

# The Light Leading Us Home

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*I am the light  
of the world.  
Whoever follows  
me will never  
walk in darkness,  
but will have the  
light of life.*

JOHN 8:12

**T**he 19th-century English painter J. M. W. Turner was renowned for his stunning use of light. Stare long enough at pieces like *Snow Storm*, *Frosty Morning*, and—my personal favorite—*Fishermen at Sea*, and one gets the sense that Turner was painting with fire as much as oil and watercolors. Pastor and artist Michael Milton notes, “In Turner there is not merely light, but light leading the viewer in search of meaning.” In the artwork of this master, light is not the end—it is an invitation toward hope, beauty, and meaning itself.

Walking around our neighborhood on cold evenings during the

Advent season, we are dazzled by arrays of Christmas lights. In recent years, seeing them through the eyes of my two young children has awakened something in me I'd lost to the subtle and insidious cynicism that often sets in with age: longing. Light is a wonderment because of its promise that there's something brilliant veiled behind the darkness, waiting to be found, pulsing with life, on the brink of unfolding before us.

In 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.'" The words alone are poetic enough, but this wasn't just a catchy metaphor. In announcing himself to be the Light of the World, in this particular place and at this particular time, Jesus was making a bold and beautiful declaration about what's veiled behind the darkness—and more importantly, about his own ability and willingness to get us there.

Jesus spoke these words during the Feast of Tabernacles, a weeklong Jewish festival centered on celebrating the Exodus, when God led his people out of slavery in Egypt and into freedom in the Promised Land. During their long journey through the wilderness, Yahweh had revealed himself to the people as a pillar of cloud

by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21–22; 40:38). To remember this act of divine guidance during the Feast of Tabernacles, in the temple courts flames were lit atop two 75-foot-tall pillars to symbolize the pillar of light in Exodus. It is in this very setting that Jesus stands in the temple courts—likely in the light of these pillars—and declares, "I am the light of the world."

Jesus is the light guiding us through the wilderness of our despair, our pain, our loss. He is the light undoing the darkness of our fear, our anxiety, our uncertainty. He is the great Light of the World, leading us home.

*Reflect on John 8:12.*

*Optional: Also read John 9:5 and 12:46.*

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What do you imagine Jesus' first hearers thought or wondered when Jesus said this? How does the context of the Feast of Tabernacles enrich your understanding of his claim?