

# SHINE

make them wonder what you've got



# SHINE

make them wonder what you've got



WHITAKER  
HOUSE

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### **SHINE: MAKE THEM WONDER WHAT YOU'VE GOT**

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## Dedication

*To Summer, Breeon, Heather, Erika,  
Jenny, Sharon, and Simone.  
Truly you shine above rubies.*



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five brothers from different nations and mothers.

# Preface



Over twenty years of pastoral ministry in Nashville, Tennessee, have given me wonderful opportunities to minister to many of the folks who are involved in “CCM,” the Contemporary Christian Music industry. But back in 1997, a unique thing happened. I received a call from Wes Campbell, a faithful member of our church and leader of the management team that had brought the Newsboys to America. Wes presented us with a framed gold record commemorating the sale of over 500,000 copies of the Newsboys’ album, *Take Me to Your Leader*. Wes told me it was because the Newsboys had gotten some of their ideas for songs from my preaching tapes and wanted to show their appreciation. At the time, I did not know any of the band members personally, but I remember how kind it was for them to do this for us.

That was just the beginning. Since then, and especially over the past two years, it’s been my privilege to have an increasing amount of pastoral input into the Newsboys



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and their tremendous support team and staff. Right after the tragedy of “9-11,” I even went out on the road with the band for five days of their “Festival Con Dios” tour. (You really get to know people when you live on a bus with them for a few days.) We’ve also had many rich times of Bible study together. My wife, Elizabeth, and I have gotten to know the Newsboys’ families, as well. We spent all day with the group and their families last Thanksgiving. We’ve had lunches and breakfasts together. And after all this, I can tell you truthfully that these are some of the finest folks you’ll ever meet anywhere.

I love the Newsboys. But I don’t love them primarily because of their talent and gifting, even though that’s tremendous. I love these guys because they are for real. They love the Lord, and they want to “shine” for Him. I’ve never heard them say a bad word, an off-color joke, or an unkind thing about anyone. The tour bus was equipped with satellite TV that picked up every channel the world has to offer. The first day I noticed one of the Boys was deleting all the “adult” and “movie” channels so they were blacked out of the system. There was no fanfare involved, no “holiness” speeches. It was a simple decision to block out images none of us needed to see, even in passing. That impressed me. (They did watch unending coverage of international cross-country motorcycle racing, however—not my favorite!)

Some of what you’ll read here is cutting-edge insight into what it’s going to take to change our culture and



our world. I think you'll be impressed with how this band grasps the importance of personal discipleship and commitment to the local church.

- (1) They understand that *individual* destiny can never be discovered apart from *corporate* destiny. Who we're with determines where we're going; therefore, identification with a local church is not an option. This membership is not nominal (in name only), but vital and indispensable.
- (2) They understand that moral accountability insures the development of personal character. Each band member has committed to be accountable to a pastor or pastoral team and is willing to be corrected, disciplined, and held accountable for his personal life and behavior.
- (3) They understand that concerts and "platform ministry" do not really permanently change lives. They know that there is no substitute for personal discipleship and follow-up and that Christian lives not grounded in foundational biblical principles won't work.
- (4) They understand that the Christian life is a progressive work of sanctification and that the process is never completed this side of eternity.
- (5) Finally, they understand that although the church has not been "shining" as it should, the church is still Christ's body, the foremost expression of the kingdom of God on earth and the visible "family of God." *Shine:*



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*Make Them Wonder What You've Got* points out some of the weaknesses and shortcomings of the church in America. But this band is not standing on the outside, criticizing and judging the church. The Newsboys are “in” the church and committed to its health and well-being. *Shine* simply gives us a good look at how we can become the “salt” and “light” Jesus designed us to be.

Enjoy *Shine*. It's coming from the heart.

Pastor Ray McCollum  
Bethel World Outreach Center/  
Morning Star International  
Nashville, Tennessee

*Let your light shine before men, that they  
may see your good deeds and praise your  
Father in heaven.*

—Matthew 5:16



# Prelude: An Awakening



I believed Christ was the way, but yet I was lost. I believed He was the truth, but at the same time, I was deceived. I believed He was the life, but I knew not the Life. Then, by way of mercy, trial, tragedy, and grace, there was a sifting like that of wheat, and for the first time, I started again on this journey knowing that Christ must increase, and I must disappear.

—Peter Furler

I think in the last couple of years there's been an awakening in the band to what really matters....I feel like I've become a new person, an absolutely new human being.

—Phil Joel

The events of the last year and a half or two years have really shown me that it's one thing to have your ministry and the work that you are doing. For us, it's being the Newsboys and doing our thing there. But we really got a big wake-up call a little over a year ago....

—Jody Davis

I didn't learn what grace really meant until about two years ago, and it has changed my life dramatically. I think it scares a lot of people around me because, if anything, I may present myself as what a lot of people think of as less of a Christian, when really, I'm being more honest and transparent.

—Jeff Frankenstein

I believe that God is really doing something in the spiritual realm with this band, more so than He ever has done before....I've been a Christian for a long time, probably twenty years now, and you have your times of your mountaintop experiences and then you have your other times that aren't quite so high. But I really feel that God is preparing me for something incredible, something exciting, and I think the rest of the band is feeling the same.

—Duncan Phillips



Like a song written in private, then played over a public address system, this book carries personal thoughts, secret hopes, maybe even a little wishful thinking, and sends them blaring out for everyone to hear. Or as Frederick Buechner put it, “Think of these pages as graffiti maybe, and where I have scratched up in a public place my longings and loves, my grievances and indecencies, be reminded in private of your own. In that way, at least, we can hold a kind of converse.”

Many a conversation has been had among the members of the band over the years, from pubs in London, to a Greek restaurant in Detroit (lamb chops—well done, thanks), to the dirt bike trails of Baja, Mexico. These were not discussions (I guess) like those of the intelligentsia or even the “super-spiritual,” but instead were maybe like those of nomads or “ragamuffins” finding land with a buried treasure and dealing together with the process of selling everything they had to buy that land.

Having been with the band since its beginnings, sleeping in an old Dodge van; freezing in a harsh New York winter; sweating buckets in a Death Valley, California, summer; playing shows until my fingers bled a little bit; meeting my beautiful wife in Atlanta, Georgia; seeing the end of the days (I hope) of asking rowdy punters to step



outside to deal with it Aussie style; standing in a foot of snow in Louisville, Kentucky, numb at the funeral of our friend and former bass player, K.M.—God's grace is sufficient; celebrating my tenth wedding anniversary when, suddenly, in what seemed like the twinkling of an eye, we were all standing in the foyer of Vanderbilt Hospital—band, wives, suits and ties, waiting for the doctors to tell us if Jody and Erica's baby girl was going to make it through the night; and watching the grace of God restore marriages that seemed irreparable to our human understanding; I've often thought how odd it is that life's strange happenings and times of adversity, which normally might tear a group of people apart, when offered upward, can have the reverse effect.

These are thoughts written down mainly so that we, the band, don't forget them. Maybe for us they are a little gathering of what has been our daily bread on the path to the kingdom that, the closer you get to it, the more you shine.

The truth is, we're not where we need to be, but many are witnesses that we're not (by His grace) where we used to be, either. I pray for God's favor, because the Good Lord knows that's what it's going to take! Even more, I pray that His Spirit breathes upon each word, lest we be wasting His beautiful trees.

True love and peace, only through Christ,  
Peter



And the end of all our exploring  
will be to arrive where we started  
and know it for the first time.

—T. S. Eliot



## Part I



## Where's the Light?

*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

—Matthew 5:14-16





Down here in the valley  
Nothing's able to grow  
'Cause the light's too low  
Folks spend their days  
Digging 'round for diamonds and gold  
'Til they just get old  
And they don't know anything else  
They don't know they're breathing bad air  
But I'm tired of living like this  
And my soul cries out, "If You're there..."

Call me up to Your side  
Draw me up to Your light  
Let it blind me  
Lord, refine me  
Refine me out of my mind

"Thrive"  
*Thrive*



The gospel will persuade no one unless it has so convicted us that we are transformed by it.

—Brennan Manning



☀️ A car with a bumper sticker that reads, “Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven,” speeds down the highway, cutting someone off. As the other driver scrambles for control of her car, she sees the bumper sticker and yells in frustration, “Does being forgiven give you license to run me off the road?”

☀️ Two teenagers meet for lunch. One wears a shirt that announces, “Jesus is the reason for the season,” and the other a jacket with the words, “Jesus rules.” Their lunch conversation centers on the latest church gossip. A husband and wife seated nearby exchange glances. The wife says, “If that’s the way they talk about each other, I certainly wouldn’t want to go to *their* church.”

☀️ A busy executive spends many hours leading the men’s ministry at his church and teaching a Bible study, but he never seems to have time for his family and constantly loses his temper when he is home. Each week his children sit in the back of the room where the Bible study meets, listening to him teach the Scriptures and thinking, “Hypocrite!”

☀️ A protester explodes a bomb at an abortion clinic, killing a doctor. As the smoke clears, the news media



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interviews a pro-abortion leader and an attorney who say Christians are dangerous and their beliefs promote violence.

 A demonstrator stands at the fresh grave of a murdered homosexual, holding a sign that says, “He’s burning in hell.” Relatives and friends, who have come to mourn their loved one, stare in shock. “If that’s the way God really feels,” the victim’s mother says, “I hate Him!”



**T**he driver, the teenagers displaying Christian slogans, the busy executive, the protester, and the demonstrator all have something in common. They believe they’re shining the light of Christ to the world.

### What’s the Message?

If you had encountered these people while you were unsaved, what would you have learned from them? Would you have found their words and actions attractive—or would you have been repelled by them?

Whether we’re dealing with controversial issues such as abortion and homosexuality or everyday situations such as driving to work, eating out, and serving at



church, what we do and how we act speak volumes to those around us.

Because we are Christians, when people hear the name of Jesus, they see a picture of us in their minds. How we live our lives sends a message to them about who Jesus is and what the Christian faith is all about.

If someone were to give a description of the Gospel just from observing your life, what do you think that person would say? What message is your life proclaiming?

Through our lives people learn the message of the Gospel. If what we say and what we do don't match up, we create confusion and cause people to reject the message.

That very question has been burning in our hearts and minds. As the Newsboys, through our albums and tours, we have some degree of contact with hundreds of thousands of people. We're grateful when people are blessed by our music. But in learning what it really means to "seek first the kingdom of God," we have begun to ask ourselves: What about those who know us best or interact with us personally? Do our families and friends see the light of Christ in us? What do our neighbors think of the way we demonstrate our faith? Do we treat people the way



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Christ would when we address a clerk at Home Depot or talk with a ticket taker at the airline when the flight is two hours late?

Some of these things might sound insignificant on the surface. Does it really matter if we snap at a waiter because he gave us the wrong change or if we make a sarcastic remark about the way someone is dressed? We may not think so, but these actions are very significant in God's eyes because we're meant to do what Christ would do in every situation we're in. Through our lives, people learn the message of the Gospel. If what we say and what we do don't match up, we create confusion and cause people to reject the message. For example—

Could a christ who impatiently snapped at a waiter—someone who is likely tired from working for hours on his feet—then turn around and say to him, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”?

Could a christ who made a sarcastic remark about someone's taste in clothes be credible when he said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another”?

Could a christ who held a sign at someone's grave, saying, “He's burning in hell,” then say, “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”?



There is a vital connection between what we say and what we do. Our actions either give credibility to our words—or undermine their validity. We must earn the right to be listened to.

The Scripture says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” When Jesus came to earth, He was the personification of the Word. It wasn’t just His words, but His very life, that was the message of the Good News.

When we receive Christ into our lives, He no longer just makes His dwelling *among* us, as He did when He was living on earth, but He dwells *within* us. When we allow Him to live His life through us, our lives become the Word personified, just as His life was. It is not just our words that speak the Good News. We are living and walking pictures of Christ.

The one thing that is central to the message of the Gospel is the one thing that we seem to forget so easily—

Our *lives* are the message.

The Gospel is about transformation—the transformation of our lives by the life of Christ within us. We have to ask ourselves: Do our lives reflect the grace, truth, and love we have received through Christ? Or do they reveal that we haven’t allowed the Spirit of Christ to transform us into His image so that only He shines through?



### The Light of the World

Jesus described Himself as “the light of the world,” but He also described His followers in the same way, saying, “You are the light of the world.” When He returned to the Father, He placed the world in the care of believers, telling us that we are now to be its light, just as He was the light while He lived on earth.

At the same time, He gave us vital insight about how to be the light when He added, “*Let your light shine.*” Jesus’ statement shows that we need to *enable* the light to shine. It’s not something that happens automatically.

It is the nature of light to illuminate. However, if something is blocking the source of that light, a shadow is created—and the full strength of the light can’t be seen. If the world is having difficulty seeing the light clearly in us, then there are things in our lives that are blocking it—obstacles that are casting shadows and obscuring the power of the message.

Each one of us must discover what those obstacles are in his or her own life. However, as we have observed contemporary Christianity—and our own lives—we have noticed several obstacles many of us have in common that prevent a clear illumination of Christ to our culture. Understanding how to deal with these “shadow-casters” will go a long way in enabling us to be the light of the world.



## Shadow-Casters

### The Pace of Our Lives

The first obstacle may sound simple, but it has massive ramifications in our lives. It has to do with our contemporary lifestyles. Like everyone else in our culture, we are busy and exhausted. From corporate executives to grade school children, our lives are scheduled from morning to night. We're trying to keep up with work, school, family, church, and other activities. We have cell phones pressed to both ears, pagers beeping, E-mail and faxes coming in, so that we're simply overloaded with information and the demands of always being "on call."

Daily life for most families means running to sports or music practices, juggling jobs and school and friends, doing homework, making meals, taking care of the house and garden—the list goes on. Kids get tired and stressed, and parents become anxious and exhausted. Most families don't even eat meals together or spend time enjoying each other's company. They have become "strangers living under one roof"—preventing them from shining the light of Christ to one other and often setting themselves up for emotional problems, family turmoil, and even substance abuse as they try to cope alone with the pressures of life.

Then there are church activities. We can sometimes get so involved in meetings and outreaches that we have



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no time left for God Himself—let alone our families and friends.

Of course, many of the activities we're involved in aren't bad in themselves. But it is possible to be involved in good things for God and still miss out on what's most important. The problem is that we're neglecting the area of our lives that needs attention if we're going to shine: our spirits. We may be active and accomplishing many things, but we can't live at this pace of life for very long and have time to reflect on our priorities and nurture our inner



Our problem is that we're neglecting  
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our spirits.



lives. Our spirits are starving because one of the first things that seems to get shortchanged is our relationship with our heavenly Father. Once we lose connection with the Source, our light grows increasingly weak. It is impossible to “seek first the kingdom of God” without that connection.

We also neglect our bodies and souls, not realizing that when they don't receive the care and attention they need, it can have a negative spiritual effect on us. Physical exhaustion and emotional isolation do take a spiritual toll. Our bodies need more than activity. They can't keep functioning non-stop; they need rest and renewal. Our souls need more than



information and stimulus. We need to develop relationships with our families, friends, and neighbors that go deeper than surface interaction. Since our band is on the road so much of the time doing tours, spending long hours traveling, recording, and performing, we know how easy it can be to lose those spirit- and soul-sustaining connections with God and other people—and we know the detrimental effect it can have on us spiritually.

What's hard about this “pace of life” obstacle is that it affects us gradually, so we don't notice that it is happening. It's not like being suddenly plunged into darkness, as in a blackout. Instead, the light of Christ is slowly encroached upon, just like a late-afternoon shadow invades a sunny patch of lawn. Many of us are unaware of our condition until an internal or external crisis forces us to look at what's happened. That's when the realization hits that we haven't felt at peace for a long time or that something vital is missing from our lives. The numerous expectations that have been placed upon us—either by ourselves or others—are making us uneasy and restless. Anxiety is invading our thoughts. So many things are distracting and sidetracking us from what's really important that we wonder if there's any meaning left in our lives. The thought may even cross our minds, “Is God still out there somewhere, or am I alone in this?”

Frazzled and exhausted, we go around trying to be the light of the world when the light is being blocked from our own view. In addition to all this, we feel guilty because we know we aren't making a difference in pushing back



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the darkness in our culture. However, we keep struggling along, trying to be a light where we can, because we remember Jesus' words—

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

We carry around these words like a burden on our backs. The responsibility seems too overwhelming, and despair sets in. We're tired of trying to be something we're not. Why did Jesus have to leave *us* with the job of making Him known in the world? Doesn't He know that just making it through the day is hard enough? Doesn't He know how often we mess up? Maybe we should give up trying...

Feelings of failure and despair can sometimes lead Christians to totally give up on their calling to be the light. Other believers experience the same feelings of failure, but they go around with smiles on their faces, pretending that everything is okay. Because they feel they have to have all the answers, these Christians end up wearing themselves out as they strive to keep up spiritual appearances. Rather



than casting their cares on the Lord and trusting Him to live His life through them, they're continually burning their own coals, so that their spiritual lives are perpetually depleted. Other Christians react to their discouragement by slipping into a lifestyle where they hardly acknowledge God any longer and take on the attitudes and perspectives of the world—becoming barely distinguishable from the rest of society.

All these believers face a genuine dilemma because Jesus said, "If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"



We are yeast and salt. It's up  
to us to change things.



### "Us Versus Them"

Another obstacle that prevents the light of Christ from shining through us is a misunderstanding of what it means to proclaim the message of the Gospel to the world.

When Jesus told parables about the kingdom of God, He said we're supposed to have the same effect on society that yeast has on bread when it works its influence all the way through the dough, causing it to rise. In other words, we're to influence all aspects of society with the Gospel so that, ultimately, it can be totally transformed. He also talked about how we are to preserve the culture from corruption



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as salt preserves meat. For years, we have heard sermons and talks urging us to act on our responsibility to society. If Christians don't function as yeast and salt, society will continue to deteriorate. It's up to *us* to change things.

In response to this urging, many believers have tried to preserve what is good and transform what is bad in our culture. To do this, we've decided we won't let anyone silence our witness in the public arena or treat us as second-class citizens. We will demand an equal voice in policy and social matters.

Increasingly, this has become the primary focus of many Christians' outreach to the culture. Being the light of the world has come to mean announcing to the world what we believe and making sure we have a right not only to believe it, but also to say it publicly. Though there have been some setbacks, there has been significant success in achieving this goal. For the most part, we have preserved our right to express our faith and preach the Gospel.

There is certainly a need to exercise our social and political freedoms. But the difficult question then becomes, How much have we really achieved? Have we illuminated the light of Christ in society so that it is changing people's hearts and making a significant difference in their lives? Or have we traded changing hearts for merely changing laws—as good as those laws may be?

We have asserted our prerogative to be part of the culture. Yet have we made ourselves just one more special



interest group striving to be heard? We must ask if we have fought for our rights to proclaim the Gospel only to become another subculture in society rather than “a holy nation, a people belonging to God, who declare the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His wonderful light.”

Most of all, has the reason for proclaiming our faith really been motivated by a desire to be the light of the world? Or has it been the result of *fear*—fear of losing our rights, status, and influence in the world?

Will winning those things mean we've won the world for Christ?

In the larger scheme of things, have we been merely justifying our position and promoting ourselves—or have we promoted the interests of God's kingdom?

Some years ago, we recorded a song called “Not Ashamed.” This song was based on a turning point in Peter's life. He had reached a place in his faith where he had settled for himself the question of, “Who is Jesus, really?” The song was meant to express, “I've truly found Christ. I believe that He is who He says He is.” That's an affirmation that every Christian has to come to for himself or herself. If we believe Jesus is who He says He is, as the Scriptures attest, then we must recognize how that belief should influence every area of our lives, and we need to commit to Him and follow Him wholeheartedly. And that's what the song was about.



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When “Not Ashamed” was released, it struck a chord because many Christians were uncertain about declaring what they believed. There was a hesitancy about acknowledging who Christ is. But this is no longer the case for most Christians, and the original meaning of the song has been forgotten. Slowly, over the years, the message of “not ashamed” has come to mean something entirely different for many believers.

As we have become bold in declaring our belief in God to society, we have become a generation of Christians who are no longer timid. Gone are the days when we were embarrassed to identify with the name of Jesus or when we would hide our faith for fear of being ridiculed. Although this new courage started out to be something positive, in the end, it has turned into something negative. “I’m not ashamed” has become a kind of battle cry, an anthem proclaiming: “Jesus rules, so the world can shove off!”

This “macho Christian” attitude is a misinterpretation of the Gospel because it does not reflect the nature of Christ—servanthood, compassion, and sacrifice. It is blocking the light of Christ from the world because, instead of being ambassadors of reconciliation, we have become ambassadors of Christian pride. What started out as a desire to be bold for Christ is now promoting an arrogant attitude that is creating misunderstanding, suspicion, and fear between us and the world.



An “us versus them” stance is fatal to the presentation of the Gospel because it is the place where grace dies. Our dealings with the world are no longer about reconciliation, but confrontation. It is like the parable Jesus told of the man who was forgiven a huge debt that he could never repay, but then he went out and beat up another man who owed him practically nothing. Once we've been forgiven, somehow we forget that the only difference between “us” and “them” is *grace*.



Once we've been forgiven,  
we forget that the only  
difference between “us” and  
“them” is *grace*.



There's a lot of this “gung ho” Christianity in the church. Christian music festivals draw tens of thousands of people, and the Christians who gather there are certainly not ashamed. They openly display symbols of the faith. Bumper stickers, T-shirts, and jewelry all proclaim the name of Jesus. Today, it's the “cool” thing for kids to wear T-shirts with Christian messages, whereas ten years ago you were considered radical if you wore shirts like that to school. Now, everyone in every youth group does it.

Sometimes we have the idea that wearing and displaying these messages of our faith is the sum total of what it



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means to be a witness, instead of recognizing that we ourselves are that witness. We're bewildered when our efforts to show the truth of the Gospel to the world seem to come back and hit us in the face. When people aren't interested in the message, we can feel increasingly isolated from the mainstream of society.

One reason for people's rejection of the message is that some of the slogans have become more offensive than thought-provoking. For example, there is a popular bumper sticker that says, "If you think you're perfect, just try walking on water." What is that really saying to people? Our Christian culture can be so perfectionist that it scares people away. When we act as if we have everything figured out, it comes off as self-righteous and judgmental. People see Christians who apparently "have it all figured out," and they think, "Well, I'm not nearly good enough for that." Or, as we mentioned before, they see the inconsistency of what we *say* we believe and what we *do*—and then write us off entirely.

Another outcome of the "not ashamed" attitude is that it has a tendency to promote selfishness. The result is that we become isolated not only from the world, but also from our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. Christianity becomes all about "me"—my church, my bumper stickers, my T-shirts—so that we're almost in competition with other believers to see who can be the trendiest. While we think we're showing our *difference* from the world by displaying



the latest Christian fad, we're actually copying the spirit of the world.

There really isn't anything wrong with most of these displays. We can use them and enjoy them. The problem comes when we allow them to become substitutes for true expressions of faith. For all the fish on our cars, hats, bags, and Bibles, have we allowed ourselves to focus on surface expressions of faith while neglecting the development of our inner character? Do we wear our Christian T-shirts declaring our faith in a loving, merciful God, but then gossip against one another or refuse to forgive each other?

We need to be strong in our  
faith, but not by our own  
might. Sometimes we forget that  
we weren't born Christians.

Do we display our Ichthys-eating-Darwin stickers on our cars, but then drive like maniacs? Do we quote, "God is not willing that any should perish," but then gloat over the predicaments of unbelievers with an attitude of, "I told you so"?

The prideful "not ashamed" approach just isn't working—and it is never going to work. We need to be strong in our faith, but not by our own might. Right now, this attitude has gone over the top. It's a frenzy. A *graceless* frenzy. For the most part, we're not as concerned about reaching the



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unsaved for Christ as we are about proving we're better than they are. We act as if we were never in their position in the first place—or never would have gotten in their position. In other words, sometimes we forget that we weren't born Christians. Each of us had to make a choice to repent and turn our lives over to God, and that choice was made only under the umbrella of God's grace.

Therefore, we need a paradigm shift, a new way of thinking about our faith, because faith that is based on "us versus them" will not stand. It is going to get washed away because the foundation is just sand. This is one reason we're seeing massive turnover in youth groups. Kids come, and they attend for a couple of years. Then they turn eighteen, and heading to Fort Lauderdale for a good time looks like a lot more fun than being part of a group that doesn't display much grace. Maybe this is because our focus has become what we are *against* rather than what we are *for*.

Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." If people don't recognize the light of Christ in us, it could be because our lack of love, for each other as well as for the world, is blocking its radiance.

### The World as We (Don't) Know It

The third obstacle is related to the second. It has to do with the increasing isolation of Christians from the rest



of society. Although we are obviously meant to be “in the world but not of it,” we’re not meant to be so cut off from it that we can’t effectively communicate the love of Christ. But this is what has happened to many believers.

There is confusion in the body of Christ over how we are to interact with the culture. The “us versus them” perspective has caused us to believe that people first have to come around to our way of thinking before we will talk to them about Christ. We don’t feel we need to understand how the world thinks and feels because, we reason to ourselves, “Why should I spend my time with the world’s philosophies and beliefs if they’re all false, anyway?” We tell people, “Look, you need to be like us!” without taking the time to patiently and lovingly bring Christ to where *they* are. We forget that Jesus was the friend of tax collectors, prostitutes, and other “sinners” and that He brought them the Good News of the kingdom of God.

We wonder why people can’t relate to what we’re saying, although the Bible clearly says, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” The world can’t understand us, and we don’t feel the need to understand the world, so the chasm between us never gets bridged.

In *Learning the Language of Babylon: Changing the World by Engaging the Culture*, Terry Crist describes the



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bewilderment many Christians have over the state of the world we're now living in: "How did we go from being the social majority to being cultural captives in three generations?" Crist compares the situation of Christians today to the Jews in Daniel's time who were in captivity in Babylon and faced living in a culture that was the antithesis of their own beliefs. He says that if we're to be the light of the world, we have to understand the world we're living in and learn its "language." This is because the landscape of the world has changed, and we're living in a postmodern culture. Refusing to accept this reality causes us to try to be a light to the world as we *think* it should

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be, rather than to the world as it *actually is*. Our first step should be to learn the way the postmodern world thinks and lives. Otherwise, we won't be able to address the real needs of real people.

Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred by the Nazis in 1945, encountered a similar cultural divide to what we're experiencing today. He witnessed the loss of religious belief and church attendance among the German people. Bonhoeffer recognized that the people no longer



understood the language of the church. He felt deeply that the church would have to step back and focus on prayer and righteous actions as its witness until it found a new language that could communicate spiritual truths to the contemporary mind. Developing this new language would take patience and a willingness to learn—it would require the hard work of making an effort to truly understand the minds and hearts of the people and then connecting with them.

Jesus went from the glory of heaven  
to a sinful world. His love for us  
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We must do the same thing, motivated  
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When we encounter the values and mind-set of contemporary society, we often respond by thinking, “I wish the world were like this, and since it isn’t, I’ll retreat into my safe community and have no contact with it.” It is natural to want to run away from what is unpleasant to us. However, we can’t be the light of the world when we have no personal contact with it and don’t understand the way it thinks and feels.

One definition of postmodernism is “the fragmentation and promiscuous trivialization of values, symbols, and images.” People living in a culture where what is true



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and real has been trivialized will welcome an authentic manifestation of the life of Christ when it is communicated consistently and with love so that the difference is inescapable.

Increasing our interaction with a world that does not acknowledge Christ as Lord may not feel comfortable at first, but we can remember the example of Jesus. He went from the glory of heaven into a sinful and hostile world. His love for humanity caused Him to take extreme measures to win us back to God. We must do the same for the world today, motivated by the same love—while, at the same time, being careful not to become absorbed by the very world we're trying to reach.

Sometimes, in an effort to bridge the cultural gap, or because we find ourselves drawn into the mind-set of society, we think that to reach the world we have to keep up with the world's trends. Frankly, that is just rubbish. Our real need is to get back to what is true, to get back to the Gospel of the kingdom of God. Christianity has been around for two thousand years. It is never going to be trendy, because trends come and go, but the church—and the Word of God—are eternal. They have survived every trend.

Today, many of us are tempted to make the Christian faith into something that sounds appealing to people's self-interests, as if it's merely a self-help method. Yet this approach ignores the reality of our need to die to ourselves



and take up our cross daily in order to follow Christ. The Gospel is the Good News, but it's not always the news we want to hear, and it's not always packaged in the way we want to view it. We need to get back to the basics of the Gospel because if we try to make it trendy, we will fail. Our efforts to do this are already failing. People need to know God's reality.

If the world can't see the light of Christ in us, it may be because we have hidden ourselves from its view entirely, or because we look so much like it. Continuing

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to isolate ourselves from the world or to imitate its trends will cast an even bigger shadow between Christ and our culture.

### The Life Is the Light

All these obstacles are the result of a single cause: We are trying to shine by our own efforts instead of allowing Jesus to shine through us. When Jesus said, "You are the light," we hear, "You are the light," and we think the light has to come from us. So we try to generate the light ourselves. After a few attempts, it should become obvious



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that we just don't have the power. But we keep trying anyway. The Scripture says, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." This is a massive principle to remember: The *light* comes only from the *life*—the life of Christ in us.

Let's ask ourselves, "Whose light are we trying to shine—ours or Christ's?" Without the manifestation of His life, we wouldn't even glimmer, because none of us has life in ourselves—that's a divine quality. Jesus said, "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself." We *must* depend on Christ for our life.

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All the obstacles that we have allowed to block the light can be used for good, if we allow them to teach us how to stop struggling in our own strength and start relying on Christ. They also can help us realize we're not all that different from the people we're supposed to be reaching out to. Those who are in the dark need the light. That is as true for us as it is for the world.

This book is called *Shine: Make Them Wonder What You've Got*. There is a reason that "Shine" comes *before*



“Make Them Wonder” in the title. It is a truth we often forget or ignore: We can't make people wonder about Christ if our light isn't first shining. We can't make them wonder what we've got if we haven't got it! So when Christ says, “Let your light shine,” He is saying, in essence, “Remember who the Light is. Let Me shine through you.”

Jesus said, “A city on a hill cannot be hidden.” With this description, He defines us as a city whose lights can be seen even by those far away, because it is high up on a hill. We can be a light to those closest to us *and* to those who observe us from afar if we stay on that hill, because it is the city *on a hill* whose light cannot be hidden.

Too often we think the hill is a symbol of our being noticed for doing good things. This is because, a couple of verses later, we read, “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds.” But the hill is *Jesus*. We're just the city. We can't do the truly good deeds if we're not relying on Him to live His life through us. When we start thinking *we're* the hill, then we are no longer resting on Him. We have slid down the hill into a valley of our own making. People can't see the light from there. Jesus said that trying to shine in our own strength is like lighting a lamp and then hiding it under a bowl. It can't do what it was intended to do.

Why aren't we the hill? It is because there is nothing about *us* that raises us higher than other people. Everything we are as the light of the world comes from our being set



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on the hill. King David said in one of his psalms, “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” Christ is our Rock. If we are not abiding in Him, we’re going to be on shaky ground.

Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.

We aren’t anything without Christ as our High Ground. To shine, we need to let Christ lift us out of the valley of ourselves and our own efforts and set us back on the Rock. Then His light will no longer be hidden—not to ourselves and not to the world.

“Be the Change You Want to See”

In the end, it comes down to this: The more we allow the life of Jesus to show through our lives, the more we will shine. The less we allow the life of Christ to show through us, the less we will shine. Jesus said, “The man who walks



who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.”

There is no better way to make a meaningful impact on the world than by becoming God’s children of light—by living lives that are so free of obstructions that His light is unhindered. People today don’t accept what they hear at face value. They want to know that it works. They want to see that it works. If not, they’ll move on to something else. They’re not very different from us. They have problems, needs, questions, and hopes. But they won’t necessarily recognize that these things can be answered only in Christ without seeing that fact demonstrated—in *us*. We are the hope of this world, because as we reflect Christ’s life, we enable them to see Him clearly.

As Christians, we’re walking on “holy ground” as we live our lives before God. But holy ground is not a ground of “us versus them.” Nor is it a ground where we can proudly say, “We’re saved, and you’re going to hell.” When we are truly changed by God, suddenly we realize that all of us—the saved and the “sinners”—are equal in our need for God. We all start with the same slate. The Bible says, “There is no one righteous, not even one.” God’s grace—not our own—is the only thing that makes the difference.

In essence, if you want to change the world, you have to be changed first. To borrow from a famous phrase, you have to—



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“Be the change you want to see.”

This is because the kingdom of God does not work from the outside in but from the inside out. Jesus taught this principle in a number of ways. It is what He meant when He said we need to take the log out of our own eye before we can take the splinter out of someone else’s eye. It is what He meant by “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

We will start being effective when we stop trying to change other people and instead change ourselves. To shine, you have to fill yourself with Christ. This means you first have to empty yourself, just as Jesus emptied Himself of His heavenly glory to come into the world. It’s not as if we’re going to rally a bunch of Christians together, get out the vote, put our man in as president, and that will solve everything. We could do all that and still not have changed anyone in the process. If we haven’t seen people transformed from the inside out, we haven’t really done anything that’s lasting.

However, when people see us truly change, when they see our integrity, when they see the way we live our lives and the way we treat our families, our neighbors, and our enemies—that will be the ultimate witness.

This book is about that change. It is about the life and teachings of Jesus that show us how to “be the change we want to see.” Many of the principles are very basic, but they bring about *monumental* transformation when they’re



grasped and put into practice. As you begin to apply them, all of a sudden, even before you realize it, the light will start to shine, and people will become attracted to the life of Christ in you.

Long ago, God predicted that light would dispel darkness:

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest.

Jesus said, "You are the light."  
When we remove what's obstructing  
His light, nothing in the world can  
stop it from being seen.

That prediction came true when you encountered the love and forgiveness of Christ and stepped into the light of His grace. Now He asks you to become a vessel through which His light can shine to the world, shattering its darkness.

Jesus wouldn't have said we are the light of the world if we couldn't *be* the light of the world. The trouble is that we have forgotten what that means—or we never learned it in the first place. We are not just "meant" to be light. Light is who we *are*. Jesus didn't say, "You *can* be the light," but



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“You *are* the light.” That means His light is already inside us. When we remove what’s obstructing His light, nothing in the world can stop it from being seen.

Remember—your *life* is the message. As St. Francis of Assisi said:

“Preach the Gospel at all times.  
If necessary, use words.”



Shine: make em wonder what you got  
Make em wish that they were not  
On the outside looking bored  
Shine, let it shine before all men  
Let em see good works and then  
Let em glorify the Lord

“Shine”

*Going Public, Shine: The Hits*