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Why Connect with God for Strength

How to Connect with God for Strength

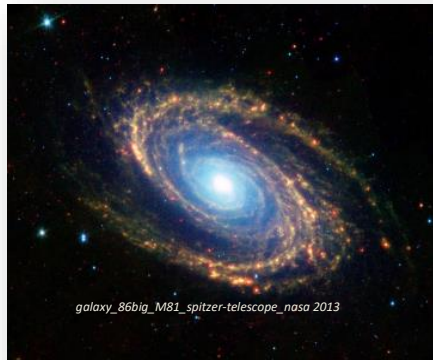
Sources of Strength

CHAPTER 2

Shine Like Stars

Connecting with Jesus Christ activates stellar power. He transforms mortal weaklings into shining stars. Blazing at millions of degrees for billions of years, stars surpass every spiritual analogy for fire, heat, and light. Our Sun burns 700 million tons of fuel per second. This thermonuclear word-picture illustrates the far-reaching and unquenchable influence of God's people in action.

While incarcerated in an ancient prison, 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** [phoster] **in the universe as you hold out the word of life.** (Phil 2:15-16 NIV)*

The Greek word *phoster* means that which gives light, an illuminator of the stars, sun, and moon.¹ The NAS, NKJ, RSV, and ESV translate *phoster* as "light".

The Truth about us

Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world."² He is "the bright Morning Star."³ Jesus also said to those associated with Him, "You are the light of the world."⁴ He did not say you are the light of the room, or the city, or the nation, or even of the

¹ Biblestudytools.com (4-3-10) Greek lexicon based on Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary plus others.

² John 8:12 NIV

³ Rev 22:16

⁴ Mat 5:14

earth. He said, *“You are the light of the world”*. The Greek word for world is *kosmos*. It literally means cosmos or universe.

Artificial light may illuminate the earth but it cannot illuminate the universe. Light bulbs and candles are inadequate for such a task. Jesus told His disciples,

*“I am the **Light** [phos] of the **world** [kosmos]; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the **Light** [phos] of life.”* (John 8:12 NAS)

Jesus also said,

“While I am in the world [kosmos], I am the Light [phos] of the world [kosmos].” (John 9:5 NAS)

Only stars can light the world—and God’s children are distinguished to shine like stars. They radiate His light throughout a universe plagued with moral depravity and spiritual darkness. Besides providing illumination, stars also radiate energy vital for life. Eliminate one star, the sun, and life on planet Earth dies.

Our potential to shine like stars becomes a reality when we connect with Jesus Christ. As we, *“hold out the word of life”*, our influence becomes far-reaching and unquenchable. Strengthening our relationship with Jesus enables us to live more abundantly, love more passionately, and shine as the prevailing influence—especially during the darkest of times.



Paul’s Words Continue to Shine

Paul used this metaphor while confined in Roman chains. He describes followers of Christ as fiery luminaries exerting their influence by extending the word of life—they say it, they do it, they pray it, they sing it, and they live it.

From inspired moments in an obscure jail to the present, Paul’s message endures. It radiates life and sustains hope. Like a burned-out star, Paul continues to shine far beyond his origin. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul’s influence affects our spiritual atmosphere today. With penetrating insight, his message pierces layers of spiritual darkness nearly two thousand years after he communicated it.

The God who transformed Saul of Tarsus into Paul the apostle urges us to connect with the knowledge of the truth. Jesus offers spiritual power so we can proclaim His word while performing works greater than He performed. Jesus said:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12 ESV)

Unquenchable Spheres of Influence



Once a thermonuclear reaction begins in outer space, stopping its emission of light, heat, and radiation becomes futile. At their core, stars burn with an intensity that can exceed 100 million degrees. Supernova explosions create neutron stars that burn 20 trillion tons of hydrogen per second while blazing at over 100 billion degrees in their core.⁵

The word that burns in God's heart is not like any fire on earth, "*for our God is a consuming fire*".⁶

Behold, the name of the Lord comes from a remote place; Burning is His anger and dense is His smoke; His lips are filled with indignation and His tongue is like a consuming fire; (Isa 30:27 NAS)

The same fire that resides in God burns in us. It far exceeds the flame of a 40-watt candle emitting 13 lumens of visible light.⁷ Depending on its wax, candles may reach temperatures of 1400 degrees Celsius (2550 degrees Fahrenheit). By comparison, a 40-watt incandescent light bulb produces about 500 lumens of visible light. The temperature of an electric tungsten filament reaches about 3000 degrees Celsius (5430 degrees Fahrenheit).⁸



The capacity of just one star staggers the imagination. Consider Sanduleak -69° 202, a blue star from the Magellanic Cloud Galaxy. Estimated to be 40 to 50 times larger than our sun, this star amplified its volatile radiance by more than 100 million times when it exploded. The resulting supernova (named SN1987A) propelled

⁵ Editors of *Time-Life Books, Voyage Through the Universe—Stars*, Time-Life Books, inc., Alexandria, VA, 1988, p. 91.

⁶ Heb 12:29 NAS

⁷ *The Physics Factbook*™ Edited by Glenn Elert; quoted in <http://hypertextbook.com/facts/1999/JaneFishler.shtml> (accessed 7-15-06) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candle> (4-3-10).

⁸ <http://hypertextbook.com/facts/1999/AlexanderEng.shtml> (accessed 6-7-13)

its flash through the universe at the speed of light. Though traveling at 186,000 miles per second, its light rays took 168,000 years before observers noticed them on earth. On February 23, 1987, the neutrino cloud from this explosion occupied our entire Milky Way galaxy.

According to Physicist Michael Guidry, this supernova released more light in a single flash than our sun releases in a billion years. He states that in 1987 measurements on earth “estimated the neutrino luminosity of SN1987A to be, for an instant, as large as the visible-light luminosity of the entire universe.”⁹

Intense heat within stars rips atoms apart and then fuse them back together in new atomic configurations. Stars transform simple gases like hydrogen and helium into entirely new elements like carbon and silicon. Additional elements form when stars exceed a billion degrees during supernova explosions. Theoretically, the energy released from a supernova event can rearrange atoms to make all the other elements. This process releases enormous amounts of energy, heat, and light.



As followers of Christ, we possess the spiritual potential to exert such a life transforming influence. Just as sunlight remains indispensable to life on earth, so too, the message that emanates from us contains the word of life. Without the influence of God’s word, no life would survive.

*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, **sustaining all things by his powerful word**... (Heb 1:3 NIV)*

Connecting with Jesus and His message ignites our heart to burn with an intensity that cannot be restrained. He compels us to follow the Holy Spirit to where our own strength cannot take us.

*But if I say, “I will not mention him [God] or speak any more in his name,” **his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.** (Jer 20:9 NIV)*

***My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue** (Psa 39:3 NIV)*

⁹ Michael W. Guidry, Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Theoretical and Computational Physics Section, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, (accessed June 4, 2005); <http://csep10.phys.utk.edu/guidry/violence/sn87a.html>.

Entombed in spiritual darkness, desperate souls are not groping for a candle to improve the ambiance of their coffin. They want enduring peace, reliable hope, and authentic love, all of which, Jesus offers. His words do more than warm cold hearts with feel good emotions. They transform spiritual corpses into living miracles. God's word activates relational fusion power. It fuses broken souls with the passionate love of Christ. The power of the gospel ignites spiritual reactions, which resemble supernova explosions bursting with eternal destiny.

Stars generate staggering amounts of energy, heat, and light. They burn brilliantly for billions of years. Such longevity requires astronomical amounts of fuel. Only God can fuel the life span of a star. Connecting with the Holy Spirit empowers us to radiate Christ with stellar impact.

The editors of Time-Life Books describe stellar power in revealing detail:

Scattered like diamond chips across the cosmos, the stars look deceptively serene to the earthbound observer. Yet each one is a creature of extraordinary violence.¹⁰

According to Time-Life, "The peaceful-looking heavens disguise not only the ferocity but the enormous variety of stars as well."¹¹ Some stars are smaller than the Earth while others approach the size of our Solar System. Astronomers have discovered that stars often move through the galaxies paired with one, two, or three others.



The Word of Life

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.... (Rom 1:16 ESV)

The Gospel radiates immense power. It changes the spiritual climate wherever it goes, both in heaven and on earth. No other message conveys everlasting life like God's word. Its intellectual and emotional dynamics are unique, personal, and provocative. God's word does not operate like ordinary information. It is the only life-giving message in existence. The Gospel evokes repentance and activates saving faith. It debunks spiritual myths, which attempt to distort God's attributes. It

¹⁰ Editors of *Time-Life Books, Voyage Through the Universe—Stars*, Time-Life Books, inc., Alexandria, VA, 1988, p. 16-17.

¹¹ Editors of *Time-Life Books, Voyage Through the Universe—Stars*, Time-Life Books, inc., Alexandria, VA, 1988, p. 16-17.

diffuses religious propaganda, which attempts to belittle His accomplishments. By illuminating the knowledge of the truth, we expose counterfeit deities with their bogus claims and phony authority.

The word of life conveys a compelling message because the Holy Spirit inspired its content. God's children radiate life as they proclaim the spiritual equivalence of a thermonuclear supernova. They articulate the Gospel with deep conviction and devout passion because eternal consequences are at stake. When lifeless sinners embrace the word of life, Jesus transforms them into eternal saints.

“Now that the Sun has risen, you can Blow out the Candles” ¹²



In 1920, Harry Dixon Loes (1895-1965) wrote a catchy song entitled, “This Little Light of Mine”.¹³ The simple lyrics encourage us to let our light shine. Our light however, is not little. We offer more than the temporary glow of a 40-watt candle shimmering in the breeze. The Holy Spirit fills us with immense power so we can do more than improve the atmosphere of this planet. Any analogy that employs short-range photons, underestimates God's message and our potential to communicate it.

A Prevailing Influence throughout the Universe

When “*holding fast to the word of life,*”¹⁴ spirit filled believers overcome Satan and his sinister agenda. As damnable evil afflicts the universe, God's word radiates eternal goodness with exquisite force. The light of Christ reveals the truth with unquenchable power. By piercing menacing domains of spiritual darkness, it transforms thoughts, words, deeds, and destinies. The influence of God's word affects every facet of life with sacred intensity.

¹² N.T. Wright, *For All God's Worth*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K., 1997, p. 78.

¹³ Lyrics from 1920: This little light o' mine, I'm gonna let it shine (repeat 3x's). Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

¹⁴ Phil 2:16 ESV

Jesus shines His light through His bride with the strength of extraterrestrial stars—stars that illuminate the universe with spiritual truth. During times of unprecedented trouble, radiant messengers will lead many to righteousness by connecting them directly with Jesus Christ. Daniel prophesied:

*Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise and there will be **a time of distress such as never occurred** since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. **Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.***
(Dan 12:1-3 NAS)

Before the end of this age, followers of Christ will shine brightly beyond the glow of this solar analogy.

In a context of end time judgment, Jesus said, **“the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”**
(Mat 13:43 NKJ)

Two Types of Stars Compete for Influence

1. Children of God

As God’s children, we shine like stars for a purpose beyond ourselves. We preach Jesus as Lord and Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Before ascending into heaven Jesus said,

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8 NIV)

Proclaiming Jesus in word and deed helps connect others with the knowledge of the truth. This message is not about us. The light that shines from our heart reveals the glory of God.

*For **we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*** (2 Cor 4:5- 6 NIV)

*And **we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this***

*purpose also I labor, **striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.*** (Col 1:28-29 NAS)

2. Celebrities Detached from Christ

Another star paints the midnight sky with an entirely different message. Motivated by fame, pop stars proclaim a trilogy of me, myself, and I. Striving with all the ego they can muster, self-centered stars project an image of exaggerated superiority. They compete for distinction through standout performances, lavish earnings, and media attention.

Celebrities without Christ pose as stars perched on a bogus pedestal. They dot the canvas of this world with artificial light. Preoccupied by their own appearance, famous personalities lose perspective when they underestimate God and overestimate self. Idolizing secular and religious prima donnas merely confers an illusion of stardom.



Compared to millions of tons of fiery fuel blazing for billions of years, fake stars exhibit the spiritual equivalent of a candle flickering in the wind. Self-absorbed idols sport a weak pretense of eternal glory. Human celebrities often settle for fleeting moments of fame under a shifting public spotlight. They cast empty shadows tarnished by provisional renown.

Pop stars eventually fade away into black holes of cultural obscurity. By not recognizing their potential in Christ, they fall short of the fullness that God designed them to attain.

Peril and Possibility

Apart from Christ, celebrities become disillusioned luminaries. Stage oriented fame does not satisfy their God-given longing for meaning, respect, and significance. Artificial light beams are a deceptive counterfeit.

Lucifer's ambition for preeminence demoted him from favored stardom to fallen Satan. Lucifer literally means daystar while Satan means adversary.

Apart from Christ, professional stars paint their own image on an artificial platform. In so doing, they expose themselves to a perilous delusion. Human approval is no substitute for divine favor. Elevated under big lights, fame hardens like cement around the human heart. It sets up a lethal ambush fraught with selfish ambition and arrogant greed.

Reinforced by illusions of success, jealousy, infatuation, and strife leap into action. These inordinate passions contradict our redeemed nature and Spirit-filled potential. Paul reprimanded certain Corinthians for acting like “*mere men*”.¹⁵ The Revised Standard Version puts it this way:

For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men? (1 Cor 3:3 RSV)

God designed every human to shine like a star—in His image. By connecting with Jesus, we can all radiate a life-giving message fortified with eternal significance. In Christ, our fortune is priceless and our fame everlasting.

The One that fuels trillions of stars offers us extraordinary power. All things are possible through Christ who strengthens us.¹⁶ Jesus provides sufficient strength to everyone willing to connect with Him on His terms.

*God said this once and for all;
how many times have I heard it repeated?
“Strength comes straight from God.”
(Psa 62:11 MSG)¹⁷*

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¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:3 NAS, NIV, NKJ

¹⁶ Philippians 4:14

¹⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1996).