



Catherine
Hutton

Light

Study notes for groups and personal reflection

A Light for All People

In the prologue to John's gospel, the true Light is sent by God into the world which he had created.

It is the beginning of the incarnated Word. God will dwell with people, the light of life will be among all people and the offer of light will be for everybody.

God shows the purpose of his relationship with us when he becomes a person, fully human and enters into the darkness to shine. Jesus has to deal with many instances of the danger of being in the darkness of sin and brokenness.

Jesus speaks healing to the sick and re-places the outcast into society. His light makes the tax collector and the morally suspect person guilt free and able to enjoy life in all its fulness. He allows mistakes to be made and forgiveness and restoration offered.

He lives among us, "full of grace and truth" and this makes all the difference.

Letting each other speak our pain and give voice to our needs is part of the incarnational ministry that began in Jesus.

Where there is a need for food or clothing, where there is an invitation or there is sickness; there is also a call for us to be present in their midst - bringing light.

Where the light of Jesus shines in us, our presence brings his love. We reveal the glory of God when our faith in Him goes on to bring light and hope to others.

His mission was to make us children of God, bringing the light to dark places too.

Let your light shine brightly as you use this study and live out its challenges!

With Love,

Catherine

Session One Let There be Light!

As you Gather 5-10 minutes

Talk about Light. What do you love best about light? Which sort of light is your personal favourite? (electric, candle, fire, twinkly etc)

Pray & Worship 10 Minutes

Sing a hymn or a song which praises the God of all creation

Pray

- 1. For an increase in your willingness to hear God.**
- 2. That God will bless your Group in your discussion today.**
- 3. For a greater reliance on God for all your needs.**
- 4. For the people in your community who don't yet know God.**
- 5. For a complete commitment to Jesus' call on our lives.**

Read the Word 50 minutes

Genesis 1 New Century Version (NCV)

In the beginning God created the sky and the earth. 2 The earth was empty and had no form. Darkness covered the ocean, and God's Spirit was moving over the water. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, so he divided the light from the darkness. 5 God named the light "day" and the darkness "night." Evening passed, and morning came. This was the first day. 6 Then God said, "Let there be something to divide the water in two." 7 So God made the air and placed some of the water above the air and some below it. 8 God named the air "sky." Evening passed, and morning came. This was the second day. 9 Then God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered together so the dry land will appear." And it happened. 10 God named the dry land "earth" and the water that was gathered together "seas." God saw that this was good. 11 Then God said, "Let the earth produce plants—some to make grain for seeds and others to make fruits with seeds in them. Every seed will produce more of its own kind of plant." And it happened. 12 The earth produced plants with grain for seeds and trees that made fruits with seeds in them. Each seed grew its own kind of plant. God saw that all this was good. 13 Evening passed, and morning came. This was the third day. 14 Then God said, "Let there be lights in the sky to separate day from night. These lights will be used for signs, seasons, days, and years. 15 They will be in the sky to give light to the earth." And it happened. *Continued over ...*

16 So God made the two large lights. He made the brighter light to rule the day and made the smaller light to rule the night. He also made the stars.
17 God put all these in the sky to shine on the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that all these things were good. 19 Evening passed, and morning came. This was the fourth day.

Genesis 1 has been the source of much controversy over the years. This is mostly around its literal interpretation and whether or not the world was created in 6 periods of 24 hours. Try not to dwell too much on your varying opinions on this. The Creator is the One under whom the Sun and Moon - which had often been worshipped as gods - have a function and purpose as the 'brighter and smaller lights'.

Likewise, the stars are the creation of the Creator and not deities for worship. These distinctions would have been very important. God created the light. He was there at the Beginning when there was nothing else. All of creation is born by his Word being spoken. Wilkinson states that:

The first thing we need to know is that God is the sole creator of the Universe. Everything in heaven and earth owes its existence to the sovereign will of God. p20

God's first recorded words are "Let there be Light" in verse 3. Talk about how God is personally instrumental in the Creation. Look at:

'Calling into being'

'Naming'

'Declaring it good'

God creates the earth to be dependent on the light which is outside it. The Creation itself is a reminder of our need for light to be brought into us from God. God declares light to be good. The lights he makes will rule the day and the night - as Lennox points out, God names a few things for 'organisational purposes' p104-5

Looking again at Genesis 1, mark the things that God names.

Where does all light come from? Why is it important to understand this?

Look up 2 Corinthians 4:5-6

Talk about the importance of the lights that God gives and then talk about their role in sustaining life.

Both Wilkinson and Lennox are eminent scientists and respected in their fields. They are also theologians who are able to allow the happy interaction of God's word be understood in scientific terms, Wilkinson puts it like this:

Genesis 1 is reminding us that in terms of questions of meaning and purpose, God is the only answer. Science may describe God's activity in creation and is to be valued for that. However, we must guard against language that suggests that science is the creator. P 23

Lennox states that:

The assertion that God created the physical universe is of paramount importance. It answers the question, 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' It implies that this universe cannot explain itself, as secular atheism, by definition, must maintain. It tells us that this material universe is not the ultimate reality. God is. P 93

Talk together about God being 'the creator' and why that matters to us today.

Why was it important that God be sovereign over creation rather than subject to it in the Genesis account?

God has designed and organised light to be important for the earth to receive and benefit from. It is no accident that Jesus refers to himself as 'The light of the world' in John's Gospel. (See the I Am study guide in this series). Even before Jesus makes this claim in John's Gospel, we have a 'prologue' in chapter 1 which links Genesis 1 and the Sovereign Creation of the universe by God with the Son, Jesus.

The sun and moon are separate from the earth and give light for us.

Talk about the importance of discovering the true God who gives light to the world in the form of sun, moon and stars as well as in the Son: Jesus.

Reflection & Refreshment 25 minutes

Over refreshments, have a look at the following:

God speaks light into the world as part of the Creation. There may be situations or places that you feel are 'full of darkness'.

Acknowledge that you are not the light and able to personally bring light to these places.

Acknowledge that God alone has the power to light up the darkness. We must first receive light from him in order to bring light to dark places.

Talk about the places in the world, remote to you or locally or even personally (remember to be respectful and to keep confidentiality). Ask God to speak his light into these places and situations.

Pray for all you have discussed

For your notes ...

The Lord Turns Darkness to Light

a mini study

2 Samuel 22:21-37 & Psalm 18

It is worth reading David's song of praise in 2 Samuel 22 in conjunction with Psalm 18 as we find a distinct overlapping. For the purpose of this reflection, we are going to focus on the Lord's mighty provision for all the needs of the faithful.

In 2 Samuel, the song of praise to God is part of a dénouement of David's story which includes Chapters 21-24. In this section, it is a focus on God's power and strength and has a grasp of God's sovereignty as we looked at in Genesis 1 earlier. All of David's provision and salvation, his victory and his hope in desolation has come from the hand of God.

David is aware that he is not shiny-bright with constant good behaviour, but his intentions are always God-focussed. He will receive the Lord's rebuke and trust him for direction. (2 Samuel 22:21-25).

Read Chapter 22 aloud and with 'expression'. Read it again and get a feel for the scope of God's goodness and strength in your life.

You will notice that whilst much of chapter 22 is *about* God, some are *to* God. This includes verses 29-30 which are personal, "*you* Lord are my lamp," followed by the observational "*the Lord* turns my darkness into light."

There are many references that these small portions of scripture can call to mind as you reflect on them.

In the presence of God's lamp and in the possibilities that are presented when "the Lord turns my darkness into light", David is able to deal with impossible situations, people in opposition and insurmountable obstacles. David states his own need for the Lord's light (Baldwin p309) and also what is possible when it shines. **Consider 'what is possible' in your situation.** Wilcock p66 in writing about Psalm 18 states of the humble who acknowledge their need of God: *The effects of grace, God's undeserved goodness to such people, are to bring light into their life and (what is more) to keep it burning and to provide the very resources which they lack in coping both with people (a troop) and with things (a wall).*

In your need, where is the darkness?

Ask the Lord to light the lamp of his wisdom and strength in your life.

The Lord is the one in whom our needs are met. David acknowledges both what his needs have been and how God has met them as a song of praise. They become part of his "I believe". David had some very dark times in his life. His conclusions are that God has been a constant source of light and hope. He can be yours too.

Session Two

Shine Like Stars

As you Gather 5-10 minutes

Light mini candles and talk about what lights up your world.

Pray & Worship 10 Minutes

Sing a hymn or a song which celebrates the life of faith in God.

Pray

- 1. Pray praise-prayers of God's goodness.**
- 2. That God will lift the faith of your group today.**
- 3. For ability to remain faithful in the face of temptation.**
- 4. That you will seek God in all you do.**
- 5. For a bright and visible witness to God's love in Jesus.**
- 6. For opportunity to light up the community with the love of Jesus.**

Read the Word 50 minutes

Philippians 2 The Passion Translation

9 Because of that obedience, God exalted him and multiplied his greatness! He has now been given the greatest of all names!

10 The authority of the name of Jesus causes every knee to bow in reverence! Everything and everyone will one day submit to this name—in the heavenly realm, in the earthly realm, and in the demonic realm.

11 And every tongue will proclaim in every language: "Jesus Christ is Lord Yahweh," bringing glory and honour to God, his Father!

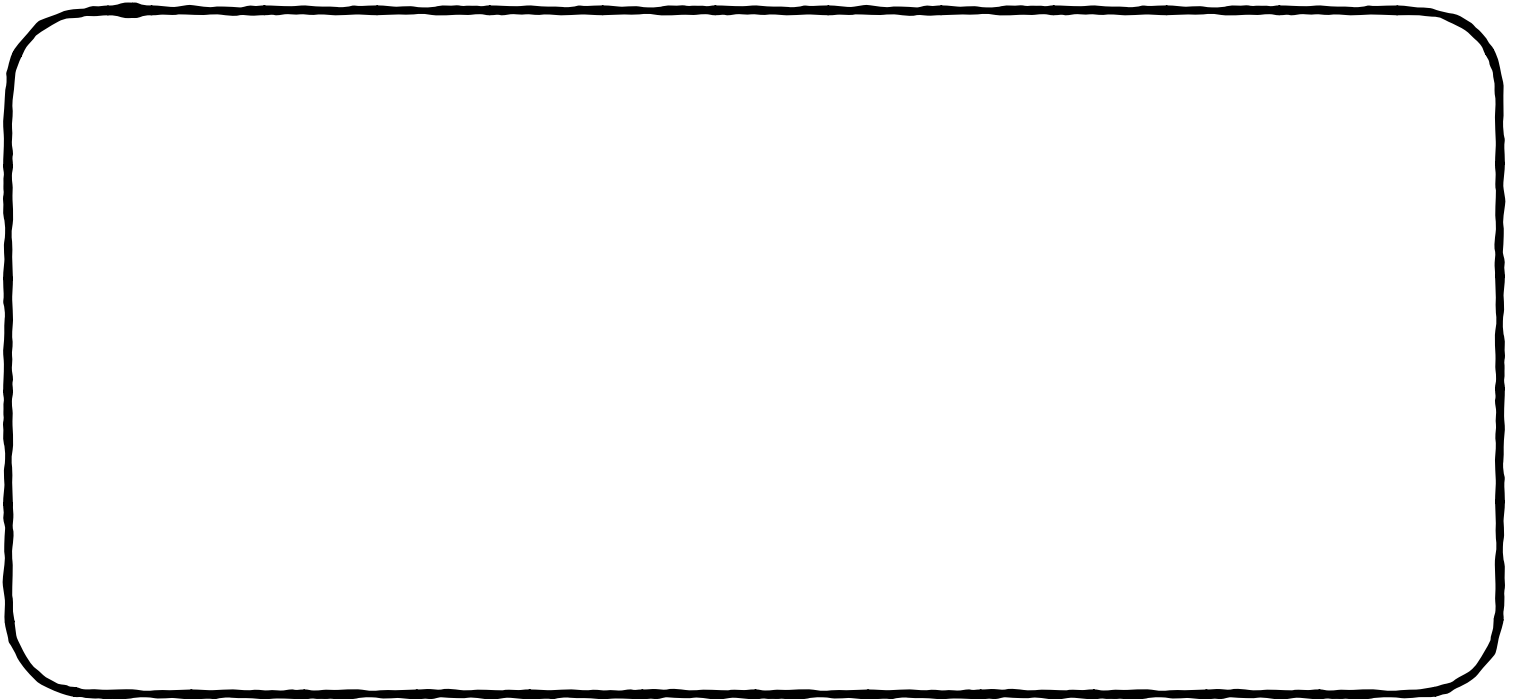
12 My beloved ones, just like you've always listened to everything I've taught you in the past, I'm asking you now to keep following my instructions as though I were right there with you. Now you must continue to make this new life fully manifested as you live in the holy awe of God—which brings you trembling into his presence. **13** God will continually revitalise you, implanting within you the passion to do what pleases him.

14 Live a cheerful life, without complaining or division among yourselves.

15 For then you will be seen as innocent, faultless, and pure children of God, even though you live in the midst of a brutal and perverse culture. For you will appear among them as shining lights in the universe, **16** offering them the words of eternal life. I haven't laboured among you for nothing, *for your lives are the fruit of my ministry* and will be my glorious boast at the unveiling of Christ! **17** But I will rejoice even if my life is poured out like a liquid offering to God over your sacrificial and surrendered lives of faith. **18** And so no matter what happens to me, you should rejoice in ecstatic celebration with me!

Light is a wonderful thing. It instantly gives life to dull and drab things and brightens them with something lovely. When we read Philippians 2, there is much light. There is the light of Jesus which illuminates this whole chapter. There is a lightness in Paul's exhortations as he describes the nature of Christ even in the presence of the unlovely (v10). There is the light of the faithful who live 'cheerfully' and 'without division'. These things cause joy to God as well as to Paul who recognises the difference made by "living cheerfully, without complaining or division among yourselves" (14) when the culture and prevailing mindset is "brutal and perverse." (15)

In the space, draw a sketch to illustrate the state of your country's culture. Think about the issues that are close to home and the prevailing state of mind.



Now add some light. Maybe use a different coloured pen. Or some glitter!

Talk together about how a little light can make a difference to the grimness of the culture you live in.

Paul is addressing a community rather than an individual. The brightness of the stars does not come from a lone light in the sky but from many. Together and undivided, we become "shining lights in the universe." We live lives 'worthy of the gospel' Phil 1:27 in order that the unity that follows might honour God. This is always our first desire - to live lives that are pleasing to him. How we live should then reveal something important about the gospel we value.

What are the most important things about the gospel?
Write down the most important ones and discuss these with the group.
What can you understand about the group from each other's priorities?

Talk about the difference between 'striving for unity so that we can be united' and 'unity which flows from a meeting of gospel-orientated lives'.

Look again at the opening words of Chapter 2 in your own Bible.

Talk about how many ways Paul describes the need for unity.

Read the extract below and discuss how this message affects the light that we show.

3 Be free from pride-filled opinions, *for they will only harm your cherished unity*. Don't allow self-promotion to hide in your hearts, but in authentic humility put others first and view others as more important than yourselves.
4 Abandon every display of selfishness. Possess a greater concern for what matters to others instead of your own interests.

Philippians 2 (The Passion Version)

When does your local church shine brightest? Talk about specific occasions and also in general.

How can it be improved by your personal behaviour and attitudes?

The unity is a mark of our worthiness as a people of God. There should be an astonishing marker of brilliance as our own lives are lit by the "light of the knowledge of God's glory". 2 Corinthians 4:6

It seems that v15 relies on v16 in order that the sparkle of use to the world! There is an evangelistic imperative operational in the sparkling - that the Word of Life be held to firmly (NIV) and that it has a dynamic flow which is attractive and hope-filled as it is offered (The Passion) for those who see

only darkness and brutality around them. For safety, warmth or to be in the presence of brilliance, the light will draw people to itself and the light we bear is the light of Christ Jesus.

Talk together about the importance of remembering that resurrection hope is the cause of our ability to live the pure and blameless lives and so to shine like stars in the sky.

Reflection & Refreshment 25 minutes

*Over refreshments,
read the beautiful poetry of verses 5-11 from your own Bible:*

Jesus is the Light of the World. You shine like stars in the universe.

*How well is the constellation that is your group doing at the moment?
On a scale of “it was on a starry night” to “obliterated by a blizzard” ...*

Pray through some of the issues and opportunities.

Purity of air is key to a star being seen. Pray for a clarity in the spiritual atmosphere in your community.

Humility is a star-quality. How can you demonstrate this in practical ways?

The Light Shines in the Darkness

a mini study

John 1:1-14

The drama and scope of 'John's Prologue' takes us back to Genesis 1 and forward to the fulfilment of God's Covenant promises in Jesus.

It is linked firmly with the creative Godhead of the trinity in Genesis, drawing a link between the "God said" and "In the beginning was the Word". This Word is sometimes known as 'the pre-existing logos'.

The light is spoken into that which was 'formless and empty' in order that a place of warmth and life giving, life sustaining opportunity is created. Even when the world has succumbed to the suffocating darkness of Godlessness and the corruption of all that God saw was good in the beginning - here dawns a new creation.

When have you experienced a power-cut?

What did you draw on for light and warmth for your needs?

The creating of life continues. The Word which speaks was 'life' and as the author and source of life, he continues, undimmed, shining into the darkness John 1:5. We are constantly affected by the existence of light in the world.

Look up verse 5 in your Bible. Read it aloud a few times. What hope do you find within it? What are the points of promise for your own life? For issues of social justice? For situations of desperation?

If we think of this section of John's Gospel as being a Creation Account for the New Testament (and especially for the gospel), we remember the constant refrain of 'and God saw that it was good' from Genesis. The 'Light of all the world' in full goodness was coming into the world to be within the world and to be the source of life and goodness. Life will be spoken as the Word is made flesh, becomes incarnate and lives alongside and among the ordinary people of Creation. Jesus' purpose is to bring life and light to all people. **Pause and think about where in your own life the light and warmth of Jesus' presence can bring 'new creation' to you.**

It makes a difference when the light is right there among the things you do and in the places where you have to be. The light points out potential and makes things better. It stops you falling prey to that which the darkness hides as a trap. Light offers protection and shines glory on the good.

Read again verse 14. In the incarnation, as Light is born into the world, we hear God's speech of love. The relationship is even more wonderful than that of the early days of Creation when 'God walked' with Adam in the Garden. Jesus IS one of us: living, breathing, thirsting, eating, crying, dying - the whole of human life. **Where the light of Jesus shines in us, our presence brings his love and reveals God's Glory. We do not hide the source of our light.. we share it so that the mission of the Word, of Jesus, may continue -always bringing life to those who will receive him.**

For Lighting Advent Candles ...

Week 1. *Light ONE Candle*

“And God said; 'Let there be light,' and there was light and God saw that the light was good.”

Lord, may your light ever be spoken into the darkness.

Let the light of the world shine brightly.

Let us shine with the Light of Christ.

Week 2. *Light TWO Candles*

“Lord, you are my lamp; the Lord turns my darkness into light.”

Lord, may your the presence of your light conquer our fears.

Let us live with the Lamp lighting our path.

Let us live with the Light of Christ.

Week 3. *Light THREE Candles*

“Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.”

Lord, may your humility and servanthood teach us to live out gospel values.

Let us value the needs of others

Let us become pure and blameless, so that we can shine.

Week 4. *Light FOUR Candles*

“The true Light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.”

Lord, may your life always be our light.

Prepare us to receive the giver of life and light.

Let us recognise him, let us believe in him.

Christmas Day *Light ALL Candles*

“Arise, shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.”

Lord, may our hearts be quickened by the coming of the Light of the World.

Jesus! We celebrate your birth.

Jesus! May your Light be our salvation.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son

And to the Holy Spirit:

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,

World without end

Amen.

For your notes ...

Bibliography

Baldwin, Joyce; *1 & 2 Samuel*; Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries vol 8; IVP; 2008
Cook, David; John: *Never Thirst Again*; 10 Publishing; 2014
Lennox, John C; *Seven Days that Divide the World*; Zondervan; 2011
Milne, Bruce; *The Message of John*; BST; IVP; 1993
Motyer, Alec; *The Message of Philippians*; BST; IVP; 1984
Webb, Barry; *The Message of Isaiah*; BST; IVP; 1996
Wilcock, Michael; *The Message of Psalms 1-72*; BST; IVP; 2001
Wilkinson, David; *The Message of Creation*; BST, IVP; 2002



© Catherine Hutton 2018 unless otherwise referenced
catherine.hutton@methodist.org.uk

Celebrating the Diamond Anniversary Year of Sprowston Methodist Church 1958-2018