

**Text:** James 1:16–18

**Title:** Firstfruits, Live as Light

### 1. Love That Comes Down

After last Sunday’s service, we gathered in our small group to reflect on the sermon. One of the questions asked was whether we each have a personal way of redirecting the desires of our hearts—when they are set on treasures other than God—back toward Him. Many shared that they meditate on Scripture, keep a time of devotion, or stand before the grandeur of nature. In particular, several testified that through sunlight—the change of light, the warmth of temperature—they sensed God deeply.

In today’s passage, God is called “the Father of lights.” It is only natural, then, that we encounter God through light. Someone shared that when they see a rainbow, they deeply feel God’s love. A rainbow is, after all, a performance created by light. Through it, we see God. We sense Him in the red glow of the rising sun and in the brilliant hues of the evening sky.

In Psalm 19:5–6, David sings:

“It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,  
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.  
It rises at one end of the heavens  
and makes its circuit to the other;  
nothing is deprived of its warmth.”

David must have experienced the blazing desert sun during his long years of wandering. Yet in that relentless heat, he encountered God. Just as the warmth of the sun shines impartially on all people, David sang that God’s love would shine upon him and never depart. God is indeed the Father of lights.

Verse 17 declares that every good and perfect gift is “from above,” coming down from the Father of lights. Notice the direction: good gifts do not spring up from the ground; they descend from above. Though our feet stand on the earth, our gaze must be lifted toward heaven.

In Korean, we use the expression *naeri-sarang*—“love that comes down”—to describe parental love flowing from parent to child. It emphasizes the downward direction of love. God’s love is like that. As parents cherish their children, God loves and cherishes us. Every good thing comes from above.

## 2. Unchanging Love

Those who grow up in dysfunctional families often carry misconceptions about God. If someone was beaten by their father or subjected to harsh words, calling God “Father” may evoke resistance. God can be projected as the very image of the father one resented. Even if a father was not cruel, he was still human—and there may have been moments that caused doubt about his love.

But today’s passage tells us that God “does not change like shifting shadows.” Shadows form when light shines from one direction. To say there is no shadow means there is no darkness—only fullness of light. This is how Scripture describes our perfect God.

The Father without variation or shadow gives every good and perfect gift from above. Do not misunderstand Him. Many imagine God as a stern father, an angry old man filled with wrath. That is a distortion. God is good. He delights in giving and rejoices in blessing us with good gifts (Matthew 7:11).

Recently, the phrase “Father of lights” has spoken to me personally. I have been struggling with depression and sought medical counsel. The doctor suggested that a lack of sunlight might be contributing and recommended more exposure to daylight. He even advised using blue-light lamps that help regulate circadian rhythms. I thought such issues affected only people in Finland or Norway, so I was surprised. I also realized that the vitamin D supplement my wife bought me last summer—unused until then—was connected to this very issue.

Light is precious. Likewise, God is the precious Father of lights in our lives. A good father is like a vitamin to us.

## 3. He Chose to Give Us Birth

Sometimes children are born according to careful planning; other times, unexpectedly. But this passage says that God brought us forth intentionally. The phrase “He chose to give us birth” comes from the Greek word *boulomai*, meaning “to will” or “to intend.” God gave us birth deliberately, with purpose.

The verb “to give birth” is also used earlier in verse 15: “Desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin.” James intentionally contrasts the two. Desire gives birth to death; God gives birth to life. All life comes from Him.

He brought us forth “through the word of truth.” We are not accidents. God willed our existence with intention and purpose. Being born through the word of truth means our lives are anchored in the grand narrative of Scripture.

What is that narrative? Creation, fall, redemption, covenant, salvation, church, and new creation. God created humanity to partner with Him in bringing about a new heaven and a new earth. This purpose is clarified in the latter part of verse 18.

#### 4. First fruits of His Creatures

“He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.”

To understand “first fruits,” we must look to the Old Testament. In Exodus 23 and Leviticus 23, God commands that the first and best portion of the harvest be brought to Him. The first fruits represented the entire harvest and were consecrated to God.

This is similar to tithing. Though all our income comes from God, we set aside a tenth as a confession that everything belongs to Him.

Firstfruits were also a guarantee—a foretaste of the full harvest to come. Through the first sheaf, one anticipated the abundance yet to arrive.

The meaning of being “firstfruits of His creatures” can be summarized in three ways:

**First**, first fruits signify the beginning of new creation. Among all creatures, humanity is given a representative role. God desires to restore this broken world, and He calls us as His co-workers in that renewal.

**Second**, firstfruits point to an eschatological community. The text says “He gave *us* birth”—plural. God birthed not merely individuals, but a community: the church. Through this community, God advances His new creation. Jeremiah 2:3 calls Israel “the firstfruits of His harvest,” underscoring the communal dimension.

**Third**, first fruits are a guarantee of future restoration. Israel was meant to display God’s redemptive work but failed. After the cross and resurrection of Christ, God now works through the church. The church is a foretaste and preview—a model home—of the Kingdom of God.

#### 5. Firstfruits—Live as Light

You are not here by accident. You exist by God’s deliberate will and purpose. You are His first fruits. In Korean culture, the concept of the firstborn son is well understood. If we translate “first fruits” into cultural language, it resembles the “eldest son.” Parents place particular hope in the firstborn, believing that if the eldest thrives, the younger siblings will follow. The eldest often receives concentrated attention and affection.

An author once said in an interview, “This work is like my firstborn—it made me known and sold the most copies.” In that sense, “firstborn” means “ace.”

God calls us His ace. Not only each of us individually, but also our church community. As first fruits, we are called to partner with God in the work of new creation, restoring a broken world and embodying a foretaste of His Kingdom.

If our Father is the Father of lights, what are we? We, too, are light. Jesus said, “You are the light of the world.” May the places you inhabit shine because of you.

Lent is a season to practice living as light—to imitate the humility of Christ, who clothed Himself in human flesh to illuminate the world. The *Tao Te Ching*, chapter 4, contains a phrase: “Harmonize the light; become one with the dust” (和其光, 同其塵). It means to soften one’s brilliance and unite with the dust. Rather than flaunting radiance, light blends gently with the world and becomes one with the lowly.

Is there a better expression of the incarnation? To live as light is not to boast of our brightness, but to lower ourselves like dust in order to win others—gently illuminating their worth.

May this Lenten season be a time of practicing such a life.

I close with a poem, *Star*, by Jung Jin-gyu, which sings of a small light that transforms surrounding darkness into gentle illumination:

The proper background for stars is darkness.  
 They cannot be seen at noon.  
 Those who are in broad daylight  
 cannot see the stars.  
 Only those who are in darkness  
 can see them.  
 Only those in darkness  
 can give birth to stars.  
 Those who stand in broad daylight are dark.

— *Star*, Jung Jin-gyu