

## A Light to the Nations

**“I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”** (Isaiah 49:6b)

**Scripture:** Isaiah 49:1–6

**Song:** “This Little Light of Mine”

My young son’s Sunday school class used to sing “This Little Light of Mine.” But it didn’t start as a children’s song. The origins of the song are uncertain. The title phrase first appeared in a poetry book in 1925, but it may have originated as an African-American spiritual. The popular Christian version was composed in the 1940s by Harry Dixon Loes. Then in the 1950s and 60s, it became an anthem and anchor of the civil rights movement.

I love that the origins of this song cannot be traced to a single person or date of creation. The light for the Gentiles, which would reach the ends of the earth, is the light of Jesus, the Servant of the Lord. Each singer of this wonderful song shines their light, but the origin of that light is Jesus.

Jesus told His followers not to hide their light but to let it shine (Matthew 5:14–16). We shine His light when we help those in need, giving glory to God for the good works He inspires in us.

**Father,** help me to shine Your light into the lives of those I encounter today. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

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June 29–July 5. **Linda L. Kruschke** lives in Oregon with her husband of 39 years. She enjoys flower gardening, cooking, writing poetry, playing with her two Cockapoos, and having their adult son over for dinner.

## A Deliverer Will Come

**May he be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth.** (Psalm 72:6)

**Scripture:** Psalm 72:1–13

**Song:** “Bring the Rain”

Sometimes when the rainy season drags on into April and May, I complain about the chilly temperatures and muddy puppy paw prints on the newly mopped floors. A dreary feeling envelopes my heart. I long for the sunshine and warmth of summer. But then the sun peeks out from behind the clouds, and I venture into the great outdoors. I remember why I live in the Pacific Northwest despite frequent downpours. The rain ushers in an abundance of flowers that bloom from early spring through late fall. Lawns are green, and all is beautiful and lush. And my puppies wiggle their cute little behinds on a sunny walk.

Many of us miss God’s blessings when they come in the form of rain clouds. We forget that without rain, there are no flowers and green grass. We allow gray skies to diminish the peace God desires for our lives. Psalm 72 reminds us that rain showers watering the earth are a blessing bestowed by the King of kings.

God is faithful to fulfill His promises. Even when our circumstances seem to be filled with only gray skies and downpours, like the sun, a Deliverer will come. His grace and comfort never fail. We can trust that He will use every drop of rain to usher in blessing upon blessing.

**Father**, remind me today to be thankful for the beauty that springs forth from the rain You give. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## Saved by Grace

**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.** (Ephesians 2:8–9)

**Scripture:** Ephesians 2:1–10

**Song:** “Are You Washed in the Blood?”

A dear friend is active in our church in many ways, from organizing women’s gatherings to playing instruments for worship services to going on mission trips to our sister church in Haiti. One thing she balks at doing is standing in front of the congregation to give a ministry report or announce an upcoming event she helped organize. She prefers to do her work behind the scenes and doesn’t see the work as something to boast about. Rather, she helps others out of gratitude for God’s gift of grace and would just as soon have the spotlight be on Jesus. She also finds time to rest in His Word and in prayer.

Often Christians believe they must say yes to every ministry request, whether it be to earn favor with God or to boast of all they have done. As a result, they grow exhausted and weary. Rather than resting in the gift of God’s grace, they treat faith as a never-ending treadmill.

God has given each of us good works to do, but we cannot do them without His guidance and wisdom. They are really His good works accomplished through our hands and feet, as we obediently listen to His direction. We are saved by His grace alone.

**Father,** open my heart to joyfully complete the ministry opportunities You have for me. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## No Longer Strangers

**In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.** (Ephesians 2:21–22)

**Scripture:** Ephesians 2:11–22

**Song:** “The House of God”

There is a trend in our neighborhood for a developer to buy up smaller houses, knock them down, then build oversized houses to turn a huge profit. We watched a darling cottage across the street meet with this fate. At the same time, we were enlarging our own home. Instead of tearing down and starting over, we chose to remodel, joining parts of the old house with a new addition. We more than doubled our living space and kept the quaint cottage look we loved.

God made the Israelites His people and His dwelling place when He called Abraham to follow Him. But His final dwelling place was with *all* people. He did not reject (or tear down) Israel to bring the rest of humanity into His kingdom. Rather, He accomplished the greatest “remodel” of all time through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, bringing Jews and Gentiles together as one people in whom He would dwell.

His Spirit rests and resides in His people as a whole and in each of our hearts. We are no longer strangers but members of His household. We can trust that He, as the chief cornerstone, will fill us with grace and peace.

**Father**, build in me a dwelling place for Your Spirit, remodeling me as You see fit. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## Nations Come to God's Light

**“See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.”** (Isaiah 60:2)

**Scripture:** Isaiah 60:1–7

**Song:** “We Shall Rise”

Mira Jarali and his family lived in Bangladesh, which is predominantly Muslim. They were converts to Christianity and suffered persecution, along with 29 other Christian families in their village. Because they refused to renounce their faith in Jesus, they were prohibited from using the town well for water. Mira was beaten and jailed when someone accused him of stealing water from the well. Despite this terrible treatment, Mira did not lose hope because he believed this darkness could not destroy his spirit or take away God's gift of eternal life.

Most of us will never experience the level of persecution that Christians like Mira face in countries such as Bangladesh, but we nonetheless experience darkness in this broken world. Jesus warned His followers, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). But He also promised, just as today's passage does, that He rises into our darkness and trouble, bringing God's light.

The only true hope when we face difficulties in this world is the glory of God, which is Jesus Christ. He has promised us salvation, and His promises are sure. All that He offers us will endure to the end of time. The time we have on earth is fleeting; our time in His glory is eternal.

**Father**, when the world seems covered in darkness, give me hope in Your glory and in the promise of eternity. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## Nations Bow to Zion

**“Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night.”** (Isaiah 60:11a)

**Scripture:** Isaiah 60:8–14

**Song:** “I Will Enter His Gates”

My husband, Randy, and I were enjoying our honeymoon at Expo 86 in Vancouver, British Columbia. One evening, we left the world’s fair to have dinner at a local restaurant, planning to come back later. The dinner took much longer than anticipated because of a slow-cooking duck, and when we returned, we were denied admission. Unbeknownst to us, an international rule provides that the gates of the fair can only be open for 12 of every 24 hours. To stay late, we would have had to be inside the gates before they closed.

In life, people often encounter situations where they are denied admission to a venue, park, neighborhood, or building. Sometimes we are left out of relationships. Being excluded can leave us feeling devastated and lost. It is then that we must realize we need never be excluded from the most important venue.

Unlike an expo, the gates of heaven are always open to those who trust in Jesus. Through the words of Isaiah, God promises that whether it is day or night, His gates won’t be closed. One day, all nations will bow before Him, and God will not deny those who serve Him an admission to their heavenly home.

**Father,** thank You for keeping Your gates (and Your heart) open for me so that I can enter with rejoicing. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## A Banquet Spread for All

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.” (Matthew 8:10)

**Scripture:** Matthew 8:5–13

**Song:** “Sweet Hour of Prayer”

Chinese evangelist and pastor Li De Xian spent over 10 years preaching to Christians in Hua Du Village. Despite being arrested several times, Li never stopped sharing the gospel. The number of people who flocked to hear him grew from 100 per week to over 500 at two gatherings per week. They prayed for him as they watched the police arrest him again and again. The head of the Public Security Bureau admitted that Li’s words had more power than did the Communist party.

Li De Xian’s faith is truly amazing. I’m not sure my faith in the face of such strong opposition would be so great. Yet Jesus gives each of us the wisdom and strength to have faith that inspires faith in others, if only we will trust wholly in Him. Jesus said the centurion had “such great faith” because he trusted Jesus to heal his servant even from a distance.

We can trust Jesus to uphold our faith and give us courage to speak the truth about Him. He has promised that the Holy Spirit will give us the words we need when we need them (John 14:26) because His invitation is for all.

**Father**, give me amazing faith that will strengthen me and inspire others to trust in You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.