

COPING WITH THE SHADOWS OF DAILY LIFE

By Jim Langley

As an insurance agent, I deal with death more than most. At the height of COVID-19, four of my clients have succumbed to the virus and 12 clients have died from various other diseases. Some died unexpectedly while others had suffered from lingering illnesses.

Confronting death's ominous shadow is never easy. A Bible passage often used at memorial services is Psalm 23, a psalm of David. I first memorized those six verses as a young boy and have found them wonderfully encouraging over the past 68 years as I have faced adversity – especially confronting the “valley of the shadow of death” described in the fourth verse of the short psalm.

Here's the verse in its entirety. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” This psalm presents the good shepherd, Jesus, who will not allow those sheep that follow Him to be harmed by Satan, the Evil One.

For those who follow Jesus Christ, we are assured the “shadow of death” is only that – merely a shadow. As a young boy, I was often fearful of shadows, but outgrew my fear of the dark, realizing shadows cannot hurt us – shadows are harmless. This is true in the marketplace, as well as every other area of life.

Shadows are nothing more than the absence of light. Here's what the apostle John asserts in John 1:1-5: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him, all things were made, without him nothing was made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”

There's been darkness in this world ever since Adam and Eve ate of that forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. That darkness will remain until Jesus triumphantly returns. In the meantime, we must face certain shadows as they infiltrate our lives. But that is no reason to fear the darkness they seem to create. I have faced extremely dark moments in my past, but I never lost the assurance that God would see me through the valley of the shadow of death. Perhaps you can relate through your own experiences.

Our spiritual enemy will try many ways that could cause us to lose hope. However, in some ways, those dark moments become a test and an opportunity to draw nearer to God and His Light, which will certainly remove all darkness. As James 1:2-3 urges, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”

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Some constantly remain in darkness as they wrestle with controlling sins and addictions. Most of us, however, only occasionally experience the darkest moments. But even a short time in the throes of darkness can cause us to feel we have lost all hope. The final verse in Psalm 23 says, “Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” It took me 40 years to realize that’s where God wanted me to be. I now gladly proclaim my intent to remain in His everlasting, protective arms for the rest of my days here on earth.

If you want to remain in the light, you too must receive Jesus into your heart and ask Him to do a total makeover, changing you into a very special child of the King – taking you from darkness to light.

© 2023, all rights reserved. Jim Langley has been writing for more than 30 years while working as a life and health insurance agent. In recent years, his passion has turned to writing about his relationship with God. His goal is to encourage others to draw near to Him as well. A long-time member of CBMC, he started writing “Fourth Quarter Strategies” in 2014.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. How often do you think of death? Does its prospect frighten you? What about the “valley of the shadow of death,” where unknown dangers seem to lurk – how do you cope with those times of darkness in your own life?

2. Psalm 23 speaks about a shepherd guiding his sheep through dark, shadowy valleys. Do you ever feel like one of those sheep, timid and defenseless, wishing you had a caring shepherd nearby to guide you to safety? Explain your answer.

3. What are some dark valleys you are facing right now, or some that you have had to confront in the recent past? How do you typically respond when such circumstances arise – what is your “default setting” for dealing with trials and adversity, whether at work or in your private life?

4. The last verse of Psalm 23 declares, “Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Do you have this hope, such confident assurance of God’s love and protection? If so, describe what this means for you.

NOTE:

*If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:
Psalm 23:1-6; Isaiah 40:28-31; John 10:1-15, 11:25-26; 1 John 1:5-7*