

Try something with me. Identify someone that you interact with on a regular basis, only this cannot be someone that you are related to, someone you would consider a close friend, or someone you go to church with. Maybe this person is a coworker, a client, or a classmate. Now imagine that this person was to take the following survey about you, and we all got to see the responses. In the following questions “this person” is you.

Influence Survey:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how pleasant is this person to be around?
2. Based on what this person talks about, what do you think they value most?
3. What assumptions do you have about this person’s spiritual life?
4. Choose the three words from the list that best describe how this person makes you feel:
 - Valued
 - Safe
 - Happy
 - Inspired
 - Confident
 - Anxious
 - Inferior
 - Depressed
 - Rushed
 - Exhausted
5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how well does this person listen to others?
6. What do you find most challenging in relating to this person?
7. What overall influence has this person had on your life?

Would you want to know the responses of that survey? Would you want others to know the responses to that survey? It is both insightful and terrifying to consider the question, “What is it like to be on the other side of me?”

As we process our own influence, we will be guided by these words of Christ that call us to an ideal influence, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

That is what we want it to be like to be on the other side of us.

These words are found in Matthew 5:14-16. There are three basic elements in Jesus’ teaching on influence.

1. Us- Believers are the light of the world. It is “your light” that is to shine.
2. Community- The light shines “before others”.
3. God- The light originates with him and shines for his glory.

The home page of our church website says, “Welcome to Palmer SDA!”. Then it says, “We exist to build a community that reflects the character of God.” I want us to see the key elements of our mission in this verse. God’s character is what is reflected. The community around us is where it is reflected. And our role is to reflect.

The concepts of community and character have been well represented in the sermons of our church. The concept of reflecting has not. The high calling of Christian influence is to reflect the character of God in the community around us. The teaching of Matthew 5:14-16 gives us the basic principles of reflection.

“You are the light of the world”

The first line in verse 14 catches your attention if you are familiar with the words of Jesus. The title “light of the world” is also mentioned by Christ about himself. Jesus says he is the light of the world and then he says that we are too.

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

John 9:5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

God is light. The main way that the world saw that light is through Christ on earth. The main way the world sees that light now is through those who live with Christ. Christ’s words tell us that he no longer is the light of the world. That sounds blasphemous. But it is an incredible truth. God has chosen to embody his light. The light was displayed through Jesus in the flesh and now through us in the flesh. It is still God’s light. And he designs that light to shine on the world by reflecting off of those who live in his light. Shining our light requires reflection. Jesus calls it “your light” but we don’t have light. Our light is a reflection of his light.

Ephesians 5 gives us a description of shining as reflecting. It opens with this call, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.” Then in verse 8 Paul says, “At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.” He talks about the darkness we used to walk in and then says, “But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’” (verse 14-15). How is it that we imitate God? We let Christ shine on us. As he shines, we reflect.

Shining light is made possible by being in the light. The best thing we can do to improve our influence in the world is to be connected with Jesus. When Jesus claimed to be the light of the world he told us that those who are with him would have the light of life (John 8:12). When John tells us that “God is light” he adds, “If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 5:6-7). Being the light of the world is directly related to being in the light of God.

“Let your light shine”

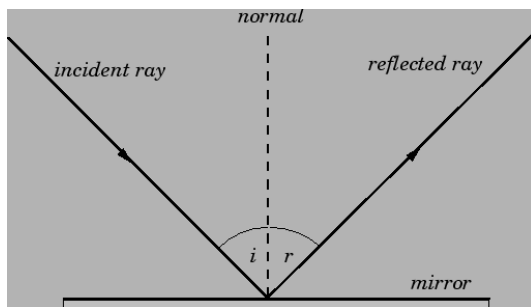
So we know what “your light” is. It is God’s light reflected off of you. Now notice how that light shines.

Jesus said, “A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.” (verse 14-15). This language corrects our idea of the effort required for shining. The default, if you are in Christ, is to be shining. You would have to be intentional about covering your light if you didn’t want it seen. You cannot even hide a city on a hill. The language I hear about Christian witnessing suggests that we need to put in great efforts for our light to shine. We need to be more involved in

witnessing and give more and serve more. God loves those efforts when they come from the right place. But you don't have to do these things to shine. The diligent effort is not about making ourselves shine but keeping ourselves in the light. If we are in the light, shining is automatic. When the command of Jesus is translated, we use the word "let". This is not a command to produce light but to give permission for light to reflect off of you. The mirror cannot give enough effort to shine but if the mirror is placed in the light it will shine.

This week I got outside in the sun. Even with only about 2% of my body uncovered, the sun felt good on my skin. It is a welcomed thing in winter in Alaska. The experience of sunbathing is something like the experience we should be having with the glory of God. We should place ourselves in his rays and soak them in.

Science has a couple of laws about reflection. The Encyclopedia Britannica explains the first law, "The law of reflection states that, on reflection from a smooth surface, the angle of the reflected ray is equal to the angle of the incident ray."ⁱ If that is confusing, try the picture.



The lower the angle that the light comes in the lower the angle it reflects. This works in the illustration of reflecting God. The closer God is to us the closer the light comes to shining on the people around us. If the light is coming from far above us, it will reflect back into the sky far above the people around us. Our job is to stay close to the light. God is the stunning landscape. We are the pond. But the edge of that

pond touches a stunning landscape, the pond reflects the beauty. The beauty is not generated by the quality of the water but by the location of the water.

For clear reflection to work, the surface needs to be smooth and reflective. Reflection is possible because of the location of the water but it is impacted by the quality of the water. The reflection off of a lake becomes blurry when the wind picks up. This is a defused reflection. A pure life provides a highly reflective surface. I surveyed scripture with the question, "what makes us highly reflective surfaces." In connection with the idea of reflecting light to the world I found several repeating themes.

Wisdom reflects.

Daniel 12:3

And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above;[Ⓜ] and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Ecclesiastes 2:13-14

Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.

Purity reflects.

Philippians 2:14-15 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

Matthew 13:43

Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Compassion reflects.

Isaiah 58:6-8

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

Sanctification reflects.

Ezekiel 36:23

And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.

Romans 2:24

For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

Trust reflects.

Psalms 37:5-6 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.

As we grow into the likeness of Christ we become increasingly reflective. But we must always remember that it is not our efforts of Christlikeness that generates light but it is his light that shines on us.

There is another simple principle of reflection that should be familiar to us. When you look in a mirror, what do you see? You see yourself, just as you are. This is why we struggle with mirrors, they are honest. Smart phones can edit your appearance. They can put a hat on your head or change your nose. Mirrors just show what is there. There is a song called Reflection in the movie Mulan. In the song she asks, "Who is that girl I see staring straight back at me? Why is my reflection someone I don't know? Somehow I cannot hide who I am, though I've tried. When will my reflection show who I am inside?" Someone needs to tell Mulan that that is not how reflections work. They don't show what we want them to, they show whatever is being shown onto them. This is an exposing truth.

As mirrors tell the truth, so our lives reflect the whatever is shining onto them. People see reflected in our lives whatever is shining onto our lives. We cannot change it. We cannot be soaking in selfishness and somehow shine our light for Jesus. If I place myself in the light of Ryan, I should not expect the world to see the light of Jesus reflected. Ask the hard question, “what shines into your life the most?”. What do you expose yourself to the most? The light that reflects off of you will always be the thing that shines on you.

So how do we shine? We cannot fake it. We also cannot stop it. Whatever shines on us reflects to the world. We shine for Jesus by walking in the light of Jesus.

John 1 says of Jesus, “In him was life and that life was the light of men.” Shining our light is a function of living in light. It is not restricted to a witnessing program. The life is the light of men. It comes out in the way we do everyday life.

Influence is inevitable. You can choose to not talk. You can decline opportunities. And, now more than ever before, you can survive without leaving your house. But there is not an option for living without influence. Silence still has influence. Lack of involvement has influence. Hermits have influence. Our influence can be good or bad, but it cannot be completely hidden. A house may smell like Oxi-clean, or it may smell like dog, but every house has a smell. A face may express joy or may look uninviting, but we all have a face. We may light up a room or we may darken it, but we all have influence on whatever space we are in. Since we are stuck with having influence, it is worth the time to think about what our influence is and what we would like for it to be.

I used to have in my car CD player the audiobook Christ’s Object Lessons. It consistently convicted me to live more like Christ. I remember one of those convicting moments while driving on a country road, to spend the day on some hiking trail, and hearing some ideas about influence, from the chapter on the 10 talents. This is what gripped me.

“Every soul is surrounded by an atmosphere of its own... By the atmosphere surrounding us, every person with whom we come in contact is consciously or unconsciously affected. This is a responsibility from which we cannot free ourselves.” -Christ’s Object Lessons, page 339

We are always reflecting something. What changes is the quality of the thing we are reflecting and the clarity of that reflection. But we cannot choose to stop reflecting.

Shining for God requires community. We need something to shine on. Jesus says, “let your light shine before others”. What is the community that you are shining your light into? I claimed that hermits have influence. It is a small influence and not an ideal one. It may influence loved ones to feel distanced. It may influence curious young minds to create wild speculative stories about you. It is an influence. But with minimal community it is a minimal influence. You don’t have to be an extrovert to obey the command of Christ to shine as the light of the world, but you do need to be engaged in some community. A point of weakness for many of us in reflecting the character of God is that we have not been intentional about building community. Christ may

shine on us but few people are around to see it. A key part of being the light of the world is finding places to shine that light. How are you doing with community? How will you be more intentional about getting close to people who need to see what is reflected in your life?

Christ's ideal for influence is not just that we shine but that we shine to a certain end, "so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

There is a world of difference between shining so that people see you and give you credit and shining so they see you and give God glory. We are to shine in a way that it is obvious that we did not generate the light but that we reflected the light.

It is responsible of us to consider our influence. And there is a danger that we consider too much how we look to others. Most of us are guilty on two counts, we think about our appearance too much and our influence too little. We care too much about looking good for our sake but too little about coming across well for the sake of God and others. We care more about how we look to people than how they feel around us. A meaningful legacy is not about who is impressed with our accomplishments but about who is changed by our influence. We would do well to shift our focus from what we can accomplish to how we can influence. When we can take self out of shining, people are able to associate any goodness in us with the glory of the God who shines on us.

Now is a fitting time to talk with God about your influence. Review the text a final time and ask God to highlight the phrase where you need to make a change.

Matthew 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

ⁱ <https://www.britannica.com/science/light/Reflection-and-refraction>