



**IGNITE**  
*The Light*  
*Radiate Love*

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a lit matchstick. The match is partially burned, with a bright flame at the end. The hand is positioned over a dark, textured wooden surface. A small, wispy plume of smoke is visible near the flame. The background is dark and moody, with warm, glowing light highlighting the hand and the match.



# Ignite the Light: Radiate Love

Foundry's 2026 Lenten Devotional

**E**very year since 1996, authors and artists of Foundry have contributed to a collection of daily reflections for Lent. This year's creative collaborators dared to share their reflections on finding and sharing Light in the darkness. They hope their expressions resonate.

For a deeper spiritual connection, try starting each day's meditation with a centering breath. After receiving the devotional, take time to:

- Reflect on how the sharing relates to your life.
- Be still. Ask God to speak to you. Listen.
- Give thanks.
- Pray for yourself, those special in your life, the contributor, and your community.

Whenever a devotional moves you, consider sharing your response with the author or with someone who came to mind in the day's meditation. Authors you do not know personally may be reached through an email to: [LentenDevotional@FoundryUMC.org](mailto:LentenDevotional@FoundryUMC.org)

In making connections through the devotional, you may find new, renewed, or deeper relationships with yourself, God, and others.

*Ignite the Light: Radiate Love* also is available online at [foundryumc.org/devotional](http://foundryumc.org/devotional)

# From Ashes to Light

On Ash Wednesday, we come forward to receive ashes — reminding us of our fragility and deep need for grace. At every stage of life, we carry ways of being that hinder our relationship with God and others: crooked places, rough edges, habits shaped by fear, wounds we carry and wounds we inflict.

Lent invites us to face these realities honestly. Scripture's promise is not that God causes the fires we endure, but that God comes alongside us in whatever life brings, using even difficulty as an opportunity for refinement and growth.

God desires an ever-closer relationship with us and will not abandon us in the heat of transformation. Ashes and fire belong together; what has been burned becomes soil from which something truer can grow.

Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl wrote, "What is to give light must endure burning." Lent does not ask weary people to endure more than they can bear. It invites us to consent, to place ourselves in God's hands, to release what smothers love, to trust that even discomfort can serve healing. The ashes mark what is being released and what God is faithfully tending in us.

Ephesians invites us to "Live as children of light — for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord." Lent is a season of gentle discernment. Through prayer, fasting, repentance, generosity, and honest self-examination, we make space for God to show us what needs attention — not to earn God's love, but to stop resisting it, so the light already within us can breathe.

God, our refiner, brings us through the fire shining with light — more fully ourselves, more fully alive. As children of light, may we emerge from this season not exhausted, but cared for, our light rekindled from the ashes for the sake of the world God loves.

**Ginger Gaines-Cirelli**  
Senior Pastor

# Filling the Blank Page

There was a struggle to write this.

To find big ideas in a time that feels increasingly small.

To say kind, soft words when the world feels mean and hard.

To offer hope and joy to others when I struggle to have enough for myself.

The blank page sat there, and I was tempted to let it stay that way.

Empty, the devotional not sent.

No big ideas, no words that build, any hope and joy kept only to myself.

I realized I wanted to read the words from others in this Devotional, and that I wanted to share my own words with them. If this is a struggle for me, it could also be for them. And yet they created.

So I started where I was, with what I was feeling, and went from there.

This is a small, mean, hard, time that wants to limit us. The blank page – the silence, the fear – beckons. We can't let it take us.

## **Prayer:**

*Lord, this is hard. Give us the strength to admit our struggle and the courage to create the words and world we need.*

**Beth Scott**

# Making Space for Light

Every week, when I arrive for worship, the first thing I do is fill the candles in the sanctuary with oil. That would be impossible if the candles were lit. A flame won't let you adjust or prepare it. Fire changes how you handle everything.

And that's why before worship begins, we make space for light.

As the service begins, the acolytes come forward. They carry the flame carefully, as if it is precious, moving from candle to candle, passing light along until the sanctuary begins to glow.

It's a simple act, but it preaches: light is received, then shared. The flame isn't theirs to own, but rather to tend and spread.

That's been sitting with me as I pray through 1 John 4:7-12. John doesn't start by telling us to try harder to love. He starts with where love comes from: "love is from God." Before love becomes something we do, it is something we receive. The wick has to be soaked before it can burn.

And then God showed us what love is: "God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him." God ignites the light, not from a safe distance, but entering our darkness, paying a cost, offering life. Love is not a mood. Love is a self-giving presence.

When John says, "If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another," it isn't a guilt trip. It's an invitation to radiate what we have received. When we love each other — patiently, practically, sacrificially — God becomes visible. God's love is made complete among us when we love.

Today, maybe the faithful step isn't to become a wildfire. Maybe it's to stay close enough to God that our wick gets saturated again, then offer one steady flame: a forgiving word, a generous act, a gentle truth, a loving presence that doesn't run away.

**Jonathan Brown**

Associate Pastor, Director of Discipleship Ministries

# Are You Willing?

Growing up, I loved to "play with fire."

I blew out a friend's birthday candles as a toddler (yikes!). At Girl Scout camp, I was always the one tending the campfire. Once during the summer, I got bored, so I took an old newspaper, set it out on our driveway, and used my dad's magnifying glass to focus the sun into a mini-bonfire until the police happened to drive by and verbally reprimanded me. Needless to say, I was fascinated with fire.

When I got to middle school at Dunwoody United Methodist Church, I began volunteering as an acolyte, helping bring the candles and cross into the sanctuary at the beginning of Sunday services. I practiced for months, shadowing other youth and attending training for one specific purpose: the Super Bowl for acolytes, All Saints' Sunday.

I signed up as soon as the sheet came out and was excited to be assigned the role of lighting 10-20 candles in front of my congregation.

To my dismay, when I arrived that morning and got dressed in my robes, the youth pastor crossed my name off the list and gave the role to an older, more experienced acolyte.

I was distraught and cried through the entire service.

What hurt most wasn't just missing the chance to light the candles, but the lesson I absorbed: wait until you are older, more experienced, more qualified.

That message can follow us into adulthood and into our faith.

We sometimes hesitate to offer ourselves because we assume someone else is better suited for the task. But Jesus didn't call the experienced or qualified — he called the willing.

This Lent, I invite you to join me in asking: Where in my life can I be more willing to let my light shine?

**Anne Hardin**

# Seeking & Sharing Light

*...God is light... 1 John 1: 5 NIV*

First thing every morning, I read from a daily devotional book given to me for Christmas 1993 by my Administrative Assistant, Merle Carter. Even after rereading the devotional each year over these past decades, I continue to receive light from its pages in refreshing ways.

This practice reminds me to put God first and that God's light will be with me whether the day ahead ends up sunny or full of clouds.

Merle's gift replaced a daily devotional that I had been using, also for a long time. My Aunt Jane sent me her devotional in 1965 when I entered West Point.

Both gifts are examples of light coming to me at the right time to help guide my path through what were scary and chaotic times to be an American. As is the case today, there were strong views then that divided the US culturally and economically.

Through these devotionals and other spiritual practices, I have found:

- Seeking light must be constant. Otherwise, it dims or fades out.
- Daily prayers, devotions and meditation prepare me to be receptive to the light I need.
- Light comes in many forms: nature, the arts, dance, literature.
- If I am patient, guidance arrives in especially dark times just as starlight and lighthouses guided seafarers toward safe harbors.
- Radiating the light given to me is just as important. It sustains my light, fulfilling what I should be. If not shared, my light dims. Sharing light gets me outside myself.

God is constantly radiating light to me, through me, and to others. So, *"Arise, shine, for your light has come...."* (Isaiah 60: 1 NIV)

May God be with you in discovering, nurturing and sharing your unique light the best you can, even if it is simply smiling at a passerby today.

**Joe Steller**

# Let Your Light Shine

*You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others...*  
Matthew 5:14 NRSV

Lent often begins in shadows. We name what is broken, weary, frighteningly uncertain. Yet Jesus reminds us that darkness is not the final word or even the most important one. **You are the light of the world.**

Not "you will be someday," not "try harder to become," but **you are.** Light is already placed within us by God, entrusted to fragile, ordinary people living in complicated times.

When the world feels heavy, it is tempting to fixate on what is failing. But God's most creative work is often done in difficult times. In a manger, on a cross, in a sealed tomb, light was not extinguished; it was ignited. Lent invites us to confront the darkness head-on and refuse to let it define our vision.

Radiating love does not require grand gestures. Most often it is listening without defensiveness, telling the truth with gentleness, or choosing not to harden our hearts. Sometimes it is an act of justice that costs us comfort, or an act of mercy that interrupts our schedules.

"Interruptions" are often opportunities to radiate love. Small flames matter. A single candle can change how a darkened room feels by quietly shining light into it.

What if we practiced noticing where light feels most absent, and asked how God might be inviting us to show up there? In our workplaces, families, neighborhoods, or public life, even a small, faithful response can spark hope far beyond what we can see.

Jesus says we do not light a lamp to hide it. Lent is not about shrinking in fear or despair. It is about uncovering the light already burning within us and trusting God to use it.

May we dare, together, to shine.

**Ed Crump**  
Pastoral Intern

# Strengthening Our Stakes

Isaiah 54 invites us:

*Enlarge the place of your tent,  
stretch your tent curtains wide,  
do not hold back;  
lengthen your cords,  
strengthen your stakes.*

This passage was written during the Babylonian exile when things were not going well for the Israelites. They were far from home and everything they cherished in their home had been destroyed. At that moment God calls them to expect that the tide has turned and good is coming.

In a moment in our country when things seem like they are falling apart, can we believe this might be true for us?

I'm struck by the last phrase: **strengthen your stakes**. In order for our tent to be bigger, we need to be stronger.

Strength training is all the rage right now. One piece of advice that has stuck with me is that losing muscle is inevitable as we age, so decide what you want to be able to do in ten years and do 10% more now. I want to travel so I want to be able to lift a heavy suitcase. Therefore I need to do weight training accordingly.

In the same way after Lent is over, I will lose some momentum in my spiritual journey. In the past few years I've seen my life get filled little by little with things that aren't God until I have very little time left for God.

I need to add more God work – volunteering, study, and prayer – than will reasonably fit into my schedule. I need to stop squeezing God into the gaps in my calendar.

After Easter I can pare back whatever is too much. Or, I may find I have more capacity than I thought.

Maybe God has been waiting for me to stretch open my heart so it could be filled more than I expected.

**Joanne Garlow**

# Shining Through the Darkness

In normal times, my light shines when I give speeches; train sales reps in my classroom; swim in competition meets; sing my favorite tunes; or delight in the conversation and fellowship of friends at a simple meal.

But when Jesus asks me to shine my light, I think it is for those dark times when the clouds of grief, sickness, depression, crisis, and trauma block the sun of my beloved's precious spirit.

How do I shine my light to those who need comfort? I have found these actions are helpful:

**Listen** to the whole story of what my friend is facing. Listen without judgment and allow a space to vent.

**Imagine** new perspectives to consider and possible actions to take that will ease the burdens carried. I like starting this step with prayer.

**Gather** resources that can help the person. Examples could include shelter, a therapist, a coach, or appropriate medical care.

**Heal** the wounds (spiritual or physical) with my touch, my smile, and my presence giving them time to restore.

**Transform** the cross into the crown. Once the wounds have healed, I reflect on the new person my friend has become — a stronger and wiser person. Someone who has been reborn with new life.

*You are the light of the world. A town built 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 others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.* Matthew 14-16 NIV

**Will Rumble**

# The Courage to Glow

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?  
Psalm 27:1 NRSV*

We hide our light behind careful words and quiet smiles.

We dim ourselves to survive, scanning the room, folding, blending, passing, softening edges so no one can see our full flame.

Even in darkness, a spark waits, flickering and insistent. It asks for the chance to burn fully, to illuminate corners long cloaked in shadow. Light does not disappear — it waits for the courage and honesty to allow it to shine.

Shame lingers, fear lurks around the corners of our hearts, but the light stirs, small, stubborn, defiant. Every brave act, each refusal to hide, pushes back the darkness. Even righteous anger ignites courage.

I stand, and someone else feels safe to rise. I speak truth, and another finds courage to speak theirs. A spark shared ignites another flame, passing it forward, building bridges across shadows.

God lights the flame. The Spirit fuels courage. Through Jesus, every spark we share illuminates, inspires, glows.

Let your light shine and radiate love. Celebrate the light in others. Act with love and courage. Trust that together, the brilliance we share can never be hidden.

Amen.

**Shawn Steffy**

# An Invitation and a Promise

The overwhelming lack of ease that so many experience these days can be attributed to the inordinate "darkness" that seems to weigh on us.

We are constantly made aware, through the press and social media, of the cruelty, lawlessness, and injustice that abound here and around the world. In addition, as a result of global warming, natural disasters and famines are multiplied.

We are experiencing what can feel like deep darkness.

Against this backdrop, the words of Jesus come to me both as an invitation and a promise: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."- John 8:12 NRSV. Jesus invites me to follow him, and he promises to keep me in the light.

How can I follow Jesus?

First, I can ground myself in the teachings and works of Jesus. This will require disciplined study and reflection.

Regular participation in corporate worship will help me integrate what I have been learning.

But I must also be very intentional – pay attention to where God is at work, teaching, healing, loving back to life, because that is where I will find Jesus.

It will require that I "step out of the shade", as poet Amanda Gorman so eloquently suggests at the end of her powerful poem, "The Hill We Climb."

I will have the responsibility to choose where I apply my energy: lamenting the darkness, or "freeing the dawn" (Amanda Gorman's imagery).

Jesus promises the gift of the light of life – not just to me, but to the world.

This light of life is the light of love, offered to all of us to receive and to share for the healing of our world.

**Josiane Blackman**

# Ignite the Light - and Heal

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits — who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases.*

Psalm 103:2-3 NRSV

The Gospels, especially Luke, are filled with examples of Jesus healing the blind, the deaf, the paralyzed and others beset by disease or disability.

For the past couple of years, I have been on a health rollercoaster.

Early in 2024, I was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. My body didn't respond to modern Western medical treatments. Actually, it was worse — those medications produced terrible side effects. My family doctor thought obtaining the opinion of a second neurologist was a good idea.

The second neurologist didn't think I had Parkinson's, so she tried a new test with a 90 percent chance of detecting Parkinson's. The result was negative, so there is a 90 percent chance I do not have Parkinson's!

Another test confirmed what I already knew: I have neuropathy. I just didn't realize that it was likely the cause of my balance issues and falls. The outcome: I am dealing with a far less debilitating illness, and one which is now addressed by a Chinese herb, ginseng, recommended by my Chinese acupuncturist. Exercise and physical therapy are also essential parts of my recovery.

I learned again through this medical experience what I already knew as a meteorologist: first, keep asking questions and second, don't trust all conclusions. That last applies even to well established conclusions until they have been fully tested, again and again.

One of our previous senior pastors, Rev. Dr. Phil Wogaman used to preach about not presuming too much. Maybe that is another way of saying — listen more and speak less. Thanks, Phil!

# What Happened to All the Lightening Bugs?

*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

2 Corinthians 4:18 NRSV

Talk to me two seconds and you'll figure I'm a little bit Country. I was born in Mississippi, deep in the Delta. It is a magical place, where tall weeds and taller tales stretch up to storm-sketched skies — a place where 24-inch frogs kissed pigs, where the creek might have risen a few times, where the color blue danced on jump ropes, and where what looked like rich brown sugar spilled from ditches when it rained.

Back in the day, lightening bugs lit up the endless flat fields, deftly landing on puffs of cotton and sweet magnolias, or cheeks upturned to heaven in silent, heavy prayer.

Lightening bugs guided us young folk as we leaped across muddy puddles or skipped down dirt roads in the dark. Their tiny bulbs radiated like the sun, filling each night with light and giggles as we set out searching for treasure (or maybe tomorrow).

Years later I began to ask, what happened to the lightening bugs? The absence of their light was piercingly visible, as without the lightening bugs, the dark nights were just...well, night.

Who was left to lead us across catfish-bottomed rivers, where we dreamed beneath swaying weeping willows. Who would shine and show us the way when we stumbled?

I missed them! Then I learned that lightening bugs don't go away in the daytime, you just can't see them.

The same way that God is always present with us, lighting our lives, brightening our hearts with hope, even on the dark days, when hope is not readily visible.

God is always our light in the darkness. We can trust God.

## **Prayer:**

*My God, thank you for being light in the darkness.*

**Rhoma Johnson**

# Light a Candle

*What you decide on will be done, and light will shine on your ways.*  
Job 22:28 NIV



"It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness" was first said in 1907 by William L. Watkinson, a 19th century Methodist minister from England.

Rev. Watkinson used the sentence in a sermon entitled, "The Invincible Strategy." Watkinson was encouraging listeners to take positive actions to improve bad situations rather than simply complaining about them.

Though the quote has been attributed to First Lady, diplomat and activist Eleanor Roosevelt, it was politician, diplomat and presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson who used it to describe Mrs. Roosevelt upon her death. Stevenson felt that the quotation aligned well with her transformative actions.

Rev. Watkinson's statement is timeless.

**Ta-Chen Wu**

# Reflected Light

So many people have shined their light on me, but the most direct reflected light from God came from my godparents, Aunt Ginny and Uncle Bill. They met and married in their teens, raised six children in a small row house in Philadelphia, and were married for 64 years.

They were bolstered by their faith and their anchor verses:

- Uncle Bill's: Joshua 1:9  
*Be strong and of good courage*
- Aunt Ginny's: Romans 15:13  
*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

How were their faith and love manifested to me? They welcomed Dave and me to their large holiday tables. They took me in their arms when my father died. They were genuinely involved in my life.

Aunt Ginny was curious about my faith journey, my friends, balcony plants, my commute to work. We would stay up talking in her kitchen until the wee hours of the morning. I can still hear her singing, "Trust and Obey" in my head.

Uncle Bill was so playful. Every Christmas, he had a contest to see who could get closest to counting the number of jingle bells in a jar. I forgot what the prize was — probably a hug from him, or a dollar. Whenever I visited, he said he had to go out and "shoot the blueberries" for the pancakes he'd make especially for me.

Aunt Ginny went to heaven before Uncle Bill, but he always said that if he preceded her in this journey, he'd be sitting on a cloud waiting for her.

I picture them both up there on that cloud, together, and with God.

**Ella Cleveland**

# Jesus the Light of the World

As I think of light, much comes to mind.

The moonlight brightens the night sky, yet makes the shadows ominous.

The sunlight makes the day welcoming, providing energy for movement and dispelling fears.

Then I think of the oil lamp.

When lit, the beams of the lamp begin at the spot where the lamp holder stands. The beams seem to expand beyond the holder without movement. The lamp light looks set in place. The space beyond is unsure.

Light suggests safety.

At this point in time when everything in the world order seems so unsure, we wonder how our small light, in place, may dispel the darkness.

We can take heart. Even as the lamplight seems to expand without the holder moving, so can our small light shine in the darkness and bless one person at a time.

## **Prayer:**

*Lord, help me not worry about changing my environment all at once. Let me be satisfied with holding my lamp in place where you have placed me and trust you will move the beams to desired places. Through Jesus the Christ I pray. Amen.*

**Fay Allen**

# A Dancing Flame

His Light shines  
above me  
Always there,  
for me to see

So above, so below  
His spark ignites me

I am His candle  
A dancing flame

Not always steady  
Not always the same

I even burn myself  
In my games

So where do I turn  
To go back home

When all my ways  
Have me torn

Where do I look  
When I fall

As a human  
Feeling so small

When burden weighs  
Heavy upon me

My eyes deceive  
I cannot see

Where do I go  
What do I do  
Listen to Him  
And know what's true

God says to forgive  
To judge me not

This is to remember  
I have not forgot

Filling my soul  
Guiding my light

God always fulfills  
I surrender the fight

His will supreme  
His spark a delight

I put down the weight  
And welcome  
his might

Thank you God  
Our journey  
as one

Even with forgiving  
All I have done

I am born of Grace  
A spark of fire

You make the way  
You lift me higher

Only through Grace  
The truth I face

Eternal gratitude  
My walk of life

I finally relax  
And shed my strife

You ignite my light  
Shining grace from  
above

True promise  
of peace  
Your unending love

**Pol Klein**

# Glow With Purposeful Light

As a child, I loved collecting lightning bugs in a jar on warm summer nights. I was in awe of how such a little insect could produce light, flickering across the dark landscape like tiny lanterns. I was grateful for their light which extended my outdoor time.

Lightning bugs' glow from within is unmistakable. They don't light up the whole sky, but they shine with purpose, each spark a reminder that light doesn't need to be loud to be powerful.

In John 8:12, Jesus says, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* Just like lightning bugs, we are called to shine that light from within ourselves to soften the darkness around us. When we follow Him, we become radiant with His presence, even in the darkest places.

Like jars filled with fireflies, our lives can become vessels of light. Not because we are luminous on our own, but because we reflect the One who is. When we walk with Jesus, we don't stumble blindly through life. We shine — sometimes quietly, sometimes boldly — but always with purpose.

It is easy these days to get exhausted and give up. As part of my daily prayer, I ask God to make me like the lightning bug, putting me in places where the glow from within can offer empathy, encouragement, and hope.

## **Prayer:**

*Lord Jesus, Light of the World, thank you for choosing me to carry your glow into the places that feel dim and heavy. Let my life be like a lightning bug — small but radiant, simple but full of purpose. May Your light in me ignite hope in others. Amen.*

**Drew Williams**

# The Professor Who Reignited My Lamp

*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.*

Matthew 5:15 NIV

Dr. Grace McReynolds was professor of education and my undergraduate advisor while I was student teaching. After Dr. McReynolds's last scheduled observation of my teaching skills, she asked me to walk with her to the parking lot. As we walked, I told her that I wanted to change careers. I opened the passenger door of my VW Beetle, and to my surprise she got in. I followed suit. I asked her to guide me into a different career path; she said she would not do it. The car went quiet. Eventually, she said, "I'm not getting out of this car until you agree to teach at least one year in your own classroom." Stand off! Minutes passed. In order to get her out of my car, I agreed. She assured me I would not be sorry. I wondered what she saw in me that I could not see in myself.

In 1968 I signed a contract to teach eighth grade. I had 34 students with five preparations. SY 68-69 turned out to be a wonderful experience. I loved every minute of it. I felt grateful to Dr. McReynolds for insisting that I become a teacher.

While working on a Master's Degree, I enrolled in an educational psychology course taught by Dr. McReynolds. After class one day I thanked her for insisting that I teach. She said she knew a good teacher when she saw one, and I was one. Grace McReynolds's compassion, wisdom and guidance illuminated the path that led to my 42-year career as a teacher. She was my light.

**Stephen Roberts**

# Light from a Window



Photo by Roberts/Wu

*...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

Foundry's "Come Unto Me" window is meaningful to me. It portrays Jesus wearing a white robe, vivid red sash encircling his left shoulder, arms outstretched inviting us into his presence. The light streaming through it from the back of the balcony is warm and comforting. In its embrace, I recall one passionate response to His invitation.

For 30 years, I was a volunteer reader for the Washington Ear, an in-home broadcast service for the visually impaired. I put my heart into reading with humor and flair for those who could hear but not see.

With my partner, I would read the Sunday Washington Post. It brought the outside world into my listeners' homes: global stories, diverse point-of-view editorials, cultural and community events, concluding with sports. We guided our unique audience into visualizing, exploring and connecting current events to their daily lives.

Jesus invites us each day to follow his guiding light, in the decisions we make, the lives we lead, and encourages us to reach out to family, friends and community.

Each act radiates the Light of Jesus, and sings:

*...With glad jubilation, sing hope for the world; the great storm is ending, the clouds are all furled... Rise, hope of the ages, arise like the sun. All speech flow to music, all hearts beat as one!* "Sound Over All Waters" lyrics by John Greenleaf Whittier

## Prayer:

*Jesus, my guiding light, prepare me to respond to Jesus' call to action using my talents and abilities.*

**Diane Seeger**

# Light from Unexpected Sources

When you read this devotional, spring will probably be in the air. Writing it in January, I am still thinking about Christmas. Every year we decorate our yard with multiple light balls. They are hung so it appears the balls are suspended in mid-air to glow in the winter darkness.

We started this tradition many years ago while my husband was a pastor at a church in Lorton. Members of the congregation and community helped us make about two dozen balls and hang them all over the church yard. People would drive by and enjoy all the different colors and shapes of light.

While these balls are beautiful when illuminated, most people wonder what they are when not illuminated. Each ball is made from a large piece of chicken wire. After the wire is cut, you shape it into a cylinder and endure having your hands scratched while twisting pieces of wire together. You then shape it into a ball and weave strands of Christmas lights in and out of the chicken wire.

Just like these Christmas balls, some of the strongest points of light in our lives can come from unexpected sources.

People who do not appear to radiate light or seem prickly on the outside often have a special kind of light deep inside. Whether it is a store clerk, an elderly relative, your co-worker or an unhoused person, if you take time to listen you may find the unexpected glow within them.

With a little love and effort on our part, we may be able to see the light from deep within that God gives to all of us.

## **Prayer:**

*Mother/Father God, help us to take time to search for your light in all around us. Amen*

**Sara Eakes**

# Seeing the Light, Being the Light

I grew up on Tangier Island in the middle of Chesapeake Bay. When I was coming home on a break from college my father often picked me up at Crisfield dock late in the evening. My memory of those boat rides with my dad across the dark water of Tangier Sound is vivid.

What made these memories stand out was the sudden appearance of the lights of the island. Although such a small place, my home shone like a "city on a hill" and in those moments, filled my heart with joy.

Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12), an image that for me evokes the memory of coming home on those long ago boat rides. Jesus' radiant light can bring hope and joy to a dark world, even now.

However, in Matthew, Jesus says that we, his followers, are to be the light (Matthew 5:14-16). We are challenged and maybe a bit daunted by this.

Can we truly be light in our community, in this country, in the world? Certainly, showing love and kindness to everyone we meet is a start. And Ginger's sermon of a few months ago offered a list of practical, everyday actions we can take:

- Help someone
- Rejoice
- Be gentle
- Pray
- Think on things that are good

May we open our hearts and minds and take opportunities to reflect the light of Jesus in our world.

**Virginia Dize**

# Piggy Back Rides

I was walking back from the metro at Pentagon City when I saw a grown man in a cast. He was clearly struggling to walk and get up the stairs. Another grown man paused, and looked at him.

I didn't hear the short conversation, but about ten seconds later the man who stopped was giving this other man a piggy-back ride up the stairs and down the street.

In times such as these, it's the little things.

Humanity is sometimes ugly, but more often than not, it is beautiful, even if beautifully broken. I love to see moments like these where the light shines through the cracks of our collective and individual fractures in life.

That short moment of seeing a modern-day Good Samaritan in real time renewed a bit of hope. We can make more of those little moments happen in our daily lives if we choose to do so.

Recently, we have witnessed a lot of harm, a lot of hurt, and a lot of hate. However, that's not who we are nor whom we are called to be. We have to have hope in God and in each other.

Hope doesn't mean we are not bruised or scared, but it means we get back up, nonetheless.

I believe we have a sacred responsibility to show up for each other in this messy thing called the human family.

And, today I'm especially grateful for all of my friends and family who have given me piggy back rides when I could not carry myself.

**Annie E. Clark**

# Strangely Dim

*O soul, are you weary and troubled?  
No light in the darkness you see?*

Sometimes a familiar hymn just sings in a new way. Something that's always been there hits an unexpected chord. That happened for me recently with the hymn, "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus."

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in his wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow **strangely dim**  
In the light of his glory and grace*

Helen Lemmel, who wrote the song, was inspired by Lillias Trotter's tract that describes a half-withered dandelion beaming full-faced towards the sun.

**Look full.** Like Trotter's dandelion, step outside and feel the sun warm your face. This light and this warmth, like God's love, is given unconditionally.

Feel this warmth knowing that your full self is welcome. Your full self is loved in the light of his glory and grace.

**Strangely dim.** Many lifelong Methodists have a familiar relationship with the concept of "strange" through John Wesley's moment of spiritual revelation. But these words dropped into this hymn stopped me.

"Strangely dim" isn't a state of being, but a reprieve. A lighter burden. When standing in the sun with our gaze on the light, the worries, the distractions, the grief, the guilt, the anger...they become less important, in the light of his glory and grace.

During these dark days of Lent, we know the light of Easter awaits us. May that promise encourage our half-withered dandelion selves to look fully into the light of his glory and grace.

**David Rice**

# Ordinary People Can Blaze Trails

When I read the theme for this year's Lenten Devotional, my thoughts turned to Matthew 4:12-17, which is about Jesus beginning his ministry in Galilee after hearing about John being arrested.

Specifically, I thought of verse 16: *"the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned."*

As we live day to day in a country that has alienated its allies, decided to express rule through power and aggressive force, and instill fear among many both inside and outside the United States, we must recognize that God calls on ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

In our current climate, the need is strong for more people to be trailblazers and follow their faith, their hearts, and their minds, showing love and compassion to those who need us most.

In a 1967 speech, Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us that "a time comes when silence is betrayal." We would not only be doing ourselves a disservice by not trying to make a difference, even a small one, but we would be doing the opposite of what John Wesley states that Methodists should do: love God, love others, be pure of heart, fruitful in faith, and grow through prayer, devotion, discipline, and social holiness.

My hope is that this feels inspiring to you, tugs at your heartstrings and nudges you to do more for our community. I wish all of you the best during this Lenten season!

**Daniel Conklin**

# Acts of Luminescence

Darkness overwhelms me more often than I let on. I mask it behind smiles and performative cheerfulness. But it is undeniably real.

It has several guises: deep sadness, angry resentment, heartbreak. It creeps up or is triggered by a memory, a swirling tangle of dizzying thoughts, the befuddling inability to name or fix what is wrong.

I am learning to allow myself to feel darkness even when it is unshakeable and incapacitating, like the weight of sweltering air on a suffocating August night.

At such times, I need a balm. I often seek comfort in my garden.

There, after a summer sunset, I might see a brilliant pinpoint of light, a tiny flying miracle offering its luminescence. Then, more lightning bugs will twinkle until there are miniature fireworks in the hydrangeas, leavening my mood, inviting me to exhale and breathe again.

I cannot help but smile, genuinely.

Lightning bugs come in human form too. Their inner glow shines on me, often unexpectedly, always when I most need it.

Joe greets my gloominess with morning coffee and frothy milk, just the way I like it.

A neighbor, who months before learned of my sadness, invites me out for a leisurely stroll on a beautiful afternoon.

A "thinking of you" note arrives from a friend who suspects I'm feeling blue.

A late night call or text pings. It's a younger "sister" who nurtures me with a fortifying chat and a Sara Bareilles song.

This Lent, I am cherishing my lightning bugs and their acts of luminescence. They are gifts from God, proof that there is always Light.

## **Prayer:**

*Dear Creator, thank you for lightning bugs, both insect and human. May they continue to find me, and others needing radiance in their darkness.*

**Joanne Steller**

# A Reflection on a Stained-Glass Life



Life is a lot like stained glass. When you are first making a piece, it doesn't look like much. You're starting from scratch, with your experiences slowly building you up.

Life also is a lot like the different colors of glass: when we're sad, we're blue; when we're happy, we're tickled pink; and when we're angry, we're seeing red.

As you go through life, you'll experience different feelings and emotions with cycles of up and down. We often beat ourselves up about these low periods, yet we don't judge stained glass for the variety of contrasting dark and bright shades it offers us.

We build these pictures from the colors that symbolize our history and we learn to tell our stories. We may not know what the next layer will bring, but we know what the past holds and what we might want to pursue next.

By the light reflecting through each of our multifaceted windows, we can bring forth something fresh: always soldiering forward with love, curiosity, and caring, to create a new masterpiece for our collective world.

**Katie Lundy**

# Mom's Legacy of Love

On January 21, 2025, Jesus called my mom home. She was, and always will be, my best friend, my greatest confidante, and my unwavering role model.

Every day, in countless ways, my mom radiated kindness and love — to her family, her friends, and even complete strangers. She offered a warm smile, a helping hand, and a listening ear to anyone who needed one.

One memory that captures her gentle spirit came during a visit she made to see me in Washington, DC shortly before Christmas.

As we boarded a Metrobus, the driver grew impatient when we asked about the senior fare. By the time we reached our stop and were getting off the bus, I was still irritated and walked past the driver without saying a word.

My mom, however, thanked him and said with genuine warmth: "Have a merry Christmas."

At that moment, I thought to myself, **Mom meets negativity with positivity. I need to be more like her.**

As we move through the Lenten season — and long after it ends — may we remember to treat one another with love, just as we are called to do in John 13:34–35 NIV:

*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

Continuing through life without my mom physically by my side, I hold fast to the truth that showing love is a deliberate choice — one my mom made daily and one I strive to extend to all whom I encounter, becoming more like her in doing so.

May we honor my mom's legacy — and Christ's command — by choosing that love every day.

**Jill Neuendorf**

# From Generation to Generation

"I believe... in the communion of the saints."

Finding a community. That stretches across generations. Living and dead.

That's what the viewer experiences in a performance of "The Inheritance," by Matthew Lopez. A light turns on, and the inner eye is opened to a new perspective, an epiphany that expands one's horizon.

The play covers a period mostly in the 2010's, with flashbacks to the 1980's, representing several generations of gay men. Through themes of love, sexuality, home, and resurrection (along with hypocrisy, possessiveness, deceit, and death), it explores AIDS, politics, financial inequality, grief, hope, and healing.

"The Inheritance" is an interpretation of E.M. Forster's "Howard's End." In fact, Forster is himself a character in the play, a narrator of the story, a mentor to a group of gay writers, and a spirit from a more repressed era. He started a gay love story called "Maurice" in 1913, but it remained unpublished until 1971, after his death, due to his fear of coming out during his lifetime.

Watching the play, one gets a view through the threads of time, as characters' lives become entwined with those who lived before. They, and we, are one with the people who lived in isolation because they thought they were the only one. They, and we, are one with those who lived a life that wasn't theirs, constrained by church and society. They, and we, are one with those who perhaps did live their lives openly, but whose stories are lost to the ages. And they, and we, are one with those yet to come, whose lives will be shaped by forces we can't imagine.

How can we receive wisdom, light, and courage from our spiritual ancestors, the saints who have gone before us, from whichever community we belong? How can we pass that on to those who come after us?

**Paul Keefer**

# A Heart that Overcame Darkness

For more than 45 years I have been a witness to the power of light over darkness.

We met our "adopted daughter" when she was eight through a Friends for Kids program. We did simple things together like going to movies, driving into the countryside, or making a pie. She was quiet, but eager to experience new activities, and we could see how quickly she learned.

Years later, we learned that she had been put under the care of social services and into foster care. As a teenager with emotional issues, there were few placements available for her, and it became clear that she was being housed, but not truly cared for.

When our son was born, we had him baptized at my grandmother's Methodist church. On the way home, we decided to ask her to live with us.

Years of therapy finally unlocked her deep trauma from abuse and neglect. Her abuse had brought shame on her family who criticized her if she avoided family gatherings and belittled her openly if she did.

She suffers from depression, low self-esteem, and insomnia. She shared with us that she was afraid to have children because she couldn't trust herself to be a good parent. Today, she is married with a lovely daughter. She became a successful property manager, but her real source of joy was cooking.



A year ago we encouraged her to try her dream: catering. She now caters special occasions, and cooks for seven families who heap praise on her. She cooked their Thanksgiving dinners, including a complete dinner for 25 people. One client gave her a large Christmas bonus for getting her kids to love vegetables.

The trauma is still there, but so is a huge loving, generous heart.

Every Christmas she brings me candles.

**Lynn Smarte**

# There is Always Light

Sitting on her mother's sofa, the young woman flipped through family albums, each photo capturing a chapter of her life — from kindergarten to college graduation. Each image told a story: the carefree days of elementary school, the challenging middle school years, and the chaotic times of high school.

In elementary school, she felt like a shining star. Compliments about her talents came from all directions — parents, grandparents, and teachers alike. She thrived on this encouragement and recognition.

Middle school dimmed her confidence, the shine faded. With her seventh-grade teacher's support and joining the chess club she found a place to excel once more, and the confidence she thought she'd lost returned. She began to glow again.

High school brought new challenges — starting at a different school with unfamiliar classmates made it difficult to form friendships.

She was managing turmoil at home. Her abilities were hidden behind a cloud. Communication with adults became confusing, and even minor reprimands felt like the whole world was ending. Her once lively voice diminished to a timid whisper.

Unsure of herself, she became reluctant to express her thoughts and talents, sometimes pretending not to know answers out of fear. Only after opening up to her aunt to share her difficulty, did she rediscover her confidence, learning to speak up and value her own words and opinions — a spark of inspiration returned.

The young woman realized that while fear of moving forward had been a constant in her life, there was always someone to push her ahead and ignite her diminished light.

Now, reflecting on her adult life, she realized that the light was always there. She just needed a push so the flickering light could become bright again. She praised God for bringing people into her life who could help her ignite the light.

**Celeste Carr**

# YOU Are the Light of the World

Several years ago, the leader at the annual women's retreat started her talk this way:

She had two candles on the table.

She lit one and said, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world."

After a pause, she lit the second one and said, Jesus also said,

"**You** are the light of the world."

This was an important life-changing moment for me. I was being asked to share Jesus' mission and shine my light and love on others. I needed to help others realize that they no longer walked in darkness. But how was I to do this?

At another retreat for Stephen Minister training, the leader said, "we will be together for 48 hours, but I can basically sum up our sessions with one word: **Listen.**"

Sounds easy, doesn't it? But it's not!

What do others want?

They want to be heard, to be known, to be appreciated and respected.

How do we do this? By listening, not talking!

By letting them tell their stories, without inserting ours into the mix.

By being truly present.

One of my favorite Christmas carols, "In the Bleak Midwinter," by Christina Rossetti, music by Gustave Holst, ends this way:

What can I give Him? Poor that I am.  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.  
If I were a wise man, I would do my part.  
But what can I give Him? Give my heart.

**Ella Cleveland**

# Liberty Is a Lighthouse

*Arise, shine, for your light has come...*  
Isaiah 60:1 NIV



French artist Frederic Auguste Bartholdi's *Liberty* (ca. 1884) is painted terra cotta and tin, 46 inches tall. Bartholdi delivered the scale model to the United States Capitol, where it was on view from 1884 until 1887. In 1976 it was moved to the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

After the federal government accepted France's gift of *Liberty* at 151 feet tall, a congressional committee decided it should be placed in Central Park in New York City. Bartholdi reminded them that it is a lighthouse – the first electrified lighthouse in North America. So, in 1886 it was constructed on an island in New York Harbor, and quickly became a beacon of hope for millions of immigrants.

Until 2025 *Liberty's* light welcomed everyone seeking freedom. Shall we pray it will again one day?

**Stephen Roberts**

# His Light in Her and Her Light in Me

*No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand.* Luke 8: 16-18 NRSV

Confined to my darkened room with measles at five, Grandma Florence surprised me with a porcelain-cat nightlight. Bathed in the amber glow of the candle fitted into the cat's paw, I rested my head against her knee as she read "The Wind and The Willows" aloud.

Months later, with a picnic basket tucked under her arm, she led me through a field of hip-high wheat luxuriating in luminous noon sunlight, her floral pinafore flapping like a flag on a schooner mast.

The sky was mesmerizing: periwinkle blue like the carnival glass vase on her kitchen windowsill.

"Walk toward the sun," Grandma advised, quoting Walt Whitman, "and your shadow will fall behind."

"But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." (John 11:10 ESV).

Shimmering like reflected stars in a still lake, Grandma's eyes held my gaze until they closed the ambulance doors. From the back seat of the family sedan, I saw a star tumble from the sky and splash into the creek as the squad raced over the stone bridge.

"She's gone!" I yelled as darkness swallowed Dad's Thunderbird.

God's light radiated from her, and she shared it with the world. The church being inadequately small, many stood outside the open windows to hear her eulogy.

Sunrays ricocheted off the glimmering raindrops as we followed her casket to the graveside. A bumblebee buzzed around my head, teasing me out of my mourning trance. I swatted at the annoying pest until my aunt giggled.

I smiled. Grandma is with me still.

# Aloka

I admit it – I embarked on this new year in a frightening time. I was not feeling joy, hope, or light.

As I watched my sleeping dog, Iris, I thought maybe we should be like dogs. Live in the moment. Be loving. Eat. Nap.

Soon thereafter, new topics popped up on my Facebook page.

Not the usual unappreciated ads, but news of Buddhist monks walking 2,300 miles across the U.S. with one simple message — peace. In the words of the spiritual leader of Walk for Peace: "We walk not to protest, but to awaken the peace that already lives within each of us."

I'm not sure why these monks appeared in my feed. I follow a mix of topics: art, Haiti, justice, politics, dogs. That was the connection! The monks travel with an Indian street dog named Aloka.

Their simple message was just what I needed. My heart was warmed seeing children in Alabama and Georgia line the side of the road to greet the monks and pet Aloka. Families offered flowers, placed their hands in prayer position, bowed their heads, and even cried. All learned of another culture and religion, learned we are all at heart the same.



Photo Credit: Aloka the Peace Dog, Reddit

The Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, compared the parallel teachings of Buddha and Christ. Both taught compassion and love, empathy and action, self-discovery and care, and the interconnectedness of all. According to Thich Nhat Hanh, "the best way to take care of the future is to take care of the present moment."

So, I'm just taking it one day, one moment at a time. Keeping it simple. Being Iris or Aloka.

Not only does Aloka look surprising like my Iris, the name in Sanskrit, means light, clarity, and peace. Aloka is my focus, the concept AND the dog.

**Leigh Carter**

# Reflective Light

I have always believed that light overcomes darkness. I struggled throughout 2025 wanting the year to end, yet afraid of what 2026 could bring. I prayed for strength, light and hope because I felt void of all.



A friend purchased a new photo lens and forwarded this image to me. I was mesmerized. It is said that the moon is dark, that the light that appears to shine from the moon is only light reflected from the sun. As I studied this image I thought.... God is amazing!

Photo credit:  
Sterling Brinson

Last year I missed opportunities to receive reflections of light. I was too focused on the murky clouds that surrounded me. Today I pondered the reflections I possibly missed. The list was long. Here are a few:

- Engaging in friendly banter in the grocery store with a stranger
- Listening to the joyful laughs and squeals of children playing in the neighborhood
- Gazing at the trusting face of my beloved kitty
- Receiving kind words from a friend or family member
- A genuine hello or good morning from a stranger as our eyes made contact

So time waits for no one and 2026 is here. I strive to recognize and not miss opportunities to receive reflected light. To be receptive and give thanks to God for all reflections of light. And more importantly, to allow myself to be a reflector of light to others.

Lord, thank you for loving me, guiding me and holding on to me. Help me to always seek, find light, and share it with others. Amen.

**Angela C**

# The Power of Encouraging Words

*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. Ephesians 4:29 KJV*

After managing juvenile justice programs in South Carolina, then finishing law school, I relocated to the District of Columbia in the 1980's. Needing a job, I agreed to fill an opening as a counselor in a group home for status offenders. A status offense is an act that is illegal only because of the person's age. These offenders were runaways, truants, children beyond parental control.

Darnell was one of the youths in the home. His mother would call the group home if she saw him in her neighborhood. She did not want him around her or the neighborhood youth.

One day, I was teaching the children how to bake a cake. Darnell was mixing the batter.

He turned to me and asked, "How am I doing?" My response was, "If you were doing something wrong, I would tell you." I cannot say it was the Holy Spirit, but I "saw the light."

I had said the wrong thing.

Immediately, I knew I should tell him when things were going right, affirm his value, and encourage him to improve. I regrouped and spoke to him the right way. It may have made only a small dent in his life, but I had been forever changed. Darnell was killed in D.C.'s violent 1980's.

Tell people when they are doing right, edify their spirit, and work with them to make improvements. I carried this into my national and local juvenile justice programs and my daily life. Darnell's legacy lives.

To whom do you need to offer light?

## **Prayer:**

*Kind and merciful God give us words to serve as light. Amen.*

**Catherine Hargrove**

# Glowing by Serving

Grandma Dick told Mom to get me to Sunday School just up the block on Union St. in Seattle. I walked into the building, asked where to go for class and never stopped attending.

Sunday School inspired my life in service.

In the 1980s I worked on a Habitat for Humanity house that would eventually be home for a large family in Connecticut. I spent hours pulling out nails so a new wall could be added.

I also marched to protest tearing down an old apartment building, just to add a new hotel in New York City's iconic Hell's Kitchen.

What drew me to church in DC in the 1990s was the Foundry Housing Mission, a dedicated group of more than twenty men and women that gathered to work on two Saturdays each month. Their collective effort focused on renovating and improving homes, demonstrating a keen sense of teamwork and commitment to helping others.

Each Housing Mission volunteer contributed their skills and time, making a meaningful difference in the community through their hands-on involvement. I especially liked painting walls with a fresh coat and assisting a lead carpenter with patching a broken ceiling. For more than ten years we even had a super Sunday \$5 lunch to raise funds for supplies.

A friend said my face lit up when I talked about Foundry Housing.

Since I retired, I've had the opportunity to spend an hour or two each week with a young reader and watch for progress. Last year my 5-year-old girlfriend was a star. On our second week of practice, she sang the alphabet to me as a greeting. She graduated with flying colors!

## **Prayer:**

*Lord, let your light shine on people who need help. Teach us how to grow in loving kindness.*

**Jeanette Barker**

# Be Beloved Community

I Just turned 90. I am usually a patient person. Each day my patience wears thinner as our elected leader implements his agendas.

Fifteen years ago on Martin Luther King's Birthday, Jan and I heard Marian Wright Edelman preach at Foundry on the cradle-to-prison pipeline. This sermon along with a question that Jan asked me on the way home together sent me on quite a journey.

Jan asked, "Why don't you do something with the youth in our neighborhood?" In response I began a process that produced an organization which, to my amazement, has had a profound impact on Gaithersburg and Montgomery County – Gaithersburg Beloved Community Initiative (GBCI).

Many immigrants live in our neighborhood surrounding Asbury Methodist Village. Many immigrant children and parents participate in GBCI's twelve programs along with 150 volunteers from Asbury and Gaithersburg.

Now, I worry about what could happen. ICE was apparently instructed to hire 100 more agents to work in Gaithersburg. GBCI is trying to live by Beloved Community values. How would Martin Luther King respond? What would Jesus do? How will we respond?

How do we ignite the Light of Love? And keep it from being extinguished by violence and violation of fundamental human rights? What will be the relationship between our prayers and actions? How do we practice unconditional love?

Guidance may come from reading Matthew 5:13–16 NRSV:

*You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?.... People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

**Hal Garman**

# YOU Radiate LOVE

As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "***You are the light of the world....Let your light shine before others.....***" Matthew 5:14-16 (NIV)

It's dark, dark in ways the heart and the brain find terrifying. Life is being reshaped, reframed, curtailed, and yes, destroyed. Values we depend on — fairness, kindness, truth, hospitality, helpfulness, honesty, faith — are distorted, rejected, and used by others in ways that contradict their normal meaning.

We find light throughout the Bible from the first chapter of Genesis, when it was dark until God said, "Let there be light," and there was light!

And now during Lent, we are still looking for light.

For almost 60 years the Foundry community has been a source of light for me. I moved to Washington in 1968 and visited many churches before walking through Foundry's doors. Suddenly, although I knew no one at Foundry, I was home.

Over the succeeding years, as an active member, a parent, and for the last decade, editor of the ***Foundry Forge***, and now part of our Lenten Devotional team, I have encountered person after person who has lighted my way or brightened my life.

Since May 2016, I have, more or less out of the blue, asked more than 100 Foundry members to write a personal reflection for the ***Forge*** about what some aspect of Foundry life means to them. Not only has no one refused, every single person has come through with a powerful contribution which told others about the many wonderful ways to participate at Foundry, radiating love in a variety of ways.

Every contributor to this Lenten Devotional has enriched me with the message they share, brightening the darkness of today's world, giving me hope. May each of these contributions do the same for you.

**Elder Witt Wellborn**

# The Sacred Rhythm of Light and Dark

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up... and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*  
Mark 1:35 NIV

We live in a world that worships constant light — endless productivity, perpetual availability, the pressure to always shine brightly. Yet Jesus modeled something radically different: a rhythm of withdrawing into darkness and emerging into light, renewed, ready to serve.

Before healing the crowds, Jesus sought the pre-dawn darkness to pray. Before making crucial decisions, he retreated to lonely places. This wasn't avoidance or weakness — it was essential to his ministry. In the darkness, Jesus found intimacy with God and the Holy Spirit, restoration for body and spirit.

Darkness serves us too, in ways we too often ignore. Physically, our bodies repair during sleep's darkness. Mentally, our minds process and integrate in quiet solitude. Spiritually, it's often in our darkest seasons — our doubts, struggles, and shadows — that we encounter God most authentically. We stop performing and simply are.

This Lenten season invites us into this sacred rhythm. What if darkness isn't something to fear or rush through, but necessary space for growth? Seeds germinate in dark soil. Roots deepen underground, unseen. Our capacity to radiate love depends on our willingness to rest in the darkness, to bring our whole selves — including our weariness and wounds — before God.

Jesus walks with us through wilderness and even the tomb's darkness. He shows us that resurrection light doesn't bypass the darkness but moves through it.

## **Prayer:**

*God of light and darkness, teach us the sacred rhythm of rest and service. Meet us in our shadows with your authentic love, that we might shine with genuine light. Amen.*

**Doug Barker**

# Tunnel Vision

Recently, I boarded a Metro train and sat alone at the back of the last car. It's usually the quietest and least crowded car, which I generally gravitate towards.

From this seat, I could turn around and watch the station fade away down the tunnel into the distance. I was drawn to the darkness and shiny glimmer of the tracks inside of the tunnel.

This moment in the tunnel, somewhere between here and there, is a little like this Lenten journey we're on.

We go from Sunday to Sunday, station to station, with long stretches of track in the dark tunnel during the week. The tunnels can be discomforting, so we're eager to get to the light of the next station.

But what do we do in these in-between moments of Lent?  
Are we rushing so hard towards the light ahead that we miss the quiet lessons right here in the darkness?

For those of us who believe in and have confidence in the promise of the light of Easter, what are we called to do here in the darkness?

Who do we need to simply sit down beside?

Whose eyes need our smile? Whose ears need our "Good morning!"?

Here's to being light today, right here in the tunnel.

**David Rice**

# Where is the Light?

My life felt dark a year ago. The White House was shutting down USAID, my employer and the federal agency responsible for billions of dollars in humanitarian aid, global health, human rights and anti-poverty programs. I was losing my career and my sense of purpose. The world, it felt, was losing a lifeline.

Amid this darkness, I picked up the Book of Job, hoping to learn from its depiction of faith in suffering. I couldn't help but identify with him. As Job felt abandoned and humiliated, I felt the same watching how easily the White House upended my life. As Job questioned God, I lamented and asked how this could happen.

Job's suffering leads him to reject the idea of being born, wishing instead to retreat into the darkness before existence. He refuses to believe he deserves his pain, having lived faithfully and kindly, and he petitions God for an explanation.

After long debates with his so-called friends, Yahweh finally speaks. God does not explain why suffering exists. Instead, He reminds Job of the covenant in Genesis and of his place within creation as a bearer of the divine image.

God asks, "Where is the way to the dwelling of light?" (Job 38:19 NRSV). Job knows the answer. So did I, though the reminder mattered. We are made in God's image and called to share God's freely given love, especially in the face of harm and suffering. Reflecting on Job, I felt a deep empathy and call to service with others — especially the unemployed, the lost, and the dispossessed.

I still grieve the loss of my old job and the fate of so many life-saving programs.

I am still discerning my path. But the light of faith, lit by God, continues to guide me through the darkness.

**Noah Ahlman-Nieting**

# There IS Enough Love

I used to wear my body like armor, believing that a tough exoskeleton was necessary to protect my soft heart. I was waiting for the conditions around me to be safe enough that I could let down my guard. But my heart never felt safe, and all that armor ever got me was chronic pain.

Until one moment when I heard a voice whisper, "love is the protection." (It literally happened in a moment, but it took many years of hard work to reach that moment.) It was like there was a little explosion at my core that radiated from inside out – every cell bathed in light, protected by love. I think my body instantly recognized that voice as God, but it wasn't until later that my conscious mind caught up.

That was before the world became significantly less safe. But I don't need to put back on my armor. I remind myself every day, "there is enough love for this." I repeat like a mantra – when I'm walking my dog in the morning and just randomly throughout the day when I'm on the verge of being overcome with the too-muchness of it all. There **is** enough love for this!

As teacher James Finley says:

"If we are absolutely grounded, in the absolute love of God that protects us from nothing even as it sustains us in all things, then we can face all things with courage and tenderness and touch the hurting places in others and in ourselves with love."

God's love doesn't shield us from all the harms in life, but it holds us no matter what.

The very core of me – my spirit – is safe. When I can really feel that in my bones, I feel invincible. Nothing can stop me from radiating God's love out to this broken world.

**Ari BenAissa**

# God's Radiant Love

*Lord, you have seen what is in my heart. You know all about me.*

*You know when I sit down and when I get up. You know what I'm thinking even though you are far away. You know when I go out to work and when I come back home. You know exactly how I live. Lord, even before I speak a word, you know all about it.*

Psalm 139: 1-4 NIRV

God's radiant love is all around us.

It surrounds us on the outside and the inside of us. It's a love that embraces us no matter where we go or what we do. God knows our thoughts, our actions, and our words, and yet God still loves us.

God knows our schedules and our habits. It can be intimidating that God knows us so intimately including our busyness and our stress. But God also knows our moments of joy and acts of love and service.

God knows us all through and through.

It can be refreshing and liberating that we don't need to hide anything from God. God knows us and loves us even more.

We can come in confidence to God, bringing every song of love, cry for justice, tears of grief, and shouts of joy.

We can live out our life knowing that God's presence will always remain with us.

**Emmanuel G. Caudillo**

# My Lenten Prayer

Oh, Lord, thank you for your infinite grace, mercy, and love. Please help me call to mind that your light shines compassion on all your children.

Please let me distinguish between your Holy Fire and the flame of righteous indignation that burns inside me at times these days.

You know my heart. You know my spirit. I cannot hide from you. You know that there are moments when I walk around filled with anger and harshness. You know that I sometimes haughtily declare that some folks are not "of you."

Be with me, Lord, as I practice residing in the place modeled by your son, Jesus. Stay my focus on the sacrifice — the ultimate sacrifice — that He made on behalf of all my siblings and me.

Please remind me, Mother/Father God, that the journey to Easter morning is a journey of reflection, humility and cleansing.

Move me to recall that in the face of betrayal, being disowned by friends; mocked, spat-upon, whipped and nailed to a cross, your Son did but two things: forgive and radiate love.

Please be patient with me when it takes me a minute to acknowledge that my duty and purpose are to ignite a light of harmony and to radiate your love.

When I witness actions that may be — definitely are — contrary to your teachings, activate my memory of the many sins, failures and harms of which you've forgiven me, and incline my heart to pray for that same mercy, grace and love for others and not lose sight that they indeed are your children, and therefore they too are my siblings.

Lord, I ain't go lie. It's not gonna be easy, but You do your part and I'll do mine.

Fix me, Lord, fix me.

**Douglas M. Brooks**

# From Christmas to Easter

*Picture it – Foundry UMC  
Christmas Eve candle-light service  
Grand-finale*

*It starts in darkness  
Then comes the light*

*One intentional beam, piercing the dark of night  
Until the gift is shared with a neighbor  
Candle by candle, from one trusted hand to the next...  
Until in no time our hearts too are warmed by a body of lights,  
illuminating a community*

*With a choir of voices crying out...  
Christ the Savior is born  
Christ the Savior is born*

### **It starts in darkness**

*Doesn't it feel like we are living through the dark ages?  
Is there no light at the end of the tunnel?  
Perhaps we know the answer, but how do we live it?*

### **Then comes the light**

**One intentional beam, piercing the dark of night**  
It only takes one  
Shine, Jesus, Shine!

**Until the gift is shared with a neighbor**  
**Candle by candle, from one trusted hand to the next...**  
**Until in no time our hearts too are warmed by a body of lights,  
illuminating a community**

Thy kin-dom come  
Thy will be done  
On earth, as it is in heaven

### **\*Spoiler Alert**

It may be Friday, but Sunday's coming  
So in this moment let us take time to turn  
Away from the doom and gloom of the day's headlines  
Back to the prophecy of love, light and rebirth

The promises of our collective journey with the Light of lights,  
As shared in the classic hymn by Dallas Holm, "Rise Again."

**Rise Again**  
**By Dallas Holm**  
**\*Please use the link or QR code to listen**

[https://youtu.be/Wh\\_KFneobCM?si=RCrTdEisuMjPCLw3](https://youtu.be/Wh_KFneobCM?si=RCrTdEisuMjPCLw3)



# Moving Toward the Light of Christ

There is something profoundly moving about the journey from darkness into light. I have always loved first light — the slow rising of the sun, the way illumination shifts from softness to brilliance, then returns once more to gentle dusk before yielding to night.

Each day offers this living parable of enlightenment, a reminder of the All-Knowing Presence we encounter in both stillness and activity.

As creatures of God, we awaken to the soft light of morning, invited to begin again. We step into our tasks, our relationships, our care for one another, and we return to darkness at day's end for rest and renewal. Life itself is a cycle of movement: splendid, chaotic, challenging, joyful, and often filled with surrender to God's will.

We begin life in the darkness of the womb and emerge into the 'light' at birth — crying with anxiety as we meet a world full of mystery and possibility. When blessed with years beyond infancy, we spend our lives seeking reunion with the eternal Light of Christ.

Faith shapes us, guiding us to release the ego and to move gradually from the earthly to the heavenly. What a sacred journey it is to merge our lives with Light that gives life to all!

## **Prayer in Action:**

*Holy One, God of Light and Love,*

*May the light of Christ shine upon my path as I move through each day. Help me to meet earthly needs with compassion while remaining attentive to Your will. Open my senses to Your brilliance at work in my life. Strengthen me to walk unafraid, serving in both darkness and light as scripture teaches: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all things will be added unto you."*

May it be so. Amen.

**Paula Blair**

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