The Point
Shine the light of Christ.

The Passage
Ephesians 5:8-14

The Bible Meets Life
Sin and darkness abound in our world. It always has, but our culture has become more open and blatant about sin. Worse, our society is increasingly embracing and endorsing sin, no longer even calling it sin. But sin is still sin. When we come to Christ, the Light of the world, and live as light, we present a sharp and inviting contrast to the darkness of sin.

The Setting
Paul wrote Ephesians (Ephesians 1:1) while he was imprisoned (3:1; 6:20), probably in Rome. Many scholars believe Paul wrote this letter intending for it to go primarily to the church in Ephesus (1:1). Others believe Paul intended the letter to circulate generally among several churches, one of which was in Ephesus. Either way, Paul wrote to encourage Christians in their calling to shine the light of Christ in the darkness.
Ephesians 5:8-14 (CSB)

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light—

9 for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth—

10 testing what is pleasing to the Lord.

11 Don’t participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them.

12 For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret.

13 Everything exposed by the light is made visible,

14 for what makes everything visible is light. Therefore it is said: “Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”
GET INTO THE STUDY

DISCUSS: Invite your group members to discuss Question #1 on page 117 of the PSG (Personal Study Guide): “When have you seen someone light up a room?” Allow time for each person to respond.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 118):
Ever wonder why a moth is attracted to a light? If so, you’re not alone. Scientists have long pondered this, but they don’t know either. At least, they don’t know for sure. They’ve come up with several hypotheses, but they end up poking holes in each one. So, we’ll just keep wondering—while the moths keep flying to the light. Clearly, we’re not moths, but we are also attracted to light. We’d rather enter a well-lit room than one that’s dark. We’d prefer to walk the dog during the daytime rather than after dark. When we do go out at night, we prefer evenings with a full moon. We even consider it romantic.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): If your circumstances allow it, briefly turn off the lights in your meeting space. Ask: “What issues arise when we find ourselves in darkness?” Allow group members to discuss. Share that while some issues are less significant than others, total darkness can be scary and hard to navigate. Turn the lights back on. Explain that physical darkness can be illuminated by any number of light sources. Spiritual darkness, however, can only be illuminated by Jesus. He is the only One who brings us out of darkness. (For safety, ask group members to remain seated during this activity.)

GUIDE: Call attention to The Point on page 118 of the PSG: “Shine the light of Christ.”

PRAY: Transition into the discussion with prayer.

TIP: This is the last session of this six-week study. Be sure to offer group members a time to review and share what God has taught them through this study.

PACK POSTER:
Pack Item #11
“Light” poster

PLAYLIST PICK:
“Only Jesus”
By Brian Johnson & Jenn Johnson
Ephesians 5:8-10 (CSB)

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light—
9 for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth—
10 testing what is pleasing to the Lord.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 5:8-10.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 119): In his letter to the church at Ephesus, the apostle Paul explains a central truth about Christ-followers: we were once spiritually dead in our sin. In Christ, we’re forgiven and offered a transformed life. Basic science teaches us we can’t be in the light and in the darkness at the same time, and that fact applies to our lives in Christ.

DISCUSS: Question 2 on page 119 of the PSG: “What are some words that describe your life before you encountered Christ?”

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGES 119-120): Christ-followers are to “live as children of light” (v. 8).

» Live lives full of “all goodness, righteousness, and truth” (v. 9). These are more than just outward characteristics; a life of goodness, righteousness, and truth begins in the things we pour into our minds.

» Test “what is pleasing to the Lord” (v. 10). As we fill our minds with the things of God and live in His goodness, righteousness, and truth, we will come to know more and more what pleases Christ. Paul told the Romans: “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).

DISCUSS: Question 3 on page 120 of the PSG: “How do we actively test what is pleasing to the Lord and what is not?” (Note: This is a great opportunity to highlight the value of listening to the Holy Spirit, digging into God’s Word, and developing relationships with other Christ-followers.)

TRANSITION: In these verses, Christ-followers are called to live as children of light; in the next verses, we’re called to expose the works of darkness.
Ephesians 5:8-10 Commentary

Verse 8: Paul turned to the theme of light in contrast with darkness. Paul, of course, referred to spiritual light and darkness. Spiritually, darkness and disobedience go together. Light and disobedience do not. Every believer in Christ has experienced a transformation from darkness to light. Paul wrote straightforwardly and strikingly that “you were once darkness.” We might have expected Paul to have written that believers were once in darkness. Paul’s point here, however, is not only that believers were once in dark surroundings or circumstances or even in a realm of dark influences. His point is that believers themselves were expressions of spiritual darkness. Apart from Christ, people are not only in darkness, darkness is in them. It defines them. Thankfully, believers are no longer identified with darkness. Though you were darkness, “now you are light.” In going from the past tense to the present tense, we’ve experienced a dramatic change. Darkness has given way to radiance!

How did this transformation take place? The essential answer is: in the Lord. It was the Lord’s work. This reflects that salvation is fully by grace. Paul wrote, “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift—not from works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). We have not transformed ourselves from darkness to light. God has done it. After describing this transformation, Paul commanded his readers to “live as children of light.” Paul’s logic is simple: This is who you are, so live like it. If you are children of light, then live as children of light.

Verse 9: To explain the obedient lifestyle, Paul blended the metaphors of light and fruit. Certain things come forth from light the way fruit comes forth from a vine or tree. We can readily grasp the idea of “the fruit of the light.” We are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14) because the light of Christ illumines us. The fruit that our lives produce is to express Christ’s light. Such fruit “consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth.” “Goodness” refers to kindness and generosity. “Righteousness” in this case refers to right living. “Truth” means moral integrity. Darkness, on the other hand, is associated with hard-heartedness (Ephesians 4:18). Children of light will not be hard-hearted toward goodness, righteousness, and truth. There is a fundamental, ethical distinction between light and darkness—between good and evil living, right and wrong behavior and attitudes.

Verse 10: As children of light, how are we to pursue fruitfulness? One key answer to that question is by “testing what is pleasing to the Lord.” That is, we are to assess carefully what is pleasing to the Lord. We are to examine our courses of action. We are to discern, learn, and find out what pleases the Lord. Elsewhere, Paul encouraged us to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). We are called to seek out actively the will of God by faith and clarify our understanding of it.
STUDY THE BIBLE

**Ephesians 5:11-14 (CSB)**

11 Don’t participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. 13 Everything exposed by the light is made visible, 14 for what makes everything visible is light. Therefore it is said: “Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 5:11-14.

**SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGES 122):** We will certainly encounter darkness in our world. Paul gave us the proper response: “Don’t participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them” (v. 11). What does it mean to expose things in the darkness?

» We should see sin the same way God sees it; then we should respond to sin like God responds to it. In other words, if something is sinful or ungodly, we shouldn’t laugh at it, watch it, participate in it, or be around it.

» Light exposes everything in the darkness. The apostle John described believers as those who “walk in the light as he himself is in the light” (1 John 1:7). When we are in the light and walking in relationship with Jesus, we expose darkness by boldly shining the light of Christ.

**DISCUSS:** Question 4 on page 121 of the PSG: “As Christians, what are the right motivations and goals for exposing darkness in the world?”

**SAY:** “Our task is not simply to expose the things in the darkness. God calls us to bring people from the darkness into the light of Christ.”

**SUMMARIZE THE COMMENTARY (VERSES 13-14):** Paul concluded with a powerful exhortation. “Therefore it is said: Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

» Paul was directing and inviting all people to Christ.

» Believers need to guard against falling into a slothful, neglectful slumber. We should be alert; we have responsibility in this world. Christ has shone on us and will now shine His glorious light through each of us as a child of light!
**Ephesians 5:11-14 Commentary**

**Verse 11:** Christians have become light, but live in a world that remains dark. We struggle with what Paul would call “this darkness” (Ephesians 6:12). How are we to relate to the darkness of the world? Two commands answer this question. The first command is “don’t participate in the fruitless works of darkness.” In Ephesians 5:7, Paul instructed believers not to be partners with the disobedient. Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 6:14 Paul wrote, “Don’t become partners with those who do not believe. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness?” This is not a prohibition of friendships with unbelievers (see 1 Corinthians 5:9-10). Jesus Himself was known as a friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34). We are not, however, to be in partnerships with unbelievers in the sense of participating in the “works of darkness.” The works of darkness are “fruitless” in that they do not produce good. Sin may promise great things, but it fails to deliver anything of lasting and real value.

The second command is to expose the works of darkness. If a bright light shines in a room that has long been dark and unattended, many things may show. There may be dirt and trash. Roaches and rodents may have moved into the space. Shining the light makes the character and condition of the space clearly visible. We can expose darkness by boldly shining the light of Christ. Goodness, righteousness, and truth are in stark contrast to selfishness, moral impurity, greed, and deception. In Philippians 2:14-15 Paul challenged believers to be “children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world.”

Of course, not all people will applaud us for boldly shining the light of Christ. Some will see the distinction between themselves and the children of light and resent the light. They will criticize the light to try to justify their own darkness. Others, however, will be attracted to the light. Our highest hope and intent in exposing darkness is to bring people into the light of Christ.

**Verse 12:** There is a strong common sense reason not to participate in the works of darkness: “for it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret.” The evil character of the deeds is confirmed when people do the deeds in guarded secrecy. If something would be genuinely shameful to speak of publicly, it is shameful to do or say privately. Ask yourself, “How would I feel if what I’m considering doing or saying were broadcast publicly? Would I be comfortable if my behaviors were known?” Paul’s reasoning seems to be along these lines: if you would be ashamed to speak of something, don’t participate in it!
Ephesians 5:11-14 (Continued)

DO: Instruct group members to complete the activity on page 123 on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses aloud.

MY LIGHT: What actions or attitudes allow us to shine the light of Christ in our day-to-day lives? Use the acrostic below to identify a few ways we’re called to dispel darkness. An example has been given. (Note: The PSG includes an acrostic of the word “Shine” and the example: “Extend forgiveness to someone who has wronged you.”)

LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item #11, “Light” poster and use it with your discussion of Question 5. As your group discusses the question, record each response onto a sticky note and adhere them to the poster. Afterward, highlight the idea that we each will have unique opportunities to witness for Christ that others may not have. Encourage group members to be open to these opportunities and point out that collectively God can use us to be light in many areas of our community.

DISCUSS: Question 5 on page 122 of the PSG: “Where do you see opportunities to shine the light of Christ in your community?”

SAY: “As God’s children, let’s not conform to the darkness. As light, let’s transform the darkness.”

ALTERNATE QUESTION: How can we avoid becoming desensitized to darkness?
Verses 13-14: After all, secret things will eventually be known. “Everything exposed by the light is made visible, for what makes everything visible is light.” People who live away from city lights see an illustration of this on most mornings. Before dawn, the world is covered in darkness. A person may look out over the landscape, but objects and animals are not visible. After the sun rises, the features and occupants of the land are in plain view in the light. Light shines now in the lives of believers. The light of Christ puts purity and love on display in us. This light is in sharp contrast with the works of darkness and can disclose the true character of those works. Light will shine on every life in the coming judgment. Things that are secret now will be exposed. When the Lord comes, He “will both bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the intentions of the hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Believers as well as unbelievers need to take heed. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Unbelievers need to know that all evil will eventually, inevitably be exposed. Every person’s true character will come into full and clear view before the judgment seat. “For nothing is concealed that won’t be revealed, and nothing hidden that won’t be made known and brought to light” (Luke 8:17). It is far better to welcome the light of Christ fully into our hearts and minds now than to wait for the exposure that is coming in judgment.

To that end, Paul concluded with a powerful exhortation. “Therefore it is said: Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” “It is said” may be Paul’s way of introducing his own combination of various Old Testament verses. Isaiah 60:1 reads, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD shines over you.” Paul may have been blending that verse with Isaiah 9:2 and 26:19 and showing that the fulfillment of these promises is in Christ. On the other hand, Paul may have been quoting or paraphrasing a first-century hymn or poem. We do not know with certainty Paul’s source for this saying. We do know the meaning of it. Paul was directing and inviting all people to Christ. Unbelievers have come to the time to wake up from their spiritual comas and rise from spiritual death by God’s power. It is time for them to look fully in the face of Jesus and have His saving light shine upon them.

Does someone who will attend your Bible study group this week need to hear this invitation to life and light in Christ? Believers need to guard against falling into a slothful, neglectful slumber. Be alert. You have responsibility in this world. You’ve risen from a dark grave; don’t return to it. Don’t flirt with the works of darkness that lead to shame. Christ has shone on you and will now shine His glorious light through you as a child of light!
LIVE IT OUT

**SAY:** “How will you shine the light of Jesus this week?”

**GUIDE:** Lead group members to consider the responses to the Bible study listed on page 124 of the PSG.

- **Pray.** Ask the Lord to expose any darkness in your life. Choose to repent from that darkness and pursue the light of Christ.
- **Memorize.** Commit 1 John 1:5-7 to memory and thank God for His gracious promise to dispel darkness.
- **Invite.** The light of Christ is too good to keep to ourselves. Identify someone you know who needs to hear about the life we’re offered in Christ. Connect with them this week and invite them to come with you to Bible study next week.

**Wrap It Up**

**SAY:** “As Christ-followers we are light in a dark world. We’re to live our lives in such a way that reflects Christ’s righteousness. Don’t conform to the darkness. Light up the darkness!”

**LEADER PACK:** Bring your group’s attention to Pack Item #11, “Light” poster, and remind group members to be on the lookout for opportunities to shine light in the places listed on the sticky notes. As you close your Bible study with prayer, pray for opportunities to shine brightly in the specific places your group has listed.

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When we think of an ancient temple, the temple-palace of Karnak, located 300 miles up the Nile from Cairo, or the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens may come to mind. Perhaps we would envision Solomon’s Temple. Essential to each of these massive structures was the cornerstone. Such a stone was structurally significant. In Jesus’ day people selected a cornerstone with care and laid it with great ceremony; the stone itself determined the lines of the architecture of the building. All the building took shape from the cornerstone. Today a cornerstone is merely decorative.

Simon Peter spoke of Jesus as the Cornerstone. This imagery was not unique. Following the leadership of the Holy Spirit, though, Peter explained how believers are joined with the Cornerstone in both identity and task.

“LIVING STONES”: WHAT DID PETER MEAN?
The Cornerstone

Seven hundred years before Christ, Isaiah saw the laying of the stone: “Look, I have laid a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation” (Isaiah 28:16). In his day people understood Isaiah was referring “to the massive stonework of the Temple, symbolizing the Lord’s abiding presence among his people, a feature which was firm, unshakeable, [and] reliable.”

In His teaching, Jesus pointed to the reality of this Cornerstone: “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’?” (Matthew 21:42). Referring to the Israelites during their exodus, Paul spoke of that Stone in a startling statement: “All drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4).

Throughout, Scripture speaks of a mysterious, mighty, majestic, moving Stone. That Stone is Christ, and He is the Cornerstone of the church. That was Peter’s message; he called that Cornerstone the “living stone” (1 Peter 2:4). The phrase appears to be an oxymoron, as if one were to say, “cool fire” or “bright darkness.” We normally speak of someone as “stone dead.” Yet the Bible calls the Lord both the Rock and the Life (Psalm 18:2; John 11:25).

This says something about Christ that can be stated no other way. In Him, the living Stone, are vitality, life, energy, growth, and movement. Only the phrase “living stone” can accurately describe our great Cornerstone.

Peter explained, however, that the Cornerstone is a rejected Stone. In the phrase “rejected by people” (1 Peter 2:4), the Greek term translated “rejected” means to be disallowed after having been inspected. Although that Stone was in the eyes of God “choice and...
precious”—meaning “well-hewn and valuable for building”—people generally rejected and set aside that Stone.

The psalmist foresaw this: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Psalm 118:22). This was Jesus’ prediction of Himself: “It is necessary that the Son of Man suffer many things and be rejected” (Luke 9:22).

This was Peter’s passionate proclamation of Him, “This Jesus is ‘the stone rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone’” (Acts 4:11). But God’s perspective is that Jesus is God’s chosen and precious Cornerstone. From Him the spiritual temple takes its shape.

**Living Stones**

Peter enlarged the scene. He described Christ building a temple, using believers as “living stones” built into a “spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5). That great Cornerstone is a magnetic stone. Mysteriously, stones are drawn from all around that Cornerstone and into it. Dead, lifeless stones come into contact and are made alive. “Nowhere else in the New Testament are believers called living stones.”

In Ephesians 2, the apostle Paul declared, “you were dead in your trespasses and sins... BUT GOD, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ” (Ephesians 2:1,4-5a emphasis added).

Peter gave the most magnificent picture in Scripture of the church’s dignity and destiny. He described God building a spiritual temple with believers as the living stones of that edifice.

To the Athenians Paul preached, “God who made the world and everything in it... does not live in shrines made by hands” (Acts 17:24). When Paul said that, he was standing in the shadow of the Acropolis at Athens, with its impressive temples. Years later Paul explained that believers are God’s “temple.”

**Believers As Temples**

Every believer, although a part of the whole, is a microcosm of the whole. Paul asked, “Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?” (1 Corinthians 6:19a). That the Holy Spirit should condescend to indwell humankind is an utter amazement, but this is reality. Every believer is a temple, but every believer-temple becomes a brick in that temple that God is building. Every follower of Christ is a temple—and at the same time is a living stone in the vast, invisible temple of the ages.

As if looking through a kaleidoscope, Peter again described a changing image. The walls of the living temple dissolve and onlookers see inside its sanctuary. Those who a moment ago were living stones become sacred, holy priests serving in the temple. “You yourselves, as living stones, a spiritual house, are being built to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

**Believers As Priests**

Old Testament priests served for limited times in only one place. Peter envisioned a church in which all followers of Christ, at all times and in all places, serve as priests. A believer is a priest everywhere and always—at home, at work, at church, in the community, alone, or with others. According to Peter’s words, every believer holds a sacred office, a believer-priest within the temple of living stones.
What does a believer-priest do? The Latin word for “priest” is pontifex, which comes from two words, one meaning “bridge” and another meaning “to make.” The priest is one who makes or builds a bridge between God and man. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only one great Priest, yet He has left believers as His under-priests, bridge builders for Him on earth.

Christians speak of the “priesthood of the believer.” The great truth of this doctrine is that Christ’s followers are to serve God as a way of life. Believers are in His living temple and part of His plan for the ages. This concept dignifies every aspect of each believer’s life. No job is so menial or vocation so prestigious that this high calling does not dignify it. Believers are part of what God is doing.

Simon Peter again refined his description as this scene dissolved into another. He had described believers inside that temple as both the living stones and believer-priests. But what are these priests offering? Each believer-priest is offering up “spiritual sacrifices” (v. 5). Paul explained that Christians are to bring themselves as the spiritual sacrifice: “Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Romans 12:1). To become living stones is not enough. God sets us, His followers, in His temple as “a holy priesthood” offering ourselves as a living sacrifice to Him (1 Peter 2:5). We set ourselves apart for His exclusive use. This is the miracle of living stones!

1. Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).

This is an edited version of the article by Jimmy Draper which originally appeared in the Fall 2016 issue of Biblical Illustrator magazine. Each quarter Biblical Illustrator offers in-depth articles and information that support our weekly Bible study lessons. You can subscribe to Biblical Illustrator by going to www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator, by using your church’s quarterly literature order form, or by calling 1-800-458-2772.
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1. “Glorious Day” by Passion Music
2. “A Billion Stars” by One Sonic Society
3. “Red Sea Road” by Ellie Holcomb
4. “How Far” by Matt Redman
5. “Miracles” by Kari Jobe
6. “He Will” by Ellie Holcomb
7. “Forgiven” by Crowder
8. “All Yours” by Chris Tomlin
9. “No Longer Slaves” by Bethel Music
10. “Salt & Light” by Lauren Daigle
11. “Cornerstone” by Hillsong
12. “So Good to Me” by Zach Williams
13. “Only Jesus” by Brian Johnson & Jenn Johnson

ENDNOTES

1 https://www.samaritanspurse.org/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child/

God Is . . .

Our Provider  
Genesis 22:1-14

Our Healer  
Exodus 14:29-31; 15:22-27

Our Banner  
Exodus 17:8-16

Our Peace  
Judges 6:11-16,22-24

Our Shepherd  
Psalm 23:1-6

Our Righteousness  
Jeremiah 33:3-8,14-16

God Is Faithful  
Luke 24:1-12

Stand Up: How to Fight Injustice  

Be Ready to Stand  
Esther 2:5-10,15-17

Stand with Conviction  
Esther 2:21–3:6

Stand Down  
Esther 4:1-3,10-16

Stand with Humility  
Esther 5:1-14

Stand Up and Speak  
Esther 7:1-10

Keep Standing  
Esther 8:1-8; 9:20-22