

Is What is "Living-in-the-Light"?

The passage from I John 1 on the front panel gives the Biblical verses which point to living-in-the-light, but the theme is all through the Bible. It points our lives to being people of the truth, the opposite of which is people of falsehood and therefore darkness.

Evil and sin cannot survive long in the light of day. When the light of truth shines, the evil-minded scurry for the dark corners:

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. John 3:19

But the evil-minded at least *pretend* to be standing openly on the moral high ground because they crave the worship of other creatures. They want honor, respect, power, and authority -- without honestly earning title to any of that.

Evil, as Jesus defined the matter in Matthew 22:34 ff., is acting in an unloving manner toward God or one's fellow creatures. Love means doing good for others, acting in a life-affirming way -- even at high cost to oneself -- rather than in a life-destructive way.

By these two commandments, every person in the whole universe is commanded to love all the other persons in the universe. No exceptions.

But our personal desires, plans, ambitions, grudges, resentments, and on and on.... get in the way of loving God or one's neighbor. So we often resort to pretending, faking it. Living in the dark.

Loving God and one another is the *only possible way* to have deep fellowship with one another. It cannot happen any other way.

Furthermore, only receiving the love of God and loving Him back can equip us for loving our fellow creatures. We do not have the personal stability to love each other in our own strength.

Two Stabilities

There are two stabilities which all creatures need, but do not have naturally within ourselves.

First, we need "*ontological*" stability, which

means stability of our *being*, our *personhood*. We need to know that we stand on solid ground, that we are secure from danger, that we are important to someone. That is a stability first given to us by our mothers who in the family represent *spiritual power*, the power of being ourselves. The nurturing and care of mothering conveys to the infant a stability of its own being.

We need this stability of our being because we do not have it within ourselves. It comes from outside of ourselves because we are *created*, and therefore *dependent*, beings.

Secondly, we need *moral* stability. We need to know what life is all about, what is important, what might be expected of us, what commands we should obey. That stability begins with mother, but mostly it comes from father who represents *spiritual authority* in the family.

As with personhood stability, we do not have moral stability within ourselves. We are not able to decide for ourselves what life is all about.

But again, our self-centered nature gets in the way of those two stabilities when we reject being dependent, imagining, like Adam and Eve, that we can be independent, and when we reject moral authority because we want to define our own life.

It does not work, it gets us only into deeper and deeper into the Fall. But as one popular definition goes: *insanity is when you keep doing the same thing... and expect to get different results.*

We can get quite good at faking it, and then we begin to believe our own press, deluding ourselves into unreality.

These two stabilities define the nature of salvation, so they are worth the pursuit.

The Primal Obligation

Truth-seeking turns out to be the obligation behind all other obligations -- because if we are not truth-seekers, nothing else we do will come out right, even loving God and one another. False forms of love (surprise! surprise!) abound all around us. So we need to test anyone's claims as to what is loving and what is not. We need to be truth-seekers about every thing we do. That is why we are told in Scripture:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. I John 4:1

That is what living-in-the-light is about -- learning how to test the claims made all around us, and learning how ourselves to be tested.

Truth-testing is not specifically discussed in the Bible, but it is assumed at every stage of the revelation of God to His people. God tells Isaiah:

Come, let us reason together... Isaiah 1:18

What is reasoning for if not to get at the truth of something? Elijah illustrates truth-seeking in I Kings 18:17 ff.

And then Jesus replies to the disciples of John the Baptist about whether He is the messiah,

Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. Matthew 11:2 ff.

In other words, "*What do the facts on the ground, what does the evidence, tell you?*" The disciples of John were testing Jesus, and Jesus replies, appealing to their common sense reason.

Spiritual Growth

Children constantly test, often with "Why?" They are insatiably curious to find out what the world is and how they fit into it. For small children, parents are as God to them, infallible and omnipotent. So they think they have to go no further than parents to find the truth.

But as they grow, they find that they, too, are to be tested. When mother asks, "*Johnny, did you put your hand in the cookie jar?*" little 3-year old Johnny knows what mother is asking for, and knows the consequences either way. Children already know something about the nature of truth -- the difference between "what is" and "what is not". And they discover that there is a moral issue about the matter. Truth is important. "Important" means what mom and dad insist on. What they let me do on my own is the *unimportant* part of life.

For about the first eight years, we do our truth-seeking and truth-testing in a "relational" manner. We learn even in the womb that we are

somehow "related to" someone else who is mother. We learn that she will take care of us, that we are important to her. We discover truth more or less intuitively, we perceive truth in our relationships with each other.

But then about eight or so years old, we learn more about how to *think* about truth, to examine it intellectually, with our minds. That becomes a powerful tool with which to test different kinds of truths. That helps us deal with the discovery that mother and father are not omniscient, not omnipotent, and thus not God.

But for the spiritual life, the primary testing is in relationships. That, of course, does not rule out clear intellectual thinking, such as in theology, because it is primarily in our relationships that we must learn to think consistently and clearly. When we think and act inconsistently, our relationships disintegrate.

In families where relationships are treated as important, and where the law and the saving grace of God are taught and lived, and where parents gracefully hold each other accountable, there will be a natural growth into truth-seeking maturity.

If one belongs to a church in which truth is taken seriously, and where the members hold each other accountable for their relationships, their behavior, and their truth-speaking, then again, there will be a natural growth toward spiritual maturity.

But sadly, in most cases, neither family nor church major in living-in-the-light. And probably all of us have had trouble at some point. In Western culture, pursuit of truth is no longer common. Christians especially are (to put it kindly) not known for such pursuit, when we should be the best of the best.

Living-in-the-Light Groups

So it is often helpful to have groups where living-in-the-light is taught and experienced among a small number of like-minded persons who want to grow in their faith relationship to God and each other.

The process begins best at the top, with church leadership. Any spiritually mature leadership team will consistently get together to share

with each other their personal goals, successes, and failures.

A team that gets to know each other at this deep level will be far more likely to have a powerful ministry which will not end up devastated due to a member's having gone awry spiritually or morally. No Christian ministry should proceed without building trust and obedience, holding themselves accountable to each other.

We used to hear, "*The family that prays together stays together...*" That is true also of churches and ministries. But the prayer must be about substantial issues, not fluff we put out to give an impression of holiness. We need each other to keep ourselves honest about ourselves.

A common format for a living-in-the-light group is to begin with opening prayer, a short Bible reading and commentary, with the main body of time for going around the circle to give each person a chance to tell how his spiritual life is going, successes, failures, trials, etc., and then allow time for others to respond, comment, make suggestions.

Each person should be prayed for, during or after their sharing and response time, perhaps with holy oil and/or laying on of hands. Appropriate physical touch is part of the sacramental nature of God's world.

There must be an understanding that nothing said (other than one's own story) is to be repeated outside, thus maintaining a safe arena for confidentiality.

There may be times when nothing "deep" is shared, and there may be times when someone is hurting and puts that problem in front of everybody. The group should plan for substantial and quality time without distractions, at least two hours, though it might end earlier or later.

No one is in control of anyone else's life, each person may accept or reject comments or suggestions. But at the same time, moral and spiritual issues are to be confronted as necessary.

As time passes, the trust level deepens so that a time may come when those participating will feel that freedom to share their deepest needs and hurts. In many cases, persons will find themselves able to receive the healing and maturing grace of God through their friends.

With leadership skilled in inner healing and the healing of memories, the depth and rapidity of healing and forgiveness can often be increased.

The Potential...

There is no resource more capable of such maturing and healing than an intellectually, morally, and spiritually mature Christian community. The Body of Christ is meant to pour forth the law and grace of God, the love of God and of neighbor, so that the sinful and the broken can find forgiveness and healing.

Living-in-the-light is a way of life, not only a box of tools. It is the Way of the Cross put to work in practical ways which lead to forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing of emotions, relationships, and sometimes bodies. All the ministries of a church ought to work toward this way of life. People may come and go, learning what they can, and then on to new things. New persons can circulate through the group, and, as new leaders emerge, new groups can be formed.

As church leaders learn to live in the light, trust in them and faithfulness to them will almost certainly increase. Some will learn what "family" is, perhaps for the first time in their lives.

The world is full of persons who did not have any spiritual training for living-in-the-light, which means little or no training for the deep realities of relationship life, and who therefore find themselves sharing their problems with a psychiatrist or psychologist, or in front of a judge, in jail, or a mental hospital.

It need not be that way. A healthy family and church can prepare us for the deep issues we face, and thus for Kingdom living, *beginning* right in the here and now.

Opportunity

If you feel called to grow, mature, be spiritually set free and strengthened, or to learn how to lead such a ministry, if you want your life to be tested by the law and the grace of God, if you want to live in the light, to know and be known, please call the church or Fr. Fox.

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The Reformed Episcopal Church has joined the new *Anglican Province in North America* (ACNA) to support the renewal of worldwide Anglican orthodoxy. St. Luke's Church began in 1987, with its home since 2005 in the stately Norman style Waverley Chapel.



Worship at St. Luke's is conducted in the classical Anglican tradition of both a strong sacramental life and strong Biblical preaching. St. Luke's believes that personal salvation is the foundation for family life

and for Christian participation in public policy and government, that God rules all things, and that Christians must and will recover family integrity and their witness in the public arena.

Persons who want to follow Jesus, who are looking for a spiritual home based on the Bible, on a central historical tradition, on the gifts of the Spirit, and on the wedding of reason to revelation, and who stand for the Godly renewal of personal faith and of family life to help rebuild the foundations of Western Christendom, looking for the return of the King — might find themselves a suitable home at St. Luke's.

Fr. Fox is an Anglican priest who received his doctorate on the relation between science and theology from Oxford University in 1964, after completing a year of clinical pastoral education at two mental hospitals, a general hospital, and a prison. He taught for three years in the religion department at Trinity College, Hartford, Ct. For ten years Fr. Fox pastored St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in East Haddam, Connecticut.

In 1984, Fr. Fox founded *The Road to Emmaus* for pastoral counseling and to produce teaching materials for Christian apologetics. He was the director of *Transformation Christian Ministries*, an Exodus ministry in Washington, DC, from 1999 to 2001

helping persons recover from homosexuality and other sexually compulsive conditions

Fr. Fox, now priest-in-charge at St. Luke's Church, also continues his work with *The Road to Emmaus* and Christian apologetics.

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THE LIVING LIGHT -A WAY OF LIFE-

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth, but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 1:5-7

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The Rev. Eric Fox
Priest-in-Charge