**More - Week 4  | October 7 | More Hope (Contribute)**

**Host moment – Mention Baptism Sunday**

**Need a bright spotlight as a prop**

**Introduction: Darkness**

When you were a kid… Is anyone here afraid of the dark? *(Raise your own hand)* It’s okay to admit – this is a safe space. Good, I’m glad I’m not alone. Even if you wouldn’t necessarily say that you’re *afraid* of the dark, being in total darkness can be a little creepy, right? Like, when the power in your house goes out – it surprises us, catches us off guard. Being in darkness feels a little off, doesn’t it?

Change this to when the power goes out. Or how about when you’re touring a cave? Has anyone done a cave tour before? It’s fascinating. What often happens at the end of the tour is the guide will turn off all the lights in the cave and then everyone freaks out. It’s hilarious. But it’s also understandable. It gets so dark that you can’t even see your hand when it’s right in front of your face, and that be terrifying.

*(Genius idea: “Darkness, kind of like this…” Then turn off the house lights, creating total darkness in the room)*

This should be a personal story of being scared in the dark. I remember taking one of these tours as a kid and then the guide killed those floodlights – I was petrified. I really didn’t think I would be, but when you’re there and everything goes dark, it does something to you. Now, being afraid of the dark as a kid is fairly normal, but my guess is that a lot of us adults still struggle with that same fear. And, let’s face it – there’s a lot of darkens in the world, isn’t there? Crime, heartache, abuse, corruption – you don’t have to look all that far to recognize darkness all around us.

*(Genius idea: Teaching pastor turns on a handheld spotlight. House lights gradually come up as well)*

Yet, into this darkness there shines a light. A light that shines in all sorts of dark places. When this light shines, darkness doesn’t stand a chance.

Lights back on.

**Series Recap**

We’re in week four of a series we’re calling, “More” – a series all about the “more” that we all long for. Whether you consider yourself a church person or not, we’ve all felt a longing for more. And this “more” is different than what the American Dream can offer. This “more” isn’t found in titles, accomplishments, bank accounts, or vacation homes. The “more” we crave deep down, is Jesus.

One of Jesus’ closest friends was a guy names John, and he recorded Jesus saying these incredible words:

**“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” – John 10:10**

This “life to the full” that Jesus is talking about is one with more joy, love, and hope than we could ever imagine.

* We experience this joy as we celebrate the relationship we can have with God and learning to celebrate that every day.
* We experience this love as we connect with other Christ-followers who are walking this journey with us.
* And we experience this life of hope because Jesus came to bring light to even the darkest corners of our world.

**Word: John 8:12**

Now, this image of light is one that is massively important throughout the pages of Scripture. In John 8:12, Jesus says:

**“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” – John 8:12**

There’s a lot going on in this simple statement that might not seem obvious at first. Here, Jesus is making this audacious claim that *he* himself is the light of the world, and he’s making this claim in the middle of something called the Feast of Tabernacles; a festival during which candles lit up the courtyards of Jerusalem every single night. So, imagine hearing Jesus say these powerful words while being surrounding by festival lights yourself.

Not only that, but Jesus’ words also echo the words of the Old Testament prophets, people like Isaiah who spoke of the coming Messiah as one who would be a light to the world. Everyone hearing these words for the first time would have understood that Jesus isn’t simply using a clever metaphor, he’s making he’s claiming to be the coming Messiah messianic claims.

**Word: Matthew 5:14, 15**

But here’s the amazing thing about all of this. Jesus makes the statement that *he* is the light of the world, and we all probably start thinking, *“Yes! I know that Jesus is the light of the world and I love that* ***he*** *is!”* But then Jesus, in one of the greatest sermons ever preached, turns around and says these mind-blowing words,

What’s that first word? That’s right!

**“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 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 5:14-16 NIV)**

Did you catch that course-altering statement? He’s no longer saying simply that **HE** is the light of the world; Jesus is saying that **WE** are also the light of the world! Repeat this statement in a different way for emphasis. “The way that he stood out is the way…” You and I are the ones who are now responsible for reflecting the light of Jesus to the dark world around us. What an invitation!

Now, can I be vulnerable for a moment? I am totally good with Jesus being the light of the world, because that means that his life-changing message won’t ever die. It won’t go away. He can’t mess that up. But I’m far less confident in being that same light myself. Do I really want that responsibility?

I think, for a lot of us, our natural inclination is to want to blend into the world. Sure, we all want to stand out as important, significant, impressive… but mostly in all the socially acceptable ways. Ultimately, we just want to blend in. Personally, I panic a little bit at the thought of standing out and being different, of being a light in dark places, and I don't know that I am alone in that thought. That thought actually reminded me of this experiment I saw a few years ago.

**(Video: Blending in) Replace with candid camera elevator conformity video from Summit** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgRoiTWkBHU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgRoiTWkBHU" \t "_blank)

*(Teaching Pastor narrates over the video)*

(0:05) Take a look at this crowded waiting room at an eye doctor. All these people here are actually actors in on this little experiment. Now, this lady who just walked in is *not* an actor and has no idea what’s about to happen. She just thinks she’s there for a free eye exam.

But this is actually a test on social conformity and here is how it works. Every time a beep is heard in the office, look at what everyone in the room does. They all stand up. And it doesn't take very long for the lady here to see that “beep” means to stand up and do the same.

What would you do here? We all would like to think that we would make our own decisions, right? There’s no way we’d just randomly stand up because everyone else is. But when it comes to social conformity, all too often we just follow the crowd.

So take a look at how this lady responds, simply because everybody else was doing it. (2:05). After merely 3 beeps, and not knowing *why* she was doing it, this lady now conforms to the group perfectly.

But what happens when you take all the actors away and add in unsuspecting people who don't know the rules? (3:02). Isn’t that fascinating? There’s now no one in that room who is in on the experiment, and yet the behavior continues.

It’s easy to simply go with the flow, even if we don’t necessarily understand why. It’s easy to live a life with less resistance and stay inside your own comfort zone. But by calling *us* the light, Jesus isn’t calling us to be the same, he’s calling us to be different.

Need better transition. Now, let me just say that I feel this too. Pastors are not exempt ~~except~~ in this. The other day I found myself in a conversation with some friends and the narrative quickly turned to talking badly about someone we knew. I remember having a moment where I thought, *“Do I stop this conversation, or just go along with it?”* I didn’t want to stand out or rock the boat with my friends, so I chose to just blend in and be a part of the hurtful conversation instead of being different; instead of being a light.

But why do we do this? Why do we tend to blend in and conform?

* Maybe there is a fear of what others are going to think of me.
* Maybe there is just apathy in our hearts towards other people.
* Maybe we just don't know what to do or say. ~~Whether you have been around the church for a long time or not, many of us struggle to articulate our faith in a coherent way.~~
* I don’t want others to think I’m “holier than now,” judgmental.

It’s just easier to blend in, isn’t it? And that makes being the light that Jesus calls us to be uncomfortable at times. But if you’ve felt that way, if you’re feeling that way today, youre not alone.

**Challenge: Shine (S.S. Banner Lighthouse)**

I recently heard a story that really challenged me and how I think about this idea of being a light in a dark world.

Give notes on acting this out…physical motions during this story.

On the coast of Norway there is a lighthouse where a keeper lived with his two kids. One day he went to the shore for food. While he was there, a storm came up and he was unable to return. The time for lighting the lamp in the tower came, and Mary, the oldest child, said to her little brother, *"Willie, we have to light the lamp." "But how can we? We aren’t big enough."* Willie asked. But the two children climbed the narrow stairs to the tower where the lamp was kept.

Mary pulled up a chair and tried to reach the lamp in the great reflector; but it was too high. Mary left and returned with a small oil lamp in her hand. *"I can hold this up to the reflector,"* she said to her little brother. She climbed on the chair again, but still the reflector was just beyond her reach. *"Get down,"* said Willie; *"I know what we can do."* She jumped down, and Willie stretched his little body across the chair. *"Stand on me,"* he said. And Mary stood on the little guy as he lay across the chair. She raised the lamp high, and its light shone far out across the water. Holding it first with one hand, then with the other, to rest her little arms, she called down to her brother*, "Does it hurt you, Willie?"* *"Of course it hurts,"* he called back, *"but keep the light burning."*

I love that story. I think the question that we need to ask ourselves this morning is this: are we keeping the light of God's love burning in the world even though it may hurt at times? Even when it’s uncomfortable? Are we holding it up so that all the world can see it?

See, the challenge from Jesus is to “shine.” But in order to do that, we actually have to do something at times. And that something may hurt at times. It may be painful. It probably won’t always be enjoyable. But Jesus asks us to just “keep the light burning.” It’s an action, something that we actually have to work at doing. Need better connection into this…spend more time on this. And that is what the third C is all about, something we call **Contribute**.

* Contribute is all about our relationship with the world.
* Contribute is all about how we help make God’s dream for this world a reality.
* It’s about taking what we receive in here, out there.

And so today, I want to challenge you in two specific ways.

The first is to pray.

**#1 – Pray.** The perfect place to start when it comes to being the light of Jesus to those around us is to begin to pray for those who are far from God. Who are the people in your life that need the light of Jesus today?

* A co-worker
* A neighbor
* A family member
* A teammate
* An old friend

Have you prayed for them? I hadn’t. I was convicted several years ago to begin praying for the people in my life that I know who are far from God and would you believe that as soon as I started to do that I saw God begin to move in lives like never before.

The second challenge is to simply step out.

**#2 – Step Out.** There are a bunch of ways to do this.Contribute to the mission. Join a team here at COMMUNITY that is helping to further God’s dream. Start being generous with your finances. Sign up to mentor a student.

I’m confident that God is going to be tapping some of you on the shoulder saying, *“It’s time to get involved. It’s time to contribute.”* But some of you might be thinking, *“Ok, but how do I go about that?”* Great question! Immediately following this service we are going to have a Contribute Party! Everybody loves a good party, right?

*(Give location details as to where)* We will only take about 7 minutes of your time, but we will lay out many of the ways where you can start contributing today.

**Conclusion: Aligning ourselves with Jesus**

I think the thing that enables us to shine is when we align ourselves with Jesus. When our lives are *reflecting* who Jesus is.

And maybe today, you need to make that decision to align yourself with Jesus. Maybe for the first time, or maybe again.

As we see in Scripture, it was Jesus’ baptism that launched his public ministry. And for us, in a similar way, baptism launches us into a new life where we are to “shine”. And not only do we shine the light of Jesus into a dark world, but this is one of the ways that we begin to shatter or obliterate that darkness.

As we said earlier, today is a day we call Baptism Sunday. This is one of my favorite days of the year! Baptism is a symbolic act in which we declare the understanding that Jesus is the light and has made us a light and it is our responsibility to reflect that light to the world around us.

We already have \_\_\_\_\_\_ people who have made the decision to publicly shine the light of Jesus by being baptized. And we can’t wait to celebrate with them! And maybe today, we can celebrate with you too. Perhaps today, Jesus is speaking to you to be the light that he called you to be through the waters of baptism.

Now, some of you, even as I’m talking are thinking, *“I want to take this step to following Jesus…I want to live as the light that he called me to be…I should be baptized.”* But then come all the questions that hold you back…

**Question #1:**

You might be thinking: **“I was baptized as a baby, should I be baptized again?”**

Some people were sprinkled as babies in the church. I believe that that is a credit to your parents that they were committed to your spiritual growth. But it was a choice your parents made. At the same time, we know that in every single instance of baptism in the New Testament two things were true of a Christ-follower…

#1 - The person who was being baptized was always old enough to make that decision for his or herself. It was always their choice.

#2 – We see each baptism as something that was done by immersion, or by completely going under the water.

If you’ve never made that choice for yourself, I want to challenge you to take this step today. The way I look at it is this - you are actually completing the commitment that your parents made for you all those years ago. And if this is the question that you are thinking today, don’t wait, you should choose to be baptized TODAY!

**Question #2:**

You may also be thinking, **“Don’t I need to have my life all together before I get baptized?”**

Here is some amazing news! Baptism is NOT for those who have it all figured it, but for those of us who don’t! No one has it all figured out. And baptism is actually a commitment by those who are ready to acknowledge, *“I don’t have it all together, I recognize I can’t save myself, I can’t reflect the light of Jesus without Jesus. I know I need him.”*

Think about it like this, you don’t clean yourself up in order to take a shower. You take a shower to clean yourself up. Baptism is a lot like that! Just come as you are and let Jesus begin to clean you up! And if this is the question that you are thinking today, don’t wait, you should choose to be baptized TODAY!

**Question #3:**

Or you might be wondering: **“What if I have family or friends who are not here today that I want to see this?”**

If that is what you are thinking, you should still choose to be baptized. Here is why - we have several photographers around this room who have been asked to capture this amazing moment for you. Also, we have about 900 additional photographers in this room right now! *(Hold up phone)* I’d even ask everyone here to take a picture, post it online later today and use the hash tag **#NYBBaptism** *(Use specific location).*

We also have video recording the entire experience. So you can easily share it with your family and friends later so that they don't miss out. Listen, if you sense God is prompting you, don’t put it off. You should choose to be baptized TODAY!

**Question #4:**

Or maybe you’re still holding out asking: **“What if I don’t have clothes to change into or a towel to dry off with?”**

* We’ve got an amazing baptism T-shirt to give you as a gift …in your size!
* We have shorts.
* We have towels.
* We have blow dryers and brushes to make your hair look perfect again!
* We have an entire team of people right outside those doors ready to serve you in any way in order to make this the best experience possible.

Your baptism today is a perfect way to reflect the light of Jesus to those around you. I want you to hear me say this again; you should choose to be baptized TODAY! The decision to align yourself with Jesus is before you, I can’t encourage you enough to take that step.

**Let’s Pray**