



*The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it... Though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.*

—John 1:5, 10

**H**ave you ever had a situation where you'd given of yourself sacrificially, taken care of someone or shown a remarkable amount of restraint, love and humility in the face of animosity, selfishness and arrogance... and then been treated poorly in response? It's as if all the love you've shown has gone completely unrecognized.

There's a saying, "no good deed goes unpunished." I can't think of any greater example of this than humanity putting to death the One who came to show us the way of love—Jesus Christ. Many people who do good works have been put to death because they've been suspected of being enemies, wolves in sheep's clothing. Their good works go unrecognized in the midst of the violent world in which they live.

John is obviously talking about the Creator as the Light of the world, but John himself was a witness to that Light, just as we are called to be. John 1:6-7 says, "There came a man sent from God, his name was John. He himself was not the light; he came as a witness to testify concerning that light."

## **UNRECOGNIZED LIGHT**

It may be that as we reflect Christ's light in a dark, violent and hurting world, our actions may not be recognized either. And here is a contradiction: although we are taught to be salt and light (Matthew 5:14), at the same

# **Keep Shining**

## **Blair Baker**

time, that light may go completely unrecognized.

So, what do you do if, after you've put yourself out for someone, sacrificing your time and energy, you get abuse or ingratitude in return? What if everything you've ever done for someone goes unnoticed? *What if someone feels entitled to everything you've given and doesn't recognize the pain or effort or cost to you?*

**Remember this: God loves you as much as he loves the one you've just given the shirt off your back.**

There is a danger of loving and giving pathologically. I have a friend who recently told me she has a habit of giving to others in need without thinking of the consequences to herself, and she has been left in dire straights, unable to pay her bills. She was taken advantage of and was never paid back.

Some church leaders reinforce this mindset with subliminal tones that come through sermons about faithfulness and sacrifice, while abuse hides in the shadows and everyone is busy turning cheeks.

## **SKEPTICAL ABOUT HELP**

Circumstances like this can turn us inward and make us reluctant to help anyone. The rising tide of street beggars is a case in point. It's common for people who are not actually homeless or in need to make a good living off the compassion of others by posing as beggars. In turn, people are less inclined to give and skepticism rises even higher.

Like my friend, I've had a tendency to give without thinking. It's left me feeling exhausted and, on occasion, hurt when I've realized I've been taken advantage of. I wasn't being "wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove." I was just being naive.

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more, he empowers us to be human because he conquered death from the inside out. It serves to remove our fear of death.

Eugene Peterson's *Message* translation says, *By embracing death, taking it into himself, he destroyed the Devil's hold on death and freed all who cower through life, scared to death of death* (Hebrews 2:14).

If the resurrection wasn't real, then death would be "The End."

But, if it is true, then I know there's nothing to fear. Actually, I don't know anything but I have hope. And that's the point.

We don't have to cower to despair. We can hold our heads high, live our lives, do the best we can, risk, love, laugh, and forgive. You do realize risking, loving and laughing are all synonymous?

***Death does not have the last word.***

*It is not the deepest sting. The grave is not a dead-end. It's a corridor into whatever is next.*

Peter Kreeft told me a long time ago that as the baby is inside the womb, and the womb is inside of the world, so we are inside the world and the world is inside of heaven. Death isn't the final act. It's the initial contraction of being birthed into the new creation. Behold, ***everything is being made new.***

This gives me hope. And I need hope! It's a major reason I still risk being labeled a Christian.

Will the fires of complexity be stoked tomorrow? Will the chiminea be asked to rage brighter? Maybe. And maybe I'll give it all up. Or maybe the energy of the heat will convert me all over again. □

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## Keep Shining by Blair Baker

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My son, in his twenties, recently told me about a situation where a rough-looking man came up to him while he was having his lunch break. The man asked for some money, but my son offered to buy him lunch instead. My son is on minimum wage, so every penny counts.

He walked with the man to a fast food shop and suggested he buy him one of the burgers but the man got agitated and aggressive, saying he wanted the best steak meal. He began complaining about horrible and completely inappropriate things. My son quickly bought him a burger and left. He was quite shaken and felt that he'd been scammed. I doubt the good my son did was recognized by the man who probably felt entitled to more than the burger he got.

### LOVE IS LIGHT

What then? Shall we stop doing good, stop reflecting the light because we may get it wrong or face ingratitude? I don't like the look of the world I imagine in that scenario.

I remember reading Billy Graham's book on the Holy Spirit years ago. He suggested that the good we now see in the world is because God's Spirit is at

work on the earth in people. And hell is wherever goodness is absent.

It scared me to think of such a place, and I'm daily reminded that though the world can often be a dark place, there is a tremendous amount of light shining. I want to be part of that. I'm always, always looking for the light!

Shining God's light is not just about giving. It's about *being*. 1 Corinthians 13 is a recipe for love. Love is light. Every time you forgive, you are *being* light. So forgive! Every time you are patient, you are *being* light. So be patient!

Philippians 4:6 tells us, "...in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God bring everything in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to God." If you're not sure if you should give to someone, pray about it. There are other options for people, which don't always require our input. If you've had a bad experience and are tempted to pack it all in, take a deep breath, shake your head and remember Christ's words from the cross: *Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.* If they can't recognize the light, maybe it's because they literally can't.

So, keep shining, but be wise. For a world without light is a scary place indeed. □

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