

"A must-read for anyone who needs a renewed sense of purpose for reaching people with the gospel."

CRAIG GROESCHEL



LIT UP WITH LOVE

Becoming Good-News People
to a Gospel-Starved World

DERWIN L. GRAY

Derwin Gray's passion for Jesus and the gospel leaps off every page. Full of vivid personal stories, real-life challenges, biblical insight, and spiritual energy, this book cannot fail to reenergize our love for God and our desire to see people transformed by his love for us.

N. T. WRIGHT, research professor emeritus of New Testament and early Christianity at St Mary's College in the University of St Andrews and senior research fellow at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford

In *Lit Up with Love: Becoming Good-News People to a Gospel-Starved World*, Derwin masterfully unpacks the why and how of evangelism. This book is for everyone who cringes at the thought of evangelism and wonders why anyone would do it. It's not offering the latest method or technique; instead we are presented with a compelling vision of the extraordinary privilege it is to join Jesus in his quest to seek and save the lost.

CHRISTINE CAINE, cofounder of A21 and Propel Women

As followers of Jesus, we know that our only hope is in the power of the gospel. Despite that recognition, many Christians hesitate to share its transformative power. In Pastor Derwin Gray's book *Lit Up with Love: Becoming Good-News People to a Gospel-Starved World*, he equips believers to confidently spread Jesus' message and shine a bright light into a dark world. This is a must-read for anyone who needs a renewed sense of purpose for reaching people with the gospel.

CRAIG GROESCHEL, pastor of Life.Church and *New York Times* bestselling author

We need this book right now. The church needs course correction, and my friend Derwin is pointing us in the right direction with this timely work. I am thankful he has never lost his zeal for the great commission.

BRADY BOYD, senior pastor of New Life Church

None of us would have found life and freedom in Jesus if someone hadn't told us about him. We are each the beneficiary of another's love, courage, and willingness to share the Good News. And yet many of us still struggle to pay it forward. We don't know what to say, or we don't want to offend, so we withhold what was so graciously given to us. If that describes your relationship with evangelism and you want to change but don't know how, this book is for you. With passion, conviction, inspiration, and clarity, Derwin has written a primer for evangelism. If you are looking for a first step to learn how to share your faith, look no further!

SHARON HODDE MILLER, author of *The Cost of Control*

Warning: Read at your own risk—because *Lit Up with Love* will ignite a missional imagination for a gospel-starved world. I am so grateful Dr. Gray has created a resource that will equip church leaders and churches to light up the dark with the love of Jesus as we shine like stars in this world.

BRENT CROWE, vice president of Student Leadership University

If you are curious about how to live empowered by the Holy Spirit and love others into the Kingdom of God, then *Lit Up with Love* is your go-to resource. Loving people out of the overflow of God's grace in our lives should be our top priority. However, loving people and loving the hard to love might be our greatest challenge. Our cultural moment requires us to dig deep into our souls and discover how to love with God's kind of love. Don't just read this book—read it and pass it on to someone else!

DR. ED LOVE, executive director of church multiplication and discipleship for The Wesleyan Church

Lit Up with Love is the guide we need to help us graciously and effectively share God's love with people in our real lives. These pages are a gift. Dr. Derwin Gray is one of the most important voices in the global church today, and we are blessed to learn what God has

revealed to him about sharing the hope of Jesus with the people right next to us.

DR. HOSANNA WONG, international speaker and bestselling author of *How (Not) to Save the World*

Derwin has been a friend and brother to me for over twenty-five years, and in that time I've watched him live out everything he writes about in these pages. *Lit Up with Love* is personal, theological, practical, and most importantly . . . *doable!* This is simple evangelism, rooted in our love for Jesus, that every Christian can begin practicing right now.

CLAYTON KING, pastor, evangelist, and author of *Reborn* and *Stronger*

Dr. Derwin Gray is my pastor. He is an older brother in the Lord, and his investment in my life has fundamentally shaped and reshaped my ministry. He is infectious about evangelism and a love for those far from God. His zeal has ignited mine in a way that permeates my preaching, leadership, and personal life. What he has written in *Lit Up with Love* feels to me like a culmination of many lessons I have learned from him, and I know they will change your life and ministry too.

LÉONCE B. CRUMP JR., pastor of United Church and author of *Renovate* and *The Resilience Factor*

This is a timely call for Christians to embody the transformative love of Jesus in a world desperate for hope and healing. Gray weaves together personal stories, biblical insights, and practical advice, inviting us to become everyday missionaries who bring light to every corner of our communities. This book is not just an exposition of the Good News; it is a practical guide that equips us to live as messengers. Read and shine!

GLENN PACKIAM, lead pastor of Rockharbor Church and author of *The Resilient Pastor* and *The Intentional Year*

Derwin Gray is a divinely appointed and anointed force of nature as a pastor, leader, theologian, author, and man of God. Twenty years ago I had the privilege of touring with him during our Dare 2 Share conference tours. As we traveled across America equipping tens of

thousands of teenagers to live and share their faith, I witnessed him light up every room he was in with the love of Christ. He became the unofficial tour pastor because of his passion for Jesus and love for everyone he encountered. In his excellent book *Lit Up with Love*, Derwin unpacks the powerful biblical insights that he has been living out for decades. I have been deeply impacted by his writings, but also, more than anything else, his life. You will leave this book energized, convicted, and inspired to be lit up with the love of Christ everywhere you go and with everyone you meet.

GREG STIER, founder/visionary of Dare 2 Share and author of *Radical like Jesus*

Lit Up with Love is a powerful call to live with purpose, on mission, and with a heart for the gospel. With wisdom rooted in Scripture and a contagious passion, Pastor Derwin guides us on a journey to embrace our God-given calling. Whether you're new to faith or a seasoned believer, this book will inspire you to live intentionally for Christ and impact the world around you. I highly recommend it!

JONATHAN POKLUDA, lead pastor of Harris Creek Baptist Church, bestselling author, and host of *Becoming Something*

Lit Up with Love: Becoming Good-News People to a Gospel-Starved World is just the right book for our present time. In a world desperately seeking answers and solutions to their pain and sorrows, followers of Christ must be ready to embrace and walk alongside others with genuine love. This book serves as a vital reminder of what it means to embody the light and love of Jesus, addressing the world's profound needs, starting within our own communities and extending to everyone we encounter daily. I highly recommend it and pray that it will be the motivation that we need to stay "lit" for Jesus.

PASTOR JOHN K. JENKINS SR., senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Glenarden and president of Converge

DERWIN L. GRAY



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with Tyndale House Publishers

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Foreword

The church in the United States is hurting. So many of the people around us aren't interested in the Good News of Jesus because they're wary about, disinterested in, or opposed to what they see of Christianity. Even some of those who once sat beside us on Sundays no longer see what's compelling about this faith that is supposed to lead to the abundant life.

On top of this, there's a whole lot of criticism out there about the church. Our culture talks a lot about what Christians are doing wrong. And, as my friend Derwin Gray has identified, it's because we've forgotten what brought us to Jesus in the first place. When we remember our first love, when we experience and are motivated and energized by the love of God, we become people who want everyone else around us to experience that love too. We see their humanity, their dignity, their aches, their needs—and love moves us to meet them and to help them encounter the only Love who will satisfy.

Derwin's own journey—from being introduced to God while in the NFL to leading Transformation Church—is a powerful reminder of what happens when someone is lit up with the love of Jesus. From the first time he encountered Jesus' transformative love through a teammate, he became alive with this truth: Every believer is called

and equipped to be an everyday missionary, sharing Christ's love in both ordinary and extraordinary ways. It doesn't have to be awkward or forced or impersonal. It's just love. Just seeing people God loves with the eyes and perspective of God and bringing God's love to their places of deepest hunger.

Derwin doesn't just talk about the core human longings for hope, rest, healing, and new life—he's lived them. And he's seen God meet these longings in other people and transform their lives again and again. That's why he's so passionate about helping the rest of us integrate the vision and discover the practical ways to live our faith with intention and love. His challenge to be "hope dealers" and "everyday missionaries" isn't just talk. He's a man of action. And he wants you to know you have everything you need to join Jesus in this mission to bring hope and love to people right where you are.

I care a lot about the church. I care a lot about Jesus' mission. I care a lot about everyday Christians getting up and doing something about a hurting world. *Lit Up with Love* is the call to action we need. May this book spark a fire in you to live boldly, love deeply, and be a Good-News person to those wandering in the dark.

Dave Ferguson

coauthor of *BLESS: 5 Everyday Ways to
Love Your Neighbor and Change the World*

CHAPTER 0

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

The End at the Beginning

I want to tell you about a new city.

This city is like no other, like nowhere you've ever been. Words like *war*, *poverty*, *racism*, *human trafficking*, *sexual immorality*, *greed*, and *unforgiveness* are not mentioned here. Evil does not exist. Sin, death, sorrow, and suffering are not even faint memories. All the world's sadness has become undone, remembered no more. The only tears in this city are tears of joy. Darkness cannot live here, for every corner of every street reflects a light source brighter than ten thousand suns, shining eternally, giving life.

This new city is completely lit up with love.

“I will create new heavens and a new earth;
the past events will not be remembered or come to mind.
Then be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;
for I will create Jerusalem to be a joy
and its people to be a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem
and be glad in my people.
The sound of weeping and crying
will no longer be heard in her.”

ISAIAH 65:17-19, CSB

Your loved ones who died in the old city are alive in the new one. Your grandmother looks different, but she's still your granny. You feel every ounce of her love in a way you never did before. Your aunts and uncles and brothers and sisters and relatives from previous generations greet you. They are whole and beautiful; their "corruptible body is clothed with incorruptibility," and their "mortal body is clothed with immortality"¹; they are now truly human, and it's glorious. They are alive.

Each one is lit up with love.

In this city of light, you also meet people you didn't know in the old city—but somehow you all know you are family. The blood of the One who lights up the city has made you a family, his family—a global, colorful, multiethnic village comprised of every nation, tribe, and tongue.² Everyone flourishes in this city. Their eyes reflect the joy of ultimate human flourishing.

Each inhabitant of the city is lit up with love.

All creation is more beautiful and more real than you imagined possible, just as it was intended to be from the beginning. The sky, trees, mountains, animals—all things are new and better and more magnificent than in the old city that passed away.

Every part of creation is lit up with love.

Just when you think the new city could not get any more splendid, you hear music and singing more wonderful than anything you've ever experienced. A holy symphony of praise surrounds you, harmonies woven in how people relate to each other and creation, thousands upon thousands of voices layering in one accord, in an eternal celebration. As you move closer to the singers, your eyes open wide, your heart beats fast. You are overwhelmed by the overflow of love and joy and laughter and tears and beauty and awe.

That's when you see him. Jesus, the glorious Lamb of God, the Light of the city and every person in it. And all you can do is join the multitude of people, lifting your voice in songs of praise.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slaughtered,
and you purchased people
for God by your blood
from every tribe and language
and people and nation.
You made them a kingdom
and priests to our God,
and they will reign on the earth. . . .

Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered
to receive power and riches
and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and blessing! . . .

Blessing and honor and glory and power
be to the one seated on the throne,
and to the Lamb, forever and ever!

REVELATION 5:9-10, 12-13, CSB

You are a blood-bought citizen of the new city, a royal priest, a coheir, ruling and reigning with the Lamb in the new heaven and new earth.³ Every day is filled with worship, delight, fulfilling work, exploration of creation—and most of all, love.

Our destiny is set. Our eternal inheritance will be fulfilled. Our identity has been declared because we are united to Christ. And Love himself has called us home.

What would happen if our glorious future transformed how we work, love, suffer, and create in the present? We would be lit up with love, shining into the darkness. Our life and words would be good news.⁴

PART ONE

GOOD-NEWS PEOPLE



CHAPTER 1

LET'S TALK ABOUT GOOD NEWS

Participating in Restoration

Matt was an atheist. He wanted me to know that up front as we connected over a cup of coffee. He worked as a personal trainer, and one of his clients had shared her faith with him—but she didn't know where to start with answering his intellectual questions about evil and suffering. That's when she asked if he'd be open to meeting with me, and he agreed.

Matt and I talked primarily about the problem of evil and suffering, which seemed to be his main hang-up when considering Christ. I told him, "Being an atheist doesn't solve the problem of evil and suffering." Not believing in a higher power doesn't exempt you from experiencing evil or suffering. Christians suffer, too, but there's a key difference: We follow the Suffering Servant, who knows our pain and weaves redemptive purpose into our suffering.¹ On the cross Jesus experienced our suffering and our pain, and through his resurrection we also experience his resurrection power. Jesus said, "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world."² Even when I don't understand or see his hand in the present moment, I trust Jesus to use my suffering and sorrow to form his character in me.³ Jesus doesn't waste any of our pain—he recycles it into purpose. Suffering opens my eyes to the pain of others. It helps me understand

the pain that Jesus endured on the cross. It gives me great hope knowing that one day suffering will be a thing of the past, but until that time, I am to experience the comforting presence of God in the crucible of suffering, and I am to be the comforting presence of God to those in pain.

I suggested to Matt that as an atheist, his very recognition that the world is unjust means there must be a standard of justice. And if there is a standard of justice, there must be someone who sets that standard: a God of justice. When we rail at the world for being wrong, we are longing for God to make it right.

I tried to help Matt see his questions as a key part of the Christian story: Sin, suffering, death, and evil are like a deadly virus that has infected every aspect of God's good creation. The darkness we see and experience was never meant to be, so God himself in the person of Jesus was sent on mission to rescue, redeem, restore, and reconcile humanity and creation through his life, death, and resurrection. God has already launched his work to make all things right—and through God's divine invitation, God's people get to participate in the restoration of creation.

New Testament scholar Michael J. Gorman puts it this way:

God is on a mission to liberate humanity—and indeed the entire cosmos—from the powers of Sin and Death. . . . The fullness of this liberation is a future reality for which we may, and should, now confidently hope. It is nothing less than the prophetically promised new creation.⁴

The love that Matt needed to encounter was not only that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection forgives people of sins—but that God will heal all creation from the snare of evil and suffering.⁵ Love equips us to see people's real needs and hear their honest pain. When we're

lit up with God's love, we overflow with God's goodness in ways that answer the deepest questions of the people around us.

Lit Up with Love

Every single person hungers for divine love—even if they don't know it. They're looking for love at the bottom of a bottle they hope will finally numb the pain. They're seeking the Father's comfort when the latest hookup still doesn't silence the loneliness in their soul. They're longing for the Savior's tender validation of their worthiness even as they work themselves into a depressed, burned-out state. When the beauty of nature takes their breath away—and yet the awe is fleeting—they are yearning for the eternal Artist who created it. The Carpenter has crafted human beings with caring hands, and we can only be satisfied by him and his love.⁶

Our friends and our enemies—even people we have yet to meet—are looking for what we have: Jesus, the light and life of humanity. They just may not know it yet! That's where we come into play. We know this God who meets our deepest needs, forgives our worst sins, and turns our failures into triumphs.

So why is it so hard for us to share the healing work of Christ? Maybe we don't know where to start the conversation. Or perhaps we don't want to come across as arrogant (even though, ironically, our culture has never been louder about sharing what they believe).

This I know: The more we are lit up with love, the more we will share Christ. Those of us who know his love will not be able to contain it. We will burn brightly and catch others on fire.

The Jesus of Scripture, the God who is love,⁷ was called a drunkard and a friend of sinners.⁸ The sinners saw his holiness and felt the hope of a new life with him. We who were once sinners, now saints, now know the light of life. May we, too, become friends to sinners, inviting them to join us in the light.

Good News

As I see some people deconstructing their faith, others rejecting Jesus, and churches closing, I've sensed a burden from God—and that burden has become a calling. Some nights it's hard for me to sleep as I think about people who do not know Jesus and his life-transforming, soul-healing love.

How do we know God truly loves the world? Because God became flesh and walked among us, lived the life we never could live, died on the cross to forgive our sins, and rose from the dead to reconcile himself to us and to restore all creation. The world's true Lord, King Jesus, came to establish his rule and reign on the earth, conquering sin and death. His victory is absolute, and his followers share in his victory. A new day has dawned. A great light has overcome the darkness. And whoever comes to him in faith can participate in eternal life and in his rule and reign.⁹

I hunger to see more followers of Jesus become so overwhelmed by the beauty of salvation, so intoxicated by and immersed in God's deep love that they join him on his mission of reaching those dead in sin with his alive-making gospel of grace. I long for a movement of Good-News people so rooted in God's love that they can't help but share it with everyone they meet.

As we inhabit Christ and are lit up with his love, what does it look like to become Good-News people who sow gospel seeds into the hearts of other men and women?

- *When you're lit up with love, you know that only God saves. You reach out to others in love and confidence, recognizing that the results are up to him. This is an incredibly freeing reality: As we join Jesus on his mission to reach lost people, he is the only One who saves. The triune God, the foundational missional*

community, allows us to participate in the process, but we are never responsible for the results. We don't have to use manipulation or gimmicks to save people. In Christ, we are free to love people and have gospel conversations, knowing that God is in charge of heart change. As speaker and teacher Ken Boa writes, "Divine sovereignty and human responsibility mysteriously mesh together in the evangelistic enterprise."¹⁰ God is passionate about every human being having the opportunity to know him. He doesn't want "any to perish but all to come to repentance."¹¹ God wants people to experience salvation much more than we do.

- *When you're lit up with love, you embrace evangelism as a process, not a onetime event.* In John 4, Jesus uses agricultural imagery to teach his Jewish disciples about the process-oriented nature of evangelism. A farmer doesn't just show up and reap a harvest. She knows there's a process: preparing the soil, sowing seeds into it, and cultivating the soil so the seeds can flourish. Only after the Lord of creation brings life to the ground is there a harvest.

Generally, a person doesn't just come to faith in Jesus after one conversation. For each new believer, the Holy Spirit used

- someone to prepare the soil (that person's heart);
- someone to sow gospel seeds in the soil;
- someone to cultivate the soil; and
- someone who had the privilege of reaping the harvest.

No matter what part you play in this mysterious process, you are doing evangelism. We tend to make a big deal out of the harvesters, but the Holy Spirit empowers different people

and different life circumstances to prepare one person's heart to receive the gospel invitation.¹² In God's story of redemption, each one of us plays a role in this beautiful mystery of the harvest.

- *When you're lit up with love, you see evangelism as an eternal investment.* In many ancient cultures, people were buried with their prized possessions in the hope that they could enjoy those treasures in the afterlife. Often, believers live as though we can take our homes, clothes, and money with us when we die. But we can only take the people we lead to Christ with us into the new heaven and new earth. The greatest investment we can make is sharing the gospel with people.
- *When you're lit up with love, you know that evangelism is holistic.* Jesus embodied and taught the gospel holistically. Through how he lived and what he preached, Jesus brought Good News that was healing balm to both the physical and the spiritual.¹³ As followers of Jesus, we give hungry stomachs bread and hungry souls the Bread of Life.
- *When you're lit up with love, you know that evangelism and discipleship must be integrated.* Jesus commanded his followers to go and make disciples,¹⁴ not just converts. A disciple is an apprentice of a master teacher. Jesus is the Master Teacher, and those of us who follow him are his apprentices. Disciples of Jesus choose to follow him, learning how to be citizens in the Kingdom of God through God's power. Jesus shares his life and power with his people so they can become living portraits of him.

That means we don't check a box off our to-do list and move on when someone makes a profession of faith. Our calling as Christians is to walk alongside others as they grow, helping

them increasingly learn to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. As philosopher Dallas Willard writes,

I am uncomfortable with the distinction between evangelism and discipleship. What we call evangelism is often nothing more than soul-winning. Evangelism has come to mean getting people “across the line.” It operates according to a model of providing goods and services that has nothing to do with Christlikeness.

The real question is, How do you do “evangelism-discipleship?” My short answer: You ravish people with the blessings of the Kingdom. You make them hungry for it. That’s why words are so important—we must be wordsmiths. You use words to ravish people with the beauty of the kingdom. It’s the beauty of the kingdom that Jesus said was causing people to climb over each other just to get in. People become excited like the pearl-purchaser—they will give everything to get in.¹⁵

Open your eyes. In the Spirit’s power, help people comprehend the beauty of Jesus and his Kingdom. The harvest is all around you. See what Jesus sees, and bring others the love you have been given.

People of Light

About a year after that meeting with Matt, a church volunteer came to me just before the sermon and said that a man wanted to see me—and that he was crying uncontrollably.

It was Matt. His mother had just died. He fell into my arms. Tears soaked my shirt.

Matt and I met a few times after that. We grieved the death of his mother, read the Gospels, and talked about Jesus. Eventually, Matt became a follower of Jesus.

I asked him what moved him to follow Jesus. He talked about the despair of his wealthy clients, the hopelessness of his life, the wreckage of a failed marriage, his own patterns of sin he could not stop, and the death of his mother. And he talked about the love of God, how he now believed in the victory of Jesus over sin, death, and evil. Jesus' invitation to partner with him in healing the world moved Matt to give his life to Jesus. Matt was baptized. He joined our small group and continued his journey as a disciple of Jesus.

A simple conversation—where the love of God overflowed to meet Matt's deepest questions—sparked something in him that would take over a year to take root and grow. *When you're lit up with love, you understand that we are playing the long game.* It takes time for people to come to faith. Just because a person doesn't believe today doesn't mean they won't believe in the future.

In the pages of this book, we're going to walk together through the many ways the light and love of Jesus meet the world's deep need—and how we can participate in bringing that light to our communities and relationships. We're going to remember our first love and find that our fears around sharing our faith melt away when we focus on and immerse ourselves in Jesus. We will discover the multidimensional beauty of the gospel, learn to treasure Jesus above all, and learn how to become Good-News people to those around us.

My prayer is that after you read this book, you will love Jesus more than anything, be encouraged and equipped to speak and be the gospel to people who are longing to hear good news, and find yourself

part of a growing community that becomes a movement of believers who are doing the same.

Friend, Jesus is worth it. We have the greatest treasure there is: Jesus.¹⁶ May we share his goodness with the world.

Holy Habits

- *When you're lit up with love, you know that only God saves. You reach out to others in love and confidence, recognizing that the results are up to him.*
- *When you're lit up with love, you embrace evangelism as a process, not a onetime event.*
- *When you're lit up with love, you see evangelism as an eternal investment.*
- *When you're lit up with love, you know that evangelism is holistic.*
- *When you're lit up with love, you know that evangelism and discipleship must be integrated.*
- *When you're lit up with love, you understand that we are playing the long game.*

Reflection Questions

1. What are some of your deepest questions about life and the state of the world? How does the Good News of Jesus meet those?
2. How does the reality of salvation make you feel? How much are you aware of that reality in your everyday life?

LIT UP WITH LOVE

3. Do you feel moved by what God has done for you? Why or why not? It's okay to be honest.
4. Why is understanding evangelism as a process important? How could this understanding create a movement of Good-News people all over the world?
5. What do you think it means to think of evangelism as holistic? Does that perspective change how you feel about evangelism?

PRAYER

Father,

Open my eyes to the light of Christ.

Holy Spirit,

Shine the light of Christ in me and through me
so the Father in heaven will be glorified.

King Jesus,

In a world of darkness, may my love shine, attracting people to you.

Give me the words to say.

In Jesus' name,

amen.