

# LIGHTEN UP

## Matthew 5

### OBJECTIVES

- To understand the word-picture Jesus used when He referred to Himself and other believers as “the light.”
- To identify what it means for Christians to live as the light.

### OVERVIEW

When I was in my early 20's, I worked at a houseboat camp in Northern California as a boat driver and water-ski instructor. (Someone had to do this job and I felt the need to suffer for the Lord.) While most people thought this was the easiest job in the world, it proved to be trying on both my spirit and my body. From 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., I had to be “on.” People expected me to lead, teach, be funny, entertain, ski them, and prepare their meals.

By the time all the campers went to bed, I was exhausted. I didn't want to see another person, let alone have another conversation. I wanted my own time. I would hide in my small bunk, grab a book, and turn on my flashlight with the hope that reading would provide me a little solitude and relaxation. Within minutes of my attempt at relaxation, I discovered my goal was impossible while my light was on. Every mosquito in the United States somehow saw my flashlight in the midst of the darkness and came to violate my space. There was no way to relax while swatting blood-sucking buzzers away from my body. It was awful! I even tried to “trick” the mosquitoes by turning off the light for a few minutes with the hope they would fly to another flashlight somewhere in Japan. After they left, I would turn my light back on. This didn't work either; the mosquitoes were laughing at me on their way back to my face.

It was on my bunk, frustrated beyond belief, when I really understood what Jesus meant when He spoke of being like the light. He used this word-picture to describe Himself as well as to describe Christians. He knew this powerful image helped communicate His holiness and our need to stand out while living in the darkness.

When we come to realize that Jesus is the Light and we are also called to be like lights, and to walk in the light, we discover the attractiveness of being set apart and recognize the desperation that lives within the darkness. I can think of no better challenge to start off a new year than to be called and set apart to let light shine brightly.

*“The light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it” (John 1:5 NLT).*

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### OUTLINE

In the following outline there are three qualities of light that will help provide a description of Jesus.

#### Jesus as the Light

**1. Light is a source of life.** Jesus knew that all living things require light to grow and sustain life. Jesus is the source of our human life. He came to give life:

*"The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness" (John 10:10 NLT).*

Too many people believe that following Jesus means boredom, rules, and death. This couldn't be further from the truth! There's nothing as exciting as watching someone realize that "real life" happens when they're plugged into the Source of life—Jesus. When we turn our lives toward the Light, our sin and darkness are exposed and we realize how desperate we are for the true Light who offers true life.

#### **2. Light is a source of safety.**

As "cool" as you might want to appear, most likely you are afraid of the dark. Darkness is uncomfortable. When we stumble around in the dark, there is usually a strong feeling of fear. The fear of the unknown is frightening and crippling.

The antidote to these feelings is the appearance of light. Light immediately replaces fear with safety. Jesus does this for the Christian—His light is the only hope for long-term comfort within the darkness of this world.

#### **3. Light is a source of direction.**

Another type of fear associated with darkness is the fear of the unknown. When you're walking in the dark, you walk slowly so that you don't run into anything. Confidence is at an all-time low. Apprehension over the lack of direction keeps us from natural living.

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 NIV).*

When Jesus says He is the Light of the world He's informing us that He has the power to give the direction we need. Following Jesus keeps us from stumbling in the dark. Not only does Jesus bring eternal life and comfort, but He also brings direction so we can live life the right way.

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## *Matthew 5*

### DISCUSSION GUIDE

#### Open

- Explain what goes through your mind when you're walking in the dark.
- Think of another description of light that might describe a quality of Jesus.
- At this point in your faith, which description of Jesus as the Light is most attractive to you? Why?

#### Dig In

**1. Transition into your study** by explaining that Jesus not only called Himself the Light but He also called His followers the light in the Sermon on the Mount. You want to discover what that means.

**2. Read and discuss Matthew 5:14-16.**

- Why did Jesus refer to Christians as light?
- What are some of the ways in which we hide our light?

**3. Since you have already discussed** Jesus as the Light and seen that Jesus calls Christians to be the light you will want to make sure that students understand the Matthew passage isn't a reference to equality with Jesus. It's a descriptive term used to help Christians understand that their behavior was supposed to be different from the culture surrounding them—so different that it would be made plain for the world to see.

**4. Read and discuss 1 John 1:5-7.**

- What does it mean to walk in the light?
- What are the results for those who choose to walk in the light?

### CLOSE

1. What can you do so that your light isn't hidden?
2. Who is one person in your life that you know is walking in the light?
3. Ask that person to help you walk in the light this week.