

“Receive God’s Light and Shine”

Psalm 27, Isaiah 49:1-7, John 8:12 & Matthew 5:14 & 16

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Prayer for Understanding Ever present Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Holy Spirit open our eyes to the signs of your presence, open our ears to your voice and open our minds to your wisdom so that we will be cleansed and renewed. Amen.

My friend, Mark, is a prankster. Mark worked on our dairy farm during the summer and lived with us. In the center of our farm was a 7-acre lake only accessible by a cow lane. I built a rustic shack on the lake. Between crops of alfalfa harvest, Mark and I would often sleep at the shack. It was a great place to swim, stargaze, and observe wildlife. An otter often played only a few feet off of the dock. Deer, ducks, geese, and frogs were abundant. There were blue heron. At night if we took the row boat to a grove of trees that overhung the water, we saw bats. On the opposite side of the lake from the shack was some woods. Sometimes at night we would take flashlights and explore the woods looking for raccoons, snowy owls, and lynx. The lake and the area around it was my happy place. I am a person who is easily spooked. I try to avoid horror movies and books. Mark relentlessly wore me down until he succeeded in getting me to read Stephen King’s *Pet Cemetery*. There are a couple of unique features to the place where the horror happens. One is being on the other side of a deadfall. The previous winter the gas company cut a 30-yard wide strip through the woods where their gas line was buried. They piled the brush up on one side so this was like a deadfall. The other was a clearing in the woods. Years ago this woods was selectively logged. In the center is where they processed the trees leaving behind lots of sawdust. Instead of trees growing back in this area it was thick with raspberry bushes. I had finished reading *Pet Cemetery* the night before. Mark wanted to go exploring in the woods and I being freaked out by the book refused. Eventually, Mark nagged me into going into the woods. We grabbed our flashlights and walked until we crossed the gas line brush, like the deadfall, and were walking the sort of trail left by the equipment that cleared this strip of land. It was a beautiful night, calm, clear, no moon, and stars seemed to be touching the treetops. Once your eyes adjusted, you could see a little by the star light. Mark kept bringing up the scariest parts of the book and I was freaked out and on edge. We had to cross a two wire electric fence line. It was a two person task. One person took two insulators and spread the wires apart so the other could step through. We tossed our flashlights on the ground. Mark went first. After Mark held the fence for me, he grabbed both flashlights and took off running. I hurried after him. He turned, shined both lights into my eyes so I was temporary blinded, and turned off the flashlights. As I was waiting for my eyes to adjust when I heard something brushed me from behind. I spun around I saw a man in tattered clothes and a white distorted face. I screamed, turned, and ran a few steps and suddenly another walking dead looking person emerged. So I turned to run into the woods where I tripped over something. Mark often took his pranks beyond funny to dangerous. Chad another one of my friends, who Mark convinced to be in costume waiting for us in the woods, took pity on me, pulled off his mask, turned on his flashlight, and told Mark to stop. Chad handed me a flashlight. After composing myself and using the flashlight to look all around, I felt safe again. On the walk back to the shack, I never let go of my flashlight. The body of the flashlight was aluminum, and I squeezed it so hard that I dented the flashlight. I was determined to hold onto the light.

Today we have an abundance of artificial light to guide our way. David, the author of Psalm 27, lived around 1,000 BC when artificial light came from just three sources; torches, lamps, and candles. David spent a good portion of his life on the run, hiding from a murderous king and his army. David hid in complete darkness in a cave. Often David had to camp in darkness to not give away his location. David endured many fear-filled dark nights eager for the dawn. David begins the psalm declaring God is light. Recall a time when you were afraid in the dark. David prayed: **Psalm 27 MSG “Light, space, zest—that is God! So, with God on my side I am fearless, afraid of no one and nothing. When vandals ride down ready to eat me alive, Those bullies and toughs fall flat on their faces. When besieged, I am calm as a baby. When all hell breaks loose, I am collected and cool. I am asking God for one thing, only one thing: To live with God in God’s house my whole life long. I will contemplate God’s beauty; I will study at God’s feet. That is the only quiet, secure place in a noisy world, The perfect getaway, far from the buzz of traffic. God holds me head and shoulders above all who try to pull me down. I am headed for God’s place to offer anthems that will raise the roof! Already I am singing God-songs; I am making music to God. Listen, God, I am calling at the top of my lungs: “Be good to me! Answer me!” When my heart whispered, “Seek God,” my whole being replied, “I am seeking God!” Do not hide from me now! You have always been**

right there for me; do not turn your back on me now. Do not throw me out, do not abandon me; you have always kept the door open. My father and mother walked out and left me, but God took me in."

Psalm 27 is for those dark times when you are afraid, being attacked, stuck, and dreading the future. God is light. For the times when you feel hemmed in, bombarded, with limit options, join David in singing God is space. When you are exhausted, lethargic, demoralized, join David in praying God is zest. Despite spending a good portion of his life on the run, alone, hungry, afraid, in trouble, in the dark, without shelter, without his cherished harp, David survived because God was his security, cover, shelter, light, and song. Despite being haunted by his sin, God's gracious steadfast love forgave David, gave him a clean heart, and put a new and right spirit within David. David's shame over his sins stained his life blood red, God's grace washed, cleansed, and made David white as snow. The weight of David's guilt crushed his bones, God's grace purged the guilt and gave David joy. David's regrets left him broken, God's grace made David whole to sing prayers of praise to God. God is your light, space, and zest.

David sings, **"One thing I ask of the Lord."** If you were to ask God for one thing, what would it be? David says the one thing is **"To live with God in God's house my whole life long."** David goes on to explain God's house and what he will do with God. **"I will contemplate God's beauty; I will study at God's feet. That is the only quiet, secure place in a noisy world, The perfect getaway, far from the buzz of traffic. God holds me head and shoulders above all who try to pull me down. I am headed for God's place to offer anthems that will raise the roof! Already I am singing God-songs; I am making music to God."** Whenever David was aware of God's presence, he was at home in God's steadfast, everlasting love, and was joyful. Whenever David let his problems, sins, and the messiness of life obscure God's presence, David wasted away. I know this as well. My struggle is to get my heart to live it, when the way is arduous. David got his heart to live it by singing to God. I get my heart to live it by going for walks in the woods in daylight and at night. When I hike at night, I am overly prepared with light. I take two headlamps and my phone has a flashlight. And I take back up batteries. I gladly carry the extra weight to know I will always have light.

Perhaps you notice that this psalm is all about God. God is cited 17 times in 14 verses. The contrast is between the weakness, fear, pleadings, and prayers of a faltering human being and our powerful God who can extract one from certain destruction; between a person who wants more than anything to shed all their troubles and a God who gives safety; between the darkest night of the soul and God's light and salvation. The psalm comes to the conclusion many know and yet struggle at times to live: it is all about God —what God has done, does, and will do.

Richard Rohr writes: "Life itself is three steps forward and two steps backward. Life gets the point and then loses it or doubts it. Our job is to see where the three steps forward are heading (invariably toward grace, mercy, forgiveness, inclusion, nonviolence, and trust) which then gives us the ability to both recognize and forgive the two steps backward (which are usually about vengeance, pettiness, law over grace, forms over substance, and requirements over relationship). Life is getting the point and missing the point. Life is awareness of God in our lives and then our fighting, avoiding, running from God. Life is too good to be true — for someone as little and seemingly unimportant as me! There is hopefully the moment of divine communion or intimacy, and then the pullback that invariably says, "I am probably making this up. This is mere wishful thinking." Fortunately, God works with all of it, both the forward and the backward, and that is what bases the whole journey precisely in divine grace or what the Bible calls "steadfast love" (hesed)."

Jesus said: **John 8:12 ESV "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."** When we experience God's light, we become a light for others. Jesus said to his disciples: **Matthew 5:14,16 "You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to God."** All of us have dark moments and yet God's light shines through us all.

Isaiah had awe inspiring, spectacular experiences of God and God's light. Isaiah strived to shine with God's light for everyone. Isaiah was disappointed for religion was a mess, the world was in chaos, people seemed uninterested in becoming more loving and it seemed that things were getting worse every day. God spoke to Isaiah and assured him that every instance of his love was making a difference, every ray of light expands the future glory of the cosmos, salvation, life, light, space, zest will go global. Like Isaiah, we often vastly underestimate the transformational glory of the light of God that shines through us.

Isaiah 49:1-7 MSG "Listen, far-flung islands, pay attention, faraway people: God put me to work from the day I was born. The moment I entered the world God named me. God gave me speech that would cut and penetrate. God kept God's hand on me to protect me. God made me God's straight arrow and hid me in God's quiver. God said to me, "You are my dear servant, Israel, through whom I will shine." But I said, "I have worked for nothing. I have nothing to show for a life of hard work. Nevertheless, I will let God have the last

word. I will let God pronounce God's verdict." "And now," God says, this God who took me in hand from the moment of birth to be God's servant, to bring Jacob back home to God, to set a reunion for Israel—What an honor for me in God's eyes! That God should be my strength! God says, "But that is not a big enough job for my servant—just to recover the tribes of Jacob, merely to round up the strays of Israel. I am setting you up as a light for the nations so that my salvation becomes global!" God, Redeemer of Israel, The Holy of Israel, says to the despised one, kicked around by the nations, slave labor to the ruling class: "Kings will see, get to their feet—the princes, too—and then fall on their faces in homage because of God, who has faithfully kept God's word, The Holy of Israel, who has chosen you."

Having experienced the light of God, each of us is to be a light for others, a beacon of hope, a lighthouse of love, a reading light of wonder, a security light of safety, a street light of joy, a dining light of community, a church light of guidance, a bedroom light of peace, a hall light of grace, a flashlight who disperses fear. God is shining light through us and God's light will bring salvation to everyone. Or in the words of Isaiah. **"God is setting you up as a light for the nations so that God's salvation becomes global!"**

Martin Luther King Jr. said: "We who are members of the church are the lighthouse of the world. We are responsible for one task above all others — to keep the light of the gospel burning." Amen