

The world is changing—maybe you have noticed. When I was in college back in America, in the 80s and early 90s, many of my friends were interested in only a few things. We talked a lot about music, movies, boyfriends or girlfriends, getting a job, traveling, enjoying life. But that was about it. Nothing too deep, really, at least among most of the people I knew.

*But things are a little different now.* I was traveling in the US last year and was pleasantly surprised, time after time, when I visited college campuses. Now, more than ever, especially on Christian college campuses in America, students are interested in *helping others*. Early this year, over 10,000 students from Christian colleges around the US volunteered to spend their spring breaks repairing homes destroyed by Hurricane Katrina—that amounted to over 2 million dollars worth of donated labor. Last year, in 2005, an estimated 2 million American high school and college students went on church-sponsored short term volunteer service trips. That work contributed over 5 billion dollars of benefit to communities around the world. Those numbers have been *rising* for the past 10 years, and are projected to rise even higher in the future.

There is a lot of bad news in the world today. But surely *this* is good news. Today's young people—in America *and* in Japan—are coming to understand that life is not just “for me.” Life surely has to be life *for others*, too.

In today's Bible passage, the writer says that people who follow Jesus—people who follow His way of loving others as themselves—are like *stars*.

It's too bad that here in Yokohama—because there are so many lights—we usually can't see the stars clearly... But when you go out of the city, and look up into the sky on a clear night, it's dazzling, isn't it? The sky itself—space itself—is dark and cold. Blank. Imagine for a moment what the sky would look like without stars? Yuk! It would surely seem lonely, imposing, hopeless.

But there *are* stars. And they shine in bright contrast to the dark, coldness of space.

Think about the world you live in. We live in a world that could be lonely, imposing and hopeless. Imagine a world in which everybody cared only for themselves and their small set of friends. Imagine a world where there was no desire to serve others. Imagine a world where everybody was “in it for themselves.” Personally speaking, I think that kind of world is not worth living in.

That's the whole point of Christianity. God wants something *better* for the world. God is working to create a new kind of human—one not bound by the law of “the survival of the fittest.” God wants to

create lights in a dark place—God wants to create people who are like *stars*: Dazzling people who stand in contrast to those around them. People who love others whom they’ve never met just as they love themselves. People whose hearts are *burning* with care for others...

“Blameless” people, “pure” people—people who carry “the words of life” to others. This was God’s purpose in Jesus Christ. And this is God’s purpose *today*.

Think of these bright and shining lights of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Bishop Desmond Tutu, Mother Teresa, Kagawa Toyohiko, and many others—these people had hearts full of love. They were committed to serving their fellow man. They stand in contrast to what is around them, like stars shining in a dark sky. And they will be remembered.

When we read passages like this, we can’t help but ask ourselves, “Will *I* be remembered?” Am I any different than anyone else around me? Do *I* shine like a star? Am I the kind of person who gives others hope? Or am I just part of the cold, black sky?”

There’s a new movement happening among young people in this generation. Don’t miss out on it. Be a part of God’s work in the world. Shine like a star. That choice will cost you something. But it will be worth it...

Our Father,

Thank you for giving us the power to become your children through faith.

Give us the courage to trust in Jesus & his way.

Give us love for others, and a desire to serve.

Give us boldness to do something new.

And make us beacons of hope.

In Jesus’ name we pray,

Amen.