

MISSIONAL INITIATIVES

Monthly Newsletter

JANUARY 2023

Living in the Light

Sara-May Cardy: Admin & Communications

Isaiah 9:2 *"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."*

Matthew 4:16 *"the people living in darkness have seen a great light on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."*

I don't know if these verses really were more prevalent than normal in the Advent devotionals I read this past Advent season or if they just stood out to me more than they normally do, but I haven't been able to shake them. They keep playing over and over in my head, and I have been wrestling with the question, "Why?"

In these verses, I have felt a challenge to really consider what it looks like to live as people who have seen this light that the verses speak of.

Often I feel like these verses are used to imply that those who live outside of our Christian views are living in darkness and they need to experience the light and hope that comes with living a life connected to the Father, Son, and Spirit. And while I do long for those who don't know Jesus to experience the gift of relationship with him, I can't help but wonder, "Are we really being a people of light to those around us, so that they want to know Jesus?"

Have we, as followers of Jesus, let this light transform our lives?

In Isaiah 9, the verses continue on to speak of joy and rejoicing (four times alone in verse 3!) and as you read through the rest of that passage, it is clear that the light that "the people" are experiencing is the reign and rule of Jesus. If the reign of this light, Jesus, is one that brings joy and peace, justice and righteousness, are we being witnesses of that kingdom to the world around us? Are we living as conduits of His light?

In my life, if I have truly experienced this transformation of moving from a life in darkness to a life in the light of Christ, how does that impact the relationships I have with those around me?

Like Saul's encounter with the light from heaven in Acts 9, has my meeting with Jesus transformed me? How does it shape my daily interactions with people?

As I have sat with these verses over the last few weeks, I feel like I've noticed a new awareness as I go about my daily tasks. As I meet with people from our church community, as I go on dates, as I prepare for upcoming initiatives at our church and with work that I'm doing with our NAB Missional Initiatives team – I feel a new sense of purpose and passion to be thankful for the light that I have encountered and to do the best I can to bring that light into the lives of those I spend my time with.

In the midst of thinking about these verses, we had a New Year's Eve celebration at our local community league. As the fireworks started, I stood with others in awe of how the quick bursts of light lit up the night sky. These bursts of light brought colour and warmth to the night sky that lingered, even when that light had done its job. I want my life to be a bit like those fireworks, maybe not so loud and startling, but I want my life to bring light, colour, and warmth to those around me in such a way that they long for more of it and hopefully get drawn to the greatest source of light so they can experience it for themselves.



The Story of My Neighbourhood

Deb Judas: Director of Formation

My husband and I live in an amazing neighbourhood with many good friends scattered throughout. We have a lot of fun here, but sometimes it can be challenging when people aren't cooperative or friendly.

For instance, there was this grumpy man who lived on the corner of my street. He would never say hello or even make eye contact. He never raked up his lawn trimmings. Instead, he would sweep them out onto the street. There was also a young man who lived across the street. He had questionable friends and a very loud car that woke everyone up in the middle of the night. And there are the neighbours who walk with EarPods stuffed in their ears, refusing to look at you and say hi, those who didn't keep up with their lawn and garden, or the ones who call the city or police on any minor infringement.

One day, I sensed the Lord calling me to pray for my neighbourhood. It began rather irregularly. At the same time, our church started a book study together called *Backyard Pilgrim* by Matt Canlis. It described a simple yet profound perspective on walking through your neighbourhood, praying as you go. I took this practice up. As I walked, sometimes I would be drawn to a particular home, its occupants completely unknown to me, and pray a blessing over it. Other times, it was a more generalized prayer for the whole community.

Over time, I began to notice people seemed more friendly. The grumpy man on the corner wasn't really that grumpy. In fact, he is making eye contact now. The young man with the car is

actually quite a friendly guy, always waving as he drives by with his loud muffler. I began to realize I don't need to take it personally when people don't say hello to me. The Holy Spirit began to nudge me to give them the benefit of the doubt. Maybe they are merely preoccupied or listening to a podcast. Perhaps I should just pray for them as they walk by.

It has been incredibly humbling to realize that God has placed me in my neighbourhood to bear witness to him and the Way of Jesus in everyday life. While this can sometimes be challenging, it has become a tremendous privilege to experience the gift of friendship and doing life together. The Lord is always reminding me that every person is made in his image and each one has such immeasurable value in God's kingdom, whether they know him or not. And, it is not lost on me that while I have been praying for God to transform my neighbourhood, it was really me who needed a renewed understanding of kingdom life. I am grateful for the tender graciousness of the Holy Spirit.



Resource: *Liberating Evangelism* – Stephen Pickard

Merv Budd: Equipping Evangelist

As part of the Christian Mission and Modern Culture series, Stephen K. Pickard has offered a deep, theologically challenging reflection on evangelism in his book *Liberating Evangelism: Gospel, Theology and the Dynamics of Communication*.

The book is only 100 pages, but for those who desire to think well about evangelism, it is a fascinating read. I couldn't help but see the irony of the church offering a Gospel that frees us but evangelism itself seemingly so bound when he writes, "Evangelism needs to be liberated from false and restrictive notions."

For those who have only understood evangelism as an activity which is fundamentally wordy, Pickard will challenge you, in good ways, to consider a broader perspective for understanding and engaging evangelism. It is not merely an intellectual dive into the theological depths of evangelism, Pickard provides some very practical advice when it comes to Gospel communication:

1. He makes an appeal for simplicity.
2. He argues for a bias towards repetition.
3. He emphasizes the need for wisdom.

How he develops and supports this advice is well worth the read and helps counter the nuanced differences of Gospel communication that is often simplistic, redundant, and unimaginative. In an age when many people shy away from old patterns of evangelism, Pickard helps us to imagine new ways forward.