light plays a critical role in maintaining our physical wellbeing – indeed, maintaining life itself. My apologies by the way, for not sourcing an academic, scientific or medical reference, but I found this description to be accessible, interesting and helpful.

What then of our emotional or spiritual wellbeing? What about light from a figurative point of view?

I won’t make reference to every Biblical reference to light - only to say that there are many. In fact, light appears in within the first three verses of the Bible. “Let there be light – and there was light”. However you view or believe the story of creation, this early appearance of light suggests strongly that it’s something of importance.

Another significant reference to light comes in the words of Jesus (John 8:12) “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

A friend of mine did some volunteering in a small village in Africa. It was a venture of many challenges. I was blown away though, when she wrote saying that the scariest of all times was when the sun went down and night came and darkness descended. It was *pitch black* and for her, very intimidating. I realised a couple of things. Certainly, I got a better understanding of the importance of the stars and the moon, along with their significance to people across the ages.

I reflected on our city-based lifestyles, where even when the sun goes down, we’re still bathed in ambient light from street lights and the like – we’re rarely in absolute darkness though much of the world actually is. I also recognised through this story, that for much of

the world (and certainly the world into which Jesus came), the claim “I am the light of the world” was one of huge significance – and remains so today.

In darkness, the eye loses the ability to distinguish colour. In a figurative sense, where light is gone in our lives or in the lives of others, so to does the colour.

Being inspired, being an inspirer

Light is a positive (unless you’re a bat), and there are many people who reflect light, promote light and inspire us in light. This season, have a think about, recognize and give thanks for those who inspire light in our world – and there are many. In our language we often refer to ‘a light going on’ – a revelation, an *epiphany*. Its important in our process to recognize and celebrate these moments and figures of light.

It’s also interesting that the word *epiphany* is common in mainstream English secular language. Its origin (coming from Greek and Latin) is primarily Biblical – no less than a reference to the revelation of Christ (light of the world) to the visiting wise men/kings (Magi) in the period after Christmas. In the church it is celebrated on the twelfth day after Christmas (deep within our Season of Light). Oh, and by the way, to conclude this piece of dialogue, don’t forget that the wise men/kings were guided by a bright light....oh yes...a radiant star!

We worship Jesus Christ – light of the world, and part of our calling is to reflect that light. What can we do as individuals and as a Christian community to shine light? What inspires us? How can we inspire? An element of our Season of Light must be to consider these questions and respond – in light.

Unfortunately, there are many areas of darkness in our lives. We don’t need to look too far to see evidence of darkness. The Seasons process is about praying for light where there is none, praying for people in darkness – whatever the nature of that darkness may be. It’s about exploring the Word of God and how light is approached in our faith. It’s about shining light in the darkness through acts of outreach. It’s about being motivated in mission through faith in Jesus Christ - the light of the world. It’s about exploring and celebrating themes of light through creative activities. And, it’s about celebrating moments and people who inspire – who *are* light and importantly to celebrate the light inside ourselves.

Light quotes

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.”

— Martin Luther King Jr

“Light thinks it travels faster than anything but it is wrong. No matter how fast light travels, it finds the darkness has always got there first, and is waiting for it.”

— Terry Pratchett,

“We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.”

— Plato

I'm so fast that last night I turned off the light switch in my hotel room and was in bed before the room was dark.

- Muhammad Ali

Words which do not give the light of Christ increase the darkness.

- Mother Teresa

Sometimes our light goes out but is blown into flame by another human being. Each of us owes deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this light.

- Albert Schweitzer

Mission challenge

The outreach and mission outcomes from Seasons has been quite extraordinary! We have managed to do some great things individually, in groups and as a community. We have already shone light into so many places.

The theme 'Season of Light' is very broad, and there is no shortage of possibilities in making a positive difference. As something of a challenge, I'm going to think about areas of particular darkness - maybe areas that need light, but may go largely unnoticed. Have a think about areas of particular darkness – some of the more challenging edges of life. How can I/we shine light here?

Light of the world

Our Season of Light of course, covers the period of Christmas - the birth of Christ. No greater light in the darkness. Born into darkness during a dark time. Born not in a well-lit, well appointed place, but into a stable bathed in darkness. Light of the world - light of healing and of hope, light of peace and light of love.

Finally.....

....from a songwriter's point of view it's great that the word 'light' rhymes with the word 'night'. There are many songs that can and will be written on this miracle of transformation – and so there should. Bringing light where there is night is a gift that we have been given. We are privileged to walk in the light of Christ. Where we go, so to will the light bearer. Jesus Christ - the light of the world.

"You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead it is put on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:14

The Word

This part of the Seasons process provides an opportunity to think about clues to hope that exist in the Christian Faith.

The Light Shines in the Darkness

Read John 1:1-9 In the Beginning....

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

This is John's Christmas story!

The way the different gospel writers deal with Jesus' birth is an introduction to what they want to say about Jesus the messiah.

For Mark, Jesus enters the world as a grown adult, beside us, before us, ready to lead us. People around him constantly ask "Who is this?" and then (with us) are challenged to follow.

For Matthew, Jesus enters the world in a birthplace of Kings, is surrounded by courtiers (like Moses was), flees persecution (like Moses did) then comes out of Egypt to lead God's people to a new Kingdom (like Moses – but better!).

For Luke, Jesus begins life as an outsider.. born in a stable beyond the company of his "betters" and immediately recognised and worshiped by sinners.

For John, this is how Jesus enters the world: this beautiful poem, which of course is supposed to remind us of another beautiful poem which starts "In the beginning..."

1. My parents like to tell stories about how as a child I had "pretend friends" each with their own voice and personality who would happily carry on conversations with my family. Do we all have family stories told and re-told about beginnings?
2. Why do we tell them? Why are they important?
3. Why would John write this poem instead of a "birth story"? What is he trying to tell us about who Jesus is?

4. Jesus is the true light which enlightens everyone; What does it mean “to enlighten everyone?”

Read Genesis 1:1-4,

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Another beginning story; but this time the beginning of the whole creation! The first thing God creates is light. The universe is darkness and God brings light. And it’s light. God doesn’t create the sun or the moon for three more days, and when he does, it’s to provide order to the seasons.

When we think of light in the 21st century, we think about it having a source; whether that source is the sun or a fire or electricity. We more or less understand that light travels in waves from that source. We understand that light bounces off objects around us into our eyeballs, and so we can see. (Scientists feel free to let me know just how wrong I am at this point). Darkness is just the absence of light.

For the ancients it was different. Light and darkness were both entities in themselves. The sun didn’t cause light (although it did cause heat). Light existed independently and fought Darkness which also existed independently. We might notice that in the Genesis 1 account of creation, light is created four days before the sun and moon.

For the ancients, living creatures “are created from earth, animated with the breath of life, and endowed with the light of life or “living light” as opposed to the light of the sky.*” For them, we see because light comes from our eyes. We have fire within us which lets us see. Jesus says “the eye is the lamp of the body” (Matt 6:22)

1. Light is God’s first act of creation. Light is the first thing God calls “Good.” What about light makes it good? Do we sometimes find light negative or difficult to live with?
2. For the ancients light is that which makes us alive. We still talk of ‘light leaving the eyes’ of those who pass away. If John tells us Jesus is light, does that mean we carry him within us? Are there people who we would say carry “the light” within them?
3. “The Light Shines in the Darkness” If Jesus was the light, then what was the darkness? If light and darkness battle for supremacy, what is the darkness in our world?
4. How do we hold to the light? How do we battle the darkness?

* Malina and Rohrbaugh – Social Science Commentary on the gospel of John

Prayer

As a Christian faith community, we recognize the importance of spending time as individuals or as a group in prayer – meditating on the grace and power of God to move in the lives of those for whom we pray.

At Coatesville, we continue with the weekly prayer group - an exciting outcome of the Winter 'season of healing' – a chance for those who wish to participate to meet and to pray for healing. Participants are invited to stay for whatever period of time works for them.

Prayer can take whatever shape or form you wish it to and it is important to understand that whilst you and/or your group are praying, so to are others in our community. It may be that some members of your group don't subscribe to the conventional notion of prayer. Where that's the case, it may be useful to encourage them to spend time thinking about light and its power of healing and hope – its power of inspiration, and what it means to them and those they care for.

Some may find it difficult to pray or lead prayer publically and that's okay. You may wish to use these words as a guide, or to break the ice.....

Loving God

We bring before you our prayers for light.

Lord, we recognize the need for light in our lives and in the lives of others. We recognize the importance of light and colour. We pray that we can be light bringers.

Where there is the darkness of sickness, let us bring the light of healing.

Where there is the darkness of despair, let us bring the light of hope.

Where there is the darkness of hate, let us bring the light of love.

Loving God, we celebrate those who inspire – those who reflect your light and we pray for the wonder of your presence as we live our lives. We pray for your presence in our hearts and hands. We pray for your leading in the darkness. Be a light to our feet and a light to show us the way forward.

Light of the world, in your name we pray

Amen

Prayer points

The following 'prayer points' are not exhaustive, but may assist in guiding your praying:

We pray for:

- *Those people who we know and those we don't who find themselves in places of darkness.*
- *Those bringers of light - the inspirers who's words and actions instill a sense of hope and healing*
- *Supporters, friends and professionals who bring light into the lives of others*
- *Decision makers and leaders in our nation and our community with the capacity to bring light. May their leadership be in the nature of light.*
- *A world enlightened.*

The miracle of silent prayer.

Consider silent prayer and meditation. As a group or individual, don't be afraid to allow groups periods of silence during which those who are present can allow themselves to focus on whatever they feel is important.

Outreach

We are hopeful that you and your group will decide on some sort of outreach activity (or activities) to complement the theme of 'Light - inspire in the darkness'. The choice of outreach activity and the extent to which your group engages this, is wholly the decision of you and/or your group. It may be as big or as small as you decide.

It is hoped that your group will embrace the outreach part of this process as it presents possibilities for very real positive change for others and as such, represents a critical part of ministry in the name of Christ.

Possible activities

If you're stuck for ideas, here's a brief list of things that you might consider doing as a group or individual. This list is far from exhaustive, but may trigger some ideas.....

- Visit someone you know needs some companionship
- Send a card, email or text to someone who you think might need it, letting them know that you're thinking of them and are there for them
- Approach Coatesville Community Care to see if you can do anything to assist in their work of bringing hope
- Agree on an organisation that you recognizes brings light to those who need it and consider ways you might support that organisation
- Spend a day, a week, a lifetime adopting a 'pay it forward' approach. Where someone does a favour for you, rather than pay them back, think about ways you can 'pay it forward' to someone else.

Recognize that in outreach, we are dealing with other people – some we know, some we don't. Ensure that actions we do for other people either directly or indirectly, are done with their permission. If dealing with a person or an organization, obtain permission first. Always respect other people's privacy and right to confidentiality.

Create

You are invited to contribute to the season's topic creatively. This could mean music, artwork, craftwork, poetry, drama etc. How do you respond to the concept of light and inspiration creatively? Its exciting here to consider the possibilities for creative response, and once again, groups or individuals are invited to engage in this part of the process in whatever way they feel comfortable.

Celebrate

At the conclusion of the Summer 'season of light', it would be great for your group to celebrate the journey and any outcomes that have been experienced. Celebration can take whatever form your group wishes it to. It may extend simply to a quiet prayer of thanks, through to a presentation or celebration in worship.

Celebration of the journey taken also presents an opportunity to plan for the journey ahead. What did we learn during the season gone that will assist us into the next?

Once again, towards the end of the 'Season of light', the Leadership Group will be in touch to see how you might wish to celebrate.

Finally.....

We encourage your group to embrace the possibilities of *Seasons*. If you require further information or assistance, please get in touch with one of the Leaders.

Finally, we give thanks to God for the talents and energies of our people, and we give thanks to a generous God of light, love and inspiration.

Coatesville Leadership Group