

The background of the entire page is a solid blue color. It is decorated with several large, expressive black brushstrokes. In the upper left, a thick stroke curves downwards and then splits into two parallel lines. In the upper right, there are several vertical, textured strokes. In the lower left, there are two 'X' marks made of thick strokes. In the lower right, there is a large, dark, rectangular blocky shape.

# A CITY ON A HILL

## PREVIEW

How many of us like to be in the spotlight? I'm sure some of us do, and some of us don't. Our preference might change depending on the circumstances, but here's the point: we are called to stand out. Luckily for those of us who don't like the spotlight, standing out doesn't necessarily mean we have to get up in front of a crowd and preach a sermon. Instead, it means we're to be different than the world. We're to be like a city set on a hill whose light radiates in all directions, penetrating the darkness.

## PRAISE

This Praise section can be presented as an object lesson with battery-operated candles, or it can serve as the basis for a discussion.

Distribute the unlit candles and turn off the lights. Ask the group if they are able to see any better with the candles off. Have them turn the candles on and ask the question again.

We are to be like lights shining through the darkness of this world, illuminating the way. When our "flames" are on, we are highly visible. Our lights illuminate the pathway, helping to guide others to safety. Our lights also provide a sense of comfort and warmth. But if our "flames" aren't on, then we can't see any better than anyone else in the darkness. It means we have allowed ourselves to blend into the world to the extent we can't help anyone find the way to the light. What good is that?

## PARABLE

Being a follower of Jesus is like being a lighthouse built on a rocky shore. Lighthouses help boats and ships establish their position. They warn ships of hazards and help them navigate treacherous coastal waterways. Their lamps shine so brightly that sailors can see the beams for miles. The light is like a promise, a place where the sailors will find safety and rest.

Lighthouses are so important that America's first public works project was to construct a lighthouse. Authorized by George Washington and built in 1792, the Cape Henry Lighthouse in Virginia was a beacon that guided ships safely into Chesapeake Bay. Cape Henry Lighthouse is now a national historic monument.

We are like lighthouses shining in a world of darkness. Our light helps people establish their position (realize where they really are and the peril they are in), warn them of hazards, and guide them to a destination of safety and rest.

## PRESENT

Read Matthew 5:14.

In this verse, the church is the city, and if we are in the church, our collective light illuminates the world around us. This city stands out because it's on a hilltop, easily seen for miles around. Yet we are not the focus of attention because it's not about us—it's about God. Having others see God in us is a demonstration that we are doing God's will. We can be examples of what it means to serve God, but we can't do that if our lights aren't lit.

## PRACTICE

Esther was a young Jewish woman in the ancient world who found favor with the Persian king. She had been selected as a candidate for the new queen during a kingdom-wide search. It turned out that the king favored Esther above all the other young women and made her his wife.

Esther's cousin, Mordecai, happened to work at the palace. An egomaniac named Haman hated Mordecai. As a royal official, Haman demanded that everyone bow to him whenever he passed by. But, according to Jewish custom, Mordecai would not bow to anyone but God. Haman became so enraged he crafted an evil plan to kill all the Jews, but Esther appealed to the king and helped save her people. Mordecai's words to Esther have echoed throughout history: "If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14, NIV).

Esther could have kept quiet; she could have hidden her light, but she didn't. She used the gifts and opportunities God had given her to help His kingdom and to help save her people. She let her light shine. She is a wonderful example of what it means to be a city set on a hill.

It would be easier to walk through life without putting ourselves out there, but is that really what God wants from us and for us? God places us in unique positions and gives us unique abilities so we can use them to guide others toward the entrance to the city of light.

## PRAY

God, sometimes it's hard to stand out, but it's worth it. You have guided me, and I want to help guide others. God, give me the opportunity to be a lighthouse for others, and when it's hard and I'm scared, give me the courage of Esther. Help me to remember that I am like a city set on a hill and that You gave me these abilities and put me here so I can be a light. Thank You, God, for letting me be a part of Your plan. In Jesus' name, amen.

## PLUS

If time allows, discuss times when the students have been a light for others, or when others have been lights for them. Ask for ways they can shine as lights for others at school. Brainstorm activities that can be done as a club. Some examples are:

- A fundraiser to help a good charity
- Prayer at the Pole
- Writing encouraging words on sticky notes and placing them around the campus