

Jana and I recently moved into a new house. We didn't move very far but that doesn't matter on the life-disruption scale. Between all the clutter and the new layout of the place the first few nights were challenging. I was a little disoriented and it was obvious the very first night in our new home that walking out of the bedroom and into the living room could be hazardous to my health. So the next day Jana made an important purchase – a nite lite. Isn't it amazing that a transaction requiring the exchange of thousands of dollars couldn't be enjoyed until we made the investment in this little light that cost a couple of bucks. It worked so well she even went out and bought a second one for another dark part of the house. The lesson of the nite lite is simple: a little light produces a benefit out of all proportion to its size. With a little light you can punch some gaping holes in the darkness.

This morning I want to shine some light on a very bright future for this faith community called Fellowship Dallas. Whether you have been here for twenty or thirty years or twenty or thirty days I hope you will be encouraged by what you hear today. God is up to something in us and through us and I want to share with you why I am so energized by what's happening.

Light is a dominant theme in the Bible. John introduces Jesus as **the light of the world**. **John 1:4-5** says, "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." (The NLT has it, "can never extinguish it" because the word "comprehend" could be translated "overtake" as it is in **John 12:35-36** where Jesus said to them, "For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not *overtake* you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.")

As I said a couple of weeks ago, light is superior to darkness. Light can overcome darkness but darkness can never overcome light. Darkness cannot extinguish light. No matter how dark it is, light will push back the darkness. On the other hand, if the light shines there is no way for the darkness to extinguish it.

John declares Jesus to be "the Light of men." Where did he get that concept? He records in chapter 8 that Jesus stood up one day and proclaimed, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." **John 8:12**. Later Jesus said, "He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me. I have come *as* Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness." **John 12:45-46**

Jesus goes by many names. He calls Himself, "the way, the truth, the life," but in John 8 He calls Himself "the light." It's easy to see why. Light is for seeing. Without Christ we stumble through life in the darkness. We don't see anything clearly. Listen to how C. S. Lewis describes why He became a follower of Christ, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

Think of my nite lite. Darkness is full of dangers. When I walk in the darkness, I may stumble over a box or a table or hit my head on a low-hanging lamp. Furthermore darkness frustrates my

ability to get where I want to go. But light changes all that. It exposes the dangers and opens the way to my goal. It produces a clarity that allows me to see the world as God sees it. When I seek the light of Christ I often discover a different way of seeing than this world sees.

For example, when I say the word “immigration,” you have an internal response. People are polarized over this issue. On one side of the debate there are those who feel it is racist to keep anyone out of this country. On the other side there are those who want to build an impenetrable barrier around our borders to keep all foreigners out. We are exposed to a steady diet of cable news shows that invite representatives from these two sides to yell at each other for a few minutes and most of us feel caught in the middle. Meanwhile our politicians lack the will to do anything because they don’t want to alienate anyone. But what if we view the immigration issue in light of God’s activity? But what if God is sovereign over all of this? God used immigration to grow His people in Egypt into a strong nation over hundreds of years? God even allowed foreigners to invade and occupy the land He promised to His people so that a pagan Roman ruler would declare a census for taxation purposes forcing Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem so that their baby boy could be born there – so that the words of the prophets would be fulfilled. After the resurrection, a fledgling church was established and then came a severe persecution of Christians which threatened to snuff out this new movement. Turns out the persecution was the very means God used to spread the seed of the Gospel all over the world like so many dandelion spores driven by the wind of God’s Spirit. All these dark circumstances, including the ones you face, seem tragic, even catastrophic to the human eye. But hold them up to the light, the light of God’s eternal perspective, and these trying times result in blessing and glory and honor for the One who matters most. In the light of Christ human problems become divine opportunities.

**Now here is an amazing truth: We are the light of the world. Matthew 5:14-15, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.”**

“I thought Jesus is the light of the world?” He is. But when you have Jesus you become a light-bearer. We are a collection of light-bearers in the city of Dallas. He strategically placed us here in the mid-town area. We are not a downtown church or a suburban church we are a mid-town church which brings a diversity that spans the globe. Some would look at that diversity and despair. “There is no way these diverse groups could share the same priorities and passion. They can barely share the same space.” But in the light, we discover that diversity is exactly what God intends. Jesus came to break down the barriers that divide us so that we are united not by the place of our birth or the color of our skin but by the light that shines within us. That light shines through us from the inside out. **Let me show you what I mean... (graphics)**. The light shines in the darkness when...



A. **We love Jesus.** Jesus is the source of light. That is why our mission is “to lead people in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.” Until the light comes on in our lives we cannot make any permanent contribution to this world. That is what Jesus meant when He said, “Apart from Me you can do nothing.” So our first priority is to love God, value God, adore Him, worship Him, serve Him. Make Jesus our one pure and holy passion so that we will be full of light because unless we are full of light we have nothing to offer this dark world.

B. The light shines in the darkness when **we love one another**. Jesus said, “By this, all men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Jn. 13:35. Love is the identifying mark of God’s forever family. Once the light comes on in my life I want to share the light with others to produce an even greater light. Here at Fellowship we call these Community Groups. We used to call them small groups but recently felt that “small” is not the operative word, “community” is. A Community Group is simply a *consistent gathering of like-minded individuals who commit themselves for a season to the pursuit of biblical truth, authentic community, and missional living.*

Consistent spiritual growth is impossible without the encouragement and input from other believers. If not for people around me who are close enough to speak into my life, I would be infinitely worse off than I am and of little use to God. We like to say that “life change happens

best in small groups.” A corollary of that is “progress in the faith is impossible apart from community.” ([Listen to the testimonies of some of our own partners...video](#)).

Discipleship is a team sport. Jesus demonstrated that fact when He chose twelve apostles and met with them corporately in a small group setting. He didn't meet with each of them one-on-one and have them fill in the blanks of His discipleship handbook. He did life with them teaching them in the process of preaching the kingdom of God and validating the kingdom through service.

Complete the form in your worship guide and we will help you find a Community Group.

C. The light shines in the darkness when **we love those Jesus misses the most**. There are thousands of people in this city who are loved by God and have yet to be born into His forever family. They need an invitation. They need to see the light of Christ in us so they too will glorify our Father in Heaven.

We will pursue those who need the light of Christ using three specific strategies. These strategies form the unique vision of Fellowship Dallas. We are not better than any other church but we are different from every other church. We have a different history, location, staff, Sr. Pastor, than any other church. We are unique and we have a unique calling. ***Our vision is to be a midtown Dallas church of grace-filled people empowered for community transformation and new church formation for the purpose of faithfully transferring the Gospel from person to person and generation to generation.*** Let's unpack that a little bit.

1. We are committed to New Church Formation. We want to form new churches because historically the most effective way to spread the Gospel is by establishing outposts of believers gathering together to worship Jesus. The book of Acts chronicles the story of the church as it begins with a few confused and downcast people huddled in an upper room in Jerusalem and concludes with Paul preaching in Rome, the very center of the universe at that time. The message is clear – the triumphant progress of the Gospel will continue one church at a time until Jesus comes back.

Some of you may not know that this church would not exist if 33 years ago some visionary people followed a man named Gene Getz to a second campus of Fellowship Bible Church. The first one is on Arapahoe. Once that church was established they decided to open a campus in the Park Cities. That's us. We wouldn't be here if they wouldn't have been willing to support a second campus. Let me ask you a question: How many of you came to Christ through the influence of someone here at FBCD? How many of you have a child who came to faith here? How many of you were baptized here? How many of you met your husband/wife here? Would you stand? Thank God someone took a risk and formed this congregation. Fellowship was here for you – let's be there for the next generation, which leads me to the second outcome of our vision...

2. We are committed to Next Generation Empowerment. Churches that stop thinking about the next generation are dying churches as simple as that. Thomas Friedman in his book *The World is Flat*, writes, “When your memories exceed your dreams the end is near.” Churches that focus on the past rather than envisioning the future are dying churches. We are blessed with an abundance of young men and women in the community that surrounds this church. We have a growing number of young men and women who have come to Dallas to prepare for a lifetime of vocational ministry at Dallas Seminary. In the months ahead you will be hearing about some new initiatives to insure that our own children are receiving what they need in our homes to equip them to spread the light. If we don’t invest in our own children, if we don’t encourage these young men and women who will be meeting on Tuesday nights in The Awakening, we will be unfaithful stewards of God’s choicest resources. If we don’t get them in the game and encourage them then we are forsaking our God-given calling as a church.

I don’t need to remind you that working with the next generation can be messy...and noisy. I was reminded this past week of the days when we had three teenagers living in our house and on Saturday nights I had to use ear plugs to get to sleep because they had friends over. It got noisy and I don’t like noise. But noise meant life. There is one thing I like even less than noise and that’s death. You can find a lot of peace and quiet in a cemetery but you know what you won’t find? Life. Dying churches are quiet churches. No kids in the nursery, no new ideas, no new dreams or new discoveries. You find life in noisy places where people laugh and joke, call out one another’s names and lift their hands and their voices in praise to God.

3. We are committed to Community Transformation. The reasons is simple, our good works validate our message. Jesus didn’t heal people and cast our demons just to impress people. He didn’t do it because He was a humanitarian. His good works validated His message that the Kingdom of God had come. If we cannot bring positive change to our own community then how will we ever bring change to our city, our country or our world? **1 John 2:9-10** says, “The one who says he is in the Light and *yet* hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.”

So I present this modest proposal - a biblical blueprint for changing the world! I’m asking you to go “all in” on this vision. Love God with *all* your heart. And love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. And love your neighbor as yourself. **Matthew 5:16**, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” We are not saved by our good works. We don’t manipulate people to believe by our good works. Our good works is simply a manifestation of the light emanating from a life that is on fire for Christ. Keep the fire burning. Spread the fire to those in your Community Group. And let that fire light up the night because “no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand so that those who come in may see the light.” **Luke 8:16**

As we conclude I want to pray for the “almosts” in our lives. Those who are drawn to the light. Those who live in a cold, dark place who want to come near the fire where it is warm. Like the teacher Gabe mentioned last week who asked, “Are you the church that did the tail gate party for our kids? And the landscaping? And the mentoring?” Gabe said, “That’s us.” The response was, “Wow, what a great church. It makes me almost want to come to go there.” Almost. Let’s pray that we will be faithful to “Let our light shine before men in such a way that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven.” Let’s pray that the “almosts” will become the “all-ins.”