

Jesus says, “*You are the light of the world.*”
Not *you will be someday.*
Not *try harder to become.*
But *you are.*

That’s a bold thing to say. And maybe a little uncomfortable. Because if we’re honest, we don’t always feel very luminous. Some days we feel more flicker than flame. More shadow than shine.

So the question before us isn’t whether light exists. The question is: How is that light formed? What shapes it? What strengthens it? And—if we’re brave enough to ask—what distorts it?

Since before humans could read, we told stories – and some of our most sacred stories are found in this holy book we call the Bible. In this book we find truth and values, morals, laws and instructions. The Bible contains the full width of human experience—beautiful and brutal, hopeful and horrifying. It’s messy because humans are messy. We read of a people who didn’t always have it together, and we read of a God whose love for humanity transcends time and human reasoning. No one reads Scripture neutrally. We all bring our history, our fears, our hopes, our blind spots. Scripture has always been one of the primary ways God forms a people—shaping our imaginations, our ethics, our loves. But Scripture doesn’t shape us automatically. The same Bible can be used to heal or to harm, to loosen chains or tighten them, to illuminate the path or deepen the shadows.

Epiphany is about light—but more specifically, about what is revealed when our lives are brought into the light of God. Take, for example, the words from the prophet Isaiah, 58: 1-12. Here, Isaiah gives a message to the people to stop just performing religion to look good. Instead, loose chains. Feed the hungry. Shelter the homeless. And ***Then your light shall break forth.***

We could say that Scripture is like the soil that grows the light within us. So, if Scripture is like soil—then how we dig into it determines what grows. Some ways of digging let in the light and other ways lead only to pain.

1. The Trench Digger

Young men dug in to defend themselves, firing across no-man’s land. So many wounded, too many died. Trench warfare became a symbol of futility, death, and leadership failure.

Sometimes we read Scripture like trench soldiers. We dig trenches and the Bible becomes a defensive weapon. We defend positions. We arm ourselves and plot to win “battles” and prove our way of reading is right. We collect and then fire verses aimed to kill – or at least wound. And do it all without looking into the “face of the enemy. And like real trench warfare, this way of reading the scripture creates fear, division, narrowness of faith and needless harm.

Jesus calls us the “light of the world” but you can’t be the light of the world if you are using Scripture to wound it.

2. The Gold Miner

I think of the Klondike. The gold rush. Panning rivers. The miner knows exactly what they're looking for and everything else gets discarded.

We mine Scripture for gold too. We mine for verses that support our position, nuggets that make us feel comfortable and texts that reinforce what we already think and then we ignore the rest.

We can find gold... and miss Jesus. We can find doctrine and miss mercy. And when we read scripture like THAT, then we have found only fool's gold.

3. The Archaeologist

The archaeologist digs gently. Studies context. Culture. Language. She brushes dust away carefully. She asks, What is being said now? What was being said then? What is God revealing here? She doesn't ask, "How can I use this?" But "What truth is waiting to be uncovered?"

This kind of study of scripture makes us humble. It reminds us we are not masters of the text – but guests in a story that is older than us. It relishes mystery and discovery and then finds a way to help others understand.

4. The Gardener

When we read scripture like gardeners, we trust life is underneath. We dig. We scatter all sorts of seed. We water, we weed. And for some reason we are always immensely surprised and delighted when even a twig of a sprout pops up from the ground. We prune. We bear good fruit.

Sometimes we don't want to prune all the stems – It is uncomfortable and can hamper our potential – but pruning leads to good, strong fruit.

5. The Snow-Fort Builder

When I was a kid, my friend Sarah Janzen and I were expert snow-fort builders. One winter we carved rooms into a hard drift — a kitchen with tables and chairs, beds, even a bathroom. It took days of recesses. Shovelful after shovelful. Then we got one glorious day to play.

Scripture study can feel like that. Repetitive. Ordinary. Shovel after shovel. Slow. Steady. Faithful. Day after day we read. We listen. We study. We return and one day we look up and realize that something has formed inside you. A structure. A foundation of grace, hope and truth.

It doesn't happen instantly – but over time. This kind of steady immersion forms people whose faith is deep and steady and gentle.

Isaiah says: If you remove the yoke from among you, the finger-pointing, the wicked speech; ¹⁰ if you open your heart to the hungry, and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted, your light will shine in the darkness, and your gloom will be like the noon.

¹¹ The Lord will guide you continually and provide for you, even in parched places. He will rescue your bones. You will be like a watered garden, like a spring of water that won't run dry.

¹² They will rebuild ancient ruins on your account; the foundations of generations past you will restore. You will be called Mender of Broken Walls, Restorer of Livable Streets.

Isaiah promises, *“Then your light shall break forth like the dawn.”*
Jesus echoes, *“Let your light shine.”*

But light doesn’t just appear. It is formed—slowly, faithfully, over time. It is formed by how we read. Whether we dig trenches to defend ourselves, or mine for what comforts us. By whether we handle Scripture like a weapon—or like fertile soil.

When we read humbly, like archaeologists, we discover we are not the center of the story. When we read patiently, like gardeners, we learn to trust that life is already at work beneath the surface. When we return again and again, like faithful snow-fort builders, we are shaped by the steady rhythm of the work—until something sturdy and spacious forms within us.

If we read to win, we grow harsh.
If we read to mine, we grow narrow.
If we read to listen, to grow, to be pruned to be formed —**we become the light.**

And what forms within us is not just knowledge, but character. Not just belief, but mercy.

Not just light we talk about—but light the world can see.

Friends, Scripture itself is not the light. It points us to the Light. It leads us to Christ. And when we let it shape us—gently, honestly, over time—it forms us into people who loosen chains, feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, forgive enemies, and mend what has been broken.

So may we read in ways that heal rather than harm.
May we study in ways that soften rather than harden.
And may our lives—formed by Scripture and shaped by Christ—shine with a light of love.

And may your light break forth like the dawn.

Amen