

I want to tell you that I love to go hiking and camping. I never really get to do enough of it to suit me. I especially love a trip that is sort of a challenge to me, something that causes me to really test myself. Sometimes these trips are a little rough, but it is always great to think back on later. One of the most memorable expeditions that I ever went on was when three friends and I went backpacking in the Smokies in November of 1982. If you have ever been on the Appalachian Trail, you know that the shelters have to be reserved in advance. So, we did. We began at Newfound Gap, hiked past Charlie's Bunyon for a great view, and then the rest of the ten miles to Peck's Corner shelter. With a pretty heavy pack, we were fairly tired. So we decided not to go the next 12 miles to our planned stop at Cosby Knob Shelter, but to stop after 5.5 miles at Tri-Corner Knob shelter. The more experienced campers said, 'Shoot! That shelter won't come near filling up this late in the year!' Famous last words!

We arrived there early in the day, had plenty of time to relax a little, cook our supper, and regain strength. But as the day began to close, more and more campers began to drift in and fill the shelter. As we were cooking supper, it became very clear that there would not be enough room for us. There were only three choices: to sleep on the floor of the shelter and wallow in the dirt and get stepped on, to sleep outside the shelter on the ground and freeze to death and become a snack for the bears, or to hike out at night. So, we chose the most interesting one and decided to hike out at night. As the sun began to set we packed our gear and nearly ran to the top of Mount Guyot to enjoy the light as long as we could. It was a beautiful sunset, but it didn't last nearly long enough. Now we were really in the dark. Naturally, there was no moon that night. And we had already used our Wal-mart special flashlights a lot during the previous night. What an experience!

Those of you who have been on the trail before know that it not a smooth trail. It can be treacherous in the daylight! But there we were trudging along, feeling the surface with our feet before we really put our weight down. It took us four hours steady hiking to finish the 9.2 miles to Cosby Campground in the darkness. Of course, that made 14.7 miles that day, and our muscles and joints were completely destroyed. But it was indeed a memorable trip, and I really wouldn't trade it for anything.

But you might ask, What kind of idiot would do something like that? Or further, What kind of idiot would tell about it afterwards? Well, you're looking at that kind. Actually, there are several reasons that I don't mind telling you about it. First, I try not to take myself so seriously that I can't tell my mistakes. Second, even this doesn't come close to the dumbest thing I have ever done. Third, I haven't even told you about the worst part of this trip. And fourth, I believe that there are some valuable lessons that can be learned from this experience, if you would be willing to listen to me a little longer.

The first thought that comes to my mind when I think of this trip is the scripture found in Ps 119.105, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path'. We all know how difficult it is to walk in the dark, and we all need something to show us how to avoid the obstacles we find. The same is true in our spiritual lives. Our real obstacles are the ones in our minds, not physical ones! We need a light that will guide us. We read in Jn 11.9-10, Christ says, 'If any one walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if any one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.' And in Jn 8.12 we read, 'Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.' Again, here we are talking about an inner light; one that guides us morally, spiritually. Christ is the proper guide because he reflects the glory of God himself, as we read in Heb 1.3. And God is the source of all goodness. By following this light, we have access to the greatest life that can be. With this light, we can find direction and purpose and meaning for our lives. With this light we can avoid the treacherous pitfalls that those who love evil place before us. By this light we see what God is like, but we also have it likened to a guide for living with other people. In 1 Jn 2.8-11 we read, ... The wars of this world and the threat of those wars indicate that we badly need this guiding light.

The next point that I would like to make concerns the genuineness of this light. On the hike, all I had was a pencil-sized flashlight that had already been used one night. It was never meant to last 4 hours! In the dim glow that it produced, which a firefly would not have been jealous of,

all of the rocks on the trail were one confused mass of shadows. Even a good flashlight cast shadows in such a way that it was hard to see well. Many times man thinks that he is good enough to be a light for himself, that he doesn't really need God's light. He tries to manufacture an imitation of the light, but really ends up only confusing the whole picture. We must realize that there is only one true light, Jesus Christ. Whoever claims to have an equivalent light is wrong. Again we witness all the attempts made to 'improve' the world by these new standards, and the fact that each one has failed miserably. Only Christianity has the power to change man from within. So we must cling to the true light.

The next point that I would like to make is that we must try to reflect the light for others to see. Those who might not look to Christ may be influenced by our own lives. We must be leaders, too. I remember that because my flashlight was so dim, I finally put it up. I could see well enough to get by because of the light of my friends. I simply walked in the middle to get as much benefit as I could. This emphasizes, too the importance of being with the right kind of people. In Mt 5.14-16 we read, 'You are the light of the world. ... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.' We must try to reflect the light of God so that others may be guided properly.

Next, I remember the lights over the ridge of the towns in the area, Knoxville and Maryville, and how they gave me encouragement and direction. By being able to see some light, I knew that if I kept walking, I would eventually get there. Especially as we neared the very end, it seemed to draw me more and more strongly to finish what I had to do. It strikes me that the light of Christ is a goal, a marker, a glimpse of hope for the finish. During this life we have many times when things seem very dark and dreary. But by having the light shining from heaven, it helps to keep plodding on. We know that some day, no matter what happens to us, we will be able to enjoy perfect rest in heaven with God. As we read in Rev. 21.23, there is no need of the sun there because the glory of God is all the light that we need. We must keep our eye on this goal as much as we can.

29. illusion; hi; Remember on the all day hike from Clingman's dome to Fontana dam, how that the lights of the dam were so deceitful. It looked like we were heading in the wrong direction because we did not understand the complete picture of things. The same idea is true in terms of the problems of life. Things may appear backwards, but we do not know all of the facts or the complete plan of God.

It is sometimes easy to become confused about the true nature of the goal, however. I can remember on another hike that we took to Fontana Dam which stretched into the evening hours. The lights on the dam kept puzzling me because I had my own picture in my mind about what direction we were coming from, and how far away it should be. As we kept plodding along in the dark, I just could not figure out the distance using this picture from my mind. Finally, as we stepped onto the road that led to the dam, I realized how wrong I had been. In our spiritual lives, we run into the same problem when we decide beforehand what God is like, and what he wants from us. Then we have extreme difficulties in understanding the Bible, because it does not fit our conception of what we want the truth to be. Things may appear backwards or out of place to us in life, just' as they did to me on that hike, but it is simply because we do not know the complete plan of God. We must rely on faith that he will work every thing for our good. We must just keep on the trail, assured that it will come out in the right place.

Next, I believe that Christ gives us an inner light that enables us to proceed in spite of the absence of the outer light. I know that God isn't going to give me a special light even though he could, but he wants me to be able to carry on no matter how dark it gets; no matter what I have or what problems I have. Just like Job, God wants me to love him no matter what. But more than that, he has promised us strength to conquer any problems that come our way. When we were on that hike, we needed this kind of inner light and strength to go on. I am reminded of the 23rd Psalm, the part where David walks through the valley of the shadow of death. We were truly in the valley of shadow. Also a scripture I like in this regard is Is 42.16, 'And I will lead the blind in a way that they know not, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground.' The real truth of this to me is spiritual, but I cannot help thinking that he helped us as we stumbled beneath the packs over that rough ground. He gave us the strength after a very long day to keep our balance. None

of us fell a single time during the night. In Ps 27.1 we find the idea of God being our strength and light. We must use Christ's inner light to struggle against our problems.

There is another thought that I would like to add at this point, and that is that we all have within us a tremendous desire for light in our lives, even though we may not admit it. I remember being on campouts during the winter when it was so cold that we couldn't sleep and got up to stand by the fire and wish for the dawn. We searched the horizon continually for the first streaks of light. Mankind is in a similar position, as we read in Mt 4.16, 'The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.' Of course this light was Christ himself, as we have already talked about.

I hope that you will remember these lessons more than you remember how silly we were. I know as good Scouts you will be more prepared than I was. But remember that we all need light in our lives, and the true light is Christ. He shows us the way to live the best life that can be, and he gives us strength and meaning in life. We must remember to let our light shine for others, and to use the true light to enable us to overcome life's troubles. And finally, we must never forget that Jn 1.15 tells us that the true light conquers the darkness, just as a flashlight penetrates darkness. Just as no one has a darklight to overcome the light, the light of Christ will overcome evil in the end.

© Copyright 1984, Heard Lowry