



**Illuminating December**  
**Shining the Truth in a Dark Culture**  
**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

Way back in the first week of January I went out to take the Christmas lights off my house and as I did I realized what lousy Christmas lights I have. I do. They are a patchwork. You know, you buy them over the years and you add this, you add another string but it's just..., I had bad, bad, and really bad. I even had some that when one of the bulbs burns out they all burn out. I thought, I got to get rid of these, so I took them all, piled them up, instead of putting them in that plastic bin that you store them in the garage, I just threw them in the trash can. I said I'll just get some new ones later. Now if I were smart I would have gone out that week and I would have bought them on sale after Christmas. Right? I wasn't smart.

Last week, you know, time to get everything together for Christmas, so I go out to the garage, I open up the bin that the lights are in, I look in there. I am not kidding, I thought someone broke into my garage, climbed up, grab that bin, took out my Christmas lights and stole them. I was so befuddled, I went inside, I said to my wife, "Someone stole my Christmas lights. Did you take my Christmas lights? Where are my Christmas lights?" She said, "I don't know, that's like that's your department. I don't go out... I don't know where your Christmas lights are."

I am not kidding. I was so braindead it took me 30 minutes to remember that day when I just dropped them in the trash can. So I went out and bought some Christmas lights. And I realize they're so much better now. Right? They're LEDs, they got remote controls, they do all kinds of crazy things. Oh, this is cool. I bought some, started putting them up, went back and bought some more. I kind of went crazy this last week on my house.

I mean not crazy, crazy, like that guy in your neighborhood. I didn't even get up on the roof or anything like that, but I put them up in places I don't normally put them up. I mean it's not like off the charts or anything but I do go home at night to my house and feel pretty good about how it looks. Looking good.

And I did it without any help. My boys are off to college so, you know, Carlynn and my daughter are inside decorating this year, I did it all by myself. It made me think of back to the days when I had two little helpers with me. I think my middle child John was, I think, like in second grade, seven years old, and he asked me, "Why do we do this?" Putting up lights. And some years I'm like, "Exactly, why do we do this?" I've thought that many times. And, of course, asking, you know, Pastor Father, I had a great opportunity. "Well, you know, son a lot of people don't have any idea why they do this. They've put them up just, you know, they don't know what they're doing. I guess because it looks pretty, some people fall to neighborhood peer pressure and put them up. But, you know, we put them up because it is an expression of the theological truth of the Incarnation. OK...

Oh, is it really? I had a chance to tell them, you know, there is really a theological truth here in this. As a matter of fact, the Bible has so much to say about the advent of Christ, the coming of Christ into the world as the light breaking into the darkness. We're celebrating Christmas.

Now, of course, I had a chance to explain to him, really a connection that I think we can have as Christians. Of course that's not why, you know, it may have started, that's not why my neighbors do it, it's not why the mall does it, it's not why the apartment complex next door does it. But it's why I do it because I can think about the fact that light shining in the darkness, in the wintertime, as we



decorate our house, I mean that is exactly what the Bible has to say about the coming of Christ. As a matter of fact, 24 times, does this surprise you, 24 times the Gospel of John alone uses that metaphor of light, employs that word, oftentimes from quotations from Jesus himself about him, like in Chapter 3, being the light that pervades the darkness.

We see it all over the Bible. Back to the prophecies of Isaiah 9 and Isaiah 60 about a people sitting in darkness and then the light rises on them. I mean this picture of Christ coming, the Messiah, all the hopes of what God would do among his people. It's like in Chapter 6, the glory of God, like a brilliant light, it just shines in darkness and rises over everything. That's a great image and it's everywhere and the arrival of Christ is typified by that great analogy of light.

I'd like to make that connection pretty hard in your mind this morning. It would be good for you as you see lights everywhere and maybe even go to the hassle, like I did this week, of putting them up on your house. I mean, that's a connection that I think could be meaningful, could make this December more meaningful, not only in your thinking but can drive you to what I think the Bible wants to just obviously and logically drive us to when we think about Christ being the light of the world.

So open your Bibles. Let's learn a little bit from this passage and maybe it can motivate us to live a little differently this December than we did last December as we try to illuminate December for Christ. John Chapter 1. Now of course, if you've got your work sheet there you see I'm going to try to cover 13 verses, which should take me, in any normal reasonable period of my..., I mean, it should take a lot longer than one sermon. But I think if you're here for at least the next three or four hours we can cover these 13 verses. This is a great theologically rich section of the Bible and we're going to do our best to get through this. And the first challenge is to read it without too much commentary. So let's try to read this passage in totality, verses 1 through 13 and then we'll come back and take it in three very logical segments.

Verse 1. "In the beginning." You do understand (laughter) that is how the Bible starts. Right? Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning." That's a marker for time before time. Right? It's not time, but it's a segment before time began, before, time and space. "In the beginning was the Word."

Now, if you come from another planet, I know this is some more commentary, if you came from another planet and you're reading it's for the first time you're thinking that's a strange use of the word Word. But look down to verse 14, just to give us clarity, just for completeness sake, so we know exactly who we're talking about here, "The Word," it says, "became flesh and dwelt among us." We're clearly talking about the first coming of Christ, the Incarnation. This is what this first segment is all about. Now I know this is outside of the text we're going to cover today, but look at how it defines it. If "seeing his glory, glory as the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Now, it talks about John in verse 15, he comes and he bears witness about it, and then verse 16, "From his fullness." Right? "We have all received grace upon grace." Not every last person in the world but all of the people there who are representing those who trust in Christ. "For the law was given through Moses; but grace and truth came through," here he is, named for the first time, "Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God." Right? God, the Father, no one has seen him. "The only God, who is at the Father's side," though. Now, we're talking about Jesus, the only God, "he has made him known." So, we were talking about the arrival of Christ to the earth. The Word.

Now, of course, if you've studied any at all about the background to this word "logos" in Greek, the word Word, that word logos was used in the Greek philosophers to express some kind of rational principle of the universe as they sat there and stroke their beards and thought about reality. Well,



there's all this physical stuff but then there's that kind of animating principle of the universe, it's logical, and those rational truths, they extend beyond, they transcend the physical. I mean, that's the concept of something beyond the normal, the natural, something supernatural.

Well, he wasn't writing for Greek philosophers. You don't have to look too far into philosophy to figure this out, if you just think about the Old Testament use of the word, Word, "debar" in Hebrew, a different word, of course, different language in the Old Testament, but the concept of the word was God's truth that extended, the instrumentality of God's action in the world. Even that statement about his Word going forth from him and not returning to him until it had completed what God sent it to do.

The concept of God doing and acting in time and space. I mean, that picture of the Word in the Old Testament, I mean gives us some flavor and sense and maybe even a double reference to what John has in mind by giving him this appellation, this title, the Word. So before time there was this Word, and the Word was with God. Of course, they all know God, they all think about this monotheistic God, but there this God is not alone, this fellowship. "And the Word was God."

And if you ever have anybody knocking on your door saying, "Well the Greek here doesn't have an anarthrous noun..." then you'll have to take some time to get 90 minutes of my lecturing or somebody else, gets someone else if you want, but I made it convenient for you, on the back of the worksheet, the first message that I give you, just to cross-reference this message, would be 90 minutes on just John 1:1 and why having a noun without an article in front of it is not some deal breaker for the cultist at your door telling you somehow this is mistranslated. Listen, anyone who tells you this verse is mistranslated and should not be translated the "Word was God" does not know the Greek language. Okay? So this is exactly what the text means and everyone would tell you this, all the way down to my Classics professor, when I was at University of Arizona studying in the Classics Department. This was not a Christian, this was not Greek class at seminary and just taking this passage to him and saying, "Hey, translate this. Is there any other way to translate this text?" I was just a first-year Greek student at that point reading and studying Attic Greek in the Classics Department, he'd say, "Of course not, there's no way you can misread this text just because it doesn't have an article in front of it. There are plenty of rules in Greek, as a matter of fact, several references to anarthrous nouns for the noun Theos the word God. This is clearly exactly what the text is communicating. "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God," as though we would even need that sentence. We've already read down in verse 18 that this Word, Jesus Christ is God. "He was in the beginning with God," before time, before time and space, before creation.

"All things were made through him." Really? Yeah. "Without him was not anything made that was made." He is the instrumentality of creation itself. And even in Scripture we see that, God in the beginning creates heaven and the earth. He speaks these words. Oh, there's the connection, the instrumentality of God creating. Now the person, we learn, is Christ, "All things were created by him and for him." He becomes the focal point of all human existence and he was the instrumentality of the creation of all human existence and the creation of all the fabric of the universe.

"In him," now we get a new angle, "was life." Oh, he wasn't made to live. God didn't breathe into him the breath of life, he had existing within him, inherently, life. He was life.

"In him was life and the life was the light of men." He imparted it to you. You sit here as a living being, you're not a rock, you're not a tree, you're not a piece of drywall. Right? You're not a chair, you are a breathing human being reflecting the personality of the God who made you. Intellect,



emotion, will. You can you can think, you can rationally reason in your mind, you have emotions that reflect this character of God, and you can make decisions volitionally, willfully. That's the attribute of God. That life was given to you, granted to you, through the eternal well of life that is in Christ, he granted life to human beings.

He did it in the Garden and he's been doing it every time someone is conceived in this world. And you sit here today as the recipient of his life. "In him was life and the life was the light of man." There's our first reference to life. You are living, you are alive, this light has animated who you are.

Now we shift tenses of the verbs here, verse 5. The light shown... No, the light somehow came into existence... No, "The light shines," present tense, right now, "in the darkness." So, now we have the metaphor of darkness contrasting to light, and right now, there's a penetration of the light into darkness.

Well that must mean more than light in terms of life. We must now be into a different kind of reference here, a secondary reference. Well, Jesus really has a lot to say about that. That's the whole point of Jesus making the metaphor of life when he comes and talks, he says, "Listen, I'm the light of the world. If you follow me, I'll give you the light of life." Well, those people were already alive. They had already been granted the life that was given in the Garden, they're already human beings breathing and thinking, rational beings. But God now says there's a different kind of light. There's a second kind of life. Let's use that other qualifier and adjective, it's "eternal" life.

"I'm going to give you that. I going to give you a whole other life." "I came to bring you life," John 10 says, "and that more abundantly." It's a different category of life. "In him was life and the life was the light of man." You're alive, but now that light now shines in the darkness and, you know what, the darkness couldn't beat it back, couldn't overcome it.

And there are people being born again, if you want to put it in those terms, as John 3 does, even right now in this world. And there are people who care about that very much, like John verse 6, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him," because that's the operative word, isn't it? For us to put our trust in him, to recognize that he has the solution to our problem.

And John was all about making sure people knew that. He wanted to see people believe through him, not Christ, through him, through him the agency, the missionary, the one who says, "You need to trust in Christ." He is the conduit of people understanding this, he's a witness. Not just like in our English language we can say someone witnessed an accident or a crime and then they may or may not testify. That's not how it's used here. Witness is always the active one who bears witness, who tells the story, and it says here, John is the one telling the story. He's witnessing or bearing witness to the light that all might believe through him. He, that is John, was not the light. He came to bear witness about the light, the true light, which gives, present tense, light to everyone.

Now you could say, "Well that must be the light in verse 4 that they're being animated, they're human and human life comes from God. No. This is that other kind of light, in verse 5, we're talking about the kind of light that comes into our lives when we are born again, when we're regenerate, when we're made new. "Well, that goes to everyone?" Well, not everyone without exception, but everyone without distinction, follow that now. John is making a big point throughout all of his writings in that regard. When he says in the book of Revelation, "Every tongue, tribe, and nation" he's talking about God bringing this gift not just to the children of Abraham but to everyone. As Paul would put it, to slave, to free, to barbarians, Scythian, these are available promises to everyone

and that light is shining, it's penetrating the darkness, the darkness has not overcoming it, and it's coming into the world and to everyone without distinction we see that.

He, that is the light, the true light, Jesus, the Word, was in the world. From John's perspective in the 90s, Jesus had been gone for about 60 years when he penned these words. While he was gone from the world now, it's called The Ascension, he went back to the Father for a time, he's going to come back a second time, but "He was in the world, the world was made through him" and the irony of all this, the people that he made didn't even recognize him, "yet the world did not know him. He came to his own."

Now I know exactly what verse 9 means because he's now talking about his people, Israel. John is writing to the Gentiles, to the world, so they would know that this Messiah from Israel was not just for the Israelites. And he says to them now, listen, "He came to his own" and his own people, the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham "they didn't receive him." Now is that an exclusive statement too, is that an all inclusive statement? No. Because John is a Jewish man and he received him, he embraced him by faith. So Paul was, I mean, Peter, James, John, all these guys. So we're talking about the fact that, by and large, it wasn't this huge revival of the accepting of the Messiah. No, as a matter of fact, Paul shows us in the book of Acts the turning to the Gentiles and all these Gentiles now take over the center stage in the book of Acts. We sit here today primarily as a church around the world made up mostly of Gentiles with the Jewish people as the minority who trust in Jesus Christ. "He came to his own and his own did not receive him. But to all who did receive him," from all different backgrounds, from all different socio-economic strata in the world, "all who did receive him," and just to clarify what we mean by that, who trust in him, believe in him, "believe in his name" and all that he came to accomplish, "he gave the right..." You can say it, you can claim this for yourself, if you've trusted in his name, that you've "become a child of God." "All who did receive him, who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." Well that's an interesting metaphor. I'm now rightly related to my Creator. "Who were born," which John 3 is going to tell us all about, being born a second time into another plane of life, this connection with my creator, "not of blood," not about the descendancy from Abraham, "nor of the will of the flesh," two people sitting down and saying, "Hey, I'm going to have a child." I don't sit down with my wife and say, "Hey, our next-door neighbor, we're going to save our next-door neighbor." I can't do that. I can't will that. God has no grandchildren. I have to recognize this is a decision of man. Right? No, not even the will of man. When it comes down to it, my neighbor can't even respond to this in his own fallenness. His birth has to be an intervention "of God." The last two words. but it's a birth from God, of God.

Verses 1 through 13, even as I read it for you, it breaks down nicely into three sections. Let's take these one at a time: verses 1 through 5, 6 through 9, 10 through 13, as it's laid out in your worksheet. I'd love for you to take you just a couple notes on this. Let's start with this. As we think about the beginning, before time, was the existing one who ever existed, the Eternal One, he called himself the I Am, the ever existing, always present, always alive one, Christ, who was with God, he had an eternal fellowship before time, who was God, who created all things. God worked through Christ as the instrument of creation, all of that, that person came into this world. That is a huge statement. And at Christmas, whether we're using the metaphor of light or not, we're putting up a tree, we're just singing Christmas carols, what we're celebrating is the most important person who could ever bear the label "person." The most important person. The person who is the archetypal prototype, the blueprint of all other people. God. God in human form, if you really want to get close to who we are, who walked among us, who was put in that veiled little cloak of flesh called humanity.



We celebrate the coming of God to this world. I know he's gone now. He left, but he came! And God drew near. There was a word for that back in the Old Testament. "Emmanuel" God with us. Then he went in the ascension and it's like, "Oh, God left us." That's what it feels like. Now I understand that and he did. He went to receive the kingdom as he said in that parable in Luke that we studied recently.

He went to go to prepare a place for us, as John 14 says. But he's coming again, so we live between these comings, but we've got to look back because we celebrate the first Advent, the first arrival. And what we're celebrating is the most important person in the world drew near to the planet. He came and walked among us.

Number one on your outline. Let's "Celebrate The Most Important Person." This December, whether you feel like it or not, let's, as Psalm 103 says, let's start commanding your heart and your soul to say, "You know what, it's worth celebrating that the most important person came to our planet." We celebrate the arrival of the Living God, the transcendent God, the God who has all the attributes and the fullness of deity, he came to earth. Dude, if you told me Prince Harry and his new fiancée came over to our house last weekend, I'll bet you'd be bragging about that. Even you, you non-Brits. Right? You all seem to be into the "royal family" and you know it's just a farce anyway. Right? What kind of a royal family is it. They have no power. But, you know, real royalty came to the planet. He came to the other side of the planet, he walked those streets, that's why some of you pay \$3,000 to get on a plane and go walk the streets in the places that Jesus went. You go on a boat on the Sea of Galilee, you want to be where Jesus was because God himself came and dwelt among us.

That's an amazing thought. And we think back to it, it started in a little place outside in a field, where the cattle were, where the shepherds were watching their sheep by night, God came and dwelt among us. The Annunciation in Nazareth, the little town up north, here was a girl who was told you, right now, are going to carry within your own body, the fullness of deity in that little tiny preborn body. God drew near to the planet. It was hard to see. It was hard to recognize.

He just looked like a normal traveling itinerant guy who had a background in carpentry, which may have been stone masonry back then, but you were in some kind of building profession. I mean, come on, you don't look like God. You remember the transfiguration? When Jesus took Peter, James and John up to a mountain and he said, "I just want to show you something." It's almost like, you know, being one of these movies with all the special effects, but you can't see him peeling back his humanity. Peter, James and John are like, "Whoa, we got to build shrines up here. That was amazing what you showed us." That's the reality of who Christ is. That's who Christ is right now and that's who Christ was then. But he put on this frail exterior. He dressed down the majesty that he was. But that God drew near.

Just really, really quickly, would you turn to Revelation Chapter 1 with me, the last book of the Bible? Look at Chapter 1 when John, the John who writes this prologue, that we're studying here, under the direction and supervision of the Holy Spirit, he wrote this about his experience with the resurrected Christ on the island of Patmos. And he writes this, the last book of our Bible, in Revelation Chapter 1 verse 13, just to jump in the middle of it. "In the midst," he's speaking now, this one who's speaking of, the one who speaking to him, he's in the midst of the lamp stands. You Sunday school graduates, what did the lamp stands in Revelation stand for? What do they represent? Churches. OK? This one "in the midst of the lamp stands..." Now, he's here, obviously, in an omni-present sense, ever present, equally present in all places at all times. But at one point he came and literally stood among the churches of the people who put their trust in him. And he was

"one like a son of man."

I hope I have taught you well enough and you've been around Compass, whenever you read that phrase, that should take your mind back to Daniel Chapter 7, which is the most amazing passage in the Old Testament, almost. I mean, there are lots of candidates for that title, but here it is a passage where you've got someone who has all the dominion, all the authority, all the power, everyone should bow to this figure, and he's one who is now in a package like a child of a person, a human being. All divinity is described in Daniel 7 and yet it exists in the package of a human being, the son of man. And there's someone like that "clothed with a long robe" because, of course, in Daniel 7, he has all authority like a king in an ancient monarchy would have this huge robe. And he's got a "golden sash around his chest and the hairs of his head were white, white like wool, white like snow."

Well, he should get a little hair color there. Get that to look a little better. No, see that's the picture in the Old Testament, that's the picture in the Hebraic idiom of wisdom, he has all knowledge in his eyes. He sees everything. He sees right through everything. "They're like flames of fire, his feet like burnished bronze," he steps and destroys on anything he wants, "refined in a furnace" burning hot.

And his voice, well, he doesn't whisper to you. He's like the roar of Niagara Falls, the roar of many waters. In his right hand he holds seven stars, from his mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword." When he wants to say something it makes a difference in his face. Look at this, talk about the light, "His face was like the sun shining in full strength." Go out and stare at the sun after the service is over. You don't even have to stare at it. Just give me ten seconds looking at the sun. You're going to get your eyeballs hurt. Here's John saying this one who I walked with around the shores of the Sea of Galilee, the one I watched dragging across through the city of Jerusalem, the one I saw them spit upon and Roman soldiers beat upon, that is the God of the universe. "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Heaven gets excited about that, they worship that.

Turn to Chapter 5, you're in Revelation. As long as we're here, before we leave this great book, let's go here to this passage. Revelation Chapter 5. They celebrate in heaven the first advent of Christ. Because it is the first advent of Christ, by the way, I know the second advent is going to be a lot more exciting for us it seems, but Jesus did all the heavy lifting for humanity in the first coming. And it ended on a Roman execution rack. It says in verse 9, heaven is singing about that first Advent. They sing, because, of course, we're looking at the scroll, it's got all these seals, all these gum seals on it and they're unpacking it and they're saying who's worthy to take the scrolls and break its seals. Well, the one who was slain.

Who's this one on a throne, this heavenly one, who was slain? "And by your blood," you purchased, "you ransomed people from every tribe, language, people and nation, and you've made them a kingdom." They're ruling regents here, "and priests," they have access to God. "And they're going to reign on Earth." You took sinners who deserved your punishment, you "made them a kingdom and priest to our God, and they're going to reign," their future is a reigning class.

"And then I looked and I heard around the throne the living creatures," these bizarre creatures you read about in your Daily Bible Reading, I hope, because we just went through Ezekiel. So bizarre, we don't know much about them, try to write a book on the four living creatures, all you can do is describe them. We don't even understand what's going on with them. But these living creatures and these 24 elders representing, I'm assuming the Old Testament and the New Testament leaderships in some figurative way, and the voice of many angels, which we hardly understand, "numbering



myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands." What are they excited about?

They're excited about the first advent of Christ because he accomplished our salvation. They sang with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain," the cross of Christ, his death. He's worthy because of that "to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" and a few Christmas parties and some Christmas lights and a few gifts that you give. Oh, he's worthy of everything you could do to celebrate that person. He's worthy of all that. If you went broke this December celebrating him that would be worth it. It would be foolish but it would be worth it. He deserves it. That would be appropriate. He deserves everything. "And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth." You know that non-Christians right now, even damned people... I mean, there's some supposition in this, there's a little speculative theology here, but even as I read of Jesus, the rich man and Lazarus talking about that parable, you've got people who are in hell, being punished for their sin, recognizing the truth of Christ and his mechanism of salvation in the cross. I think there's no way they don't recognize he is worthy to receive everything. Now they didn't give it to him in the time that it mattered. They've lost all opportunity for salvation, but they know he's really worthy. It's right. Every creature, heaven, earth, under the earth and in the sea and all that's in them said, "Hey, to him who sits on the throne," that's God the Father, "and to the Lamb," that's the Word, the agency, the instrumentality of God, "be blessing and honor and glory and might," all the way into the 21st century, "forever." Have you really celebrated the person of God in human form, Jesus Christ?

Oh, they'll call us, you know, names. Muslims will say, you know, we're polytheists. This is the God who is, the eternal fellowship, his Son possesses all attributes of divinity and he is the focus of the worship of heaven and the four weird living creatures we don't understand in verse 14, they said, "Ah, you've gone overboard." No. They say, "Right on! You're right." That's what amen means, "You're right. You're right. Amen. That's correct." And all these elders, these 24 who represent Old and New Testament, fell down, fell off their chairs, worshiped. Celebrate the most important person.

If light can help you recognize it, because Christ's face, according to Revelation 1, is like the sun. That's what we learned in Luke Chapter 1 when we studied the narrative there of the birth of Christ. It spoke of that prophecy of the sun rising. That's the birth of Christ. The sun is going to rise. Well, it seems like it's set because of the Ascension, he's gone. Oh, it's going to come back, even as Peter says later, it's going to rise again. But, right now, what we do is celebrate the first arrival of Christ, the rising of the light of Christ. When Jesus said he's the light of the world he came and shed his light on this planet, and we're grateful with that light shines in darkness. There are people, I hope I have a room full of people right now, who recognize that the darkness has not overcome you. You don't sit in ignorance of this, the world might. They may have their parties, they may put up their decorations, they may try to sell their trinkets in the mall, but we're here to celebrate this Christmas the advent and arrival of the most powerful and important person in all the universe, Jesus Christ. Celebrate him.

And if you're wise you'll do what John did in verse 6. He comes realizing he's got a commission from God and you do too. We talked about it just before Thanksgiving. You got a commission from God. You are an ambassador of Christ. You're here to represent him in this world.

There was a man sent from God, his name was John, verse 7, he came as a witness to bear witness about the life that all might believe. Here's his passion: I want people to trust him, who acknowledge him, who recognized Christ is who he says he is.

John wasn't the light, he's not calling attention to himself. He said I must decrease, he must increase, but he came to bear witness about the light. He said, "I'm not worthy to untie his sandal but you need to recognize how great he is." The true light, again we're talking now about present tense verbs. It gives light to everyone. Everyone without distinction. You know it was coming into the world and as we look back at the first Advent you ought to be pointing people back to the first Advent. You ought to represent that message, the message that Christ came to take people who sit in darkness and give them hope. Hope of what? A yacht, better income, clear skin, strong nails, kids who obey them, get good grades, kids in Ivy League schools, healthy bodies? No. Hope that we do not have to face an eternity where we sit in outer darkness, where there's weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, because you and I deserve to be there. Instead, that we've got the hope of being priests, being kings, ruling in a place we don't deserve to be, with all the lavished grace upon us, putting us and qualifying us to be regents with God. I mean, that's an amazing thought.

Number two, you need to represent that message like John did. "Represent The Most Important Message." There is no other message that is more important than that and all this cheap nonsense from pulpits about us improving our lives and rearranging the seats on the deck of the Titanic as we go down, makes no sense.

I don't care if you're a billionaire, a millionaire or whether you're in debt a million dollars. What really matters is whether or not you are a child of God, that's all that matters. And, you know, that's all the matters with your neighbor, your extended family member, the people you work with, the people that live across the street, the people who, you know, have kids in their soccer league that your kids are in, that's all that matters for them. And it ought to be our passion, that like the very bold and unashamed John the Baptist, you say, "I want people to believe in him."

You're in John, then go to John 3. Let's go to a verse, I don't know, 16. Do you know that verse? "Well, I don't even need to turn there." Well unless you can quote verse 15 to me by memory, then you do need to turn there. Because we quote John 3:16 all the time, or at least we know it, we know it well. But what we don't know very well, is we don't know the context.

And it's unfortunate that even the English Standard Version translators have to put a heading on here, I guess just to let us know, "Here comes the most famous verse in the Bible, 'For God so loved the world.'" and puts a nice big break between verses 14, 15 and 16. But I'd like to give it its contextual due. In verse 16, you know the verse, "God so loved the world he gave his only son, whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." That's great. That's the light of life. That's the believe in me, "I'm the light of the world. If you believe in me you're not going to walk in darkness. You'll have the light of life." These are the quotes from Jesus. John 8:12. Great.

What's this "gave his only son" part? See, if you give that message to the world they're going to look at you and go, "God loves me. Did something for me. Some death involved, yeah, not perish, eternal life, I guess that's great. I hope that works out. Do I have to sign something? OK." What you really need to give them is the context. The message we're giving them has to be connected to versus 14 and 15. You've got to know a little Biblical background to get the full weight of this, but it says, "As Moses lifted up the serpent." Do you like snakes? If you do you're really weird. There's an enmity between humans and snakes. I met a couple of weirdos who like snakes. But they were known, not for liking snakes, but for being weird. You don't like snakes. You didn't bring a snake to church, did you? You're weird if you did. Snakes. No one likes snakes. Why would Moses be constructing a snake and putting it up on a pole and lifting it up in the wilderness? And why would you ever compare a snake on a pole to Jesus being lifted up? What do you mean by that? Does that mean praise and worship? It has nothing to do with praise and worship.

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." Now let me talk about the motive. God loved the world, that's why he gave his Son, like a snake up on a pole, so that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Do you see how all that all fits together? I wish we didn't divide it by headings, by paragraph changes.

See, in Numbers the people were rebellious and sinful, they felt entitled, they were spoiled brats, they had all kinds of sin in their life they weren't willing to see and God said, "I love these people enough to try and show them their sin so that they will just acknowledge their sin, they would turn from their sin, I would grant them life and everything would be great. That's all we're doing. Trying to get people to recognize the problem of sin and saying, "God's got a solution." Well, the solution in the wilderness was weird, but it certainly matched the problem. The problem was venomous snakes. God said all your rebellion here, I'm going to give you a little bit of pain here for you to come to repentance and he sends snakes into their lodging where they were sojourning. So snakes were slithering in the tent at night. Can you imagine moms, you got your kids trying to keep them... We're going from place to place in the desert and you hear a snake. You get woken up in the middle of the night with a snake crawling between you and your child, biting you. Look it up. Venomous snake bites and its physical manifestations: dizziness, vomiting, nausea, muscle spasms, respiratory labored breathing. Obviously, you're getting swelling and, I mean, it's horrible. You feel like you're dying because, in fact, you are dying with a venomous snake bite if you don't get help. You need an anti-venom, right, that's what we do today. Well, there no anti-venom. No one had that in their little refrigerator out there, no syringes, we had people dying.

And he said, listen, this is because of your sin. So what they needed to do was repent. So they could have prayed a prayer, confess their sins, God would heal them. God said, "No, I'm want to add an extra step. Hey Moses, go out there in the shed and build a bronze snake." "A snake?" "Yeah, a snake. You got that snake right now. Build it and then put it on a pole," on a standard, maybe with a cross at the top of it, which probably is how it worked. So you put the snake over the top and "put it up there and hold it up there."

Like a scene from, you know, Indiana Jones. You got this thing on a stick up here. And speaking of Indiana Jones, that's what their villages looked like as they were traveling around with snakes everywhere. "And what I want people to do, while you're constructing this, is think about the problem of their sin, and once you're ready, you put it up on that pole, you have people look at that. And as they look at that and gaze at that, I'll heal them." That's the weirdest thing ever.

I'm thinking I don't want to think about my problem if I'm gonna get my problems fixed, and that's exactly what God does. "Here's the snake you despise, here's the snake that you fear, here's the snake that caused all the problems. Here, look at it. Gaze at it."

The New Testament says, Second Corinthians 5, "God made him who knew no sin to be sin." What's a picture of sin? Jesus dying on a cross. Here's the ultimate sinner. What? That's blasphemy. No. "God made him who knew no sin to be sin."

Here's the ultimate. God treating him like a pedophile, God treating him like an adulterer, God treating him like a pornographer, God treating him like a gossip, God treating him like he beats his spouse, God is treating this man like a sinner on a big pole, dying. And God says, you look at that, there's not a person in this room who is saved who has not, in the imagination of their mind, gazed at Christ on that cross and said, "He's there because of my sin." And God says, "You gaze at that



snake and I'll take all that consequence of your sin away and you'll be restored. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up" and he was, thrown in a hole in the ground by Roman soldiers after being beaten to where he was unrecognizable, the Old Testament says, and whoever believes in him, you gaze at him, you look at him, you trust in him.

As Paul wrote to the Galatian churches, it's as though Christ were crucified, he was portrayed as crucified, before your very eyes. Did you look into the cross of Christ and say, "My sin put him there and his death erased my consequences." That's the message that frees you. That's the message that changes everything about who you are before the living God. The Bible says that that will as we read in our Daily Bible Reading, just yesterday I think it was, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light," because in him is no darkness at all, not only do "we have fellowship with one another, but the blood," the blood that streamed down that Roman execution rack, "the blood of Jesus his Son will cleanse us from all sins."

I stand here today, not because of my background is any better than yours. I can think back to all the things that have caused me shame as a kid from the youngest years, and here I am saying I have no sin attached to my account. I will stand before God one day, I'll have to answer for sin in the Christian life, I understand that, but there's no condemnation for me, I will not suffer for my sin, I will not be cast into outer darkness. And it took place in one moment when I transferred my trust from my own goodness, which I realize now is nothing, to Christ. That's the Gospel. And if your neighbor would think that way and gaze in the imagination of his mind of Christ portrayed on the cross as the sin that he committed, puts his trust in him in a penitent faith, cleanse you from all sin. That's the most important message and you need to represent it this Christmas. Christ came to die on a cross. Oh yes, he came to live and fulfill all righteousness and that was critically important, but the ultimate apex of his ministry was for him to die on a cross so that my sin could somehow be eradicated from my account. His resurrection, of course, guaranteed it and verified it, but the cross is the focus of it all and John is saying, I want people to believe that.

How do we do it? Three quick things, can I add this to the second point? You're representing the most important message. Now you're in December, how do I do it? Number one, Matthew Chapter 5 verses 14 through 16. Passages you know, "You're the light of the world." Remember that passage Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount?

You're the light of the world. A city set on a hill can't be hidden. You don't take a lamp put it under a bushel or a jar. You put it in the middle of the room, put it on a stand so the light can be seen by everyone. "So you too, let your light shine before men so that they might see your..." What is it? "Good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

What kind of good works are we talking about there? Well, the same kind in First John 1. John says, "God is light, in him there is no darkness." If you say you walk in the light or you say you're part of this light, you're in the light, I'll quoted accurately, here. "If we say that we have fellowship with him," this one who's in the light, "and yet we walk in darkness then we lie and we don't practice the truth."

So what I need is a consistent life that backs up the fact that I'm with God, God who is light. I can't be perfect, I'm working on it but can't be, the limitations of my fallenness. But you know what, I've changed the trajectory and pattern of my life. I am now trying to live a life that is distinctive from the life I once lived. Therefore, I want to live a distinctively holy life. And that means I'm not going to be like everyone else. And in some ways that doesn't sound like it's going to appeal to our neighbors, co-workers and friends, but I guarantee you it makes a statement. And some people, who



get right with God, end up saying, "Hey, I glorify my Father in heaven for that person's righteous life." It's called integrity.

Number one, if you're taking some notes here, or Letter A, you want to represent the message? Let's start with this: "Live A Distinctively Holy Life" this December. The world's going to party in December and have their office parties and tell their jokes and do their things and their funny cards. You can't live the way they live. You have to say, "No, I can't run with..."

And they will malign you for that. Peter says, if you don't run in the same excess of dissipation that they do, but you need to say, "You know what, I don't live that way. I'm sorry." You're not going to turn your nose up. You're not going to be smug about it.

They'll call you "holier than thou" and I hope you will be holier than they. Right? But you're not going to sit there with your nose in the air, you're just going to say, "I can't do that. Can't deny Christ, I can't do the things that he died for here and I can't laugh at the jokes, I can't go to those places, I can't get drunk at your party. I'm sorry, I can't." Live distinctively holy lives. And right now they may not think that's a great thing, but let me give you a second thing that they may think is a little greater than you not participating in their sin.

How about this one? Titus Chapter 2 verses 9 and 10. This is great as long as I'm talking about your everyday, work-a-day week and world, Titus 2:9-10 gives us employment context, if you will, it's a bit of a stretch, talking about bondservants, but it's saying, hey, if you're serving this master in that work, here's the words, you need to do things that are "well pleasing ... so that you may," next verse, "adorn the doctrine of our God and Savior." So I'm supposed to do things that are well pleasing. Now, here's what's probably not well pleasing to my non-Christian co-workers and boss, when I don't laugh at their jokes or go get drunk at their parties. They're not all that well pleased by that. So I've got to think in a whole different way when I think about this next thing. If I want to "adorn the doctrine of our God and Savior," I'd like them to be saved, I'd like them to put their trust in the Savior, in Christ, I need now, I put it this way, to have extra ordinarily kind deeds, because kindness does speak to them, doesn't it? As a matter of fact, on the back of your worksheet, I put a question on there for your small groups, if you're meeting this week, question number 4. I gave you three passages and one of them is the passage I'm quoting right now, Titus Chapter 2. And I'm asking this question: what type of Christian good works, what kind of well pleasing deeds, resonate positively with our on looking world. Let's think very specifically about your on looking world, your neighbors, your friends, your co-workers, your extended non-Christian family. What speaks positively to them? Now I had to put this in parentheses because if I just asked my non-Christian friends, "Hey, what would you like me as a Christian to be like?" They would say all kinds of things that would compromise my Biblical standards. "I wish you'd stop being so puritanical about your sexual ethics. I would wish you would approve of these things that we like to do." No, I can't do any of that. So I'm going to think specifically about a group of things that will adorn the Gospel. What does that mean? Make the Gospel, the doctrine of our God and Savior, look good. And I'm thinking what are the extraordinarily kind things. Are you an extraordinarily kind person in your non-Christian circles? Are you the one who is extraordinarily generous, extraordinarily sacrificial? Are you, just to use the ad nauseam phrase I use so often, are you willing to go the extra mile with those people? Are you willing to stay the extra hour? Are you willing to spend the extra dollar? If there's someone hurting, are you the first one to step up and say, "Hey, I'll bring meals to your house." Are you willing to sit there and deal with the problems in your office with those people and say, "I'll take care of that for you"? Are you able to, even in the generosity of gift giving here in this season of the year, to really go in and, it's not a part of your expense account or whatever, and say, "Hey, I care about you, I want to express that through a gift and I'm willing to be extraordinarily generous

toward you.

We do this for our king and he is worthy of everything. And just like John who was doing it all for his king, the son of righteousness, the light of the world, he was willing to do whatever it took. I want to live a distinctively holy life. That'll speak to the integrity of the Christian life. And I want to do extraordinarily kind deeds whether it's sacrifice, service, generosity, whatever it might be, to make the Gospel look good. That might attune a few ears to the Gospel.

Then lastly, John Chapter 1 verses 43 through 46. As long as we're in John 1, if you're still there, dropped down to verse 43 when Jesus comes to Galilee, he finds Philip, and says, "Follow me." He does follow him. He's from the town of Bethsaida, which is on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, up north. It's the city of Andrew and Peter, just for reference sake. Philip goes and finds Nathaniel there in Bethsaida and he says, "Hey, we found him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Now that meant a lot to him, doesn't mean much to your coworkers, but you ought to tell them, "We found the one the Bible says will solve our ultimate problem." And certainly that reference to the Messiah gave them a sense of that, you should give your friends a sense of that. "I found someone who solves the ultimate problem, takes my sin away and guarantees my future, takes away the fear of death. I've got a relationship with my maker because of this person called Jesus Christ." Let them know that. They might respond this way, verse 46, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Or like this: "Really? Jesus? Oh, that Bible stuff, with all those old strictures of ethics and sexual things and all the things you guys are against? Really? Can anything good come out of that?" Philip said something very helpful, three words, "Come and see." I put it this way. After you live a distinctively holy life and you engage in some extraordinarily kind deeds, you need to sincerely call people to investigate Christ. We need more of that in this season of the year. "Come check it out. Check it out." I can't take them to Riverside or Arcadia or Pasadena to show them Christ because Christ is not geographically here, but I can show the data, I can give them the information that puts them face to face with Christ portrayed as crucified. I can give them a Bible, I can give them a New Testament, I can talk to them about Christ. I can bring them to places like this, where we talk and share the message of light to people.

Let me help you in that regard. The ushers are going to come down and I always try to give something at Christmas time that will help you invite people. I got a little card this year. Our graphics team was so smart to do in a different way. Not only is it a different shape but this thing is like made of steel. It's like so thick. Not only will it fly a long way and hurt people if it hits them in the wrong place but this will be a great little card that will remind them of what's going on here at Compass. Now, it focuses on Christmas Eve because Christmas Eve, as Pastor Lucas said, all afternoon we're going to have services at 12:30, 2:00, 3:30 and 5:00, but everything, let me just make this commitment to you right now, everything from next weekend on, to the end of this year, is all focused on making sure your non-Christian outsider comes into this auditorium and has some sense that we're not just here huddling up talking to ourselves about these things.

There's going to be an openness about, "Hey, we want to make sure we're speaking in terms you understand, we're going to talk about the Gospel, it starts with this big play next week, invite them to that. Invite them to the week after that, I'm going to preach on the narrative of the infancy of Christ there in Matthew 2, focusing on the character of Joseph and then, the next weekend is Christmas Eve, and this card gives you the times and gives you a little map. Take a few of these and if you only took one because you're in the front section here, there's always more out there on the tables and grab five or six of these and just say to some people come and see, after you're living an integrous life in front of them and you are doing extraordinarily kind things to them, bring them



some kind of invite and tell them, "Hey, not only do I want you to come and see the data in a Bible or let me talk to you about Christ, I'd love for you to come and see what's going on in terms of what we're doing this December in celebrating Christ. Represent that most important message that way, as I said to you just before Thanksgiving, we're ambassadors of Christ. The question is whether we're any good at it. I'm trying to help you in that regard.

Well, you said, "Well, you've already read verses 10 through 13 for me and it doesn't look like many people are going to respond." Well, that's true. Maybe not the people you expect to respond will respond.

Certainly the people who Christ should have just, without any question, won over, they weren't won over. He was in the world, the world was made through him, the world didn't know him though. He came to his own people, trained in the synagogues, who knew all these Old Testament passages, apparently they did, they should have, and they didn't receive him. But there were people who they didn't expect who did, all who did receive him. A lot of Gentiles in that mix. There were some tax collectors, there were fishermen, there were some political zealots, all who did believe him. Even a couple of Pharisees he gave the right to become children of God. They were born not by bloodline, they were not born of the will of the flesh, they weren't born by the decision of a man, they were born of God. It's a God thing. If it's a God thing and God's going to pick people from all over, he's going to point people to eternal life and those are the people who are going to respond and we don't know who they are because they're not marked with an "X" on their forehead, then what we're going to need to do is pray.

Number three, let's put it this way. We need to pray that these people who are blinded to the truth will have their eyes open. That's an amazing miracle. "Pray For The Most Important Miracle." It has nothing to do with prosperity, it has nothing to do with us being healthy, it has everything to do with us having our eyes open to see the light of the Gospel. And once you write that down turn quickly with me to Second Corinthians Chapter 4. You can just use this as your theme this December. This is what we're all about right here. Second Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 1. The Apostle Paul took his job seriously just like John the Baptist and he understood this: If I'm going to have any success in representing the message then God is going to have to open up hearts, open up eyes, to see the light of the Gospel.

He knew his ambassadorship and I hope we do too. He's about to explore it further in Chapter 5 but right here in Chapter 4 verse 1, he says, "Having this ministry by the mercy of God," we don't deserve it, we don't deserve to see the light of the Gospel, but we do and, thankfully, now we're called to be fishers of men. "We don't lose heart," even though it would be easy to lose heart because a lot of people are rejecting this message. But I tell you what we have done. "We've renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways." We're not about tricking anybody, it's not like selling Amway, we're not trying to, you know, hook people in, bait and switch them. No. "We refuse to practice cunning" or any kind of deceit and we're not, certainly, going to do what is so popular. They were not going "to tamper with the word of God," can't water down. Got to talk about sin, got to talk about all those things, I can't just quote John 3:16 without quoting 14 and 15. I mean we've got to deal with the issues of sin and the problem needs to be solved. We get that, "We're not tampering with the word, but rather by an open statement of the truth," and while some will reject it some are going embrace it and "we commend ourselves" hopefully living an integrous life "to everyone's conscience in the sight of God." You know we're sincere. We know we're living this, we're practicing what we preach. And by the way, "Even if our Gospel is veiled," and in some irrational way they reject it. Oh it's veiled, not to those who are chosen, not to those who are right with God, not to those who are right for... No, it's veiled to those who are perishing, they can't see it.



Why? Verse 4. "In their case the god," small 'g', "of this world," that Satan, "has blinded the minds of unbelievers." Oh, that seems impossible, yet powerful spiritual forces blinding people's eyes, "to keep them from seeing," look at this, here's our phrase, "the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ," everything and John 1 we've talked about, "who" by the way, "is the image of God." Sounds like John 1. "For what we proclaim is not ourselves," like John the Baptist, we decrease, he increases, we're all about putting the focus on him. We're not the light, we come to bear witness of the light. We reflect the light at best, we're reflectors, we're trying to point people to the sun, s-u-n, his face shining like the... Jesus Christ as King, as Lord. And ourselves, we just want to be your servants, go the extra mile, extra hour, extra dollar. How can we help? And we do that, not for our sake, not for your sake, but we do it for Christ's sake. God, think about this, who said, "Let the light shine out of darkness." Now we're back again to Genesis 1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The first thing he did was, "Let there be light."

The one who said, "Let there be light" out of nothing, created out of nothing, he has shone, it's like a similar miracle, he has shone in our hearts, he just blasted this light in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God when we looked at the visage, the face of Jesus Christ. Think about that. God at one point, I hope, took the blinders off your eyes and you're like, "I get it. I see it." It's not because you are smart, not because you are better than your neighbor, but because God gave you that gracious unveiling of the truth. If they're born, not of your persuasion, not of the right lineage, they're not born just because they make good decisions, they're born of God, then we need to be praying for that miracle.

Now I know this sounds pretty redundant cause I say this kind of thing all the time. We're going to ask you to do this in four different ways. Number one, Letter A. Start "Praying For Our Entire Generation Of Christians" all over the world. You understand we're part of the 21st century Christian Church, capital "C" all over the world. There are Christians in Australia, there are Christians in Sweden, there are Christians in Egypt, there are Christians in Iraq, there are Christians everywhere in this world. And, you know what, we, as a generation of Christians, need to do our job because the 22nd century is coming, if Christ delays his return, and what kind of church are we going to hand off to them, an anemic church, a strong church, a biblically sound church? We need to do our job. All over the world we have to do our job. Pray for this generation of Christians everywhere in the world to be effective in building and sustaining the Church, capital "C".

Number two, Letter B. "Pray For Compass Bible Church." That's your church, I trust. Here's how I like to pray in my prayer list, "Make a dent." Let Compass Bible Church make a dent in south Orange County. That's what I want to do. I don't want to sit here and tuck out of our offices and come together and just do our worship thing and keep our religion in our pew, you know, like they say, "Keep it in your homes and your pew, don't bother us with it." No. I want to make a dent in this culture for Christ. That doesn't mean we're out there with signs and bullhorns, trying to tell everyone their sinful and going to hell, but it does mean we sit in coffee shops and we sit in people's front rooms and we sit at the lunchroom and we say, "Yeah, we've got a problem called sin and it's going to cost us our eternal life. But Jesus Christ has come to solve the problem." Pray that Compass Bible Church to make a dent. I hope you get to heaven, stand before the Bema Seat of Christ, and he goes, "Oh, there is one of those ones from Compass Bible Church." I know you'll stand there on your own, this is an imaginary statement but, it would be great, wouldn't it, to say, "Oh yeah, you're from that very productive, fruitful, harvesting church." That's what I hope you're identified with. I don't want you in a church where he says, "Oh, you're on that back-slapping, we're all comfortable, we got ours, don't bother anybody else, church." Pray for a radical church that makes a difference in our culture for Christ.



Thirdly, how about your family? What about the people who share your last name who are connected to you. People whose pictures are up on the wall of your hallway at home. Can you pray that they become the instruments of many people coming to Christ? Wouldn't it be great for you to think, "I want my kids..." If I can think of a team, I got a mini team here, my grown kids, my wife, my brother, my sister-in-law, my parents, I want all of us who share that last name, I want us to make a difference. I want us to be an instrument. I want our family, I know we stand alone before God, but when we walk through the gates of the New Jerusalem behind us is a trail of people who came to Christ through the Fabarez family. It would be a great way to think about it. Pray for my family.

Lastly, of course, I pray for myself. Pray for a generation of Christians, pray for the Compass Bible Church family, pray for your biological family, and pray for you, the guy you look at in the mirror every morning. Pray that you represent Christ in this way.

Colossians Chapter 4. Matter of fact, real quickly, take a look at this if you're fast on your Bible. Colossians Chapter 4 verses 5 and 6. Three ways I want you to pray for yourself. A lot of this is review. It sums up everything we've talked about. Chapter 4 verse 5, Paul says, "Walk in wisdom." This has nothing to do with your gait. This is Paul's favorite word for how you live your life. "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders," toward non-Christian. And this December, I want to think about that, I want my life to be integrous, I want to make sure I'm living a distinctively holy life, I'm going to make sure I'm doing extraordinarily kind deeds, I want to "walk in wisdom toward outsiders making the best use of the "kairos." Two words in Greek, obviously, for time, I've told you through the years. Kairos opportunity "kronos," ticks on a clock. It's not make the best use of the time you've got before you're going to go away, that's one way to say it, but some translations even translate it "opportunity." When you have opportunities, and we got one right now, in the mall they're singing, "Hark the Herald Angels, sing glory to the newborn..." What? "King?" It's time for us to take those opportunities and go, "Hey, do you know what that's all about?" Do you know how Biblically ignorant our culture is? They don't even know what's going on at Christmas. I mean, you can be the walking Wikipedia who just says, "I knew a little bit about this thing called Christmas. Let me tell you what it's commemorating."

"Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time." And, of course, you're going to have to use your mouth. Verse 6, "Let your speech be gracious." Wise actions, gracious speech. Wise actions, gracious words. Like popcorn that's just got the right amount of butter and salt on it. "Seasoned with salt." Just goes down, it's well received, you're caring about how it comes across, "So that you may know how you ought to," third thing, "answer each person."

I wrote down six words in my notes, this is my prayer. I want to represent Christ this December with wise actions, gracious words and appropriate answers. "Yeah, that's kind of scary, when I have to have some answers. That drives me to the Word every day, drives me to pray, God I want to have the right answers for people. If I start dialogue we're going to start dialoguing, they're going to say some things, I need the right appropriate answer. And they're not answers I might want to give, they're answers I ought to give," that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Pray for the generation of Christians, the Compass Family, your biological family, pray for yourself that you have wise actions, gracious words and appropriate answers this season. This is a God thing, you ought to pray for these things. God's will to change men's hearts.

According to the Goddard Space Flight Center, NASA's organization, in an instrument called the Visible Infrared Radiometer, each December in the United States, cities, as they look down from the satellites, are 20% to 50% brighter when they're observed from space in December.



Some cities in America are 50% brighter this time of year. I just want you to know I am doing my part at my house right now. Come 5:00 o'clock, BAM, I want the satellites to see me. I've seen maps of this. You do the research on this, it's amazing. The United States lights up brighter in December.

Well, I joke about wanting the satellite to see my house from space. I don't really care. Matter of fact, I wouldn't mind if I could go dark from the satellite perspective. But I do care, not about how the satellites look down on me, but how God looks down on me. I'd like him to see us shining brightly. I'd like for him to look at this campus and not just see, "Hey, we put up extra light. So it's great. It's glittering down there in Aliso Viejo." I'd like him to see Compass Bible Church with lives, as Paul said to the Philippians, that you're shining brightly in a dark world. That starts with celebrating the most important person and getting serious about representing the most important message and praying for all aspects of this most important miracle, the miracle of new birth. Let's care about how God sees us. If he looks down on you this December what's he going to see? I hope he sees you shining brightly with the Gospel of Christ.

Let's pray. God help us as we think through our opportunities this December, our social calendars, our domestic calendars, our work calendars, they all collide with a lot of busyness and it's easy to get frustrated, as I have been many, many Christmases, I confess God. You know I sometimes have to pull out Psalm 103 and say, "Bless the Lord, oh my soul" because I don't feel like it. But I pray God we would fight that battle in our hearts to say, you know what, it's worth it. Even in these cultural traditional expressions that we can take and redeem for the Gospel. Putting up lights on our house, I mean no one in my cul-de-sac, for sure, has any Biblical reason for doing it and yet I'm going to drive into my driveway and see those lights and say, "Christ penetrated the darkness and the Gospel is shining right now and I hope it's shining through my words and my actions and my deeds." Make our church a church that's filled with people that think that way and convert our intentions into good actions. Actions that really are characterized by wise kinds of deeds, gracious words and appropriate answers, because we're going to be asked. If that steps up our responsibility and we think, "Oh, we've got to study and too much pressure, it would be better if I didn't have this agenda in my heart." Yeah, it probably would be easier. God I pray you'd help us to see what a privilege it is to be your ambassador, just like an ambassador scooting up his chair to deal with a foreign nation. They care about how they represent their own country. We want to care about how we represent you this December. Reap a harvest God, please, through this church, through my life, through my family. Reap a harvest really all over the world in this generation of 21st century Christians. We need to do our job and do it well. We'd like to leave behind a church that's stronger than the one we inherited. That's a tall order and a big prayer request, but I pray you do it and start in our lives and start in our families and start in our church.

In Jesus name, Amen.