

Understanding Vermeer's Vision as the Borrowed Light of God



God's light is Love. We borrow from His light to create, innovate and collaborate.

By light, we live our lives, do work.

By that same light, others behold it!

And all light is borrowed from God since the beginning.

For the past few weeks, I have been studying the Book of Genesis. It's the telling of the foundation of life and it's an adventurous story. Many of our hearts were captured during our younger years with the story of Noah's Ark. It was amazing to re-read the ever-so-detailed instructions God gave to Noah for building the Ark and navigating safely through a monumental flood. God chose Noah -- the only righteous man in God's eyes -- to build the Ark before the flood arrived that would wash away "all the weeds of life throughout the earth."

In the beginning God created light. Light to outshine all darkness. Light to create beauty in all things. Light for us to walk in and live our lives. **Light that is His Everlasting Love.**

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

*God saw that the light was good,
and he separated the light from the darkness.*

Genesis 1:3-4 (NIV)

Reading through the book of Genesis, I learned that God's loving light of creation was invaded by the dark ways of the world: pride, jealousy, hurt, anger and hate. This darkness grew like weeds in a garden. I reflected upon other studies in the bible and thought about our daily lives and how the challenges and 'noise' of the world we may face today may overshadow God's light. I realized how God's light is always there for us to borrow from so that we may let go of things that pull us down and away from his love. I was also reminded of God's loving kindness and forgiveness. **When we turn to Him, he shines a light of hope for all generations—past, present and future.**

This is the life-giving message we heard him share and it's still ringing in our ears.

We now repeat his words to you: God is pure light.

You will never find even a trace of darkness in him.

1 John 1:5 (TPT)

I took a break to reflect upon the story of Noah (chapters 6-9). Not only did God design and craft the perfect plan for Noah to build an Ark to navigate through the great flood, he also created a beautiful rainbow of reflective colors from the light as a symbol of his promise to Noah and future generations.

*Here is the sign for you and future generations that my loving covenant
will endure between me and you and every animal that came with you
out of the ark: I have placed my rainbow among the clouds,
and will be a sign of loving covenant between me and the earth.*

Genesis 9:12-13 (TPT)

After reading through this portion of Genesis, I thought about *Rembrandt is in the Wind: Learning to Love Art Through the Eyes of Faith*, authored by Russ Ramsey. In his

book, he refers to the unique perspective of light that the artist Johannes Vermeer created in his masterpiece paintings.

I started to think about my recent study of Vincent Van Gogh. He and Johannes Vermeer had several commonalities: They both are from the Netherlands. They both had a short life span of creativity. They both faced financial challenges. Yet, both van Gogh and Vermeer had a true appreciation of light and its reflection upon everything we see and do. Their masterpieces capture the perspective of light. Van Gogh wrote in a letter to his brother Theo, "A good deal of light falls on everything."

There were also differences between the two: Van Gogh had made over 3,000 writings, drawings and paintings—far more than any great master artists we know of to date. Vermeer created only 40 paintings during his lifetime. We know so much about van Gogh, thanks to his writings and the published articles and books about him. We know very little about Vermeer. As I read Ramsey's account of Vermeer, it felt as though I was reading a detective mystery rather than an art historical account!

Ramsey refers to Vermeer's "borrowed light" as a unique combination of science and art. Vermeer was fascinated by the microscope, a scientific innovation of the time, and created a special lens to capture color as he painted his works.

Unfortunately, there are no



records of how he created his art and, when his paintings were examined, it was discovered that there were no markings, like a sketch, below the surface. This is why so many believe that Vermeer was an artist whose vision was shaped by scientific innovation. Some regard his use of the lens as a shortcut; others believe it was truly an innovative breakthrough.

As I read further in the story, I began to understand the perspective of “light” in a more creative way. **All of us are borrow lights to one another.** We illuminate and inspire each other’s ideas. This doesn’t just happen in art, it happens across many disciplines: a chef borrows light from the maker of his stove; the homeowner borrows light from a developer who borrows from the surveyor, and so on.

I began to think about God’s order. After the first day of creation, the movement of time is set up in cycles of day and night. God created the rainbow as His promise to all, a reflection of his creation. God’s light ‘opens the eyes of our hearts’ allowing us to change our perspective and see hope and beauty through his eyes. These artists have chosen to borrow light from God to create their perspective of life for all to view.



*And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.
God saw that the light was good,
and he separated the light from the darkness.
Genesis 1:3-4 (NIV)*

If you stop to think about it, all the light is borrowed from our Heavenly Father God. When we open our hearts to God's love, we become His lights—to be shared and borrowed with others.

*O house of Jacob, come let us walk in the wonderful light of Yahweh!
Isaiah 2:5 (TPT)*

We see in the beginning of time and throughout the story of Genesis that when we look to God to guide us, His word lights our hearts. As he did with Noah, he will lead us to safe passages of His promises.

I read in a Bible commentary that walking is a metaphor for the kind of life we are called to live. We are called to walking in the pure light of God, not in darkness, but in His word and truth. I encourage all to take time to walk in God's light to discover His everlasting love and promises.

*For God, who said, "Let brilliant light shine out of darkness"
2 Corinthians 4:6 (TPT)*

Thoughtful Reflection:

Take an afternoon walk after the rain and breathe deeply the fresh clean air, accented by the sweet aromas of the flowers, plants and trees. Borrow light from God and shine His light of love everywhere you go. Who knows you may even discover a rainbow!

*Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.
Psalm 119:105 (NIV)*