

Got a Light?
September 30, 2007

You know, it's interesting all the beautiful and poetic images one finds in the Bible relating God to light. For instance in Psalm 36:7 it says, "*How exquisite your love, O God! How eager we are to run under your wings, To eat our fill at the banquet you spread as you fill our tankards with Eden spring water. You're a fountain of cascading light, and you open our eyes to light.*" This is a beautiful way of saying what the Bible says later in 1 John 1:4-5 *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in God there is no darkness at all.*

However, I think I was struck by one of the most familiar passages we read about light—one I imagine many of us have heard before. It is the very first mention of light in the Bible and it comes from Genesis 1:3-4 and it says, "*God spoke: "Light!" And light appeared. God saw that light was good and separated light from dark.*" Now...this seemingly innocuous little passage is chocked full of imagery that as many times as I have read or heard this passage, I really haven't stopped to think about it. For just a second, suspend any conceptions you may or may not have about creation and what you believe happened or didn't and consider this powerful imagery... our Bible says, "*Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness.*" So, before there was light, there was nothing...something very powerful happened here around the idea of light...light of some sort appeared and light became a force of creation. So, light is creation, light is good...and light was separated from dark.

Let me leave this idea of light as creation for a moment and talk about light of a different sort. This morning we are talking about how we might become a light in someone's life. That is to say how we might be a mentor for someone struggling to try and find their way in life. On the surface this might sound a little daunting or even presumptuous. We ask ourselves, I've got enough problems on my own how on earth am going to light someone else's way? And, there is no shortage for examples of great mentors that may cause us to feel inadequate for the job.

In the world of sports I think of the legendary college basketball coach John Wooden who as coach of the UCLA Bruins won 10 NCAA championships. However, what gave him the greatest satisfaction was seeing his former players succeed off the court. Wooden said, "*Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best you are capable of*

becoming." Then there is Vince Lombardi who won 5 NFL championships and was named "Coach of the Century" by ESPN. However, Lombardi is remembered for his dedication, his infectious enthusiasm and his love of the game of football. Of Lombardi, former player Jerry Kramer said, "*He made us all better than we thought we could be.*"

At first glance these are pretty lofty examples to try and emulate...10 NCAA titles, 5 NFL championships, that's pretty big stuff. But I think if you look deeper, you find that in fact winning *wasn't* everything. Sure, their players might remember the championships, but the most enduring legacy these mentors left with their former players is the life-changing value of becoming much better people than they could have ever imagined off the field.

That is the key ingredient for being a mentor...being a person who helps others become more than they imagine possible.

There is a story about Kelly, a college student, from Fort Worth, Texas who became a mentor to a young woman named Cedrica. Kelly had first been introduced to mentoring through a friend who was already participating in the program, and Kelly was taken by the connection between the pair, and wanted to experience that same close-knit bond with a young person. Five years later, her match with Cedrica is still going strong. Their match consultant beams that they are "as close to real sisters as I have seen a match become." Kelly adds, "*I never dreamed that I would still be involved, but now I can't imagine my life without Cedrica.*"

Throughout their relationship, Cedrica has enjoyed visiting Kelly at Texas Christian University as both a student and now as a staff member. As a result, Cedrica is being exposed to a world that previously seemed unattainable. "*We always do things I would have never thought I could do,*" says Cedrica. "*Kelly helps me to do better in school and sometimes we talk about me going to college.*"

And what has Cedrica taught Kelly? "*I'm thankful for the trust we share. Cedrica has taught me about awareness, what it means to have an open mind and she has forced me to re-examine my priorities. Cedrica has brought joy and excitement to my life that I've never experienced before. We are blessed with a solid relationship built upon trust and I can't imagine my life without her.*"

This relationship is at the essence of what mentoring is all about...both have experienced life in new ways that neither imagined possible, and why? Both opened themselves to the possibility of growth beyond what they could achieve alone. Both sought to be in relationship with someone who might not be perfect, but someone who was willing to invest the

time in the relationship. You don't have to be John Wooden or Vince Lombardi to be a mentor.

About a zillion years ago, it seems now, when I was considering entering ministry, another young man and I were going through the process to enter ministry. We were both sharing the inadequacies we felt in to do this job...All of a sudden in all earnestness he said, "Stan, God doesn't call the equipped, God equips the called." At the time that statement sounded so canned, so rehearsed and so, well, lame.

Only one problem...turns out he was probably right. Even if we don't think we are perfect or capable, even if we feel we are broken ourselves, I firmly believe God gives each of us just what we need to be a light for others. Listen to what our Bible passage from Matthew says:

Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God.

You'll notice there is no formal requirement here for being a light bearer. It's pretty simple really...pretty much straightforward, it says, "You're here to be light." When we agree to open up to others...in essence agree to help shine the light of God, God will give us everything we need.

Sometimes connections have a way of leading to other connections...and to ways of supporting and mentoring others.

Many of you know Jerry and Linda Toomer. Linda is an integral part of the hospitality team at Oak Hill, and Jerry sings with the Oak Hill band. A few years ago they were having a conversation over coffee with some friends. They became aware of a single mother, Sharon, who was looking for a 'Big Brother' for her son Malcolm, who was 8 years old at that time and had no father present in his life.

As the story goes Jerry and Linda were introduced as a potential "big couple" to Malcolm. They were both so impressed by Sharon and Malcolm—and vice versa--- that they became enrolled in a vision to be partners in this new relationship.

What is especially meaningful about this story is how so many others have become enrolled in this mentoring partnership. Sharon and Malcolm come to Oak Hill occasionally with Jerry and Linda and have made friends with several Gardeners. Sue Burton has provided computer support, for instance.

Another couple has provided a bicycle for Malcolm as he outgrew his "kids" bike.

And, recently Jerry and Linda took Sharon and Malcolm to Racoon Lake where Bettye and Dave Ellison have a place. Dave and Bettye's son, Hank, catches and examines "almost any bug, snake or small animal that moves," ...and in this instance he had found an Indiana ring neck cobra. Cobra? Hmmm ...that sounds large, but in fact it is a 10-14" snake about as big around as a pencil...but it does squeeze its prey, like a cobra...and rarely bites.

In the car on the way down to the lake the conversation about the snake resulted in a fair amount of concern on Malcolm's part about exactly what this snake was all about...and particularly how big this "cobra" really was ! Malcolm needed a bit of encouragement to take a look at the snake "up close and personal".

And, after a full day of boating including bouncing wildly up and down on a tube behind the boat—something Malcolm is now doing with abandon—Hank actually got Malcolm to *hold* the snake. It is because of this willingness for so many to open themselves that Malcolm is experiencing such opportunities for growth.

Because Sharon is determined to have opportunities available for her son, she has sought out people who are willing to engage in relationships with her. This has been realized through several people who have said, "yes"...yes, we are willing to open ourselves and get involved; "yes"... we are willing to be generous with our lives. Now, that generosity is a beacon that shines God colors in and throughout so many lives here at The Garden.

So...light and creation. It is clear to me that in stories like Kelly and Cedrica...Jerry and Linda, Sharon and Malcolm, that through this mentoring process something new is created and it is good. I think it is as simple as the story of creation from Genesis:

"God spoke: "Light!" And light appeared. God saw that light was good and separated light from dark." It is pretty powerful to think that we could be partners with God in creation. However, this is exactly what I believe happens when we become mentors—we help God separate light from dark and create something new.

There is a quote by Michael Strassfeld that I believe is exactly what we are talking about this morning:

Light gives of itself freely, filling all available space. It does not seek anything in return; it asks not whether you are friend or foe. It gives of itself and is not thereby diminished.

