The Well-Lit Road

Are You Ever Afraid in the Dark?

Several years ago I was passing out flyers, inviting the neighbors to our church vacation Bible school. It was getting dark and this was going to be one of the last houses for me to visit. As I started walking up to the porch, there was a very low step I did not see. I tripped over it, fell face first on the porch and my flyers scattered everywhere. As soon as I landed, the porch light with a motion sensor came on. My first thought was someone inside heard me and they would open the door and I would be sprawled out on their porch. Humiliated, I rushed to get up but my leg hurt so badly, it was a struggle but finally I made it. To my great relief, no one came to the door, so I picked up the flyers and made my way to the next house. If you have never stumbled and fallen in the dark, I am glad for you. But many of us have stumbled when we were living in darkness. We've made big mistakes, taken risks we shouldn't have, made decisions we regretted. The darkness is not just outside you; it can also be within you. How you respond to the circumstances you face can certainly affect the quality of your life. Troubles and difficulties may not be what they seem, and it takes the light of God to assess properly what you are going through. Grandparents have been through it all but there is always something that happens that throws you off. A dad suddenly is no longer confident because he has a major crisis on his hands with one of his kids. A mom gets a diagnosis that seems impossible to be the case. Teens think they have their future in place and then something comes along that shatters their plans. The darkness can be great at times but as Jesus pointed out to us, it is not the darkness without that must concern us but the darkness within. **If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!** (Matthew 6: 23 NIV) Inner darkness can lead to confusion, depression, bitterness and despair. Outer darkness can have no effect whatsoever on your inner world if you stay in the light. Here is the big idea. Trust Christ to lead you when circumstances become too overwhelming for you. Let's see what the Bible has to say about the troubles you face or will face at some point.

John 10-11 are what many Bible experts would call the beginning of the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. In Jerusalem, opposition to Jesus was steadily growing. This controversial statement Jesus made infuriated the Jews there. **"I and the Father are one."** (John 10: 30 NIV) The Jews started picking up stones to kill Jesus and this must have been terrifying for His disciples. Jesus and the disciples somehow escaped the murderous crowd and left to the other side of the Jordan where there was a completely different response to Him. The Bible tells us that many believed in Jesus there. But then word came to Jesus, probably from Mary or Martha that His good friend Lazarus was deathly ill. The assumption is that the sisters were hoping Jesus would hurry and come heal Lazarus. But he didn't. He continued to teach there. Two days He waited. Then suddenly Jesus announced to His disciples that He was going to return to the Jerusalem area. Alarmed, they questioned the wisdom of going there. **"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"** (John 11: 8 NIV) Jesus fully understood the risk involved in returning to Judea. **Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."** (John 11: 9-10 NIV) Because Jesus had the light in Him, He was determined to go to Judea and raise Lazarus from the dead despite the clear danger involved.

Literally, Jesus said the one who stumbles does not have the light "in him". It is an inner clarity that is not determined by what is outside him but created within. What Jesus makes clear is that circumstances do not need to determine how you are doing inside. Most of us care a lot about physical fitness but many neglect emotional fitness. Those who are not emotionally fit are pushed around by their emotions. As circumstances change, so do their emotions. They get angry or depressed when something bad or troubling happens or they think has happened. They are happy if everything seems to be going right. Worry is an emotional response to scary circumstances and fear is when worry grows to uncontrollable levels like a fire that turns into a wildfire. Some isolate themselves when troubles come and hide from their emotions. Others literally become physically ill as emotions take over their inner world. Jesus tells us that we can have a light that shines within us. That light enables us to not stumble emotionally, to maintain peace and even joy when troubles arise. Most people never let the light shine within them when circumstances become chaotic or threatening. But you can! You don't have to be like most people. Jesus can transform your inner world.

Jesus could go to Jerusalem with great peace and contentment, despite the threat of the religious leaders, because He was confident the Father was showing Him the right way to go. He had the light shining within Him. However Martha and Mary, when Lazarus died felt none of that peace. Circumstances determined how they felt. Both Martha and Mary complained when Jesus arrived, that if He had come earlier, Lazarus would not have died. **When Mary reached the**

place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (John 11: 32 NIV) Mary and those with her had fallen into despair and they all were weeping bitterly when Christ approached them. Of course weeping is normal and natural when someone you love deeply dies. But Jesus' reaction to their response is telling. Literally, the text reads in verse 33 that He "snorted". It was anger, legitimate anger Jesus felt as He watched the weeping of Mary and her friends. Mary was walking in darkness and did not have to do so. Because of the darkness within her, she did not know how to deal with what she faced. It wasn't that she was bad or lacked faith. She had deep devotion to Jesus and like her sister Martha believed in the resurrection, but she was not letting the light within her guide how she felt about things.

The same was true of the disciples. As Jesus made His way to Jerusalem and the dangers awaiting Him there, Jesus told them that although they were going to see Lazarus, Lazarus was already dead. Thomas most likely spoke for all the disciples when he despondently responded, **"Let us also go, that we may die with him."** (John 11: 16b NIV) Where was his confidence in God to see them through it? What happened to his faith that Jesus would protect them, no matter what? When the light of Christ is not shining in you, God's view of things is lost to you. Your faith is diminished and your dependence on God weakens. Jesus said powerfully that if we just follow Him, we will not walk in darkness ever. **"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."** (John 8: 12b NIV) But how do we do that? It is much simpler than it seems.

If you want to stay in the light and live life with the peace and joy and contentment Jesus has, then you must follow Him at every turn. The Bible promises you have the light of God in you; you just have to live that way. **For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.** (2 Corinthians 4: 6 NIV) If you are born again and your faith is in Christ for your salvation, then Jesus Christ Himself lives in you and through you. All His character traits, His peace and joy and courage are yours and available to you all the time. You simply let Jesus have His way in you and out will come from you the goodness of God. You then will not be emotionally rocked by your circumstances as Christ lives through you. Each day let Christ know He is in charge of you. And then agree with Him as He directs your life. There is never a time when it is not right for Christ to lead you, but it is especially true when times are tough. The big idea is a really big idea. Trust Christ to lead you when circumstances become too overwhelming for you. Every mom and dad needs to do this. Every child and teen needs to also. Grandparents must lead the younger generations when it comes to trusting Christ to direct their lives. Peace like a river and joy that overflows your soul are not too big for God to do in you since He lives in you all the time.