

# Journal of Applied Christian Leadership

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Volume 6 | Number 1

Article 1

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2012

## Walking in the Light

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### Recommended Citation

Editors, JACL (2012) "Walking in the Light," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 6: No. 1, 4-7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol6/iss1/1>

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## EDITORIAL

# WALKING IN THE LIGHT

*But the path of the just is like the shining sun,  
That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.*

*The way of the wicked is like darkness,  
They do not know what makes them stumble.*  
—Proverbs 4:18-19 (NKJV)

When I was growing up, I was blessed with many talented friends. However, one friend in particular seemed to be amazingly talented. Peggy could play the piano and the cello, she was an excellent student, she was fun to be around and when we were together, we laughed a lot. And she could snow ski. One January weekend, another friend's parent offered to take a carload of skiers, including Peggy, to Vermont for an all-day ski trip. When one lives in Massachusetts, Vermont is the place of skiing choice, because Vermont has mountains! Or at least Vermont has mountains when compared to Massachusetts.

When the group assembled, Peggy asked, "Where's Ann?" I had not been invited, which was not surprising, as I was neither experienced nor adept at snow skiing. I had never been on an all-day ski trip, so it was possible to question whether I could last the entire day. But despite these drawbacks, Peggy insisted to the gathered group that I should be invited, too. In fact, I understand that she used all her leadership skills and influence to point out that my house was nearby and there was room in the car. A phone call to my house, early in the morning though it was, created a level of excitement for me that I remember to this day. I was going skiing in Vermont for a whole day!

Due to Peggy's leadership, that day was a major turning point for me with respect to snow skiing. While never ready to join an Olympic team, I enjoyed years of skiing success because of that all-day experience. Whenever I skied, I remembered Peggy's use of her talent for skiing and her leadership within the group to gift me with a new skill and a day of

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great pleasure. The lightness of that day is still with me, even though the event itself occurred almost 40 years ago.

Parker Palmer (2000) makes the following observation in his book *Let Your Life Speak*:

A leader is someone with the power to project either shadow or light onto some part of the world and onto the lives of the people who dwell there. A leader shapes the ethos in which others must live, an ethos as light-filled as heaven or as shadowy as hell. A good leader is intensely aware of the interplay of inner shadow and light, lest the act of leadership do more harm than good. (p. 78)

Intrigued by the thought of the leader projecting either shadow or light, Craig Johnson used that metaphor for his book *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership: Casting Light and Shadow*. In an interview with JACL, Johnson talks about this book, his thoughts on casting light and shadow, and the direction of leadership research in the future.

In keeping with the thought of the power of leaders to project either shadow or light, Bill Richardson discusses the basic principles of good leadership, especially the need for integrity, in light of the question: “Do jerks make better leaders?” His thoughts are reflected and expanded on in Donna Randall’s article on power, which notes that while leaders seek to create and maintain an ethical climate through their power, it is personal power, rather than positional power, that has the most effective results, because it is personal power that reflects the stronger values orientation.

Duane Covrig, Mordekai Ongo, and Janet Ledesma contrast the roles of priest, king and prophet (Allender’s model) and then add the role of judge to the list. In their article they posit that leaders may better avoid the shadows in their leadership by listening to the voice of a judge, or judgment, thereby not only improving their own leadership, but also empowering the community. Brian Traxler and Duane Covrig then act in this judgment role in their article on the morality of U.S. President Andrew Jackson.

Finally, Wilton Bunch reminds us that whether or not we consider ourselves to be leaders, we are all followers. To follow is a noble calling, and requires each follower to reach that noble status through understanding and application of the virtues in his or her life. These virtues include the “cardinal virtues” of Aristotle (prudence, justice, courage, and self-control), and those identified as the “fruit of the Spirit” by the Apostle Paul (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control).

But how does this happen? How can a leader successfully project light rather than shadow?

In her book *The Sabbath World*, Judith Shulevitz (2010) discusses the 1973 John Darley and Daniel Batson study of whether students at Princeton Theological Seminary would stop to help someone in distress. In this study, seminary students on their way to give an assigned lecture (on “the good Samaritan”) were forced to confront a person who sat slumped motionless in a doorway, coughing and groaning. (This slumped person was actually an accomplice of the experimenter.) Some of the students were told that they had to rush to get to the lecture on time. Others were told that they had enough time to get to the lecture, if they moved along at a good speed. Still others were told they had plenty of time to get to the lecture. In the experiment, the researchers found that few of the students stopped to help. And the evidence pointed to an interesting conclusion (Shulevitz, 2010):

“After the data was weighed and the variables analyzed, only one variable could be used to predict who would stop to help and who wouldn’t. The important factor was not personality type or whether a student’s career or the parable of the Good Samaritan was foremost in his mind. It was whether or not he was in a hurry. . . . The study made it hard not to conclude,” said Darley and Batson, “that ethics becomes a luxury as the speed of our daily lives increases.” (pp. 25-26)

The psychologists did not adversely judge the students. Even though all the students who hadn’t stopped admitted they had seen the man, Darley and Batson noted that several said that they hadn’t realized that he needed help until after they’d passed him. Time pressure had narrowed their “cognitive map” as they raced by. They may have seen the stranger, but they didn’t really see him.

Meanwhile, the students who had realized that the man required assistance but had withheld it from him showed up for their talks looking “aroused and anxious.” Darley and Batson suggested that possibly the students experienced conflict between their duty to help the man and their desire to live up to the expectations of the research study. “‘This is often true of people in a hurry,’ Darley and Batson wrote. ‘They hurry because somebody depends on their being somewhere. Conflict, rather than callousness, can explain their failure to stop, according to the researchers.’” (Shulevitz, 2010, p. 26)

As leaders, being focused and driven may result in unethical actions, in actions that move toward the shadow, because our consciousness

doesn't "compute" what is happening outside of the main activity on which our minds are set. Fortunately, Scripture urges us to take advantage of Sabbath—a day when we will stop and consider the most important aspects of our lives and take time for those people who matter most to us. Sabbath reminds us every week that being in too much of a hurry can lead to decisions that we will regret, because we haven't taken time to pause, consider, and reflect before we act. It may be that to engage in truly ethical leadership—leadership that shines light onto some part of the world, or even into one day in the life of a friend who wants to learn to ski—requires that we take the time to be, to think, to engage in relationships. It may be that ethical leadership comes only by practicing reflection and quiet, that is, by remembering to take a Sabbath.

Herta von Stiegel (2011), in her book *The Mountain Within*, agrees:

Pacing yourself, not racing to your goal in a slipshod manner . . . takes fortitude, or strength, to keep yourself from the natural urge to just get it done as quickly as possible, at any cost. There's more, though. If you want to lead, it does not serve you well if you are the only one who reaches the goal, and you have taken nobody with you. . . . People in leadership positions who do not pace themselves and do not take time to reflect can cause untold damage to themselves and the people around them. It's important that you cultivate a rhythm that enables you to reach your objectives while enjoying the journey. Also, you may be pleasantly surprised that people will want to follow you. (p. 169)

## References

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