

Christ's Love in Action

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth (1 John 3:18).

Scripture: 1 John 3:14-24

Song: “A Worker’s Prayer”

The homeless man stood on the roadside, clutching a cardboard sign. Car after car whizzed past him . . . until a college student pulled to the shoulder. The young driver gathered his own clothing and shoes from inside his car and heaped them into the arms of the needy gentleman. Seeing a fellow human in need was all it took for this young man to change his course and give what he had. The young man’s actions, caught on video by a fellow motorist, paint a beautiful picture of love in action.

Jesus showed His love for us by giving His life to set us free. When we enjoy the love our Savior has lavished on us, the Holy Spirit prompts us to live out our faith by sharing with those around us, as this college student did.

In our busy world, it can be easy to overlook the hurting and needy. Yet looking for ways to love and provide for those who are struggling fulfills God’s commands while demonstrating what God has done for us. Furthermore, the joy that comes from honoring God by serving others blesses us beyond compare.

Father, thank You for the gift of life You have given us through Your Son. We want to honor that gift by blessing others in need. In Jesus’ name, amen.

January 16–22. **Kristen Grossman** enjoys hiking the California hills, soaking up time with family, and spending mornings curled up with her Bible in hand.

Choosing Light over Darkness

You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (Ephesians 5:8).

Scripture: Ephesians 5:1-10

Song: “Take My Life, and Let It Be”

The closet by our front door used to be a dark and daunting place. Tightly packed coats crowded the rack, and a jumble of rain boots and winter accessories littered the floor. Because the closet contained no lighting, I would rummage around in the darkness, pulling things out to determine what they were. However, once I installed a simple rechargeable, motion-detecting strip light, simply opening the door bathed the closet's contents in light. Instead of being just shadowy shapes, coats and jackets took on form and color. Items could be seen and selected.

Like my hall closet without lighting, our lives without God's touch are shrouded in darkness. Secret sins, shame, and selfishness remain hidden like mittens buried under a pile of shoes. However, once we receive Christ's gift of salvation, we become children of God. Knowing we are beloved by God enables us to live freely in the light of His love, forgiveness, power, and joy. It brings us out of the shadows of sin.

Sometimes, the temptation is strong to backslide into sin. However, God reminds us that our adoption into His family means we can choose to follow Christ's example and live our lives in the light of love, goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Father, sometimes it's tempting to retreat into dark places. Thank You for sending us Your light and the reminder that as Your children, we can walk joyfully in the light. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reflecting God's Light

Everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light (Ephesians 5:13).

Scripture: Ephesians 5:11-20

Song: “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

As I make my way through the quiet streets of my neighborhood, the moon in the clear night sky illuminates the sidewalk ahead of me. While the moon seems to provide the light that enables me to enjoy this nighttime walk, the moon itself does not create any light. The light that allows me to see my path is merely a reflection of the light given off by the sun.

Just as the moon reflects sunlight to brighten the nighttime landscape, our lives as Christians reflect God's light. On our own, we may feel as dull and dark as the barren terrain of the moon. However, as children of God, we can reflect the love, joy, and radiance of the Holy Spirit at work within us.

When we feel dark and empty, we need not turn to the useless, false brightness the world offers us. Instead, we can turn to our heavenly Father. We can seek His will and offer praise to Him. We can ask to be refreshed and renewed by His Holy Spirit so that Christ's brightness continues to be reflected in and through us.

Father, sometimes we feel dark and cold. When the world holds out glittering lies that offer to make us feel/do/be better, help us remember that chasing them will leave us steeped in darkness. Today we turn to You in gratitude despite how we may feel. Renew us in Your love so we may, in turn, reflect that love and radiance. In Jesus' name, amen.

Following God's Path

I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path (Psalm 119:104).

Scripture: Psalm 119:97-112

Song: “Thy Word”

After an enjoyable hike along a wooded trail, it was time for our little group to head back to the parking lot. As we continued along the network of paths, darkness was setting in, and we worried we were going in circles. With great relief we came to a fork in the way, marked by a map on a wooden post. With the map's clarity, the trail suddenly transformed from a seemingly endless loop into one we could envision, understand, and navigate. An arrow pointing one direction indicated a longer, more demanding trek. Meanwhile, another arrow guided us to a shorter, less strenuous route back to the parking lot.

Like the directions on a map, the guidelines found in Scripture direct us away from the dark and directionless paths of sin and toward paths of righteousness. As we study God's Word, we come to see the trajectory of His plan of salvation, learn lessons from the lives of men and women of faith, and gain wisdom for our own lives.

When we feel as if we're stumbling on an endless, circular path of situational confusion—with spiritual darkness setting in—we can turn to God's Word to point us in the right direction. His Word is our road map to help us find and remain on the path He has made for us.

Father, thank You that we can turn to Your Word for the clarity we need on this journey. I will seek Your way through this loving provision. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Beacon of Light

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you” (Isaiah 60:1).

Scripture: Isaiah 60:1-8

Song: “Channels Only”

By all accounts, Ida Lewis was a quiet, unassuming woman. When her father, a lightkeeper, fell ill in 1857, teenage Ida began tending Lime Rock Lighthouse near Newport, Rhode Island. She kept the lighthouse lamp fueled and clean throughout her lifetime and performed as many as 25 sea rescues. Eventually, newspapers began to laud Ida’s bravery. Thousands of people, including President Ulysses S. Grant, were drawn to visit this quiet heroine and her shining light. However, it wasn’t fame that motivated this no-nonsense woman; it was her desire to keep shining the light that guided vulnerable seacraft away from the rocky shore.

Like the beam of a lighthouse lantern, we can shine the light of Christ to help others find their way through the dark and treacherous seas of life. Being a light to others doesn’t have to be a daunting task. We can be a critical ray of light by showing Christ’s kindness, engaging others with the gospel, or pointing them back to God as the source of their strength, peace, and joy.

We don’t have to be flashy or dynamic to be a light to those around us. When we worry that we’re not impressive, intriguing, or courageous enough in our faith, we need only remember that He is the one who imparts brilliance. We each need only faithfully tend the lantern of our heart.

Father, I will tend my heart today so it can carry Your beacon of light to others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Guiding Light

[Jesus] said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Scripture: John 8:12-20

Song: “The Light of the World”

A trip through the Cave of the Mounds in Wisconsin treats visitors to breathtaking views of grand stalagmites, elegant stalactites, and a shimmering river. As a backup measure, guides carry flashlights so they will be able to lead tourists safely through the darkness in the event that the electric lights fail. But at one point in the tour, they turn off the lights intentionally, allowing visitors to experience briefly the complete absence of light. Spending a few moments in utter darkness can be interesting, but bumping around very long in a narrow, lightless underground chamber would be dangerous!

In our Christian walk, Jesus, the very Son of God, is the light that leads us through the darkness and dangers of life in this world. The Gospels provide examples of Jesus’ relationship with His Father, revealing how He spent time with Him in prayer. We also see how Jesus related to others, demonstrating love not only to the humble but also to His enemies.

In the darkness of this present world, it’s comforting to know that the ultimate source of light—Jesus—understands and hears our prayers and shows us the way of life. We need not fear anything with Him lighting our way.

Father, I’m grateful for Your Son, who is the light of the world. Today I’ll walk joyfully in the light of His salvation and in the example of His obedience and love. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Blessing of Sharing

“If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday” (Isaiah 58:10).

Scripture: Isaiah 58

Song: “Make Me a Blessing”

The precious dried vegetables, vitamins, soy, and rice moved through the funnel and into the bag my 8-year-old daughter was holding. (We had joined friends who were helping pack meals to send to hungry children all over the world.) Carefully, she lowered the sack onto the scale before passing it down the line to be sealed. Joy radiated from her face as she knew she was helping provide food for other little children.

Food: it's such a basic necessity. Not only does it provide the fuel to keep our bodies healthy, strong, and functioning, but it also can provide a welcome opportunity for fellowship and refreshment. During Jesus' ministry, He performed a number of miracles around food. His first miracle was at a wedding feast, where He turned water into wine (John 2:1-11). Another time He fed a crowd of thousands from a boy's meager lunch (6:1-13). Near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus filled the disciples' empty fishing nets with an abundant catch before sharing a meal with them (21:1-14).

When we care for the needs of the hurting and hungry around us, we experience the joy of walking in the light of Christ's love. What needs might you meet with His love today?

Father, thank You for providing for our needs and for opportunities to share Your gifts with others. In Jesus' name, amen.