



December 4 & 5: The Light of Hope Leader's Guide

Series Overview

Holiday lights are beautiful, but nothing compares to the light of Christ. In this series, we're exploring the true meaning of Christmas and how we can uncover the light, shine the light and even be light to others.



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Sermon Highlights

Darkness is the absence of light. It's not what you see; it's what you don't see. When there is no light, you have darkness. Darkness is mentioned 200 times in the Bible. It's used as a way to describe what life is like without God.

Before we talk about light, we need to recognize the darkness that surrounds us. To some extent, our eyes have adjusted to the darkness. We hear of another murder or another missing child, and we lay on the couch, unemotional, because we're used to it. The reason we don't notice the darkness is because we are a part of the darkness.

Darkness is naturally progressive. Darkness grows until it overtakes the light. When Jesus was arrested to be crucified, He said, *"This is your hour—when darkness reigns."* Luke 22:53

Christmas is God's answer to that darkness. We have come to celebrate the fact that God came into this dark world with the light of His Son, Jesus Christ!

1. Jesus gives light.

John 8:12, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Jesus came to shine His light into the darkness. As the sun brings physical life, the Son of God brings spiritual life.

2. People reject the light because they cannot see.

John 1:4-5 ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Have you ever tried to explain Jesus to people who don't know Him? Sometimes the harder you try to explain, the more they seem to struggle to understand. It is because those in darkness don't understand the light.

3. People reject the light because they like darkness.

John 3:19, This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

We don't like to admit it, but darkness can be fun. There is an appeal that darkness has. I can tell you what to do, but when it's my struggle, I can feel the darkness. So John is saying, "Don't be surprised when people refuse the light because they like the darkness."

4. People who shine the light.

Matthew 5:14-16, ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Where is the light most needed? In the dark. It's pretty bright in here. But sometimes, when we leave here and go to our homes, schools, communities or jobs, it's like we have a dimmer switch on. Our light is not as bright out there as it is in here.

As you go into darker environments, shine your light even brighter. But remember that this light is not self-generated, it's a light that comes from the light of the world. And when Jesus becomes your Savior, His light starts to shine *through* you.

And the light of Jesus can break *through* the darkness in you!



Take it home ... Practical Applications

Between now and Christmas, prayerfully think of some practical ways you can shine the light. Involve your family or your small group. Think of 10 - 12 ways to shine the light of hope this Christmas.



Take it to the source ... Bible Study

Introductory question: Were you one of those people who were afraid of the dark when you were younger? What scared you about darkness?

Opening Thought

There is something about darkness that unsettles us or that causes fears—rational or irrational. Almost all of us have been afraid of the dark, or what we thought was lurking in the dark, at one time or another. Use this question as a time to start thinking about darkness and its spiritual implications. This will help your group prepare for the light that comes through Jesus Christ.

Read *John 1:9, 8:12* and *Isaiah 9:2*.

1. What is the first mental picture that comes into your mind when you think about light invading darkness?
2. What aspect of Christ's light has most affected your own life since you began walking with Him? Why?
3. In what ways is the light of Jesus Christ shining today in our society? What part do you play in helping to shine that light?
4. What do you think Jesus means when He talks about *darkness* in *John 8:12*? How would you describe the *light of life* to someone who had never heard about Jesus before?
5. How does Jesus as light practically affect your life?

Key Point

Darkness often has a spiritual aspect in the Bible. We often talk of places that feel strange or disturbing as being "spiritually dark." It is accurate to say that there is much in our world that is dark. Jesus came to bring light to the darkness, to change the spiritual climate of our world. He does that in individuals, and then He uses those people to shine light to others. Help your group to think of Jesus as a light in this dark world, and to consider all the implications that it means for them and for others that they encounter in their lives.

Read *John 1:11; 3:18-21; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Proverbs 5:3* and *Psalms 141:4*.

1. What are some of the reasons why anyone would reject the message of Jesus Christ? Why is it more likely to be a spiritual issue rather than an intellectual issue?
2. What are some of the ways *the god of this age* (Satan) clouds the minds of people so that they cannot understand or accept the good news of Jesus?
3. Do you ever find that trying to argue someone into a faith in Christ doesn't work very well? How do these scriptures help you better understand why that might be?
4. The Bible acknowledges that the darkness of sin may be fun (*Proverbs 5:3*) or like a delicious delicacy (*Psalms 141:4*) that can be very seductive, at least at first. What practical things can you do to help shine God's light into the lives of those who are living in darkness in a way that is going to help them see the reality of God and His love?

Key Point

It's hard to imagine that not everybody fully responds to the message of Jesus Christ as soon as they hear it. But it's true. People have been hurt, abused or disillusioned in so many ways that they can't even understand the grace of God or the love that Christ has shown to each one of us. They may also be in a place of addiction or in a time of life where everything seems to be going well and they are ruler of their own little kingdom. We personally cannot change the hearts of individuals, but we can share the love of Christ, tell them the good news of Jesus and pray that God will work in them to transform who they are.

Read *Matthew 5:14-16* and *Ephesians 5:8-14*.

1. What are some ways that the church should be light in the darkness of society? What are some ways that you can be light in the various areas of your life?
2. Have you ever been in a situation where your actions made someone recognize their own darkness, without you even saying a word? How did the situation affect you? How did it impact the other person?
3. Do you see yourself as *a city on a hill* or one of the *children of light*? What images does that bring to mind? What kind of responsibility is connected to being a child of light?
4. Jesus says that our good deeds cause people not to look at us, but to praise our Father in heaven. How can you help to ensure that the things you do for others point them to God and not to yourself?
5. What are some things your small group can do this year to be light to those in your community?

Key Point

What does it feel like to be the “light of the world”? Many of us think that unless we can clearly and accurately declare every part of the story of Jesus Christ, we can’t touch the lives of others. The reality is that most of the time our actions really do speak louder than our words. What we do and how we respond to others can alter the way people see God and the people who follow Him. The thing all of us have to watch is that we start to think more of ourselves and what we are doing than how it is turning others to God and who He is. Humility is a key part of being light in darkness. As we humbly follow God and care about others, He will be glorified and praised through the lives that we live.

Notes...



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All Bible references are from the New International Version unless otherwise stated.

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