

“Faith Eyes”

Isaiah 60:1-3, Luke 2:32, John 1:4-5, 2 Corinthians 4:6, & 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

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One of the great things about living on the farm and getting up every morning at 4:30 to milk cows was never missing the sunrise. The short days of winter made God’s gift of light extra special. On the cold days of January, it seemed like an eternity before the horizon would start to glow. Every sunrise was a little different. Most days it was a spectacle of color. Every second the colors and intensity of light would change. As the sun burst over the horizon, you could feel its warmth as it poured into the barn. The sunrise not only brightened the landscape and warmed everything; it brightened our spirits and dispersed the cobwebs of our groggy, autopilot work. Often we would work in silence until the sun rose and then the conversation, laughter, and smiles rose as well. Since leaving the farm, I realize what a wonderful blessing it was to be able to witness the sunrise every day with no obstructions and the luxury of watching the sky while one worked. For me a sunrise is God’s way of saying Good morning, I love you, I am with you now let’s have a great day together. Just as every sunrise is different every day is different with new opportunities to discover God’s love and beauty and share God’s love. Every day is a new beginning the past is over, God gives us a fresh, clean slate everyday.

The prophet Isaiah’s words **Isaiah 60:1 “Arise shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you,”** likely brought the beautiful image of a sunrise from the Mount of Olives to the hearer’s mind. Many people say the Mount of Olives is the most beautiful place on earth to witness a sunrise. If you are looking east, the light dazzles as it tops the mountains. If you turn and look west, the light dances across Jerusalem until it reaches and strikes the eastern white limestone walls of the city. The city looks as if it is both rising up from the shadows and shining with its own internal radiance as the light reflects off the walls and glows in a bright white golden sheen.

God’s loving presence is symbolized by light throughout the Bible. The problem is many of us have a hard time seeing the light. I rarely see a brilliant sunrise these days. There is the clutter of all the buildings and the abundance of ambient light that diminishes the sunrise. My schedule usually has me occupied with something else at sunrise. However, none of these factors make the sunrise over the world less spectacular, rather it shows my failure to notice the light. Science reveals that we are able to perceive only a tiny sliver of the light that floods our life. Most of the light from the electromagnetic spectrum cannot be detected by our eyes even though about one-fifth of our brain has the job of doing nothing but processing information from the light our eyes can see; let alone processing the light that Isaiah calls “the glory of the LORD”.

Today is Epiphany Sunday. Epiphany is the celebration of the wise people who recognized the light of God, searched and found Jesus, were filled with joy, worshiped Jesus and gave offerings of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Epiphany means to show, to make known, and to reveal. Epiphany is God revealing Jesus the light of the world, to us. The wise people showed us how to accept God’s light and respond. Epiphany requires the eyes of faith.

Striving to improve our faith vision is an excellent way to begin 2018. How much of God’s loving presence will you perceive? How often will you use your faith eyes as you step into a new year of opportunities?

Improve your faith vision by uncluttering that which obstructs your view. Unclutter cynicism which obstructs one’s perception of God’s beauty all around us and in other people leaving us bitter, feeling that the world has given us a bum deal, that life has unfairly passed us by.

Unclutter rationalism thinking that there’s nothing real except the visible world. Let go of wanting irrefutable proof, wanting to physically touch the resurrected Jesus and hear Jesus reassure us in a clear audible voice. Sometimes we want to see before we believe, to understand before we have faith. Anselm put it this way, “I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand.”

Unclutter idols like money, fame, stuff, pride, self-reliance, addictions, and on and on. There are so many worldly things we like to worship. It is easy to fall into cluttered thinking if I get this or achieve that or when this or that happens, then I will be whole and joyful. Only God can adequately fill the void in our life with eternal peace, joy, and love.

Unclutter sinful habits. Turn them over to God in prayer. Confide in a prayer partner who can join you in seeking God's help to minimize your sin. Someone who will both hold you accountable and remind you of God's grace.

Unclutter negative news. For every negative story you read, find and read a positive one. For every story on one side of the issue, find a story on the other side of the issue. Monitor your speech. Strive to dominate your talk with positive stories. Whenever you share something negative, point out the opportunity, possible solutions, and good that may emerge. In the last few years putting this into daily practice has greatly enhanced my joy. Instead of dwelling on the loss of someone, I celebrate the blessings of knowing them. Instead of being hurt by a complaint, I strive to give thanks that they care enough to share and want to improve the situation. For the most part, instead of sharing negative happenings from my day with Leslie I share the positive happenings. I vent the negative stuff to God, then ask God to help me let it go. Regarding change, I look for the growth that will happen. I strive to unclutter by letting go of the past and not worrying about the future, so I can fully live in the present.

Unclutter whatever it is that is obstructing your faith eyes from perceiving God's light. Sometimes circumstances produce clutter that cannot be removed for awhile but be assured that God's glorious, loving light is always shining on you.

Once, I was flying during a heavy thunderstorm. After sitting on the tarmac for over an hour, we finally took off. Battered by the wind the plane shook, lurching up and down, giving me that uncomfortable feeling of my stomach being in my throat. We climbed higher and higher into the dark cloud-covered sky. I peered out the raindrop speckled window at the dense swirling cloud. Slowly, the cloud lightened. Suddenly the plane burst through the clouded darkness into a brilliant aura of light. It was so bright I had to squint and shield my eyes. It was breathtaking! The light was so intense. The light was always there, but the clutter of the clouds obstructed my vision. I often remember this experience when I find myself in a dark, cloudy state of being. I know God's light is trying to pierce its way into my life.

Faith eyes can pick up divine light in times of deep darkness, and this was as true in the first century as it is today. There wasn't much brightness in the world when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. But through the darkness, there were some who had faith eyes to see the light. Wise people were filled with joyful love as they worshiped Jesus. Isaiah describes the state of the world and foretold of the wise men's visit. **Isaiah 60:2-3 "For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and God's glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."** Isaiah is telling you today, "Lift up your eyes and look around...then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice."

Our challenge is to focus on this light and to trust that Christ is always present — even in times of chaos. Even in our darkest moments — times of disappointment, failure, temptation and tension — God is shining light into our life. DC Talk in their album *Jesus Freak* sings about using our faith eyes to see the light. "The subtleties of darkness never cease to amaze as a physical world creates a spiritual haze. Blinded by distractions lost in matterless affairs reaching through the darkness trusting God will meet me there." With our faith eyes we can see God's face. "God smiles as God show us grace. Love pours down in a shower of grace. In my faith eyes, God takes my hand. We walk through foreign lands. The foreign lands of life." "Like a child I hold onto God, in my moment of truth, we can ride the storm, endure the pain, God comforts me in my hurricane and I'll never be alone again."

God's light is a powerful radiance that changes anyone who perceives God. Moses began to shine when he talked with God. You and I shine from our prayers, service, and worship.

When Jesus was born, the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds. Simeon said that the baby Jesus was **Luke 2:32 "Jesus is a light to reveal God to the nations, and Jesus is the glory of your people Israel!"** The gospel of John says Jesus the Word of God became flesh and lived among us. **John 1:4-5 "Life was in Jesus, and this life gives light to everyone. The light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it."**

Brilliant light dazzled again in the transfiguration of Jesus and in the resurrection. The apostle Paul rejoiced that God **2 Corinthians 4:6** “has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus”.

God’s light is brilliant, intense, and illuminating. Faith eyes enable us to perceive God’s loving presence. This year improve your vision by using lenses of faith. The lens of Scripture reveals God’s love and plan for our life. The lens of the church brings into focus the encouragement, prayers, and support of a family of faith. The lens of worship provides nourishment for our souls so that the eyes of faith will remain healthy. The lens of service makes our faith sight stronger. The greatest lens of all is the lens of love. **1 Corinthians 13:4-8** “**Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; love is not irritable or resentful; love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.**” The lens of love is the ointment that heals the eyes of faith.

Faith eyes are developed over a lifetime of looking. If we are willing to search for the light of God in times of deep darkness, we will find God. If we look hard for Jesus in situations of chaos and confusion, we will discover God. If we train our faith eyes on the small glimmers of light that appear in our shadow times, we will emerge from the darkness that threatens to overwhelm us. Although darkness shall cover the earth, Isaiah foretells, **Isaiah 60:2** “**the LORD will arise upon you, and God’s glory will appear over you**”. Twenty-Two physical eyesight is not needed--just the eyes of faith.

Someone once said to the woman who stood at the gate of the year, “Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown!” And she replied, “Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That will be a better light and safer than a known way!” May God bless you this year with ever growing faith eyes. Amen