

A Servant Song

Isaiah 42:1-9

If you are like me, you like nightlights. You know, those little lights that give off just enough of a glow so that you're not stubbing your toes in the dark. We have one in the master bathroom, the main hallway, and the main bathroom. No one should have any trouble navigating around our house in the middle of the night. And it's a given that at one time or another, someone will be walking around in the dark for one reason or another. These lights are a necessity to keep us safe.

Of course, there is another use for nightlights, and any parent can tell you it's to ward off the bogeyman under the bed of young children. It's amazing how that little glow can banish monsters in the closet and relieve the fears of little ones. It is amazing how just a little bit of light can relieve fear and provide safety.

Have you ever had this happen? Because of a lack of available outlets, the nightlight is unplugged to make way for something more powerful like a curling iron or hair dryer. The little light is superseded by the more powerful appliance. Then what can sometimes happen is that the user of the appliance neglects to re-plug the night light. That means darkness prevails. As trite as this all seems it is still symbolic. Power is given precedence over a "dimly burning wick."

This was one of the images Isaiah used to describe the faithful. God has made a covenant with God's people to be "a light to the nations." God does not expect us to use force, such as political or military force. God expects us to provide light in the form of spiritual vision and enlightenment. The light Isaiah describes is not a searchlight or streetlight giving bright light in the dark. It is a small, flickering flame.

In his book, *What's So Amazing About Grace*, by Philip Yancey, he says, "Jesus' images portray the kingdom as a kind of secret force.

Sheep among wolves,
treasure hidden in the field,
the tiniest seed in the garden,
wheat growing among weeds,
a pinch of yeast worked into bread dough,
a sprinkling of salt on meat."

All these images, like the dimly burning wick, are metaphors for people of faith who spread the light in small, discreet ways.

The church does not have to be a powerful force in society. Rather, the church is about letting the light shine. In today's social climate, unfortunately, many churches seem to try to mirror other institutions in society. By comparing itself to corporations or government we are influenced to watch the "bottom line" and "implement policies." We live

under the assumptions that “bigger is better” or we attempt to “keep up with the Jones’s.”

Many people I encounter have faith and they have shared countless examples of how they let their light shine. Because we live in an age of sensationalism, people are led to believe that what they do is insignificant. They feel inferior and lack self-esteem. Here is a paraphrase of one of Mother Teresa’s best known quotes, “*God doesn’t call us to be successful, He calls us to be faithful.*” We don’t have to make grand gestures to shine our light in the world. We are to take the position of a servant, offering support and encouragement. Here is a story from the Chicken Soup series of books found in *A 5th Portion of Chicken Soup for the Soul*, that demonstrates just how powerful a small act of kindness can be:

Dr. James C. Brown tells about the time he left his light on. Dr. Brown has a private practice, and he would on occasion stay up late in his office, doing paperwork. One night he was studying patient charts when he heard a knock on the door. It was two o’clock in the morning and 16-year-old Brian, a patient of his, appeared at the door. “I was just out taking a walk and thinking,” he replied. Dr. Brown invited him in and together they talked. Brian told the doctor about his girlfriend, who had just broken up with him. His grades were bad and his hopes of becoming an

architect were dimming. His parents fought a lot and he felt it was his fault. He wasn't even sure if God loved him.

Dr. Brown just listened and offered some encouragement. He also put him in touch with some of his architect friends. They talked for two hours then Dr. Brown drove Brian home. They kept in touch after that and Brian invited Dr. Brown to his graduation ceremony a year later. Inside there was a note and Brian told the doctor that the night he passed by his office and saw the light on he was extremely depressed and contemplated taking his life. After their conversation Brian felt much better and followed through on the connections to the architects. He had been accepted to the university's architecture school. He was very grateful and thankful that Dr. Brown had his light on that night.

Each of us has a light of our own. It is a light that leads to our hearts. People tend to underestimate the power of their light. They think unless they are glowing brightly or sending out giant beams of light, they cannot be effective.

As servants of God, we are not called to crush our oppressors with powerful rays or build huge bonfires to get attention. Ours is a much subtler approach. The world is filled with blindness, darkness and bondage to sin. All it takes to free folks from their worlds of darkness is the tiniest flame, like the night light in our bathroom.

As helpful as search lights and streetlights are, we don't need enormous amounts of light to find our way in life. We simply need a little light to take the first step. On a weekend retreat I heard a speaker talk about a lantern lighting our path. The lantern in question only gave enough light for the next step. Even though the light seemed dim, it was still enough to keep you on the right track because you could safely see the next step. So it is as followers of God's greatest Servant, Jesus. He is the light guiding us along life's pathway, one step at a time.

Dr. Brown gave a great gift to young Brian. He turned on the light that led to his mind and heart. That's all Brian needed to begin his new journey. Isaiah is reminding us that to be a "light to the nations" is to turn on our lights, too. They too can be a gift to someone who lives in darkness.

I close with these words attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: "All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle." Go now and "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) AMEN

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Adapted from *Lighting The Way*, by Dr. Keith Wagner

