

# LOADSHEDDING

Making us bitter or making us better – a Biblical perspective

By Mike Burnard

A main topic of discussion among many South Africans in recent days has been **LOADSHEDDING**. South Africa has suffered some of the worst power cuts in several years (both earlier in the year and currently) and residents have expressed frustration with the electricity utility company, Eskom\*, as they battle to keep the lights on. This topic has been discussed in parliament, debated in politics, elicits concern among economists, is criticised by the public and even bemoaned in church. Once again, just like the 10 spies who suffered from tunnel vision as they saw the “giants” in the promised land (Numbers 12), few are able to view the current crisis in the context of a living God who “works **all things** for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). We might be facing the “giants” of power-cuts, but we are still citizens of light, called according to His purpose, who should reflect a different spirit in **all things**.

Sadly, for many Christians, loadshedding is a practical reality that has little to do with spirituality. But life’s unexpected challenges have a way of affecting our spirituality by making us either a better person or a bitter person. Loadshedding, added to the lack of integrity, corruption and the involvement of foreign powers, became the “final straw” of irritation for many.

Gloriously, or disastrously (depending on our attitudes), loadshedding provides an opportunity to re-evaluate our hearts, to rediscover some forgotten virtues and to reignite the light of Christ in a very critical and cynical society. This is an opportunity for Christians to respond with a Christ consciousness – to guard against bitterness, while pursuing ‘betterness’, especially in the following virtues:

## GRATITUDE

*1 Thessalonians 5:18 says: “Give thanks in **all circumstances**; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

To a large extent gratitude depends on our level of comparison. If we compare South Africa upwards to the USA or Europe, we will soon embark on a road of complaining, criticising and showing displeasure, that ultimately leads to a destination of despair. This will inevitably lead to bitterness.

But the opposite is also true. If we compare ourselves to much of the world – with the average person – we find that we actually have much to be grateful for. Not all energy is consumed equally across the globe with **one in every six** people in the world – an estimated **1.2 billion people** – having little or no access to electricity.

In Africa the situation is even worse. The latest “World Energy Outlook” reports that more than **one out of two – 55%** of Africa – has little or no access to electricity. In South Africa, **one in every five people – 20%** of the population – are not able to access the full range of electricity services. For them loadshedding would be a blessing in the sense that they would at least have electricity for some hours of the day, rather than not at all.

## ESKOM\* WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Eskom is a South African electricity public utility, established in 1923 as the Electricity Supply Commission (ESCOM)

The utility is the **largest** producer of electricity in Africa, is among the **top seven** utilities in the world in terms of generation capacity and among the **top nine** in terms of sales.

Eskom operates several notable power stations, including Kendal Power Station and Koeberg nuclear power station in the Western Cape – **the only nuclear power plant in Africa**.

The company is divided into generation, transmission and distribution divisions. Eskom generates approximately **95%** of electricity used in South Africa.

In 2019, it was announced that Eskom was to be split into three distinct, nationally owned entities due to huge debt and poor reliability of supply.  
Source: *Wikipedia*

So, if we have access to electricity, albeit not for 24 hours every day, we are still in the top half of the fortunate people in Africa. Does that mean we have to settle for corruption and inefficiency? Of course not, but it does mean we still need to be grateful for having what most Africans only dream of having. We should never confuse expectations with grace. **Gratitude is the ability to view what we have as grace and then turn what we have into enough.**

## CONTENTMENT

*Philippians 4:11 says: "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content **whatever the circumstances.**"*

One of the great mysteries of Christianity is contentment. At least one must presume it is a mystery, because so few people live it, especially in time of lack. Yet contentment is not something that's found; it is an attitude.

If money can't buy contentment and poverty doesn't provide it, what is contentment and how is it attained? Contentment, contrary to popular opinion, does not mean being satisfied where you are. Rather, it is knowing God's plan for your life, having a conviction to live it, and believing that God's presence is greater than the world's problems.

Contentment can only come from the inside and is not determined by the external factors. It comes from a deep delight in the knowledge that nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ – not trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword (Romans 8:35) – not Eskom, politics, corruption, darkness or power – nothing. When we base our delight and satisfaction on external factors like electricity, we will soon find ourselves in the downward spiral of bitterness.

## PATIENCE

*Psalms 37:7 says: "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for Him."*

*Philippians 4:2 says: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."*

*James 5:8 says: "You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."*



A popular tongue-in-cheek phrase says: **"Patience is such a waste of time."** At first, this statement seems to contradict James' instruction to be patient and to stand firm. But, as with most things in life, our perceptions are mostly shaped by our definitions. If we define patience as "waiting", then loadshedding, and waiting for things to improve, is indeed a waste of time. In this context, loadshedding will become a source of irritation and a platform for bitterness. But when patience is understood in its true Biblical context, as "the position of endurance under difficult circumstances", it becomes the sustaining force, enabling perseverance in the face of delay. The journey of faith will require this virtue in large quantities and at frequent intervals.

Personal patience is often a process of control that involves individual choices; we choose to be patient during peak-hour traffic, and in so doing, remain in control of the steering wheel. Communal patience however is never a calculated choice: it is always forced on communities through uncontrollable and unavoidable events or circumstances. Teaching a nation patience is a laborious process that will be accepted by some and rejected by others. Those who demand their rights and continue a path of anger and discontent will become bitter and impatient. Those who see the inconvenience as a way of slowing down will become better in the pursuit of patience.

## DELIGHT

*Psalms 37:4 says: "Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart."*

We choose whether we are happy or unhappy. If loadshedding robs us of our joy, then it is safe to assume that true joy was never part of our armour in the first place. That sounds harsh, but if you are unhappy because of loadshedding, the chances are good that you are unhappy in general.

Let's not confuse happiness with joy and joy with delight.

There is a huge difference:

- Happiness is a feeling<sup>1</sup>
- Joy is an attitude<sup>2</sup>
- Delight is an expression<sup>3</sup>

Delight really is the ability to enjoy joy – to take pleasure in what God allows us to enjoy. And His goodness is not found in electricity but in salvation, grace and mercy. This never depends on the external circumstances. Understanding this will make us better people to be around. Once we comprehend this principle, we would be able to find delight in the dark hours of loadshedding and joy in the times without power.

## URGENCY

*Romans 13:10 -12 states: "Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law. And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So, let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light."*

*John 4:35 says: "Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."*

We simply cannot afford the inconvenience of loadshedding to distract us from what really matters in a Kingdom context. There are so many pressing needs in the world today and Christians cannot afford to be hijacked by issues of less importance.

- Loadshedding fades away in the light of more than **70 million displaced people** in the world.
- Loadshedding fades away in the light of **1 in 12 people** worldwide who are malnourished, including **160 million children** under the age of 5.
- Loadshedding fades away in the light of **half the population** of Yemen that could die of cholera
- Loadshedding fades away in the light of the nearly **1 in 4 people** - 1.3 billion - living on less than \$1 per day.
- Loadshedding fades away in the light of the **3,14 billion people** that are still unreached by the Gospel of Christ.
- Loadshedding fades away in the light of more than **55.5% of South Africans** living in poverty.
- Loadshedding fades away in the light of the more than **650,000 people** that were displaced in Mozambique a week ago.
- Loadshedding fades away in the light of more than **1 million South Sudanese** refugees living in Uganda on 12kg of rice per month

The inconvenience of loadshedding should never replace the urgency in our hearts for what really matters to Christ.

## CONCLUSION

One of the many Eskom jokes goes as follows: "During stage 7 loadshedding Eskom comes to your church and takes that little light of yours you were gonna let shine."

There is more truth in this joke than what many realise. If loadshedding succeeds in taking away the light of Christ in the hearts of believers, it would be a far greater disaster than the economic consequences of loadshedding. May we guard our hearts against bitterness and seek to excel in these times of inconvenience.

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<sup>1</sup> James\_5:13 Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.

<sup>2</sup> Nehemiah 8:10 ... Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 37:4 Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

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