

November 25/26, 2023  
"Light of the World"  
Pastor John Dickson



## **SPEND DAILY TIME WITH GOD AS YOU READ, THINK, PRAY + ACT.**

### **2023 SPIRITUAL PRACTICES**

Intentional activities to deepen our relationship with God and mold us to be more like Jesus.

### **DECEMBER PRACTICE Celebration**

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## **Day 1 Matthew 5:14-16 | Light of the World**

**Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.**  
Matthew 5:15-16

In one of Jesus's most famous teachings, he tells those listening that they are the light of the world. He encourages them to let their light shine so others see their good deeds and glorify God. This week, we look at the three siblings of one family from the fourth century who demonstrated the love of Jesus through word and deed in extraordinary ways. We will see how Macrina cared for orphaned children, Gregory acted as the first recorded abolitionist, and Basil cared for the sick by establishing the first public hospital. Their examples of gospel tandem helped aid in the growth of Christianity in their day.

There are often two perceptions of Christians today. Some view Christians as old-fashioned, judgmental, opinionated and hypocritical. While others view Christians as honest, faithful, kind, loving and caring. Both of these perceptions come from the words and deeds of actual Christians. Like Macrina, Basil and Gregory—we have the opportunity to shine the light of Jesus to the world through our words and deeds. May God be glorified and honored by our gospel tandem.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Reflect on how people might perceive you as a Christian. Would they group you in the negative or the positive group? Which of the words above do you suspect your family members, friends, classmates or co-workers would use to describe you? Wherever you land today, know God's grace is greater than your shortcomings and invite him to help you reflect Christ's heart to those around you.

## **Day 2 Isaiah 51:4 | Care for Children**

**"Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: Instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations."**  
Isaiah 51:4

The image of God as light to the nations stretches back to the Old Testament. In Isaiah, the focus is on God's justice. This week, we look first at one of the siblings, Macrina. Her tandem of word and deed is a great example of the justice of God as a light to the nations. She opposed a fairly common practice of infanticide in her day. Parents would abandon their children to the outdoors, but Macrina and others would rescue these children and raise them as their own. John Dickson shared with us this weekend that millions of people are alive today because of the work of Macrina and others.

The way we treat children today matters too. With many vulnerable children still, Christians can shine the light of Jesus just as bright as Macrina did in the fourth century. Serving vulnerable children today may look different, but opportunities still exist all around us. When Christians lead the way in adoption, foster care, counseling, teaching and serving children in other ways, we shine the light of Jesus to the world.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** One way to put your faith into action is to get involved with an organization aimed at helping children, both the unborn and born. Ada Bible partners with a few great organizations, including the Pregnancy Resource Center, Alpha Grand Rapids, Hand2Hand and Kids Hope. Learn more [HERE](#).

## **Day 3 Genesis 1:26 | Image of God**

**Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." Genesis 1:26**

At creation, God made humans in his image. In other words, all human beings have the image of God in them and are worthy of dignity and respect. This passage, at least in part, motivated the second of the three siblings—Gregory. Gregory was an intellectual giant and fought against slavery in word and deed. His actions and teachings had such an impact that no Christian could enslave a person in his region. A few centuries later, Elgius continued this work by freeing enslaved people using all he had.

It's a tragedy that slavery was revived on an industrial scale in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and that Christians were complicit. Stories like those above and others demonstrate what it looks like to be transformed by the gospel and use our word and actions as a light to the world amidst tragedy. They understood the value and worth of all human beings, and their actions were revolutionary. This same concept should shape how we view those around us and cause us to value everyone regardless of political leaning, social status, nationality, race or religious beliefs. Each person is made in God's image and worthy of dignity and respect.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Seeing people through the lens of the image of God can revolutionize how we treat others. Reflect on what groups of people you need to remember are made in his image. Confess this to God and ask for his help to live in a way that values others as he does. "God, I praise you that all people are made in your image. I confess I struggle to see \_\_\_\_\_ as made in your image. Help me see and value others the way you do in my thoughts, words and actions."

## Day 4 Luke 9:10-11 | Care for the Vulnerable

**He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.** Luke 9:11

Basil, the third sibling in this family, founded the first public hospital in history. Like his siblings Macrina and Gregory, he was a deeply devoted Christian whose words and deeds reflected the light of Jesus to the world. He cared for the poor, homeless, orphaned, lepers, aged and sick. Just 20 years later, Fabiola founded the second hospital. Fabiola was one of the wealthiest individuals in Rome, and she sold all she could to benefit the poor, sick, and hungry. These truly were people of word and deed. They talked about Jesus and lived out the gospel.

Basil, Fabiola and the others we've looked at this week leveraged their time and resources in tangible ways to show and talk about the love of Jesus—and many came to know him as a result. This tandem of word AND deed is something we can live out today. Maybe we need to grow in the deed side of the gospel tandem and leverage our time and resources to show the love of Jesus to others. Perhaps we struggle and need to work on how to share our faith compellingly at the appropriate time. May our gracious God use our words and deeds to shine a spotlight on Jesus Christ.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Consider how you can leverage your time and resources to show the love of Jesus in tangible ways. Our church partners with [many great organizations](#). Another way we can offer the love of Jesus is by sharing our faith. [Sign up for Sharing Your Faith](#) training at the Kentwood Campus next Thursday, December 7 from 7-8:30 pm.

## Day 5 John 15:9-11 | Celebration

**I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.** John 15:11

Christians practice spiritual disciplines in concert with the Holy Spirit to deepen our relationship with God and mold us into Jesus's character. This month's spiritual discipline is **CELEBRATION**. Celebration involves pausing to recognize who God is and what he's done. It results from the Holy Spirit working through spiritual disciplines in our lives. Joy infuses our lives as we obey and follow Jesus, becoming more and more like him.

Celebration is at the heart of the way of Jesus. Angels celebrate his arrival, declaring "good news that will bring joy to everyone" ([Luke 2:10](#)). In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus shows how God celebrates when lost people return to him ([Luke 15:32](#)). And near the end of his life, Jesus points to joy again. He says he taught and commanded his disciples to obey so they would have his joy and complete their joy ([John 15:10-11](#)). Obedience to Jesus brings joy.

Celebration is to infuse all spiritual practices. We should celebrate and be thankful for our restored relationship with God through Jesus. This attitude of celebration and gratitude should motivate our actions instead of feeling like a duty or burden. Pausing to celebrate God's character, care and gifts honors him and grows us to become more like Christ. We can celebrate his character and care during everyday activities, major life events, and holidays such as Christmas.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Ask God to help you see how you can turn every day and special events into celebrations for his glory this month. If you find joy difficult now, ask the Holy Spirit to give you joy. Ask for his help to remember that "the joy of the Lord is our strength" ([Nehemiah 2:10](#)).