

“**Worship sharing**” is patterned after the Quaker practice of open worship. Like open worship, worship sharing is a time for listening. There are some differences, however. In open worship, Friends tend to speak only if they feel compelled. In the context of worship sharing, you are *encouraged* to speak. Self-disclosure is an integral part of the process. Even if your thoughts seem unrefined, consider sharing them. Sometimes, catching a glimpse of someone “in process” can be more helpful than viewing their finished project. Here are some other guidelines for worship sharing:

**Listen to learn.** Keep in mind that each person will speak from his or her own perspective. People will feel safest if they can speak from the heart without receiving any advice or correction. If your experience has led you to a different conclusion, there is no need to be anxious. Perhaps there is a larger truth behind the seeming contradictions. In any case, try to learn from what others have said.

**Listen with patience.** Allow a suitable interval of silence between each speaker. This pause will give everyone an opportunity to reflect on what has been said. In the silence, see if God will bring insight. In general, do not speak a second time until each person has had the opportunity to speak. No one person should speak at great length.

**Speak from your experience.** In a debate, speakers often quote outside authorities to “prove” their point. It is also common for people to generalize by saying, “we” or “they,” “everybody,” “always,” “never.” In worship sharing, it is more helpful to speak only for yourself and from your own experience. Try to describe the process behind your conclusions.

Some groups may have a hard time holding to the discipline of worship sharing. If your group just wants to talk informally about these things, that’s okay – just be clear (so people don’t enter the discussion with mixed expectations).

# The Light of God



## Discussion Guide

West Hills Friends  
Fall 2006

# INTRODUCTION

When it's time to move, we Quakers aspire to "walk in the Light." When it's time to be still, we "wait in the Light." And if someone is stuck or feeling sad, we are inclined to "hold them in the Light." Clearly, "Light" is a major motif among Friends.

At least in part, Friends inherited the imagery of Light from the Gospel of John. In the opening lines of that Gospel, the coming of Jesus is described in very poetic language: "The true light that gives light to every person was coming into the world" (John 1:9). Not only does John describe Jesus as "the true Light," he goes on to proclaim that Jesus gives light to *every* person. This verse became a touchstone for the early Friends. It gives expression to something we Quakers find essential. Namely, the Light of Christ is at work in *every* heart. Regardless of our culture or language, those who seek the Light within open themselves to the activity of God in their lives.

Quakers are keen to distinguish between the *outward forms* of religion (e.g. the words we use, the way we dress or the way we design our places of worship) and the *inward substance* of faith (which is the Spirit of God at work in our hearts). It follows that some people might possess the *forms* of religion (by attending church out of habit or by adhering to "Christian" rules for language or dress), but lack the inward substance of a living faith. At the other end of the spectrum, it is also possible for some people to have opened their hearts to God's Spirit, but still completely lack the outward forms of Christian culture.

Friends have adopted the imagery of "Light" as a way to speak about the mysterious, life-changing work of God's Spirit within. This is the inward substance of faith. The ambiguity of "Light" allows us to point toward something deeper than our words or traditions.

Of course, some Christians are deeply suspicious of this ambiguity. They wonder if we Quakers are obscuring – or even denying – the Gospel. One early Friend, Isaac Pennington, answered this accusation by writing, "That charge of thine on us, that we deny the person of Christ, and make him nothing but a

light or notion, a principle in the heart of man, is very unjust and untrue; for we own that appearance of him in his body of flesh, his sufferings and death, and his sitting at the Father's right hand in glory: but then we affirm that there is no true knowledge of him or union with him, but in the seed or principle of his life in the heart, and that *therein* he appears, subdues sin, and reigns over it, in those that understand and submit to the teaching and government of his Spirit." In other words, Quakers do not reject the general tenants of Christian orthodoxy. Instead, we hold that no one's life is changed by *their knowledge of orthodox theology*. For lives to change, we must know Christ *in our hearts*. We must seek the Light within.

Historically, when Quakers described God as the "Light within," it wasn't to *tame* God or to make God more convenient – just the opposite! By speaking of the Light, Quakers were hoping to preserve a sense of God's transcendence and mystery. God is greater than the words and concepts we use.

The *challenge* of encountering the Light of God is evident in the writing of early Friends. Sometimes, the Light of God is a searchlight that pierces to the very core of our being. Many of the first Friends trembled to find some hidden part of themselves illuminated by God's presence. When George Fox wrote, "All was manifest and seen in the Light," he listed "darkness, death, temptation" among those things that became visible. The process of healing and growth is not always a comfortable one.

Light imagery is complex and full of nuance. Even in the realm of science, Light does not fit easily into the categories of "particle" or "wave." As you read through this discussion guide, I hope you will find new insights into the ways God is already at work in your heart.

Seek the Light within and you open yourself to the substance of faith.

# CANDLELIGHT

One of my favorite web sites is [www.gratefulness.org](http://www.gratefulness.org). From this site, you can light a virtual candle. As I am writing these words, people from 94 different countries have lit nearly 6000 candles. There are 30 individual candles on a single web page, and you can move from page to page as you choose. Once lit, a candle burns for 48 hours. The candles that have been burning the longest are shorter than the others.

There is a story behind each of these candles. Some write a prayer for healing beside their candles. Others light a candle to say goodbye. People from Denmark and Brazil, Russia and Laos write brief notes in their native tongues. Some people don't write anything at all. As I browse through these candles, I feel a surprising sense of intimacy with all these people from around the world. I feel a connection to their stories and to the longings of their hearts. Even virtual candles can evoke a sense of intimacy.

A burning candle has all the intimate authority of a whisper. Precisely because it is so small, a whisper demands our full attention. If we don't listen carefully, the whisper is lost. The faint light of a candle illuminates a small space. Because the space is small, we are drawn close in.

Feeling despondent, the prophet Elijah was waiting to hear from God. The story is told in 1 Kings (chapter 19). While Elijah was waiting for God, "a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper." When Elijah heard this gentle whisper, he stepped forward to encounter God, face-to-face.

This is one way the Light of God comes to us: as a gentle whisper. Through the beauty of Creation, through the warmth of human love, through quiet times of solitude, God woos us with the soft candlelight of Divine presence. God (that lover of our souls) sets a romantic banquet before us and whispers, "Come – *taste and see the Lord is good*" (Psalm 34:8).

For this discussion, please reflect on those times when you have felt particularly close to God. If you haven't felt this kind of intimacy, please use your imagination: What would it feel like to be *wooed* by God?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider what it's like (or would be like) to experience the Light of God as something intimate and alluring. After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect on intimacy with God, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind for you?
2. After everyone has spoken briefly, say more about finding intimacy with God. What has been your experience? What has been the longing of your heart?
3. Have you ever used candles in worship (or to mark some other significant gathering)? What was the experience like? How might this experience inform our discussion of God's "candlelight?"
4. Quite appropriately, we consider it a crime to *force* intimacy onto someone. For it to be like candlelight, the Light of Christ may only *invite* us to draw close to God. How might we recognize such an invitation? How might we fail to recognize such an invitation?
5. If the Light of Christ is truly present in all people, how might those who don't use "Christian lingo" describe an experience of intimacy with God? How does this question inform your own experience (or perceived lack of experience)?
6. By what practice or discipline do you make room in your life for intimacy with God?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

# FLASH OF LIGHTNING

Many scary movies offer some variation of the following scene: Through the graceful arch of a gothic window, we suddenly see a flash of lightning. The brief flash is a shocking contrast to the pervading darkness. It catches us completely by surprise. It happens so quickly that the light is gone by the time our brain registers its presence. Only in hindsight do we notice that the unexpected light *revealed* something. Maybe there was a silhouette outside the window. Or maybe someone we thought was in the room has disappeared.

This flash of lightning marks the spot where theology meets Alfred Hitchcock or Edgar Allen Poe. The Light of Christ is not always like the gentle glow of candles.

“Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:1-4).

When lightning pierces the darkness, the light fades in an instant. The boom of thunder only lasts a moment. What lingers is a glimpse of the world around us. Sometimes, the Light of God is like this: we are shocked us with a sudden revelation. Most likely, we receive a glimpse into ourselves – seeing a potential that cries out for fulfillment or a stale corner of our lives that needs renewal and transformation. It’s also possible to see another person or a situation in a “new light.”

After lightning’s brief appearance, the shadows return. In a similar way, after the Light of God has disclosed some truth to us, we might revert back to our old way of seeing. We still possess the afterimage of some different reality, but our life’s momentum keeps us moving in the same old direction. Now, however, we live with the memory of God’s revelation. We know that a change will be required of us. It just takes time for our vision to adjust.

For this discussion, please reflect on those times God has provided a sudden flash of insight. Even if you are uncertain about whether or not God was the source of this experience, think about a time when you suddenly saw things differently. How might God use these experiences?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider what it is like (or would be like) to experience the Light of God as a sudden flash of lightning. After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. Using only one or two words, how would you describe the experience of receiving a sudden insight?
2. When everyone has shared briefly, please elaborate on your experience of receiving a flash of insight. Was this experience life-changing? Did you see God at work in this experience?
3. How do you react to the suggestion that God’s Light might “startle” or even “shock” us? Does this sound like the God you know? Like the God you hear about?
4. Is someone who deliberately seeks to spend time with God *more likely* or *less likely* to be surprised by God?
5. Do you carry any “afterimages” with you (that is, do you retain the vision of some changed landscape that is not yet fulfilled in you)? If that question is too tender, what is an insight that you received some time in the past that took a while to incorporate into your life?
6. Do we need to *work* in order to conform our lives to the to flash of insight we are given? Or can we expect this to happen “naturally” over time?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

# SUNLIGHT

Even here in Oregon (where rain clouds can obscure the sun for weeks at a time), light from the sun is a daily occurrence. This light nourishes trees and flowers and ferns. It also nourishes dandelions, English ivy and other nuisance plants. The sun doesn't seem to care about whether it nourishes "good" plants or "bad" ones. Invasive weeds share in the same sunlight that sustains native plants and carefully cultivated gardens.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus gives God the credit for the prodigal generosity of sunlight. "I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous" (Matthew 5:44-45). Although I've never heard it used in this way before, this verse seems to support the Quaker contention that God's Light is universal.

There's more to sunlight than universality. Not only does sunlight come as a gift to every corner of the planet, this is the light that provides energy for fruitfulness and growth. In other words, sunlight is both present *and active*.

If the Light of God is like sunlight, then we can say more than "God is present to all people." We can also say that God is *active* in all people. We human beings are designed to respond to God's presence in the same way plants respond to the light of the sun. What lays dormant is brought to life. What stirs to life begins bearing fruit.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit. Love is a fruit of the Spirit. So are joy and patience and peace. These are the qualities that God is nourishing in us. If you are trying to discern how God is active in *your* life, consider what nourishes joy in your life. What helps you to bear the fruit of patience or peace? What opens your heart to love? Your answer to these questions will help you find the places where the Light of God is shining into your life like sunlight.

When do you feel as though you are basking in life's sunlight? Do you have a sense of God's presence in those moments? To what extent do those moments produce the fruits of love, joy, peace and patience in your life? Please reflect on how God might use these experiences to nourish you and to help you bear fruit.

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider how the light of God might be experienced as nourishing "sunlight." After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect on how God might nourish us toward fruitfulness, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind?
2. When everyone has shared briefly, say more about your experience. Think of a time when you felt "sunlight" in your life. Do you associate this experience with the presence of God? Did this experience have a lasting impact on you?
3. Love? Joy? Patience? What spiritual fruit do you long for the most? I don't think Paul intended his letter to the Galatians to be an *exhaustive* list of spiritual fruit. Is there something you would like to add to the list?
4. What is the fruit that God would most like to produce in you? Is it different from the fruit you would choose for yourself?
5. What are the things that can obscure or eclipse God's nourishing Light?
6. In the natural world, plants turn toward the sun or grow above the underbrush in order to absorb more life-giving light. Are there things we can do to be more exposed to the nourishing Light of God?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

# WARNING LIGHT

Years ago, we had to haul something in the back of our Volvo wagon. In the process, we completely obliterated the break light that was mounted inside the rear window. All that remains is a pair of loose wires and a black rectangle painted on the glass (I suppose it's the automotive equivalent of a chalk outline). Ever since then, a warning light appears on our dashboard every time we depress the break peddle. Although several years have passed, our loyal Volvo is still warning us, "Hey! You are missing a break light!"

Strangely, the break warning light is one of the few lights in the dashboard that still *works*. Despite the novelty of a functional light, I have learned to ignore this warning signal completely. Most of the time, it fails to register in my consciousness.

I know I'm not the only one. Even in newer cars, I have seen the "check engine" light aglow on someone's dashboard. Sometimes, the driver will say, "Don't worry about that light." Sometimes, we simply ignore the light by an unspoken mutual consent.

Why are we so heedless of warning lights? Maybe we've learned to ignore warning lights because our litigious culture warns us about *everything* (e.g. "The beverage you are about to enjoy is HOT" and "Do NOT leap from vehicle while in motion"). Or maybe we just resent being told what to do.

If we are skeptical of warning lights, perhaps we should also be skeptical of dismissing them altogether. When I step onto an airplane, I certainly hope the pilot is paying careful attention to the warning lights. And consider this from the book of Job: "For God does speak - now one way, now another - though people may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on people as they slumber in their beds, God may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn them from wrongdoing and keep them from pride."

If there are dangers on the road ahead, wouldn't you want to know? If the Light of God were to convey a warning, would it seem like cruelty or kindness?

For this discussion, please reflect on the possibility of receiving a warning from God. This doesn't necessarily mean receiving a threat (i.e. "Don't make me come down there!"). Perhaps it is simply a vague sense of unease. Does God work this way? What has been your experience?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider these questions. After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect on the possibility of receiving a warning from God, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind for you?
2. After everyone has had a chance to speak, say more about your experience. Have you ever felt God's warning? If so, do you look upon your experience as positive or negative? If you haven't had this sort of experience, what do imagine it would be like?
3. In general, what sort of warning would you take seriously? What sort of warning would you resent? What sort of warning would you ignore?
4. Does anything change for you if we call this section "Indicator Light" instead of "Warning Light?" Does it help to point out that some warning lights are meant to communicate GO! (Rather than STOP!)?
5. So far, we've been focused on individuals. Does God ever warn a nation or group?
6. Is there a time or situation when we should be extra diligent in listening for God's warning? How can we put ourselves in the best position to notice God's warning Light?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

# X-RAY

“The lamp of the LORD searches the spirit of a person, it searches out his or her inmost being” (Proverbs 20:27).

There are broken places inside each of us. Inside each one of us, there are places we have ignored for so long that they have become abandoned properties. Weeds take root in us, then turn brown from lack of rain. Inside each one of us, there are places that have become threadbare from neglect.

Most of the time, we can hide these broken and empty places from the world around us. We can even hide them from ourselves. We learn to walk through our days in a way that diverts our eyes from what is broken inside of us. We compensate.

Of course, there is a huge difference between *restoring* what is broken or abandoned in us and *ignoring* it. God is not content with the face we present on the surface of our lives. God wants all of us. And so, over time, the Light of God exposes our broken places for what they are. As a step toward healing, God reveals what we have hidden from ourselves.

Most of us have probably seen the image of a broken bone produced by x-rays (if not first hand, then at least on television). An x-ray image is produced by exposing photographic film to x-rays. X-rays really *are* a form of light.

While the technology would be foreign to 17<sup>th</sup> Century Quakers, the basic concept would come as no surprise. From the very beginning, Quakers have experienced the Light of Christ as a force that illuminates the hidden places in our hearts. And like an x-ray, this exposure was seen as a step toward healing.

It can be unsettling to have the hidden places within us exposed. In fact, it can be downright painful. Thankfully, the Light does not accuse us. As Friends, our testimony is that the Light of Christ is neither cruel nor clinical. God does not abandon us to our brokenness. God’s question to us is not, “What are you going to do about *that*?” It is, “Are you ready to take the next step with me?”

For this discussion, please reflect on your experience of being *searched* by the Light of God. Has God ever brought some broken place within you to the light? Whether or not you have experienced this yourself, reflect on what the process would be like.

Please take five or ten minutes of silence to consider what it means to be searched by God. After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. What is a word or short phrase that comes to mind as you reflect on being *searched* by God?
2. After everyone has had a chance to speak briefly, say more about your experience. Have you every felt someone’s attention penetrating into the broken places in your life? Was it God? Did it feel healing? Invasive? What was it like?
3. This discussion is built on the assumption that *everyone* has broken places within them. Do you agree? If it’s true, why do we try so hard to hide this part of ourselves? Why are we afraid of exposing our hurts?
4. Do you agree that bringing a broken place to the light is a step toward healing? Is it a *prerequisite* for healing (or can some wounds heal in the “dark”)?
5. Have you found some spiritual practice that helps you open yourself more completely to God’s searching Light?
6. Is there something that helps you to trust your broken places to God’s care?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

# LASER

In this opening paragraph, it's going to be hard to resist mentioning Captain Kirk or Luke Skywalker. Wow! I actually put both of their names in the first sentence. I guess that will have to suffice: Captain Kirk carried a *phaser* and young Skywalker carried a *blaster*.

If you're old enough to remember Bugs Bunny cartoons, you might recall "Martin the Martian." He was a little green man with a centurion helmet and a death ray. His tag line was, "You are making me very angry – *very* angry, indeed!" Somewhere along the line, he would usually disintegrate himself. This third example should prove once and for all that nothing is to be gained from envisioning God as a ray gun.

Instead, let's turn our attention to those lasers that are used for delicate eye surgery. As someone who shudders at the thought of eye drops, I find eye *surgery* even more frightening than ray guns. Despite my phobia on this subject, I know people who've been through the process of macular regeneration. They seem pretty happy with the results.

Laser light can literally reshape our eyes, and change the way we see the world. Now *that* is a metaphor for the Light of God! Jesus said, "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body is full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness." There are ways of seeing that *restrict* the amount of Light that penetrates into our lives. Conversely, there are ways of seeing that *expand* the potential for Light within us. Our "outlook" shapes who we are "within."

Envisioning God's Light as a *laser* gives us language to consider how God might *correct* our way of seeing. We are not condemned to dwell in the darkness of our stingy outlook. God is already at work in each of us, reshaping our eyes and making us better able to absorb the Light that is all around us.

If you are seeking the Light of God, pay attention to the way God may be correcting your perceptions.

For this discussion, please reflect on the connection between our outlook and the condition of our souls. Is there a way of looking at the world that helps you connect with God? Is there a way of seeing that hinders you spiritually?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider your way of looking at other people and situations. Would you like God to change anything about your perceptions? After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you think about the perceptions that *restrict* the amount of Light that penetrates into your life, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind?
2. As you think about the perceptions that *expand* the potential for Light in your life, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind?
3. After everyone has spoken briefly, say more about your experience. Are there ways of seeing that you would like to foster in yourself? Are there ways of seeing that you would like to have "corrected?"
4. Think of the people you know who seem especially radiant with the Light of God. What observations can you make about their way of seeing the world?
5. How do you perceive the world when you are tired or overwhelmed? How do you perceive the world when you are rested and relaxed? To what extent does God change our way of seeing by guiding us to a different way of living?
6. How do we make ourselves more available to the corrective Light of God? How do we make ourselves less accessible?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

# LIGHT ON THE PATH

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path.”

When I was about thirteen, I wandered away from a campground in Nebraska. I wandered along a river for a while, then decided to cut inland. The trees were pretty skimpy, but eventually I realized I could no longer find my way back to the river. I had lost my way.

Eventually, I wandered to the edge of a cornfield (this was *Nebraska*, after all). At the time, I thought it would be helpful to get out of the woods. I figured that walking in a straight line (alongside a neat row of corn) would probably get me... somewhere.

Inside the cornfield, the stalks of corn grew close together and towered over my head. The rows of vegetation were like the walls of a maze. It felt claustrophobic. To make matters worse, this corn was *not* planted in a straight line. There was a constant curve to my path. I started to worry that I was walking in circles after all.

Eventually, I came across a huge sprinkler. There's probably a better word for it, but I'm a city boy. It was a long section of metal pipe that hung suspended over the corn. By climbing up onto this structure, I was able to see over the top of the corn and spot a road off in the distance. Now that I was oriented, I made my way to the road and hitched a ride back to camp.

These days, people pay good money to wander around in a corn maze. I did it for free. And if it weren't for that sprinkler, I'd probably still be there.

It's hard to navigate when you're down inside the maze. It's much easier to chart a course if you can look down from above. From above, you can spot a dead-end. You can see which paths *look* like they will take you in the right direction – but lure you off course after a few steps.

God is able to offer us a perspective from “outside the maze.” Because God can see the obstacles and dangers that are not yet apparent to us, the Light of God can guide us safely on our life's way.

For this discussion, please reflect on those times you have felt God's guidance. If you haven't felt this kind of guidance, reflect on what it would be like to receive counsel from beyond your own perspective.

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider what it means to be “led” by God. After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect upon God's willingness to be a Light for our path, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind for you?
2. When everyone has had a chance to speak, say more about your experience of being led by God. How did you know that it was God who led you? What was your experience like?
3. It's fairly common to hear people say that God has only illuminated the *very next step* on their path (when they would prefer to see much farther down the road). Have you ever had this sort of experience? Why would God give us enough Light for the next step, but leave us uncertain about the step after that? Hasn't God heard of long-range planning?
4. How much flexibility is in the path? For example, can we refuse to take the “next step” and ask for a different one instead?
4. What are the things that help you trust in God to guide your path? What are the things that make trust difficult?
5. What do you see as the next step on *your* path?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

# EARTHRISE

The moon is one of the most archetypical “Lights” in human experience. Scripture describes the moon as the handiwork of God: “God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night” (Genesis 1:16). There’s also that familiar hymn, *Fairest Lord Jesus* (“Fair is the sunshine, fairer still the moonlight and all the twinkling starry host...”). So moonlight seems like a shoe-in for any discussion about the Light of God.

The problem, of course, is that the moon doesn’t really produce any light of its own. The waxing and waning light of the moon is actually reflected *sunlight*.

On the other hand, it’s easy to see some spiritual significance in the phenomenon of *reflected light*. By employing the metaphor of moonlight, we might think about how the Light of God is reflected on the surface of our lives.

As I made preparations to write a section on moonlight, I started looking at actual photographs of the moon. I came across a well-known picture. It’s from one of the Apollo missions: above the pockmarked and barren landscape of the moon hangs the luminous, blue-and-white sphere of planet earth. Not only does the moon reflect the sun’s light, *so do we*. Viewed from the moon, the earth hangs like a jewel in the night sky. Beautiful.

After seeing that picture, I knew I wanted this discussion guide to end with the image of “Earthrise.” To see the radiant beauty of the earth is a surprising reminder that we really *do* reflect a light that is not our own. We don’t need a metaphor at all. Paul wrote, “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.” More succinctly, Jesus said, “You are the light of the world.”

In seeking the Light of God, we come to see the Light in us. You are radiant with the Light of God. You are so beautiful.

Take some time to consider how you are aglow with the Light of God. Where do you see the Light of God in your own life? Where do you see the Light in those around you?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to ponder how you reflect the Light of God into the world around you. After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect on the Light within you, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind for you?
2. After everyone has had a chance to speak, please say more about your experience. When have you felt God’s Light shining in you? What is this experience like for you?
3. In what part of your life are you most likely to see God’s Light? In what part of your life is it most difficult for you to see God’s Light?
4. What’s the connection between “competence” and the perception of Light in your life? Are you more likely to see God’s Light in an area where you feel especially capable? Or are you more likely to see Light in some area where you know you are relying on God’s strength (and not your own)?
5. How do you see the Light of God in one another? Be like an Apollo astronaut and offer others in your group a chance to see their own radiance from an outside perspective.
6. What was it like to identify the Light in one another? Was it awkward? Fun? Revealing? Is this something we should do for one another more often?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence. Thank you for your participation!

