

What Kind of Light

A companion for the man writing

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” Then He said it to those who follow Him: “You are the light of the world.”

The light is His. A man carries it; he does not make it. “...at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.” (John 8:12 · Matthew 5:14 · Ephesians 5:8) So the question in this poem is not whether you shine, or how brightly. It is what His light looks like by the time it reaches the people near you.

This is the paper version of the page at ancientpathcoaching.com/what-kind-of-light. Use it with the page or without it. Everything you write on it stays with you. Nothing on paper reaches us.

- 1 **Read the poem.** Slowly, out loud if you can. Mark the lights that stop you.
- 2 **Write your nine lines.** Each one starts for you. Every line is a question. Nobody here will grade your light.
- 3 **Name what you feel.** Twice. The Word for It, further on, is there for when the word will not come.
- 4 **Decide where the question goes.** To God, to the person, to your group, or held in silence until the right moment. The choice is yours, and you can choose again.

A HEBREW WORD: OHR

In Hebrew, light is *ohr* (אור), spelled with the letter aleph. Skin is also *ohr* (עור), spelled with the letter ayin. The two words sound alike.

After the fall, Genesis says God made Adam and Eve “garments of skin” (Genesis 3:21). The rabbis record that in Rabbi Meir’s Torah scroll the word was written with an aleph: garments of light. From that one letter came an old teaching. Man was first clothed in light, and what he wears now is skin. One sage said those first garments were “as smooth as a fingernail”. That is one reason given for an old custom: at the close of the Sabbath, a Jew holds his fingernails up to the candle and watches the light come through.

So the question in this poem is an old one. How much light gets through the skin?

What Kind of Light Am I?

John Sherrod

Am I the fireflies at our first home,
among the pecan trees, the pine forest and the
open fields,
swarms of light, dancing,
and we ran to them?
Am I a light on a hill, steady and true,
easy to see, easy to walk toward?

What kind of light am I?

Am I the bulb above the table in our childhood
home,
flickering over my brothers, my mom, my dad,
the fight simmering, waiting for ignition,
then the plates rattling, the pictures falling,
the silence after, and the repairs?

To my wife and my children, am I the desk light
in the house we built,
that held me those long hours the way a drink
holds another man?
Did you wait for a while,
then accept my loss to this world of dimmer
lights?

Am I a candle in the dark room,
desire, dancing so slightly,
a lost love, distant and fleeting?

Am I sunlight on a clear day,
showing every edge and the shadow behind it?
Or moonlight, enough to walk by
and not enough to be sure?

What kind of light am I?

Am I hiding my light
in the room where addiction held the night,
until the sunlight came with the justice of the
day,
a reckoning of sorts?
Am I the red light in the window,
promising what it cannot give?

A friend called me into the space they said was
mine,
welcoming, filled with goodness and wanting.
Why did I hear it and want to flee?
Did my body retreat from the light of hope
until grace gathered me at a moment of
surrender?

Am I a rainbow, a covenant blessing and a
warning?
The promise that I will not destroy you today,
that claims the faithfulness of a family
to rebuild the generations ahead?

Am I the light that is ending,
the last red coal of the fire,
still warm for the easy few in the circle,
the ones we chose today?

What is my light offering you?

Do you see it once, then darkness again,
left alone in the pit, behind the bars, in the dirt
and the mud?
Is it so unforgiving that the dark is a comfort?
Is it a beacon, so the details of the path are true?
Is it shining in your eyes, so that you cover and
hide?
Or does it rest on one place,
leaving shadow to explore and shade to relish?

To my family from story work:
when I told you my story, the truth of who I was,
you set a lamp beside me to find the light in my
story,
you held me with your eyes and stayed in the
moment,
reassuring and true.

What kind of light are you?

What kind of light am I?

Who is in your house? A lamp on a stand “gives light to all in the house.” (Matthew 5:15) Write a name, or a word like *my son*. Leave the name blank if this light is not for one person, and the line begins “Am I...”.

YOUR FIRST LIGHT

To _____, am I _____

Where was this light? Who was in the room? A picture, then what it does. Something a man could see. Don’t tell them what you feel. Show the light doing something.

A SECOND LIGHT · LEAVE IT BLANK AND IT DROPS OUT

To _____, am I _____

The nineteen lights are listed further on, each with its verse. Pick one up, or write your own.

A THIRD LIGHT · LEAVE IT BLANK AND IT DROPS OUT

To _____, am I _____

THE LIGHT OF YOUR WORDS

Is the light of my words _____?

“The unfolding of your words gives light.” (Psalm 119:130) The psalm is speaking of God’s words. Yours give a light too. A word or two:

warm

cold

soft

harsh

dim

bright

blinding

inviting

off-putting

honest

steady

WHAT ASKING IT IS LIKE

Asking this, I feel _____.

Not what you think about it. What you feel. If the word will not come, find where it sits in you, the chest, the gut, the back of the neck, and name what is there. One word. Not “fine” and not “bad”: the real one.

*What kind of light am I?***What is my light offering you?**

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.” (1 John 1:7) Light is how two people can see each other. Now turn to one person. The one you most want to ask. They may be near, far, or gone. Write the question to them either way.

WHO YOU ARE ASKING

_____, what is my light offering you?

my wife

my son

my daughter

my father

my mother

my brother

my sister

my friend

my coworker

my neighbor

Or someone harder to name:

the one I hurt

the one who hurt me

the one I have not forgiven

the one I avoid

the one I lost

the one who left

the boy I was

someone I can't name yet

YOUR FIRST QUESTION TO THEM

Is it _____?

Write the question. You do not know the answer, and you are not the one who decides it. Four to start from, or write your own:

a beacon, so the details of the path are true?

shining in your eyes?

there once, then darkness again?

resting on one place, leaving shade to relish?

A SECOND QUESTION · LEAVE IT BLANK AND IT DROPS OUT

Is it _____?

THE WORD FOR NOW

Waiting for your answer, I feel _____.

This one is for now, with the question asked and no answer yet. It does not have to be a big word. It has to be true.

IT IS WRITTEN

Where does this question go?

What happens next is yours to decide. Mark one. You can choose again later.

- ☐ Read it out loud as a conversation with God.

If something came to you as you read it, write it here. This box can wait as long as it needs to.

- ☐ Read it to someone you love, or the person you wrote this to.

When you have their answer, write it here, in their words. If you hurt them, ask only if it serves them and not your relief. If they hurt you, you owe them no conversation.

- ☐ Read it to your group, or a trusted community of friends.

Write what one of them said, or what it was like to be heard.

- ☐ Or be silent, and hold it to the right moment.

Some questions are not for asking out loud yet. This one can stay on the page. You can come back and choose again.

WHAT CAME BACK

If this is about someone who harmed you, the lament at ancientpathcoaching.com/write-a-lament was built for that. And all of it goes better with someone beside you: ancientpathcoaching.com/begin.

If something in this stirred more than you expected: the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is there any hour, by call or text. In immediate danger, call 911.

When the word will not come

Fourteen plain words. Under each is a picture of what it looks like, the sharper words that sit inside it, and someone in Scripture who said it first. Start with the plain word. Reach for a sharper one only if it is truer.

afraid

Rehearsing the conversation before it happens.

worried · on edge · dread · panicked · terrified

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.” Psalm 56:3

ashamed

Wanting to leave the room before anyone looks up.

embarrassed · exposed · small · dirty · worthless

“I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you.” Ezra 9:6

alone

A full house and nobody who knows.

left out · overlooked · forgotten · cut off · abandoned

“I am lonely and afflicted.” Psalm 25:16

angry

The jaw set, the answer too fast.

irritated · resentful · bitter · furious · full of rage

“I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” Jonah 4:9

sad

Heavy in the chest, with no one reason.

down · disappointed · heavy · grieving · heartbroken

“Why are you cast down, O my soul?” Psalm 42:5

numb

Present at the table and not there.

flat · checked out · shut down · hollow · frozen

“My spirit faints within me.” Psalm 143:4

tired

Sleep does not fix it.

worn · drained · spent · burned out · finished

“I am weary with my moaning.” Psalm 6:6

unsure

One foot in, one foot out.

uneasy · hesitant · torn · doubtful · lost

“I believe; help my unbelief!” Mark 9:24

longing

Homesick for a place I cannot name.

restless · homesick · hungry · aching · waiting

“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you.” Psalm 42:1

in awe

Standing in the yard looking up.

wonder · curious · moved · humbled · small in a good way

“What is man that you are mindful of him?” Psalm 8:4

hopeful

Making a plan for next year.

expectant · encouraged · lifted · eager · ready

“This I call to mind, and therefore I have hope.” Lamentations 3:21

at peace

Nothing to prove tonight.

settled · safe · rested · content · still

“I have calmed and quieted my soul.” Psalm 131:2

glad

Laughing before I decided to.

pleased · grateful · delighted · joyful · full

“The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.” Psalm 126:3

known

Someone saw all of it and stayed.

seen · heard · held · wanted · home

“You have searched me and known me!” Psalm 139:1

Nineteen lights, each with its verse

Every light in the poem, and a few more. Pick one up and finish the question your own way, or leave them all and write the light you know.

the fireflies

"Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun." Ecclesiastes 11:7

a light on a hill

"A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." Matthew 5:14

the lighthouse

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." Isaiah 9:2

a star among stars

"...among whom you shine as lights in the world." Philippians 2:15

the flashing light

"I will set my justice for a light to the peoples." Isaiah 51:4

the stop light

"For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life." Proverbs 6:23

the yellow light

"Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you." John 12:35

the green light

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalm 119:105

the flashlight

"...does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?" Luke 15:8

the kitchen bulb

"...and it gives light to all in the house." Matthew 5:15

a candle

"For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness." Psalm 18:28

the welcome sign

"...its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there." Revelation 21:25

the desk light

"The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all his innermost parts." Proverbs 20:27

a hidden light

"Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand?" Mark 4:21

the red light

"...even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." 2 Corinthians 11:14

sunlight

"...the greater light to rule the day..." Genesis 1:16

moonlight

"...and the lesser light to rule the night..." Genesis 1:16

a rainbow

"I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." Genesis 9:13

the last red coal

"But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day." Proverbs 4:18

The story of light, in ten stops

1 • THE FIRST WORD

“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”
Genesis 1:3

Light is the first thing God speaks, before there is a sun or a lamp to carry it. The Hebrew word is *ohr*. Light begins with Him.

2 • THE LIGHT-BEARERS

“...let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” Genesis 1:15

The whole scene: Genesis 1:14–18

On the fourth day the word changes to *ma-ohr*, a light-bearer: the sun, the moon, the stars. They are given a job, and the job is for whoever is under them: to give light upon the earth.

3 • THE LAMP IN GOD’S HOUSE

“And the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it.” Exodus 25:37

Tended “from evening to morning”: Exodus 27:21

Seven lamps in the tabernacle, kept burning by men who tended them every night. A lamp is aimed at something, and a lamp has to be tended.

4 • MY LAMP, HIS LIGHT

“For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness.” Psalm 18:28

With Psalm 27:1 • Psalm 36:9 • Psalm 119:105 • Proverbs 6:23 • Proverbs 20:27 • 2 Samuel 22:29 • Job 29:3

In the Psalms the light becomes personal. My lamp is lit by Someone else, and “in your light do we see light”. Proverbs adds that a man’s own spirit is “the lamp of the LORD”: God searches a man by the lamp He put in him.

5 • LIGHT FOR PEOPLE IN THE DARK

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” Isaiah 9:2

With Isaiah 60:1–3 • Micah 7:8 • Matthew 4:16

The prophets see light coming to people who cannot make their own. “When I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me.”

6 • THE LIGHT, AND THE ONES WHO CARRY IT

“I am the light of the world.” John 8:12. *“You are the light of the world.”* Matthew 5:14

With John 1:4–9 • John 12:35–36

Jesus takes the title and then hands it on. John the Baptist shows how to hold it: “He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.” That is a light-bearer again: he carries a light that is not his. The question is never whether you are one. It is what kind.

7 • THE STAND, THE BASKET AND THE EYE

“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.”

Matthew 5:15

With Mark 4:21 • Matthew 6:22–23 • Luke 11:33–36

A lamp can be hidden, and an eye can go bad: “If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” Light in a man is not automatic.

8 • LIGHT TELLS THE TRUTH

“But whoever does what is true comes to the light.”

John 3:21

With John 3:19–20 • Ephesians 5:8–14 • 2 Corinthians 11:14

Some people come to a light and some hide from it, and not every light is true.

9 • LIGHT IS FOR ONE ANOTHER

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.” 1 John 1:7

With Philippians 2:15 • 1 Thessalonians 5:5 • 2 Corinthians 4:6

Light is how two people can see each other. This is why the poem turns to “you”, and why you are sent to ask.

10 • THE LAST CITY

“They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light.” Revelation 22:5

With Revelation 21:23–25 • Proverbs 4:18 • Matthew 25:21

The story ends where it began, with God as the light and no lamp needed. Every light-bearer’s job has an end.

THE RAINBOW

“I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.” Genesis 9:13

The promise: Genesis 9:15

Light through the rain, set in the sky after a judgment that was real. A covenant blessing and a warning.