

“The Everlasting Light”
Message by Stephen Whipple, Lay Servant
Providence United Methodist Church
Youth and Children Sunday
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Today’s epistle lesson is taken from the book of Ephesians, chapter 5, verses 8 through 14. I’ll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version.

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light- for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

First let me give you some background on this letter. It was written by Apostle Paul a former Pharisee and a pioneer missionary of the church. This letter was written to the church of Ephesians while Paul was in jail awaiting his trial. It is also noted that this letter was meant for Christians around their area and other nations. Paul wrote this letter around A.D. 60. from Rome. This is actually one of Paul’s most encouraging and optimistic letters to the newly developing churches. It tells of the advantages a believer has in Christ and instructs them on how to “live a life of love.” The church that Paul is writing to was established in the year of A.D. 53 on his homeward journey to Jerusalem. He then visited the church and taught them the gospel there for three years. Later, Paul met with the elders of the church on another one of his visits. As you can see Paul had become very attached to this church.

I think what Paul is trying to say in Ephesians 5:8-14 is that before we accept Christ into our lives we live in our sin or “darkness.” Once we accept Christ we begin to be transformed into the image of Christ. We also are starting to be filled with understanding, goodness, and truth that we receive from Christ, who is the “light.” Now that we are in the “light” through Christ, God calls us to act upon this change that we have experienced. God calls us to *live* as children of light and to not just be defined by this change. God wants our actions to match up with our faith.

Now you might be asking, “How do I live as a child of light? Is there a way I know that I am a child of light?” That is where Paul tells us, “Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.” Once we know what pleases God we are able to live as children of light without wondering if what we are doing is not in line with what God wants.

Now turn your focus on verses 11 through 14. The Apostle Paul tells us that once we become children of light we no longer should pursue the empty promises of sin or to even be affiliated with sin. For example, you used to go to strip clubs with your friends. Then later on in your life you accept Christ into your heart. One day your friends invite you to go and hang out with them. You know that they still go to strip clubs. This is the part where you have to say no. This is where you are choosing to not be affiliated with sin. Now there’s a catch. God tells us not *only* to be unaffiliated with sin but rather expose it.

What Paul is trying to tell us is that we need to not turn our backs when we see our sin but rather expose it to ourselves. We need to acknowledge to ourselves that sin so it can be changed. But we must be careful; when we expose our sin we must do it with love. We shouldn’t be condescending to ourselves; we must be compassionate and loving. When we do expose our sin, it becomes visible to us. It is then made clear exactly what is happening and then we can act in a way to

deal with our sin. We also can help bring peace, comfort, love, and hope to those who are also caught in that same sin.

Now I'd like to show you this video As you saw in the video, once the people in China got their Bibles, they ran to receive them. They *ran* to the word of God. Then once they had the word of God they held it. They treasured God's word so much that they would risk their lives and die for it. That is what we must do as children of the light. We must *run*, not walk, and not meander, neither stumble upon God's word. We must make it our absolute goal to always run to the word of God. Once we have grasped the word of God, we must *not* let go. We must grasp it and bind it to our hearts so that no one, not even Satan can take it away.

We must be reading God's word daily, reciting it when we are tempted by sin. We must be strong and persistent in our reading and understanding of God's word so that we can know how to live a righteous life. We must also be willing to risk our lives and die for the word of God. That's scary, to be willing to risk our very lives for the word of God!? Yet God promises us that those who could harm our physical bodies we should not fear because they cannot harm our souls.

I know that I, to this day, struggle to live as a child of light. At times I say things that I normally won't say around the members of the congregation. I have even gone as far as to allow myself to be tempted to buy cigarettes and smoke them, knowing full well the consequence of me doing so. I struggle with my parents at times, with accepting their rules or wishes. I also tell God that I will do as God tells me so, but I do just the opposite. But I learn with each and every experience that acting that way isn't as rewarding as doing what God asks of me.

Recently, I had an incredible experience! I believe that everything happens for a reason, to further the kingdom of God. I got in a fight with my mom and dad. I apologized to my dad but not my mom. I was mad at her still. During the night I

had a dream. I was mad at my mom and she was heartbroken, she then gave me a piece of paper. It showed times when I thought she didn't express that she cared about what I said or supported me. But it also revealed what she was really feeling, and how she just had trouble showing it. When I got up the next morning I was moved emotionally and spiritually from that dream.

Since I believe that everything happens for a reason I talked to God about my dream. God told me that this was helping me grow into the disciple that God saw in me. This experience was to help me understand other's pain. The reason I was moved emotionally and spiritually by the dream is because I am able to understand how other people feel. I am able to understand how people feel because I went through the same thing once in my life. God wanted me to learn how to sacrifice my own well-being to bring joy to other's lives as Christ did.

I was stunned. I was breathless. I told God, "You know I can't do this, I don't even want to." God said, "I know Stephen, but trust me this will bring such joy. Did you not say you wanted me to change you into the way I saw fit? Well here it is." I mulled it over some more. I did ask for God to change me, but I was scared! I finally came to a conclusion. I did want God to make me into the disciple I wanted to be. I wanted God to use me. So I said alright here we go. I went and apologized to her and gave her a hug.

Afterwards on my way to work, I felt so *alive*. I felt like I just conquered Mt. Everest, and still it was such a small task, but it brought so much joy. It brought me joy because I was able to set myself free from my bitterness. I had taken the burden of being proud and took it off my shoulders and gave it to Jesus. I still do struggle with other temptations. I feel ashamed for them but I always recall that moment. I use it as a foothold to get me going in the right direction. Therefore, I want to encourage you to give your life to God, and let God change

you into the disciple God sees you becoming. Don't give into fears or doubts. As you saw there is a promise of joy you've never experienced.