

WALKING IN DARKNESS

I am no prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet, but I do believe we're headed for some very dark times in this decade. I really believe in some places it's going to be rough to be a Christian. In many nations believers have already faced trouble and pressure. But what I want to look at here is a "dark time" that doesn't result from the persecution of the world.

This is something that will happen to every single Christian who wants to be involved in the work of God, or to any Christian who has truly set his heart on pleasing God. It is not a problem that comes from other people - and it is not necessarily a problem that comes from the demonic world. It can very well come to Christians from God Himself.

"Who among you fears the Lord? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God. Look, all you who kindle a fire, who encircle yourselves with sparks; walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled - this you shall have from My hand: you shall lie down in torment." (*Is. 50:10-11 NKJV*)

When I first read this passage, I assume it was written to an unbeliever. After all, it deals with darkness. I knew of only three kinds of darkness mentioned in Scripture and, well, everybody knows that darkness comes only to unbelievers! Perhaps it meant the darkness of *sin*. After all, the Bible does say: "Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (*John 3:19*)

Secondly, there is a darkness in the Bible that is really *ignorance*, and the opposite of this darkness is the word "light." This is one of the most basic statements about God in the entire Bible: "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." (*1 John 1:5*)

Then, thirdly, *demonic* power is sometimes referred to as "the power of darkness" (*Luke 22:53; Acts 26:18; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:13*).

But the darkness Isaiah spoke of doesn't refer to any of those things. The strange thing about this verse (and this kind of darkness) is that it happens only to people who are walking with God and who love God. It happens to people who are not messing around with sin, and who are not ignorant. There is a darkness that can come to men and women of God that has nothing to do with sin, that has nothing to do with lack of wisdom, and has nothing whatsoever to do with the devil. And the tragedy is, when this darkness comes upon certain people of God, they don't understand what it is and it nearly wipes them out.

Everyone who has set his heart on serving God will have this darkness come at some point. Has it happened to you? You wake up one day to find all spiritual feelings gone. You pray and nothing seems to happen. You read your Bible, and you understand the words - but there is no light. You search your heart and find nothing to match what you are going through. You rebuke the devil, you ask others for prayer, you go to hear your favorite Christian speaker - and nothing happens. No counsel seems to help. No answers answer.

St. John of the Cross called it, "the dark night of the soul." Tozer called it, "the ministry of the night." Spurgeon preached about "the child of light walking in darkness."

Each writer dealt with this differently, but the experience is common. It is not darkness of wrong or guilt or demonic oppression. It is not sin. It is instead an inexplicable sense of loss and uncertainty. It is above all a *withdrawn sense* of the presence of God.

What Does Darkness Look Like?

The first thing that happens is this: There's a *strange sense of emptiness* in your life. There's no sign of God. You sit in services and take your usual notes. The message is great, but there is no answering chord of response in your heart. When everyone else is feeling something, you don't feel anything.

So you pray. You get on your knees and tell God you don't feel so good. Prayer usually "changes things," it is said, but this time there seems to be no light from heaven! So you go to hear teaching that has always excited you, fully expecting inspiration to flow like streams of living water - and nothing! You walk out of the service in which everyone else "touched God" and say to yourself: "*What in the world have I done?*"

Perhaps, you think, it is *unconfessed sin*. You apologize to everybody. You write letters of confession to your grade school teachers. You go through everything you can possibly think of, but it's still the same. Nothing.

Then you think: "Ah, ha! Of course. It's the *devil!* I haven't taken my authority in Christ." So you do. And? Still nothing.

What you are going through is not new. It came to every major man or woman of God in Scripture. It came to Abraham when he stood waiting for God to accept his sacrifice. (*Gen. 15:12*) It came to Moses on the mountain waiting to receive the Commandments in the "thick darkness" where God was. (*Duet. 5:22*) It came to Job when he "looked for good" and "evil came." (*Job 30:26*) It came to David when the bottom seemed to drop out of his world.

It came to the prophets and they wept. It came to the godly kings and they humbled themselves. One dark day it even came to Jesus, the Son of God Himself. And if you set your heart to seek God, this darkness will also come to you. You will not be exempt. You will not escape it. It is an essential factor in a deep and thorough Christian experience.

Even in nature you know it's true. Nothing can live in unbroken sunshine. There must be the cycles of the night, and days of clouds and rain. Light and darkness are both essential for plant growth. Nonstop sunshine only creates a desert. What is true in the seasons of nature is also true in the seasons of the spirit. Summer is beautiful, but winter must always come. Don't be surprised at the darkness. Jesus will help you walk in it sooner or later.

Dealing With Feeling

An unsaved girl who had been attending a Christian college once asked me a profound question: Do Christians really love Christ or do they just love the good feelings that come from loving Christ?"

Job faced the same question when his world fell apart and God did not seem to answer. Sheltered in the personal care of God, he had walked secure in the knowledge that God his Friend was also his Provider and Protector. He, too, was a man who feared the Lord, who walked in obedience, who trusted Him. Satan's challenge to God over Job was simple. He said, in effect: "Sure Job loves and worships you. Why not? You give him everything he wants! Take away the presents and he'll be just the same as one of my crowd." So God let Satan test Job. And Job came through - but barely.

Job faced the darkness that is the most fearsome of all to the child of God. Not the darkness of sin, ignorance, or the demonic, but the divine darkness - the darkness of the withdrawn sense of the presence of God.

What can you do to get out of this darkness? *Nothing*. Nothing at all. There is nothing you can do to get out of the darkness if it is *God* who put you into it. That is why all your usual remedies fail, all your counselors draw a blank, and all your frustrated attempts come to an eventual exhausted end.

The darkness of God is given by Him, and it will not lift until it has accomplished its work in your soul. Jacob was left alone in the darkness and "a man wrestled with him until daybreak." (*Gen. 32:24*) You cannot escape it, but you can surely *live* through it.

What do you do when you are going through the darkness? You say, "Lord, I know that this is a hard place. But what shall I do?" Nothing. Silence. "Well," you say, "at least show me what to do." Nothing. Yet what is this person in *Isaiah 50:10* doing? Look carefully: he is *walking*.

The first thing you must do when the darkness comes is to do your duty, to keep going in the same direction you were going when the darkness came. You must continue your daily routine.

What did God say to you before you went into the darkness? What was your call when the voice of God was clear? *Then do it still*. Keep on walking. Nothing has changed on the path except your perception of it. Do your duty nevertheless, and keep walking even when the lights go out.

Let him who has no light trust in the name of the Lord. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower the righteous runs into it and is safe," (*Prov. 18:10*) and "...those who know Thy name will put their trust in Thee." (*Ps, 9:10*) His name is descriptive of what He is - and He is there. He is the uncreated, unchanging, unshakable God. He is what He always is, and He has not changed in the darkness. He is not missing because you cannot see Him. God is committed in everlasting covenant to you. He is faithful and will remain faithful yesterday, today and forever. (*Heb. 13:8*)

You're to get on your knees and say: "O God, I don't feel You. I don't get any zap from You. I don't feel Your presence. But You're there nevertheless because Your Word doesn't change. Amen."

Here is something else you can do: In this time of darkness, go over in your mind what God has already done in your life. Those things aren't just little dreams in the back of your head - they really did happen. God really did do them. Now you are going to have to *remember* them.

Remember what His character is like. When you can't see the way, open the Book and read again what He is like. *Recall* what God has already done. What have you seen of God in your own experience? Once you said, I have seen His hand, I know what He is like and I am committed to Him forever." Did you really mean that?

Others before you have walked in the darkness. They too, have found that faith is not *something* you hold but *someone* who holds you.

The Danger Of False Fire

St. John of the Cross had some rare insight on walking through this "dark night of the soul." He said:

"The way in which they are to conduct themselves in this night is not to devote themselves to reasoning and meditation, since this is not the time for it, but to allow the soul to remain in peace and quietness, although it may seem clear to them that they are doing nothing, and are wasting their time, and although it may appear to them that it is because of their weakness that they have no desire to think of anything. The truth is that they will be doing quite sufficient if they have patience and persevere in prayer without making any effort."

Isaiah 50 contains a solemn warning: You cannot take matters into your own hands! If God does not bring you light, you must not make your own. But some have tried to do just that. "If God is not going to speak," they say in anger, "then I am going ahead anyway: If He won't show me the light, I will make my own." What they are saying is, "O.K., God, if You're not going to guide me, I'm going to guide myself."

What you have then is an extremely brief and temporary light. It cannot last and will only leave you blinded. Don't do it. Don't make the foolish and futile mistake of lighting your own fire. If God has put you into the darkness, let it do its work in your soul. He got you in - and you can trust Him to take you out. If you light your own little match and then go and do your own thing, you will see in that man made light a destruction of much that God has for you. Walk in what God has already given you to do and remain faithful until new light comes.

The Purpose Of Darkness

You might be wondering, "Why is God doing this to me? How long will it last? How come when I talk to Him He doesn't answer? Why am I not getting any revelation in my life?"

Probably because this is the only way God has of teaching you some very important lessons. And those lessons are basically:

- 1 Will you obey Him whether you feel like it or not?
- 2 Will you do what He asks you to do?
- 3 Will you hold onto the truth He's given you, whether you feel He's there or not?

You say, "Of course I will!" But how about with no sense of His presence?

Some of you have *convictions* that God has written and locked into your heart. You think these are so strong, so unshakable that you will *never*, ever doubt them. Then the darkness comes and you start asking questions. Are these convictions really true or not? What you will

find out is whether you really do believe them. The darkness will test your convictions. And the only thing left when the darkness lifts from your life is what you really *do* believe.

How about your consecration? You had a wonderful experience, perhaps in a church service one time. A totally incredible, miraculous, fantastic thing happened. You wish you had a movie so you could play it back every day of your life. On that day you said, "Lord, I know You've called me. I'm giving my life to You. Hear me, Lord, I dedicate my life to You. I'll never turn back."

Then darkness comes.

How long will the darkness last? A week? Maybe more. Maybe a year. But when the darkness has finished its work in you, everything that can be shaken will be shaken, and only what is firm, real, and solid shall remain.

Light At The End Of The Tunnel

Darkness comes to reveal our need of God and God alone. Don't fret over your helplessness and your emptiness - they will be riches to you. God says, "I will give you the treasures of darkness." (*Is. 45:3*)

When I was a little boy my sister and I sometimes rode into town on the train. Early New Zealand railroad cars had no interior lights in the daytime, so when we entered a tunnel the car would become totally dark for a brief time. Do you know what happens in such darkness? The pupils of your eyes, which in the sunshine shrink almost to pinpoints, expand wider and wider in the darkness. And when the train suddenly bursts out the other side of the tunnel, the brightness of the world outside is astonishing!

And so with the darkness of God. We do not know or appreciate the brightness of the light we *already* walk in until we enter this discipline of God. We have absorbed so much that our spiritual perception has shrunk to a pinpoint. We have been given so much that we cannot appreciate what has been shown us. And then God puts us like children onto His train and runs it into the darkness.

But this darkness you are in is only a tunnel. The train is on a sure journey. It is headed without fail to the place you need to be, and the Engineer knows all of the way. This tunnel is not eternal. You will not remain in darkness forever. And ultimately you *will* come out of the darkness into a greater sense of light than you had when you went in.

Holding The Hand Of God

God is the One who dwells in thick darkness. (*Duet. 5:22*) The darkness and the light are alike to Him. (*Ps. 139:12*) There are treasures that can be found *only* in such darkness, for there He will show you things about Himself and about yourself that you will never learn any other way.

Remember, you will find wonderful things in that darkness! You will hear the voice of God at the end of the tunnel saying, "Well done, you good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord." We must ask God for courage to go through the darkness ahead. This is necessary

because God is going to prepare His people to obey *no matter how they feel*. You will go through it, beloved - but make the most of it! He will speak to you in that very silence.

When I was a child I remember reading a small plaque that hung on my grandfather's wall. I was not a Christian when I first read it, but I'll never forget the words inscribed there:

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the years,
"Give me a light that I may walk safely into the unknown."

He said to me, "Go out into the darkness
And put your hand into the hand of God
And He shall be to you brighter than a light
And safer than a known way."

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