



Shine

SPARKLING WITH GOD'S LOVE

Christina Hergenrader

YOUTH
STUDY

*This book is for my goddaughters:
Kate Leimbach, Lydia Ward, Bella Axcell,
Lanie Ward, and Emmy Hergenrader.
Shine brightly, beautiful girls.
Jesus loves you.
And that means you are enough.*



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Dear Beautiful Readers . . .

Can we talk about pressure?

The pressure to stay connected all the time . . . to always be your cutest, funniest self . . . to try all the activities . . . to keep up with the constant schedule . . . to take advantage of every minute, each opportunity, all the advantages . . .

Pressure can destroy. The force of it exposes weaknesses and creates cracks. Yes, this happens in science, but it also happens with you, dear girl. Too much pressure, and you'll find yourself wondering who you are and how you can escape the stress of your very own life.

The truth is that pressure is as much a part of our modern lives as texting and Amazon Prime. Yet it's hard to know how to deal with the weight of so many expectations. On your busiest days, it might feel like your cracks are showing. You want answers, but you don't know who to ask because everyone around you is under the same stresses and strain.

Plus, you don't want to just survive the pressure. You want to thrive.

Here's the good news: you can do exactly that. Because sometimes pressure doesn't form cracks—it forms diamonds. What will pressure do to you? That depends on what's inside you.

Are you filled up with the richer nutrients from your heavenly Father? Do you trust all the ways He takes care of you? Do you believe that you are already enough, just because you are so loved?

In these pages, you'll discover the very excellent news that God has chosen you to shine. And you can, because as a daughter of your heavenly Father, you do have everything you need.

Your Father loves you so much. He wants you to reflect that love like billions of pieces of brilliant, bright glitter.

Let's look at how you can do exactly that.

Shine on with God's love!

Christina Hergenrader

Rise and Shine

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

—ISAIAH 60:1

Imagine these thrilling moments:

- ✦ The surprise of five hundred “likes” on your Instagram post.
- ✦ The satisfaction of getting your eyeliner exactly right the first time.
- ✦ A card from your mom telling you that you are the sweetest daughter.
- ✦ Finding a prom dress that’s 50 percent off and fits perfectly.
- ✦ Overhearing your dad telling his friends what a “superstar student” you are.
- ✦ Finding a forgotten twenty-dollar bill in your pocket.

All of these moments zing delight through your ho-hum day. These instants are filled with warm glow, with adrenaline, with Christmas-morning excitement.

This is a tiny bit of what God’s people experienced when the Old Testament prophet Isaiah said these words: “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you” (Isaiah 60:1).

You see, God's people had been in a bad place. They were slaves. Their king was literally crazy, and they were very hungry. To say life felt hopeless would be an understatement.

Maybe the situation was even worse because God had warned His people that their sin was leading them to this kind of darkness. But over and over, they kept sinning and worshiping false gods. They kept repeating the same sins God had said would hurt them. (Imagine how your mom feels when you have blown off her warnings about ignoring your homework. You've been telling her, "I am handling it!" and now you're on academic probation. The angry emoji does not do justice to the smoke coming out of her ears.)

But God didn't leave His people stranded in their own bad decisions. He promised to send His Son to die for their sins. God gave His wayward people an exit plan from all their dark sin.

This was the promise in Isaiah 60, that the glory of the Lord had come.

The promise of Isaiah—of God's brilliant, blinding glory—is our promise too. Jesus has come for us, and He is coming again. Because of that, you have the light of Christ inside you.

You are still living in a dark world of sin, but you know that you belong to something richer, something better.

In this section, we'll look at some of the darkness in our world: toxic friendships, the terror of a school shooting, the crush who lives up to his name, and the problems with social media. We'll also talk about how you can handle the pressure of all these things to become a floodlight of God's love.

Shine on, dear girl. God has given you His best joy, the true delight for your heart.

And you get to shine it to the world.

How to Keep Shining God's Light

(And Six Friends Who Want to Put It Out)

This is an (incomplete) list of those toxic friendships that can cause so much darkness in your world. If you recognize some of these characters from your actual life, read on to discover how you can rely on God to help you share His love with friends who need it.

1. THE GOSSIP

Of course you're aware that this particular friend has some issues. She loves telling you all the dirt—the problem is that most of it is so mean. Also, she can't be entirely sure any of it is actually true.

The real problem is that her stories are so interesting. How else would you learn that your geometry teacher is actually gay and your former best friend is probably anorexic and your crush cheats to pass biology?

It feels a little cheap to know all this about people. But also super interesting. And if you're being honest, it kind of makes you feel better about yourself to know everyone else has these big secrets.

Except all this comes crashing down when you find out that your gossiping friend is actually telling your secrets too. She's on text threads separate from you, and when you're scrolling through her phone, you find the secret you told her about your parents not speaking to each other.

So, what to do now? You could spread some lovely stories about your gossiping friend—particularly about how she sleeps with her lights on because she has a strange fear of wolves.

Revenge storytelling about this particular friend would feel so very sweet.

But you realize that gossiping can do serious damage (and besides, there's a whole commandment about it).

You will need God's help to forgive. Ask Him to help you deal with your anger, for discernment in confronting her, and for the wisdom not to get wrapped up in her gossip in the first place. Ask God for an exit strategy the next time she starts to spill the tea so you can tell her that you don't want to be part of it.

2. THE CONTROL FREAK

True, this friend does like to be in charge. But she's also the very best at organizing you and your life.

With a friend like this, you always know what's expected of you. Usually that is that you should do what she tells you to do: *Call me at exactly eight o'clock. . . . Meet me for lunch right in our spot and right on time. . . . Remember that I hate when you bring turkey sandwiches because the smell makes me nauseous.*

Life gets a bit tricky with your friend when you don't follow the rules exactly as she would like. For example, the time you went totally off script and brought other friends to your lunch table. This became the moment when you realized you should not rock her boat. EVVVERRRRR!

What can you do, except try to tell her your side of the story?

("I'm sorry I wore my hair down when you like for us to match on Fridays. . . . Please forgive me for not laughing hard enough when you were trying to tell the joke to your crush. I really wasn't trying to annoy you.")

But then, also use this as an excellent chance to take a good look at yourself and remember that you can be friends with the kind of girl who needs the world to operate on her schedule—but without letting her take your entire identity from you. You, dear one, should never be a prop in her incredibly organized life.

This will take some work, so go back to the Lord, back to who He said you were when He claimed you in your Baptism, back to

His Word. Remember your heavenly Father’s promise that He has adopted you as His daughter exactly as you are.

3. THE USER

This is nice—a new friend. She appears overnight as The One Who Is Suddenly There All the Time.

Where, oh where, has this friend been all your life?

She really “gets” you. Suddenly she’s calling you, just when you’ve had the worst day. She’s inviting you to get Starbucks with her and texting you really funny memes, and she truly seems to care about your weird love of synchronized gymnastics videos on YouTube.

Until it all becomes clear. And once you see the REAL REASON she’s been the very best friend, you can’t believe you ever believed she was genuine. It’s your brother she’s really trying to get to know better—as in, get to know him as his new girlfriend.

Or she’s looking at your new car and is so ready for you to become her own personal Uber driver. Ah, now you see.

Or maybe she heard about how your uncle works for the ticket sales group for *Hamilton*, and now you know why this new “friend” has not left your side until the show comes to town.

But maybe you don’t have to react with the same self-centeredness. Perhaps you can tap into a kinder, more balanced approach to friendship and talk to her about how you really hope the two of you can stay friends long after your brother announces he would never date one of his little sister’s friends.

Try it and see where it goes. If you’re meant to become the kind of friends who stick together, that will probably become obvious. If not, you might be better investing a little more in friends who will be by your side all the time—not just when they need a favor.

4. THE SUPER-INSECURE FRIEND

She is on the swim team with you, and you spend hours every week at the pool, pulling swim caps over each other's hair and talking about your split times.

But really, you end up spending lots of the practices assuring her that she looks just fine in her bathing suit, that she does NOT in fact swim like a bloated sea turtle, and that it is ridiculous to believe that the coach hates her.

Total honesty? You kind of love that you can make her feel so much better about herself. You've actually become pretty good at talking her out of her insecurity. You can pep-talk her into the pool every single day. It works so well that she seems to have become a tiny bit dependent on you.

(Okay, actually a lot dependent. Like you overheard her telling her mom that you're like HER SAVIOR. And that was just a little weird. Actually, a little nice because that sounds like she will probably always like you. But mostly weird.)

It also gets to be exhausting to always be the wind beneath someone else's wings. For just one day, you would like to NOT be a personal cheerleader.

Plus, you are a little worried about your friend. It seems like a pretty desperate place to be to need another person this much. She really doesn't believe anything good about herself.

Maybe you could share a little about Jesus with her—since He is her actual Savior. He won't exactly be there to tell her that it's okay if she's the slowest at backstroke.

Or actually, maybe He will be there. Because you know the power of prayer, and the Bible does say that the Lord is right there with us when we're scared (Psalm 34:18).

So, it's probably worth a try to share all this with her. You might lose your job as SAVIOR TO THE INSECURE . . . but that's probably better anyway.

5. THE FRIEND WHO SAYS SHE LOVES JESUS (BUT DOESN'T SEEM TO)

What a strange friend this one is.

She's the lead singer of the praise band, the one who argues against abortion in the schoolwide assembly, and the girl who quotes Bible verses to the kids who vape in the bathroom.

You want to really like her, and you totally admire her confidence, but sometimes she isn't very nice.

At first, you thought all the praying for sinners around the flagpole and going to church three times a week would be an inspiration for you. But this friend is actually kind of hurtful to anyone who doesn't meet her standards. Also, lots of days it seems like it's very important for her to keep everyone's focus on her. That's not right. Shouldn't the focus be on God?

She might be your Pharisee friend.

Remember the Pharisees in the Bible? This was pretty much their deal too. Big, grand shows of religion—then cruelty to real, actual people. They loved to prove how holy they were, but they were not so hot on pretty much everything that Jesus was saying and doing (i.e., “Love God,” “Love your neighbor,” “Forgive,” “Show grace”).

So, your gut feeling on this one was right. Your modern-day Pharisee friend needs to see what God is all about. God never tells us that we are winning at Christianity when we obey His rules perfectly. In fact, He tells us the opposite. Part of living as a Christian includes how you treat those who have the least to offer; you know, the ones who are usually invisible to everyone else (James 1:27).

So, yes, your friend who is making a big show of praying for sinners probably needs prayer herself. Ask God to show her that worshiping Him looks much more like spreading the news through hot meals for the homeless than insulting the atheists. Ask Jesus to help you lead by example and love everyone.

6. THE ANGRY FRIEND

It's not entirely clear what she's so mad about, really.

This is your friend who has a chip on her shoulder roughly the size of every person who has ever let her down.

She remains ready for anyone else to let her down—specifically you. Even though you really don't want to disappoint her, she takes it all very personally when she gets the idea that you might be a tiny bit less than loyal to her. (For example, the time when you told her that you didn't really like the same band she does and she was SO MAD because you were saying you didn't like her. Wait. What?)

There's also the constant problem of her deciding she doesn't like whole groups of people. (For example, the workers at the pet shelter—who doesn't like people who take care of homeless puppies? And she is convinced the old guy at the smoothie place hates kids. Really, he probably doesn't like how you and your friends never tip, but whatever.)

With friends like this who are angry or bitter or negative, ask God to help you keep your own identity. He might even decide to heal your friend's deep anger issues. Or maybe not. Just remember that *she* might have major issues with the cafeteria workers, but you can still smile at them as they hand you a tray of meat loaf.

GOD'S SILVER (GLITTER) LINING

Okay, you're old enough to realize that there is no perfect friend. Seriously. Movies and books are filled with these instant friends who look nothing like the people who go to your school.

From what you've probably discovered, friends are actual humans—selfish, insecure, trying really hard, and also working to figure out how to do a bit better. There will be lots of ups and downs with friends. I'm sure you have already learned this the hard way.

But here's the good news: God can—and will—work in the middle of all these relationships. To be clear, Jesus hung out with a crazy crew of sinners. Consider this: one of His friends decided to turn Him over to His enemies. This was Jesus' actual life, and yet, He never sinned. He just kept showing His friends that there was a better way.

Through all of your friendships, keep your eyes on Jesus' perfect standard. You'll see so many examples of how to love your friends well—even when one of you is off the rails with selfishness or gossip or insecurity.

Also, of course, forgiveness. Learning how to forgive those who keep letting you down is hard, but your time here on earth is forgiveness school, and you'll get plenty of chances to learn this lesson.

You'll need God for that part. Ask Him for help forgiving and for giving second chances. Thank Him for forgiving you too.

Because this is your Lord—and He is so good at grace.

CONVERSATION SPARKS

1. Which friend is missing from this list? Tell about a friendship you have right now that can be difficult. What particular darkness does this friend bring into your life? Do you see yourself as any of these friends?
2. Read Colossians 3:12-14. What does this say about how we should love others? How has the Bible helped you to understand friendship?
3. What is your prayer for your friendships? What can God change in your heart to help you love yourself and others better?

SHINE ON!

Lord, You understand the kind of darkness that comes with hard friendships. You know what I need from my friends and how I can be a good friend. Please give me good friends who will help me follow You. I trust You to strengthen my faith so I can tell the world about You. In Jesus' name. Amen.