

They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them. But you are not like that for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:8-9 NLT) We often describe life in active addiction as darkness and life in recovery as light. We are grateful to God for pursuing us and bringing us out of the darkness we were in. He called us again and again until, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we were able to respond and move towards the light. Sometimes it seems that people hear the call, move away from the darkness towards the light, but then get caught somewhere in-between, "in the shadows."

What is life like in the shadows? Difficult things which happen to us are said to "cast a shadow" on our lives. Many people feel they are living in the shadows when they experience deep grief and pain. However, we have God's promise of help, strength and safety from enemies, as well as His comforting presence, when we face the shadows of grief, pain and injustice. **Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. Poor people have come to you for safety. You have kept needy people safe when they were in trouble. You have been a place to hide when storms came. You have been a shade from the heat of the sun.** (Psalm 23:4, 91:1 NLT, Isaiah 25:4 NIRV) Not only does God come close to us during these shadowy times, but just as the shade of a tree is comforting and refreshing on a hot sunny day, so the Lord cares for us and provides for us. God's healing and restoration calms and restores our soul in these safe and shady places.

There is also another kind of life in the shadows, a negative kind of shady living. A famous psychiatrist, Carl Jung, has called it the dark side of our personality. These traits, the defects we would prefer to hide, form the shadow of our flawed self. When we stop using an addictive substance or try to quit an unhealthy habit, before we know it, out from the shadows bursts anger, frustration, resentment or fear that's been hiding under the cover of those mood altering elements. Those of us who have relapsed a few times know about a dark urge that seems uncontrollable, that lurks in the shadows of our recovery. We wonder, with varying degrees of unease, if we can live beyond its power. This shadow self has been described as that part in us that causes us to do things that hurt ourselves and others. These actions later cause us grief, guilt, and shame. Jesus is the light of life and, if we walk in His light, He will eliminate the dark things in us. Jesus said: **I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.**" (John 8:12 NLT)

God has good teaching for us to strengthen us so we can walk in the light and truly leave the darkness behind. When we turn our lives over to the care of God and follow His guidance, He promises to lead us forward safely. **You will open eyes that can't see. You will set prisoners free. Those who sit in darkness will come out of their cells. I will lead them along paths they had not known before. I will guide them on roads they are not familiar**

with. I will turn the darkness into light as they travel. I will make the rough places smooth. Those are the things I will do. I will not desert my people. (Isaiah 42:7, 16 NIRV)

If we fail to follow God's guidance and turn to our own thoughts and plans we will find ourselves in shadows that are fearful and uncomfortable. Where does life in the shadows lurk for us and what should we do to avoid dangerous shadows and live in the light? Here are 4 shadowy areas to consider.

1. Who or what are we spending time with? **Do not be joined to unbelievers. What do right and wrong have in common? Can light and darkness be friends? "So come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch anything that is not pure and clean. Then I will receive you."** (2 Corinthians 6:14, 17 NIRV) Am I spending time with uplifting people or with gossips, complainers and fault-finders. Are we talking problems and war stories or speaking truth and encouragement? What about the content of what I'm watching or reading, the lyrics of the music on my iPod? God calls us away from people, places, and even media that are filled with sin. We need to find new activities, new places to gather, a new circle of acquaintances and friends, and new sources nourishment for our heart and soul. Mixing darkness and light is a recipe for shadowy discontent and relapse.

2. What are we thinking about? **Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them.** (Ephesians 5:11 NLT). Are we thinking about engaging in any behaviour that the Bible says is harmful? Are we harbouring irritable, hateful, or lustful thoughts? We need to come into the light, confess our dark thoughts, and receive forgiveness. We need to discipline ourselves to refocus our minds with the light of God's truth.

3. Are my beliefs, thoughts, and behaviours 100% in line with God's word? **Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.** (2 Corinthians 4:4 NLT) We can't just ignore those parts of the Bible that are inconvenient to our lifestyle. In fact, ignoring the truth of God's word drives us further and further into the shadows. **God is light. There is no darkness in him at all. Suppose we say that we share life with God but still walk in the darkness. Then we are lying. We are not living by the truth.** (1 John 1:5,6 NIRV)

4. Are we willing to forgive and bless everyone, even those who have harmed us? **If anyone calls down curses on his father or mother, his lamp will be blown out in total darkness. Anyone who says he loves God but in fact hates his brother or sister is a liar. Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you.** (Proverbs 20:20, 1 John 4:20, Luke 6:27 NIRV) Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. Unforgiveness casts a shadow on our relationship with God even more than on our relationship with the offender.

Light and darkness just don't mix. Let's leave behind shady living in the shadows and enter fully into the life of goodness and light which God has prepared for us today.

Question for Discussion and Reflection

Where do I recognize shadows in my life and what am I doing about them?