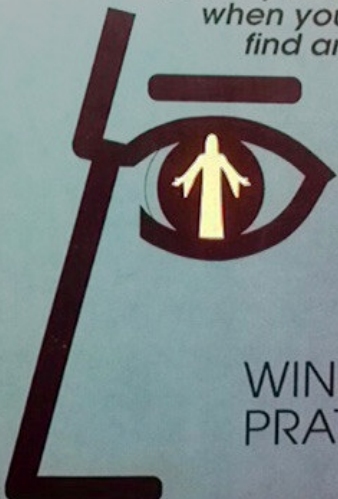


THE THOMAS FACTOR

*The key to believing
when you cannot
find an answer*



WINKIE
PRATNEY

THE THOMAS FACTOR

**FOR THAT
SOLITARY SEEKER
WHO BRAVES
THE DARKNESS
AND DARES
BELIEVE.**

IN HIS FAVOR IS

LIFE...

**"WEEPING MAY
ENDURE FOR A
NIGHT,
BUT JOY COMES
IN THE MORNING."**

Psalm 30:5

Introduction

**"FOR YOU ARE
MY LAMP, O LORD;
THE LORD SHALL
ENLIGHTEN MY
DARKNESS."**

2 Samuel 22:29

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What in the World Is Going On?

We have been
chosen by Jesus. We're
walking with Him. Being
His follower. Committed
to doing what He says,
being what He wants,
going where He leads.
But now, after all the
years, we ask: Is it

real?

"There has never been a time when it has been more difficult to be a Christian," says William Barclay, "and there has never been a time when it has been more necessary." At the edge of the new millennium, we now

embark on what seems at once the most challenging, frightening, and exciting decade of contemporary history. Vast changes are taking place around the world. Russia. China. The Middle East. Entire political, economic, and military systems are shaking and altering

before our very eyes.
As we accelerate into
the twenty-first century,
we all face a time of
major decisions. What
is going to happen in
our world? What is
going to happen to us?
If a caring, sovereign
God is indeed in charge
of the future, how can
we best prepare to

follow Him into it?

We are not the first to ask these questions. The early disciples also came to a time of great crisis and darkness. Jesus said He was going to die, that the Shepherd would be struck and all the sheep would be scattered. And then just

when they most needed a sense of closeness, of common purpose and courage to face together what was coming, Jesus spoke to them about betrayal in their own ranks, about denial, about an immediate future they would all apparently have to face alone. And

like us now, on the edge of an incredible age, they were filled with questions.

"Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?' “ **(John 14:5).**

What did Jesus mean?
Where was He going?

What were they supposed to do now? They had general assurances from the Lord before, but this time was really serious; and the person who dared voice to Jesus his unspoken questions was not satisfied with a general promise.

We all know
Thomas, don't we? The
disciple who doubted.
Thomas, the born
skeptic with the heart of
a scientist, the man
who said even after the
miracle: "Unless I can
put my hand in the hole
in His side I will not
believe."

There has never

been a time in contemporary Christianity when the temptation of Thomas was so prevalent and widespread at all levels of the Church. We, especially of the Western world, live in a period of deep uneasiness in the Christian Church. While

some is obviously fallout from scandals, the failures of well-known people, ministries, and institutions, there is another factor at work deeper than this. Even our culture currently reflects a mood of pessimism, malaise, and disenchantment.

The Church is experiencing a time of great change; a “whole lot of shaking,” forsaking, and breaking is going on. There is an inability in most people to get a handle on what is happening personally or globally. The questions of Thomas are ours as we face the

immediate future: What is God up to? What is happening to me? What can I do in the midst of all this?

The River Is Rising-Toward 2001 A.D.

Our answer may be found in a vision given to the prophet Ezekiel. In the vision a man took him out into a

river, farther and farther until he could no longer stand on his own.

In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity... [the Lord] took me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain... There was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze ... a

measuring rod in his hand
... The man said to me,
"Son of man, look with
your eyes and hear with
your ears, and fix your
mind on everything I
show you."

Ezekiel 40:1-4

There followed
lengthy and specific
instructions for the

reconstruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. Then this:

He brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the house faced east. And the water was flowing down

from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar.

And he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate by way of the gate that faces east. And behold, water was trickling from the south side. When the man went

out toward the east with a line in his hand, he measured a thousand cubits, and he led me through the water, *water reaching the ankles.*

Again he measured a thousand and led me through the water, *water reaching the knees.* Again he measured a thousand and led me

through the water, *water reaching the loins.*

Again he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not ford, for the water had risen, enough water to swim in, *a river that could not be forded.* And he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?"

Ezekiel 47:1-6, NAS

This vision is not only a promise of God's inheritance for Israel; it is also a metaphor of increasing risk, of inevitable major changes in our Christian life, the "passages" of spiritual growth. The Church, especially in the West,

is in what seems perhaps the most difficult and frightening level. We have learned to live in comparative security with water around both our ankles and our knees, but now things are getting serious. God is bringing us into life and healing, but first we have to get

where we no longer
move in the water but
the water moves us.
This is the task of the
man with the measuring
line; this is the intention
of God for our time.

A Prelude

**AND HE SHOWED
ME A PURE RIVER OF
WATER OF LIFE,
CLEAR AS CRYSTAL,
PROCEEDING FROM
THE THRONE OF
GOD AND OF THE
LAMB. IN THE
MIDDLE OF ITS
STREET, AND ON**

**EITHER SIDE OF THE
RIVER, WAS THE
TREE OF LIFE,
WHICH BORE
TWELVE FRUITS,
EACH TREE
YIELDING ITS FRUIT
EVERY MONTH. AND
THE LEAVES OF THE
TREE WERE FOR THE
HEALING OF THE
NATIONS.**

Revelation 22:1-2

The Waters of Life

To understand the changes God is bringing to our lives- and to find answers to our doubts- we need first to see how much of life from creation to the present day has to do with water.

Scripture speaks

of water as a life-giving stream:

These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. And it shall come to pass, that every thing that

liveth, which moveth,
whithersoever the rivers
shall come, shall live: and
there shall be a very great
multitude of fish, because
these waters shall come
thither: for they shall be
healed; and every thing
shall live whither the river
cometh.

Ezekiel 47:8- 9, KJV

It is significant that much of life in creation, in the Scriptures, and in our current physical existence has to do with water. Earth, of all the planets in our solar system, perhaps in all God's universe, is the dominantly water-rich world. Oceans cover two-thirds of our planet.

Rain feeds the fertilization cycle and keeps the multiple billions of plants and trees alive. Snow caps our poles and puts some of our world to sleep in winter; rivers, lakes, and streams become a source of refreshment and joy in the heat of summer.

Water is in
Scripture a symbol of
both life and death.
Take Christian baptism,
for instance; the image
of water signifies both
burial and resurrection
(new life). During my
early years of ministry I
had so many
backsliders and
dropouts as a result of

my ineffective
witnessing that I
thought, Well, perhaps I
should baptize them. I'll
hold them under twice
and take them out
once! I won't get to
heaven, but they will.

Water dominates
our whole lives. We
commence our physical
birth when "the waters

burst." A large percentage of the physical body is made up of water. Every major cell, tissue, and lean muscle mass is replete with water. We can go weeks without food but only a few days without water; dehydration invariably means death.

The birth and death of early earth is likewise filled with references to water; the Bible speaks of the waters "above" and "under" (Genesis 1:7) and of God's gathering the waters together (Genesis 1:9-10). God even speaks to the waters in the creation of

life (Genesis 1:20-22).

Some creation scientists postulate that before the early earth was destroyed, it had both a water layer in its upper atmosphere and perhaps another modulating water layer around its core. This early earth may not have been struck by the

directly unscreened rays of the sun. It may instead have been warmed from its core, an energy source something like a perfectly balanced breeder reactor, gently moderating its heat to the surface.

According to these creation scientists the

destruction of the world took place like this: God spoke in judgment to the center of the earth and unbalanced that reactor. It overloaded; sections of earth cracked like a microwaved egg. That water-moderator shell shot up in places under tremendous, intense

pressure. Huge, violent explosions of water cracked the floating granite substructure layer of our planet.

Fountains of water as high as two or three miles devastated an upper firmament shell loaded with electromagnetic energy and it in turn

discharged onto the surface of the doomed early world.

If this is the way it happened, can you imagine how utterly scary it was? In places like the Paluxy River you can still see authenticated dinosaur tracks and what appear to be apparently large

human tracks trapped in the same disaster together. The prints are stretched out. There is a human handprint still left of a scrabbling, panicky attempt to get up after a fall. The tracks sometimes cross, but the lizards are apparently not after the people. Everybody's

running ... going in
different directions.
Everyone is running
from something that is
scaring the living
daylights out of them.

Can you imagine
what it would be like to
see for the very first
time the utter blackness
of space and the
discharge of lightning

like at no other time in earth history? And then, for the first time in the record of mankind, rain. Rain that washed down out of the skies along with subterranean explosions of water that sent giant tidal waves sweeping over the shallow land masses in the awful judgment of

the first world. Water: life and death. It was true in the days of Noah. That first flood that destroyed the wicked ancient world also preserved eight people, carried by the waves in the shelter of God.

And so it goes throughout Scripture.

There is Moses, the greatest of the Old Testament Law-giving figures. His life is marked, both life and death, by water. Pharaoh commands all Hebrew parents: "Throw your male babies into the water" (Exodus 1:22). Moses has parents who,

besides being law-abiding Hebrews, are somewhat imaginative. Fearing God, they look for a creative alternative way to carry out the king's command, and come up with a literal interpretation of the law that certainly meets with God's approval.

After all, Pharaoh didn't say how to throw the baby into the water... so they put him into a little boat (Exodus 2:3) and you know the rest of the story.

The life of Moses is spared by the same water that means death to so many other babies. Later, he meets

his wife through water
(Exodus 2:16-21). The
spared child becomes a
wanted, hunted man;
and that man is at last
called by God to lead
the children of Israel
through the waters of
the Red Sea, which
close down on pursuing
Egypt and drown
Pharaoh and his hosts

(Exodus 14:21-31).

Water: life to Israel, death to Pharaoh. Water also marks the end of Moses' earthly ministry. On the edge of the promise, he strikes the rock of symbol in anger instead of speaking to it. Unable to enter the Promised Land during

his lifetime, Moses is buried by God in the desert to await the fulfillment of His original promise. Moses has to wait to enter the Promised Land thousands of years later, when in his resurrection he joins Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration

(Matthew 17:1- 5). Life and death by water.

In Ezekiel's vision, we see a rising river of water. He is taken out farther and farther; and level by level the water encompasses him.

Four areas this water touches: the ankles, the knees, the loins, and, finally, everything.

There is the man with the measuring line. Did you ever notice in some sections of the Bible how much space is given to apparently useless and boring measurements? Chapters of it! When I first began to study it, I couldn't see the sense of it. I thought, *What a*

waste! Why didn't God put in more verses like Psalm 23 and John 3:16 instead of all this cubits stuff? But then, I never did like measurements much.

Yet it is obvious that God is a Counter, a Measurer. He not only measures things like this river, the

Tabernacle, and the great City to come; He counts the days, the people, the tears, the sins of the world. In Psalm 147:4 we read that God numbers the stars. He even names them all. In Matthew 10:30 we read that even the hairs on your head are numbered!

God seems to be into numbers.

Now there are some missionary people who are not only good at speaking or singing or writing; they are also good at engineering and carpentry and building. They can build both a church and a place to

put the church. I find
such people
embarrassing. I can't
even put a shelf up
straight on the wall!

In my more
rational moments
between smashed
thumbs and wasted
materials I think about
the factors that make
people good builders. I

know at least one thing they have that I don't. They habitually think of precise measurement; the first thing they pull out is a tape measure, while the first thing I reach for is a saw. They measure six times and cut once; I measure no times at all and have to cut 150 times! The

difference between me and my kinds of attempts and a real carpenter, builder, or craftsman is called measurement and attention to detail.

We have a God who counts stars and comes to the funeral of every sparrow and this God is infinitely

detailed. We tend to think of the general greatness, immensity, and compassing power of God, but He is also precise. The same God who has upheld the galaxies effortlessly for light-years both knows and cares how many hairs you lost this morning.

So that man walks
in the vision and
measures. See how
slowly the water rises.
Only to the ankles after
a thousand measures!
Nothing very fast.
Some things change
very slowly. And in this
vision, the man walks
out a thousand cubits
before the river rises to

his ankles. A thousand cubits. If we consider a cubit eight inches long, we're talking about 15,000 feet! That's a long way to walk to have water just reach the ankles.

We are perhaps unaccustomed to this kind of slowness. Most of us grew up to like, to

prefer instant things.
We belong to a
generation used to
watching T.V. programs
with anything slow and
boring edited out. We
like things to happen
fast. We eat fast, drive
fast, live life in the fast
lane. We want our
miracles of provision,
healing, or restoration

to happen instantly.

Thus, we are not so sure of supernatural things that happen very gradually. How can we see them unless they move quickly?

We may be in a terrible situation and want things changed immediately. Of course, the same God who

turned water into wine
instantly can do it
again, but a lot of times
He moves much more
slowly. After all, He
turns water into wine all
the time. He does this
millions of times all over
the world every year
through His creation,
grapes, but we often fail
to appreciate that this,

too, is a work of God. It is only when He accelerates time and shrinks His power to our level of perception that we are compelled to notice His help and intervention. George MacDonald said, "The miracles of Jesus were His Father's normal works, wrought small

and swift that we might see them."

The slow change can be a miracle, too. Someone can look back and say, "That was a mess a year ago. Back then I had no idea how it could ever be any different." But little by little, things changed. It is better

now than it was before.
He has been at work
even when we have not
been looking.

Fractionally the tide has
risen, and now there is
water where once there
was only mud and
sand! God has made all
these changes in us
and we have cause to
be thankful for the slow

miracle as well as the fast. As the old lady said, "Well, I ain't now what I *should* be, and I ain't yet what I'm *gonna* be, but praise God, I at least ain't *what I was!*"

And you, too, need never be the same. It is time to begin the scary, costly change. Come with me now. We are

going to a place of both
life and death. We are
going down to the river.

Level One

Water to the Ankles

**"LORD, WE DO
NOT KNOW WHERE
YOU ARE GOING;
HOW DO WE KNOW
THE WAY?"**

**THOMAS
QUESTIONS JESUS**

**WHEN THE MAN
WENT OUT TOWARD
THE EAST WITH A
LINE IN HIS HAND, HE
MEASURED A
THOUSAND CUBITS,
AND HE LED ME
THROUGH THE
WATER, WATER
REACHING THE
ANKLES.**

Ezekiel 47:3, NAS

Healing from Chaos

The first miracle of the early Church after Pentecost had to deal with the healing of someone's ankles. It centered around a man who had been *born*

lame; he had never walked in his life (Acts 3:1-16). When the disciples met him, he was at the Beautiful Gate begging for alms. He looked at Peter and John, expecting something from them. "I do not possess silver and gold," said Peter, "but what I do have I

give to you." And the power of the Resurrected Christ touched the lame man in the ankles; God healed him instantly. He called out for "alms" but in the name of Jesus, Peter and John gave him "legs" instead!

In our spiritual

journeys, all of us begin at the bottom. There really has been a "fall," not only in our world but in us, too. We both bear the consequences and reinforce the choices of our first sinning parents, and the devastating harvest that has resulted over the centuries is now the

current tragedy of our world. No one who knows the meaning of the Bible word *lost* needs any illustration of this primary truth; our first and greatest need is to be *found*, at the deepest and most basic levels of our being.

In M. Scott Peck's probing book on

community and peacemaking, *A Different Drum*, he refers to an excellent recent university study on six stages of spiritual experience. These stages are not only apparently universal; they seem also to me to have peculiar relevance at

this time to the Church in the Western world. Peck reduces these various stages to four ascending levels of experience: what he calls *chaos*, *tradition*, *doubt*, and *mystery*.

The four basic transitional stages or passages of spiritual experience bear a

natural correspondence to the four rising levels of Ezekiel's vision of the river: waters first to the ankles (chaos), then to the knees (tradition), to the loins (doubt), and to swim in (mystery).

Let us examine each stage of our spiritual growth as a parallel to the vision of

the river. In our lives,
too, there will be a river
of God from the
Temple; at each
measure we will come
to see and touch a
whole new level of
spiritual experience.
You can think of these
if you like as passages
of the spirit, necessary
levels through which we

all must pass in our
adventure with God.

Peck calls the first
stage of our lives
before conversion
chaos. It's a pretty good
description, if we take it
in its common meaning
and do not confuse it
with "randomness."
Within the last few
decades the word

chaos has become the term for a whole new science, a term to describe patterns discovered in the underlying complex simplicity of nature. The science of chaos has become a way of seeing structure in the apparent disorder of different things like

clouds and coastlines,
waves and leaves, a
dripping tap in your
bathroom or a swirling
storm on a planet like
Jupiter millions of miles
away. Chaos in nature
is now a study of unity
in diversity and order in
disorder, replete with
odd names like *Koch*
Curves, *Lorentz*

Attractors, and Mandelbrot Sets.

Put simply, this recent discipline says that nothing in life is as simple as it seems. The complex diversity of things is often at heart the result of tiny changes in initial conditions on which the result is sensitively

dependent. The new science of chaos has shown that in life, randomness is death; that small things can make a big difference later; and that a complex system can be turbulent and coherent at the same time.

Coherent, yet turbulent. Like you, like

me. *Chaos*. All of us know what it is like to live a life that, for all its apparent order, is nevertheless antisocial, adult autistic, and devotedly self-centered- another word for what Barry McGuire called his early life without Christ: "Insanity."

Chaos is a good description for a life in which we have become dangerously irresponsible, so captive to sin and self-deception that we become pawns of our own choices, circumstances, or conditions. In a life of willful rebellion against

God, we like to think of ourselves as free. But look closely and you see we are locked into repeating patterns, not truly random, but endlessly repeating. Like the man at the gate of the Temple, we see no real way out of our situation. Maybe we are frustrated,

immobilized, helplessly
locked down into our
own intensifying,
recurring patterns of
guilt, blame, and self-
pity, really wanting
something better but
wholly unable to get up
by our own strength.
Crippled, unclean,
demeaned, and
demoralized, we fight

having to admit the final truth: We can do nothing at last but perhaps humble ourselves enough to beg for help and mercy.

This is the place of need for the first stage of spiritual growth. It involves the "waters to the ankles." What is the significance of

water that begins at the feet? It means that God will come first to restore in our lives the following things:

1. Purity. He makes us clean.
2. Dignity. He gives us a real self-worth.
3. Responsibility. He restores to us a sense of

commitment and care.

4. Mobility: He empowers us to reach out to help others.

Purity

The river of God washes first at our ankles. There is a key significance of that first

water contact with the feet in Scripture, one we tend to forget in the world of paved roads, carpets, and socks and shoes. Our feet are the parts of us that are most in touch with the earth. We take off our shoes when we draw near the bush that burns with fire, because

we are on holy ground.
That's why the foot
washing ceremony of
Bible times was such
an important part of
honoring a guest at
your home; it was a
provision for cleansing.

And there is first a
cleansing for our sin in
the river. In his eventual
obedience to God,

Naaman, the proud Syrian general, was freed in the river from leprosy, the AIDS of his time. "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin," prayed a repentant David. "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:2, 7).

Into our guilty, chaotic,
and defiled lives comes
the river of God,
cleansing and purifying.
Our first contact with
the river comes with the
conviction that we
cannot cleanse
ourselves, and that we
must be touched by His
mercy: "Not by works of
righteousness which we

have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). The Bible also speaks of the Church being purified "with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26).

We walk through the world and we get our feet dirty. And in our day, the spiritual reality is the same. For our daily contact with a fallen world we need daily cleansing from the water bowl of Christ.

Dignity

The second great accomplishment of

salvation is the sense
of value and
specialness it restores
to men and women.

"You are a chosen
generation," says 1
Peter 2:9, "a royal
priesthood, a holy
nation, His own special
people, that you may
proclaim the praises of
Him who called you out

of darkness into His marvelous light." A lame man has lost more than his legs; the loss of his mobility is also an assault on his dignity. There is something about an external handicap that gets inside you; when you can no longer use your own limbs you

tend also to lose your desire to do anything else.

John's Gospel records the account of Jesus healing another crippled man (John 5:1-15). Jesus meets a man utterly powerless to move, someone unable to walk for 38 years. Day after day he

has been carried there
by others, perhaps
even drags himself
there to the sheep
market pool, one small,
lame part of the great
crowd that hangs
around Bethesda
hoping for a miracle. I
have friends who, like
this man, have lost their
ability to walk; I can

know only something of the daily battle they wage with frustration and anger, the sense of uselessness, impotence, and helpless dependence such a crippling brings to the spirit. Thirty-eight years. "What more can we say about him," said Luigi Santucci, "once

we know this about him? What is there to say about such a man apart from the number of years?"

And Jesus asks what must have sounded like a silly sort of question: "Do you want to be cured?" Cured? After being dragged here year after

eternal year, always
watching for the moving
of the waters,
scrabbling toward the
rim of the pool at the
troubling touch of the
angel, but always being
beaten to the edge by
the man with the
crippled hand but the
healthy big elbows, the
blind man with 20/20

hearing of water
motion, or the deaf
Olympic pole-vaulter?

Yet here is a Man
with a question to ask
that is not at all silly
when you have been
sick so long. "*Do you
want to be well?*"

Sometimes you
lose hope. One by one,

your friends have
gotten tired of carrying
you around. They don't
call anymore and you
can't blame them.

Nobody wants to look
at you; they are afraid
you will capture them
with your naked stare of
need. "I have no man"
is your life summary
now; you are all you've

got but even you can't stand to live with yourself. And as for the angel who sometimes stirs these waters, how come he never notices you? You've been coming now year after year and here you are, still crippled while others have walked away free. Some

healing angel! The angel must be blind.

But now suddenly a Face that does not look away; a gaze of utter and total attention; a look that will not let you go. Jesus is looking at you with those eyes that have eternity in them. And He is speaking, not to the

crowd but to you. "Do you want to be well?" Sometimes you forget what it ever felt like to feel good. You no longer remember what it is to be ordinary. You do not pray in faith because you have no remaining vision of what normal is. Your problem so fills the

horizon of your daily life
you have no room
anymore for a surprise
sunrise. Maybe you
have been sick so long
that now in your heart
of hearts you actually
find it preferable just to
stay that way. You tried
before; it never
happened. It happened
to others; it never

happened to you. "*Do you want to be well?*" asks Jesus. "*Do you?*"

Responsibility

It is a frightening thing to be well. Ask the man in the asylum about it. Ask the habitual offender who is checked once again into his prison home how he handled the

latest venture outside. It is sometimes easier to be sick. When you are well, people expect things from you. They expect you to help others. They expect you to carry your share of the burden, to be part of the solution and not the problem, to have something you

can give for a change.
When you are well, you
are to be a healing
force yourself in
society; you are
someone whom others
may want to come to
and draw from. It is a
very serious question,
this one Jesus asks by
the edge of the water,
as it reaches for our

crippled ankles: "Do you really want to be well?" "It's not my fault," says the cripple at the edge of the pool. "I have no man." "*I am a Man,*" says the presence of Jesus. "*Rise, take up your bed and walk.*"

Mobility

Purity, dignity,

responsibility. And when the healing river of God touches the lame man at the Gate Beautiful it gives him the one thing every person needs who cannot move: mobility. The man at the gate has much more than a divine healing; he also experiences a miracle.

It is indeed a "notable" miracle because Scripture makes it clear that he has never walked. A man, around forty years old, instantly learning to walk? No tripping around, no crawling, no stumbling as a baby does? Just like that? A miracle indeed.

So comes the river of God to us in our powerlessness, in our weakness, in our helplessness, in our irresponsibility, having always to be carried by other people. The river touches us. It sets us on our feet. It sends us out with a message for a crippled world. It

makes every Christian
a missionary and
everyone else a
mission field.

When the priests
bearing the Ark of God
came to cross the
Jordan into the
Promised Land, the
waters marking the
beginning of their
mission did not part

until their feet touched the river (Joshua 3:7-17). And they stood on their feet in the middle of that riverbed with the waters rising "in a heap" in a faraway city until the whole nation had passed over to the other side. When the priests' feet then touched dry ground, the

waters refilled the
riverbed to overflowing.

This divine
commission to move
out may take us to
some scary places. The
water now washing our
ankles will rise much
more, and if we go
where it is headed we
will travel with it to a
parched and dying

world.

There is a mighty
GO in the word *Gospel*.
What cleansed,
restored, and made you
caring now needs to be
taken to the rest of the
world; the river brings
healing and life
wherever it flows, and a
great draught of fish.
Mobility. The Great

Commission in our generation is a realizable goal. We know what it will take. We know what needs to be done. It can happen. We have begun to focus on the untouched places that are the last great frontiers of missions; God is looking for those who

will go.

Maybe you never understood just what it meant to get involved with Jesus Christ when you first said you would follow. But He is out first of all to make you clean, to give you beauty for ashes, real love for others, and a global task to do that

will not be over until
you stand face-to-face
before His throne.

What about the
countries that are
closed to the Gospel?
"What about them?"
says Brother Andrew.
"There are no closed
doors. Show me a
country closed to the
Gospel and I will show

you a way to get in. I
may not be able to tell
you how to get back.
But after all, Jesus just
said, 'Go.' He didn't
say, 'Come back.'"

All this and more
is involved when the
first innocent wave
curls at your ankles.
Are you ready for the
rest of the river?

Prayer

*Lord, we thank
You for the bittersweet
memories of things once
deeply loved and shared
that have now passed into
history and the record of
our walk with You. We
thank You for each one of
them-the places, the
people, the circumstances*

and situations that became for a small, sweet time the reflection of Your great grace and provision for us.

We appreciate in each of them Your care; we acknowledge in all of them Your dear hand; we rejoice in what each taught us of Your beauty and Your bounty. And

*now that they are gone,
moved with some sadness
into the journal of what is
now forever past, we ask
for the grace to lift our
hearts and our hands
from what may never be
again to what is yet to
come. Our brook has
dried up; the birds You
sent are now gone, but we
are not forsaken or*

*forgotten. We hear again
that still, small voice that
calls on us once more to
touch and taste and see
anew the adventure that
comes with Your
friendship, our living and
Creator God.*

*Thank You, then,
Lord, for what is now
past; we look to You in
faith for the needs of the*

*present hour in newness
of expectation; and we
say "Welcome" to the
future as something under
Your care, as that which
has been filtered through
the righteousness, care,
and faithfulness of a God
who cannot lie, who shall
not fail, and who has
promised never to leave
or forsake us. We affirm*

*again that nothing You
give us can or must ever
take Your own lovely
place.*

***You are our Father,
and we are glad.***

Level Two

Water to the
Knees

**"MY LORD AND
MY GOD."**

**THOMAS
SURRENDERS TO
JESUS**

AGAIN HE

**MEASURED A
THOUSAND AND LED
ME THROUGH THE
WATER, WATER
REACHING THE
KNEES**

Ezekiel 47:4, NAS

The Discipline of Limits

The river comes,
secondly, to the knees.
At this second level I
can't help but think of
an image from the
wholly irreverent movie
Monty Python and the

Holy Grail. One unforgettable image from this weird flick is of the Black Knight protecting the bridge. He challenges King Arthur, who after a short scuffle promptly hacks off one of the Black Knight's arms. "Just a flesh wound," the Knight mutters and

undaunted resumes the battle. Arthur then proceeds to systematically cut off his other arm and both his legs. Finally, there is left this man hopping precariously on his knees yelling: *"All right. Let's call it a draw."*

It ought to be obvious. You can't fight

when you are reduced to your knees.

Resistance on this level is futile. The whole heart of the bowed knee in Scripture has to do with the idea of submission.

In the first stage of a standard spiritual conversion, a person goes from what Peck

calls "chaos" to some form of "tradition," some structure, some limits. For example, you've been "doing your own thing" in some sophisticated or unsophisticated way. Then the river comes; it touches your ankles, it cleanses you and gives you strength. It puts

you back on your feet.
It makes you strong.
Now you have some
dignity; now you have
some mobility. And with
that dignity and mobility
comes a danger. The
danger is that now
you've become a
motivated person, you
can easily become *self-*
motivated. Now that

you can move on your own, you may do just that outside of God.

The danger then of God's making us significant and responsible is that we now are tempted to do as we please. We can call it "the Protestant heresy" because it comes only to people

who are free. We can be *too* free. Our liberty can degenerate into license.

That's why law is important and why tradition is important. That's why at weddings a bride doesn't usually come down in a purple dress with green spots, exchange chickens with

the groom, and have a local dogcatcher conduct the ceremony. There is ancient wisdom, significant heritage embodied even in many of our traditional customs and rituals and ceremonies. There are principles. We need rules and limits and boundaries.

So the next thing is for the river to touch our knees. We now have to learn to do things simply because we're told, not because we personally agree, understand, or think that it's a good idea. We have to learn to obey even when the call comes against our

own best intentions and
our own good ideas.

Most conversions
take place in this
transition from chaos to
tradition, nothingness to
order. Even in the
religious world that is
not Christian, this is an
observable stage of
change: from
dissipation to discipline;

from doing our own thing to doing what we are told. The guy who's a drug addict takes up Zen Buddhism (with or without "motorcycle maintenance").

Before, perhaps he was a vomiting, addicted transsexual; now he chants koans while people slap him on the

back with wooden boards if he moves. The dissolute, indolent playboy who wouldn't give you the time of day before 11:45 A.M. now chants a mantra faithfully at his 4:00 A.M. devotions. Then after his sparse vegetarian breakfast he is off to sell magazines

or flowers in airports.

This change is especially true in *real* conversion. What we get at this level are some limits and some guidelines. We all need rules. If we find the right ones (from God's Book and in God's world) and work with them, we are working with life as God

designed it. And most times we're comfortable in this. The point to notice as the water laps around our knees is that now we do what we are told, rather than following our usual inclination to do what we think or feel.

Previously, if people didn't like the way we

were, then tough; we weren't in this world to measure up to their expectations and they weren't in this world to measure up to ours, and if by chance we met, it was beautiful. Now it's all changed. We are given rules, the limits, the way it's done, and we learn to bow the

knee.

This surrender is, as we will find, a place of real security. We are told what to do by a trusted authority. We learn principles. We learn there are reasons behind the rules, and we learn the rules themselves and commit ourselves and commit ourselves to God in

them. We learn God's laws, His structures that govern relationships in the home and family and marriage, in business and government. We delight as a culture in seeing how God put things together and discussing why we think He did. Seminars that propose

to show us these rules and relationships are a key part of our information-centered Western world.

But God likes people who do things because He told them to, not because they always understand why. Brother Andrew said he noticed one key

difference between people who served God in the Bible and people who claim to serve God today. The people in the Bible disagreed with God quite vocally but still did what He said. Today we agree wholeheartedly with God, but *don't* do what He says.

The Bible God is the Ruler of the universe. All our lives are dependent on His care and guidance. He is under no obligation, save His love, to speak or reveal Himself to anyone. We, however, are dependent on revelation, and revelation is given only

in trust. George Washington Carver, the man who found God's hidden treasures in the lowly peanut plant, said, "When you love someone or something long enough, it will reveal its secrets to you."

There is a divine order even to the *way*

we receive truth from
God. It goes something
like this:

Revelation - God
speaks

Practical Service -
We do it

Illumination - He
explains it (maybe!)

This

communication order is inherent in all of God's dealings with mankind; it is illustrated even in the order of the languages of Scripture. Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, is a revelation/action language. Greek, the primary language of the New Testament, is one

better suited to description and explanation. This is an order that promotes faith and develops trust with an ever-growing wonder.

The *maybe* in the above diagram is important. Explanation is not our own option. God never *has* to

explain it. Obedience
always precedes
illumination. A. W.
Tozer put it like this:
"Obedience is the
opener of the eyes."

It is true that we
have to be sure it really
is God speaking. It is
biblically true that we
are to "test all things" (1
Thessalonians 5:21),

and to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1). It is also true that the Christian life is supposed to be the wisest way, one that demands the commitment not only of the whole heart but also of the mind. God has not called us to some careless leap in the dark. God never said,

"Be ye transformed by the removal of your minds."

But it is not true that God has to explain things to us before we can obey Him. It is not true that we have to know why before we must do it. God has an order in the way He communicates with us,

and that order is always
this: He speaks; we do
it; He explains it-
maybe. If we attempt to
reverse this divine
order we get into
serious trouble.

Yet reverse it we
do. We do it all the
time. We do it
especially in the
Western world, with our

rich heritage of thought from civilizations like those of Greece and India and millennia of philosophy, education, and science. It is the characteristic idolatry of our communication/informat culture that our lust to understand has time and time again stood in

the way of the clear Word of God. Our educational system, even in the majority of our best Bible colleges, fits this inversion.

FIRST we explain.

Then we're encouraged to do. Later we are expected to become godly. Yet somehow this "spiritual" goal

keeps receding for many. They can't understand why the more they seem to learn, the less they seem to grow. In the desire to understand, we have become the victims of our own strength.

It is not the facts or the learning that is

the problem. If the more we learn the less we grow in trust, then ignorance is indeed bliss. The less we know the happier we will be, and heaven is a final haven for all true idiots. If it is true that the more we know the less thrilled we are, then God Himself (with

infinite wisdom) should rightfully be infinitely bored. If learning is an impediment to spiritual growth and excitement, then the Lord Jesus Himself who "increased in wisdom and stature" (Luke 2:52) as time went on should have become less and less committed to His task.

Yet He was a man who lived by the hour, whose whole life was a testament of dangerous and infectious joy and of whom it was said near the end of His mission, "The zeal for Your house has eaten me up."

No, knowledge is not the problem; what

we have is a *wrong priority*. Something good and right has been put in the wrong place and given false authority-a nice, approved, and eminently respectable idol, but an idol nevertheless.

What actually happens when we

reverse the divine order is an eventual erosion of faith, a "rust" in our trust! The result of this inverted approach in our spiritual lives is that we become more cynical and rationalistic and fault-finding.

More than a hundred years ago, one of the great revivalists

of history, Charles Finney, noticed the danger of a minister's explaining too much before calling people to obedience to God. He said that this tendency would eventually result in a generation with a critical, proud, and rationalistic mindset that, "either has no real

faith or holds most loosely to Divine things that do not admit of a clear explanation"

(Reflections on Revival). If God is not going to explain to our single brain cells why He made the universe, well, then, we're not going to do what He says.

The Western world (which leads in information and communication technology) has done precisely this. Part of God's work in our time is to restore divine order to our lives, to learn again how to follow when we cannot see.

This is exactly why God taught the leaders of His people in Bible days the central thought of *covenant*: that God and man may enter into a mutual pledge of faithfulness and commitment. In Genesis 15:18 and 17:4 the Lord covenants with Abram, promising his

children not only the land from the rivers of Egypt to the Euphrates, but to make him,"a father of many nations." To Noah and his family on the edge of the world's greatest disaster. God's covenants are the safety of the ark and His promise never

again to destroy all life
on earth by flood
(Genesis 8:21; 9:11).
His token of this was a
rainbow (Genesis 9:13).

To "cut a
covenant" in those
ancient days in the
cultures from which
Israel came meant the
forging of a mutual pact
or oath made deeply

serious by the slaying and sacrifice of an animal. This idea was inherent: "May my blood be spilled like this and my body cut apart if I ever break this promise to you." It also sometimes involved the sharing of a meal with someone; you would never harm even your

worst enemy who
shared your table.

What did covenant
with God mean to Israel
in Moses' day? It
involved *blood* (Exodus
24:8), a *book* (Exodus
24:7), and a serious
bond that was never to
be broken. He told
them, "If you will indeed
obey My voice and

keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine" (Exodus 19:5). They were warned not to covenant with the cultures around them, nor with their gods (Exodus 23:32). And for His part God promised that,"before

all your people I will do
marvels such as have
not been done in all the
earth, nor in any nation;
and all the people
among whom you are
shall see the work of
the Lord. For it is an
awesome thing that I
will do with you"

(Exodus 34:10). To this
day Israel celebrates its

Sabbath in honor of that covenant made so long ago (Exodus 31:16).

We have today in Christ by the "blood of the everlasting covenant" the promised help of the full energy of the Godhead for those who trust Him. This is the significance

of the Lord's Supper when He took bread, broke it, and said, "This is My body which was broken for you," and poured out the wine with the words, "This is the blood of the New Covenant in My name." Jesus is committed to me by His blood, by His Book, and by an utterly

serious mutual bond:
God Himself has bound
Himself to my
happiness as I have
bound myself to His.

Covenant also
means this: It may be
no great thing for me to
give my trust and
promises to God, but it
is wondrous indeed that
God would entrust His

promises to me. My faithfulness to God will always be limited by my finiteness and humanity, but His faithfulness to me is without limit and without measure.

A classic example of faithfulness to God while enduring the discipline of limits is

Joseph. If ever someone held onto a dream that seemed doomed from the start it was he. From his story, which we will explore in the next chapter, we will see that God is faithful beyond our understanding, that even when our dreams seem to self-destruct,

God keeps His Word.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the One who went before us to taste the sting of both life and death for every man and woman in our world. We thank You we can speak with You as a man speaks face to face with a friend; for You Yourself became a man

*and lived among us and
You know perfectly what
it is to be human.*

*You know what it
is to be brought before
enemies and to have them
mock You; to be with
close friends and still not
have them understand
You. You know what it is
like to be misrepresented
and misunderstood; You*

know what it means to be despised and rejected, to be humiliated and hated, to cry real tears, and to know loneliness and grief and sorrow. Though You were God's own Son, You did not count equality something to be grasped after; You laid aside Your own rights in order to win the right for us to enter in

*at the throne of the Father
in heaven.*

*Because You
cared enough to die for
us, we can ask in turn for
ourselves to die to all self-
seeking ambition; and
because You live, we shall
live also. Give us the
courage to walk on from
the dust of our past with
all its failures and loss; to*

*walk with our heads held
high because of Your help
and Your love; to walk on
with dignity as Your
forgiven children without
turning aside from this
road You have already
traveled on our behalf.*

***We love You, Lord,
and we believe; help
Thou our unbelief.***

Level Three

Water to the Loins

**"UNLESS I SEE, I
WILL NOT BELIEVE."
THOMAS TO THE
DISCIPLES**

**AGAIN HE
MEASURED A
THOUSAND AND LED
ME THROUGH THE**

**WATER,
WATER REACHING
THE LOINS.**

Ezekiel 47:4, NAS

The Challenge to Your Emotional Levels

When you hear the Ezekiel phrase *waters to the loins* in a sermon, some preachers will refer to the river's "touching

your pockets" and the necessity of giving.

Actually there are probably more primary meanings. Robes didn't have pockets in Bible times.

What do the loins signify in Scripture? These things: (1) the focus of power of your life, or your strength; (2)

security; (3) the reproductive side of your life, or your creativity; and (4) the vulnerability, and sensitivity of your life.

Strength

I asked a friend who is a legendary pro tennis player what physically goes first in competitive tennis. She

said, “Your stomach.” I
said, “What do you
mean, your stomach?” I
would have thought
your legs, your arms—
perhaps as you get
older and are still
running around in the
heat, even your brains
—but no, her answer
was your stomach. And
a year later, playing for

hours in a grueling tennis match, I suddenly found out what she meant. My arms were still there. My legs would still move. I still knew what I was supposed to be doing. The only trouble was, something in the very center of my body just quit.

You've probably noticed how weight lifters wear those wide belts. Why do they wear them? Here is one reason: If they sneeze at the wrong time, perhaps while power-lifting some mega-weight, their bodies could give out there at its weakest spot. All the

focus of our strength
flows right through
here.

The most
vulnerable area of your
body is the loins. That's
why the Roman belt
alluded to in the armor
of God mentioned in
Ephesians 6:14 was no
little Gucci designer
creation. It was a big,

strong, broad belt. It was more than a support, something to hold up your toga; it was also a protective device. For the loins also represent your security.

Security

What are you really resting on? In what is your final

confidence? Where is the ultimate base of your security? As we grow in grace, we learn some things in our walks with God that become life-messages to us, the central descriptions of our purpose in the world. We have some things that we consider very

strong in our lives; they become areas we consider places of power, the focus of our God-given abilities.

And therein lies a danger. Our strengths can betray us. We can shift our reliance in subtle ways from trust in God, who gifts us, to trust in His gifts. We

can lean on what He gave us and forget the Giver. But when the river rises to the loins, for the first time we realize that we are reaching a place where we can no longer dictate the situation.

Jesus is the only One I know who can look you in the eye, tell you how

you are going to die,
smile, and say, "Follow
Me." He said it to Peter.
"When you were
younger," He told him,
"you girded yourself
and walked where you
wished; but when you
are old . . . another will
gird you and carry you
where you do not wish"
(John 21:18).

There may come a time to you, too, when everything you could once do easily is threatened by the river; it moves to the place of your security and promises to carry you where you never intended to go.

The truth is we can't find ultimate

security in any
manmade institution.
So much that we have
relied on recently in the
Church has
dramatically failed us.
We have looked up to
and trusted people and
they have failed, looked
up to and trusted
ministries and they
have failed, relied on

tried-and trusted
methods and
approaches and
formulae and,
unaccountably, they,
too, have failed. Our
media are full of these
failures in the Church;
every day seems to
bring a new expose of
people who have blown
it one way or another in

morals, in finances, in misused authority. The world is filled with hurt people who have trusted in someone or something that has gone badly astray.

Creativity

Another major area represented by the loins is, of course, the reproductive center of

our lives; it is the focus of our sexuality, our ability to procreate, and thus the source of our initiating new life. And it is also in the area of our creativity that the waters will reach us, threatening all that we have been good at making and initiating and bringing into being.

There may come a time when everything you have done well in now fails. You were once a wellspring of creativity; now, unaccountably, the spring seems to have failed. You were the one who had all the ideas; now they are gone. Our strengths are often the sources of our

greatest weaknesses
so God must also
search us out here.

What we have relied on
outside of God Himself
to carry us must fail, in
order that we may learn
again what it is to trust
solely in Him.

Sensitivity

You may have
noticed that writers in

the King James Version of the Bible sometimes used the word *bowels* to refer to our affection, our compassion, the innermost being and emotional depths of our lives. (See Genesis 43:30; 1 Kings 3:26; Isaiah 63:15; Jeremiah 31:20; Philippians 1:7; 1 John 3:17; etc.)

Here, too, the waters to the loins touch us. It is not until water gets to your waist that you really notice how cold it is. In almost every culture on earth, covering is placed around the loins. To be stripped naked is not merely something physical. It is also

mental and emotional
and spiritual, tied in
since the fall of Adam
and Eve (who once
were "naked and not
ashamed") with the
whole core of our self-
protection, self-image,
and self-preservation.
To be stripped naked is
so fundamental a
shame that it is given

as a judgment in
Scripture, one that
touches us in the very
deepest levels of our
being. And when Jesus
the Lord was hung on
the cross, He was
stripped naked Himself
for our sakes. He was
raked to the very
depths for the covered-
over secret sins of His

fallen world.

Living in the communication-rich Western world has its unique advantages and its hidden consequences. We are continually exposed to the constant clamor of sophisticated media. It can result in what we could call "emotional

shell-shock.”

Faced with a constant barrage of demanding, exciting, scary, sad, painful, and frightening images, we learn in a way to live like someone in a war. If we have a choice, we get ourselves out of the danger, we switch off or disconnect the source.

If we don't, we try to somehow dull out our responses; we steel ourselves to what is going on, and try to ignore our feelings. A person who has been badly shaken in combat one too many times goes over the edge into the rigid irresponsiveness we

call "shell-shock."

A similar thing can happen to us right in our living rooms. Every day we can see hundreds of sophisticated commercials demanding our attention. We turn on the news; there are the headlines deemed

currently significant,
footage of new
tragedies, of crimes or
wars, brilliantly edited
and presented as
impending threats to
our health, our family,
or the entire planet. For
entertainment we can
watch close-ups of our
favorite sports stars in
the "thrill of victory" or

the "agony of defeat,"
or see some multi-
million-dollar
dramatization,
calculated by a team of
talented professionals
to make us laugh or cry
or scare the living
daylights out of us.

All these are
vicarious; we are not
really there and we

rarely if ever share in the events we see. So we get to feel the feeling without actually having the experience. We experience reality secondhand. And the effect over a period of time is this: Either we learn to tune out deep emotions in self-defense or we need

deeper and deeper levels of manufactured emotion to move us.

That's one of the reasons many modern kids like gory and scary horror movies. They have been exposed constantly to hurt and fear and shock. It takes something quite drastic now to move them. And

drastic provision there is. Rock stars compete with ear-bleeding sound systems, outlandish stage acts, and more violent, mind-blowing, and extravagant sets. Music videos have to be full of drama, shock, and weirdness; metal singers have to scream for attention. There's a

lot of competition for an audience out there and the ones who are noticed (any way they can be) are the ones who make the charts and the bucks. Listen to media-saturated kids today and you'll hear it. Their most common complaint and comment is this: "Boring, it's so-o-

o boring." Emotional shell-shock. Either we turn it off (limit the input) or learn to turn ourselves off and limit our responses.

And this, too, has affected the Church in the West. We are not deeply moved by much. We have learned to

carry our filters and
screens and
reservations around
with us, to protect our
deep levels of feeling
from anything that may
affect us profoundly. In
consequence, we are
often emotionally and in
other ways shallow. We
feel few things deeply.
We are sheltered,

secure, protected. We carry our defenses against mediated, secondhand feelings into the sanctuary and even into the inner court of God. We will not be affected, even by real events that demand real feelings. We are never caught naked and we are

never ashamed. But that must change if we want to be serious with God. The river is rising. It is reaching for the depths of our emotions, and we will experience again reality firsthand.

Now it is in this area that we come to a major thing God is doing in the Church.

There is unexpected danger in the comfort of inner strength, security, creativity, sensitivity.

That danger is that we know the principle so well, we know the law, the rules, the tradition that have given us shelter so well, that we become entranced with the shelter and not with

the Person who gave it.

God has a remedy for that. The water moves, "up to the loins." We need something in our lives to threaten profoundly all our reliance on even the good things, the right, true, and proven things, the things we have learned to trust that

have nevertheless
moved us away from
trust in God alone. We
need to be stripped in a
deep way. And this is
where a whole new
struggle begins.

Our Struggle with Doubt

Although everyone has experienced it, few people today have thought deeply about doubt. It is one of the most misunderstood problems in life. We

always tend
automatically to equate
doubt with unbelief. It is
not the same thing at
all!

One of the few
contemporary books on
this theme was done by
Os Guinness, a friend,
teacher, and author
who is an articulate and
well-informed

spokesman for the cause of Christ and for a biblical world view. I was first privileged to meet Os some years ago when he was teaching with Francis and Edith Schaeffer at L' Abri in Switzerland. I have always found his work both challenging and stimulating. Os put

together one of the best
overviews in print on
the subject of doubt,
one that certainly
deserves more
exposure. His book *In
Two Minds* is a major
source for much of
what I have recast in
simpler form here and
is must reading for
people who want to

explore this area in more detail.

Os first of all defines doubt scripturally. Here are his five Bible words for doubt, and the first one is very easy to remember. It's in James 1:6 and it is."Don't waver." "He who doubts is like a wave of the sea

driven and tossed by the wind." The Greek word is *dipsukos*, which means 'to be chronically double-minded.' A double-minded man is, "unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8).

Next there is *diakrino*. It means 'to discern,' and is a

stronger form of the verbs *to sunder* or *to separate*. It means that you are so torn between two options that you cannot make up your mind. It's used, for instance, in Mark 11:23: "Whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does

not doubt in his heart...” (See also Matthew 21:21; Acts 10:20, 11:12; Romans 4:20, 14:23.)

There is a restaurant in northern California near Sebastopol where I used to live. It serves only three things: great steak, fish, and

chicken. And the waitresses, I think, are trained to make a point of being rude to the customers about it. You see "Steak, Fish, Chicken" painted on the wall when you come in and sit down. There's no menu and you say, "Is there a menu?" "No," says the waitress,

hand on her hip, "we don't have menus. Can't you read? Fish, steak, chicken. That's it! So *whaddya want?*" So before she really gets tough and punches me out, I say (in true character): "I'll take the chicken."

You know the good thing about a

small menu? It makes it easier to decide. It's the multiple options of our society that have given people this looseness, this being in two minds, this being torn between this and that. That's one of the Bible words for doubt, *diakrino*.

A third word for doubt is the word from

which we get the word
meteor, meteorizomi.

The word means, "to
raise up or suspend or
to soar or lift oneself
up." This idea is to be
arrogant or proud. But
another meaning, the
way it's used in the
Bible for doubt, is to be
"hung up." We use that
in the vernacular to be

“hung up,” to be “up in the air about something. That’s what a meteor is: up in the air. To be hung up, to be unsettled, to be tense, doubtful. We also call it ambivalence. This is the word used in Luke 12:29: Jesus said, “Don’t worry—don’t be hung up—about these

things." Don't be hung up about food and dress and where we're living....

A fourth word for doubt is the word we get dialogue from, *dialogizornai*. The word means "thought" or "inner debate." "Should do it? Should I not do it?" Talking to yourself.

Dialogue. In Luke 24:38 Jesus said: "Why are you troubled?" In other words, "Why do questions arise in your mind? Why are you having this inner debate?" (See also Matthew 16:19; Luke 2:35, 5:22, 6:8, 9:46-47; Romans 1:21, 14:1; 1 Corinthians 3:20;

Philippians 2:14; 1
Timothy 2:8.)

The last word,
distasia, is found in
Matthew 14:31. We get
an account of the
disciples who are out in
the sea. A big storm
comes up and
threatens to sink the
boat. They're scared
out of their minds.

Jesus is off somewhere on His own being spiritual, praying, and they're all going to drown. They just don't know what to do.

In the middle of it, here comes Jesus. He has no ground or sea transport available, so He just walks right across the sea toward

the boat! Peter looks at this white apparition coming toward him, perhaps flapping in the howling wind and waves, and he is totally terrified. *There's something coming toward the boat walking on the water!* They are not only going to die; first they are going to

be attacked by a ghost. All the disciples hide behind Peter. Then through the roar of the storm and the waves, in the licking of the lightning they hear these words: "Don't be afraid! It is I."

I know what Peter's thinking: "*Who is I?*" It *sounds* like the

Lord. But most normal people don't walk on water, especially in the middle of a storm. So Peter, the disciple with the foot-shaped mouth, does it again. He says, "If that's really You, bid me come to You the way You are coming to us."

There's this

pregnant silence. Then Peter hears what he probably never expected or wanted to hear: "Come."

Peter puts one foot out, then both feet. He even gets to take a few steps into miracle and mystery before remembering a lecture he heard at the

University of Babylon
on "Relative Density"
and he goes under. A
hand reaches down
and grabs him and
here's what Jesus says:
"You of little faith. Why
did you doubt?"

The word is
hesitate, to hold back.
"Why didn't you just
keep coming?" It is the

same word that is used in Matthew 28:17 when Jesus rose from the dead and they saw Him and they worshiped, "but some doubted." They held back.

If we put all of these five words together, we come up with what the word *doubt* really means. It is

not the same as
unbelief. Unbelief is "I
don't care what God
says; I'm not going to
do it." Unbelief is a
refusal to commit
yourself to something
seen quite clearly as
true. Faith is "I see it
and I'm going to do it."
Doubt is, "I am in two
minds about it. I don't

know what to do. I'm up in the air about it. I'm hesitating. I'm not sure."

Doubt, says Os Guinness, is always a halfway house. **There is no such thing as "total doubt." *Doubt is always in between.***

Actually, doubt is not the opposite of faith. When you doubt,

it is not some cowardly betrayal of Jesus and a surrender to the wrong side.

The relationship between doubt and faith is more like the relationship between courage and fear. The opposite of courage is cowardice, not fear. Here's a person in a

war who, though he's afraid, lets courage master his fear and goes ahead and does it anyway. Or take climbing a mountain. Healthy fear can be a good thing as long as it does not rule you in the hard or dangerous parts of the climb. So, likewise, faith doesn't

mean that you will have no doubt. It just means that one overrules the other.

Doubt is never to be encouraged, of course, just as fear is not something given by God. Doubt is a transitional situation, something to be passed through and passed on.

You can trust God in the middle of doubt just as you can be brave in the midst of fear. You come down on the side of what God says and you go on anyway. Like Peter, you put your foot down on the water despite everything that threatens you and you walk toward Jesus.

Peter in the storm
wasn't walking on the
water. He was walking
on a word, and the
word was from the One
who made water, and
the word was "Come."

Why does doubt
devastate us so
deeply? Because the
bottom line of
everything in life is

trust. Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). And when trust is threatened, betrayed, or put on the line, the wound is always huge because trust is the basis for everything between people. In every relationship—family, marriage, home,

business, devotions,
friendships—trust is the
foundation.

God is a Person.
Because we are made
in His image, we are
designed to draw our
ultimate sense of
personhood from Him.
From His personality,
we get the idea of our
own sense of

personality. To know God is to trust Him. To trust Him, then, is also to know ourselves better. That's why if we get our eyes off God we always have problems finding out who we really are.

The spirit of the world blatantly reverses that order. It says,

"Express yourself!" or,
"Be yourself!" as if you
were in real danger of
becoming a carrot or
something. But Jesus
says, "Deny yourself."
Try to find your value in
other people, even in
close relatives, and you
will always be a loser.
But give your life away
to your Creator and you

will discover why you were born. In other words, "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39).

And only an infinite God, expressing Himself in finite beings, can give us infinite diversity. None of us

will ever be boringly alike unless we take our eyes off Christ as our prime focus and try to start cloning our visions and goals and character from each other. God's call to us is just: "Love Me. Don't try to be like anyone else. Just forget yourself and love Me." And in that

uniqueness formed of trust, the closer you get to God, the more different you become from anybody else.

The more *unlike* God you are, the more like the same mud of unsaved humanity you are. If you meet one drug addict, you've met them all. Meet one liar,

you've met the prototype of all liars at all times. There are no new sins; there are no new, "creative" ways of wrongdoing. And the same is true in self-expression. Try to emphasize your own uniqueness, focus on "being yourself," and you usually wind up just

like everyone else. Isn't it sad to see little kids all dressed up like Madonna or Rambo so they can be really different? That is why the "chief end of man" is to "glorify God and enjoy Him forever." That is why doubt is so devastating to us- because it attacks not

only our trust, it attacks ourselves. It destroys our own ideas of what personhood is. Doubt is intimately linked with the matter of trust and trustworthiness.

To understand and react correctly to doubt will help equip us for two things. First, there is going to be a *radical*

apostasy in the last days. (See 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Peter 2:1-3, 12-22.) We know that. You have probably seen it. How many times do you hear, "I was once a Christian"? It is devastating in the West, where many people have given up their so-called "faith in

Christ," or at least some
professed form of
Christianity. A lot of this
defection, of course,
stems from never really
having come to grips
with true Christianity;
their contact with true
faith is only a shallow
thing. But some of it
has to do with church
people's going through

some experience of not being able to handle doubt.

Doubt is common in one way or another to every child of God. Doubt comes to us all in different ways. And viewed correctly in the light of God's purposes for us, doubt can even be a positive factor.

Like temptation properly responded to, doubt can bring us into a better place with Christ.

Number two reason for the necessity of a time of doubt is *preparation for the years of testing*. I believe also that we in

the West have entered a time of great testing. That decade of pessimism, of malaise and questioning, has already begun. It is not only happening; it is happening faster. Notice how everything is compressing? The consciousness generated by the '60s

took about fifteen years; the 70s took about eight; the '80s took about six. **We're already in the '90s.**

This is a time of serious testing, of pressure, of concentrated searching, and, if God's allowance of doubt has not done its work properly, some of us

may not survive
spiritually.

There is even
something good that
can come out of a time
of pessimism. In good
times, people often
forget their source of
blessings. It is harder to
speak to a man who is
lost and happy than a
man who is lost and

hurting. There is a shallow optimism that often rules in people's lives when everything is all right. They tend to take life for granted, not think much about the serious issues of life. But when times are hard, when there are days of darkness, when the bottom drops out of

the stock market, when the nations shake and the world moves a step closer to total destruction, people begin to think a lot more. They ask questions, they wonder about their priorities, about what is really important. And while times of doubt are

always times of shaking and uncertainty, they can lead to important changes in the way we think and feel and act.

6

Seven Kinds of Doubt

God is out to bring us to what we might call *radical trust*. What does that mean? It means, says Os Guinness, faith plus nothing. Not faith plus a good community

of friends. Not faith plus
ministry. Not faith plus
people whom I can look
up to. Not faith plus a
lifestyle that happily
enough agrees with the
particular one I've
presently chosen. Just
faith plus nothing.

Trusting in Him, that's
it.

Final

abandonment involves God's dealing with us even in principles we have trusted in—good principles, even godly principles that we have come nevertheless to rely on other than God Himself. That means that He is going to take all the things that we are so strong in and

turn them under His
careful hand into
nothing. The things we
know so well and are
so reliable will fall apart.
The house will leak.
The business will fail.
Your best bell-ringing
sermon will be met with
stony silence. Your joke
will bomb, your singing
voice will crack in

public, your very best friend will blow it. The car, the equipment, the sound system, which has been previously flawless, will die.

Your strength is also your greatest weakness. And this necessary step when the water touches the loins must be death.

Here is a summary of what Os Guinness sees as the seven different kinds of families of doubt. For details and much more content, get the book and read it carefully for yourself. Here my only concern is to introduce you to the problem on a very general level and relate

it to the peculiar needs
of our particular time.

The first four levels of
doubt have to do with a
faulty premise, a poor
or inadequate
understanding of what it
really means to be a
Christian. This carries
right into our Christian
lives. The last three
levels have to do with

failure in the outworking
of our Christian lives in
practice.

Independence and Ingratitude

The first major
cause of doubt Os
examines has to do
with *independence and
ingratitude*. That's why
we looked in our

analogy of the river at the water rising to the knees. The danger of being made truly free in God is that you can move quite subtly from being free *under* God to becoming free *from* God. And in our four-level river analogy it goes like this: First, before it touched your

ankles, you were a chaotic person. Now your needs are met and you have become resourceful; you are cleansed, given dignity and responsibility and perhaps even a ministry.

Take a kid, for example, who was a drug addict, in prison all

the time, a real cancer in society. He gets saved. He sets his heart on loving God and people. Now he becomes in his own eyes significant. Now he realizes his value. He begins to preach. His ministry meets some needs. Large crowds come out to

hear him. Now he's considered somebody important. There are a lot of people looking up to him for help, for answers, for an example. And now his temptation is different from when he was in the streets.

Similarly, when first our needs are met

by Christ, we develop under Him some resourcefulness. The problem comes when that God-sufficiency begins to turn into self-sufficiency and, finally, independence. It's an independent spirit that wipes out more people than anything else. Satan didn't get in

trouble trying to run off with some lady angel. His ultimate problem was an independent spirit. It's very subtle. No one would ever say, "Hey, I don't need Jesus anymore. I'm going to do this sort of stuff on my own." It never happens like that. It goes like this: We

begin to focus on what we do well. We've got it down. And as we magnify in our own hearts how well we can do what we can do, we forget that what we have was given (John 3: 27). God does a slow fade.

What do you think God is really going to

do at this stage? It's not something *bad* that is the idol of our lives; it may well be the gifts He has given us that are now becoming gods. How do you deal with the idolatry of a gift *given to you by God*? How do you deal with something given by Him that has taken His

place? That's the situation of Abraham and Isaac. Isaac was given to Abraham by God (Genesis 18:11-14, 21:1 -8). Now for Abraham to take that thing that was not only most precious to him but even given him in a miracle by God, to have to,"deliver it to the

death," to give it back...
It seemed just
incredible. Yet God so
tested Abraham, and
the old warrior came
through with flying
colors (Genesis 22:15-
18).

So here is really
the heart of dealing with
doubt on this level:
"Blessed are the poor in

spirit" (Matthew 5:3).

Our antidote to ingratitude is many times spoken of in Scripture. It speaks of "*giving thanks*" (Ephesians 5:20), "*not forgetting*" (Deuteronomy 4:9, 6:12, 8:11; Psalm 78:7, 103:2; Jeremiah 2:32), and "*remembering*"

(Deuteronomy 8:18; 1
Chronicles 16:12;
Psalm 25:6;
Ecclesiastes 12:1; Acts
20:35; Revelation 3:3).
This is to be a genuine,
unforced, and heartfelt
response to God's
goodness and
provision. We can get
so mechanical in giving
thanks that that is all it

is-a form and a tradition. Or we can get so loose over it that we forget. So thankfulness should be like a little bright thread that runs through all kinds of formal and informal occasions of giving thanks and remembrance.

In the Bible, Jesus

said in one sad situation: "Were there not ten lepers healed?" Only one came back to thank Him; the others were so excited about their miracle they forgot the God who made it possible (Luke 17:11-19). It is important that God is remembered and thanked. In

Numbers 15:38-39 we read that the Israelites were even supposed to put special threads in their clothes to remind them to give thanks. They remembered God's salvation with unleavened bread (Exodus 13:3-10). They remembered His holiness by the censer

altar plates (Numbers 16:40). And they remembered their deliverance and specialness as a nation on the Sabbath (Deuteronomy 5:15). They were not only to give thanks to God for *what* He did but to give thanks for *how* He did it (Deuteronomy 8:1-18).

We can call this the Pattern of the Prodigal Son. Come back thankfully. Come back conscious of God's mercy. To keep this in our lives all the time is an inoculation against the doubt of forgetting how bad it is to be lost. In 1 Chronicles 16:35, one

translation says, "To make thy praise our pride." The thing we're to be really proud about is that God is so wonderful.

Doubt comes when we take our eyes off God. He will withdraw the sense of His presence and everything will fall

apart.

A Faulty Picture of God

Doubt number two is *a faulty picture of God*. Now it is areas like this in which material like John Dawson's awesome little tract for Last Days Ministries, "The Father Heart of God," has

been greatly used. So many people have poor pictures of God. Some come from the fact that they just don't know what He is like and need to learn. Some come from the fact that they have been hurt perhaps as children by an ugly and unworthy picture of God. We all

need to learn more about what God is really like. Too often, as J.I. Packer points out, we'll hear people say, "I like to think of God as....," which is usually followed by some idiocy. Who cares what you or I "like to think" about God? God is who He is. We are not to try

to fit Him into our warped or inadequate notions, but to let the revelation of who He really is keep on correcting our vision. The greatest need of the twentieth-century Church is a fresh discovery of the greatness, glory, and goodness of God.

Weak Foundations

The third kind of doubt comes from weak foundations, from a poor understanding of truth. You got saved, which at the time seemed the obvious thing to do. You understood that God was real and you were lost. You then had a

real experience with Christ. You just trusted Him; it was wonderful. If anyone asked you, you could testify to meeting Jesus. You knew that you believed, even a bit of what you believed, but above all you knew in whom you believed.

At this early level of Christian experience

"Christian apologetics" probably means to you telling people you are sorry you did bad things to them! You might not know the issues. You might not know there even *are* any issues. Your primary concern is that the Gospel works, and perhaps later with how it works; you may

never have had to even think about *why*.

If Christianity is true, it is supposed to have real answers to the problems of life. When we are first looking for answers from anything, we usually carry in mind two simple tests: (1) Does it seem to work?

(pragmatic, practical)
and (2) Does it make
sense from where it
starts to where it ends?
(logical consistency
within its premises,
coherency).

Now if Christianity
is true, we should see
(perhaps in someone
else's life before our
own) that it "works." We

first find Christ a real answer for our felt and known needs. What we tried before did not last or did not satisfy. Our search for truth was on the basis of failed personal alternatives, not realized absolutes. Most of us meet Jesus on this first, pragmatic basis. We say, "I was

into other things like
_____ and _____ but my life
was falling apart. Then I
met Jesus and
everything came
together." Or, in the
words of the old song,
"I tried the broken
cisterns, Lord, but, ah,
the waters failed."

The truth is that
Jesus is not only an

"answer" to our needs. He is much more than even the real, sufficient, and only answer to all needs. First, Christ can meet our needs, but that is not why He is God. Jesus is much more than an answer, even more than the answer; He is the Lord of the universe, and we

are to come to Him not just in needs, but in everything.

The second test, the "does it make sense?" question, usually isn't thought about until later. In this we come to the question of knowing who He is, and we can be freed from false

pictures of Him by a growing, corrected revelation of His character that is both adequate and accurate. Here, when we have problems believing, we are dealing with doubt that comes from either being badly taught or badly treated. We can limit our vision of God

and make Him too small, or we can live with a hurt that has damaged our idea of God and gives us a bad picture of Him. If our understanding of God's character is inadequate or inaccurate, incorrect or incomplete, we will experience doubt at this level.

But the facts that something "works" and "makes sense" within its premises are not the only tests for truth.

There are after all a lot of things that seem both to "work" and to "make sense."

A devoted Buddhist lifestyle is a logical match for its

philosophical tenets; a dedicated Muslim may live out the teachings of the Koran; even the hedonism and unabashed power-seeking of Satanism makes ugly, logical sense within its demonic premises. Hitler, too, accomplished things.

Charles Manson made sense to his followers. Some things, like lies, are real but are not true.

So now we have to ask another question: Is Christianity also true? Does it make sense from where it starts to where it ends? Does it help? And now

is it really true? We are going to be tested on that. We're telling other people in a world filled with competing ideas, principalities, and false gods that there is only "one Way" to heaven and only "one name under heaven" by which we may be saved. We are going to say to that

world, "This is really true," so we are going to have to know something of the why. The bottom line is not that it "works," nor even that we can see how it "makes sense," but that it is true.

No matter how much we study or learn, of course, our

knowledge of the "whys" and the "whats" of Christianity will never be exhaustive. We will never fully be able to know all the reasons; no finite being ever can or will. It does not mean that what we do learn is untrue; it just means there will always be more to learn, and

there will be much more to the reason for what God says than we will ever know. Francis Schaeffer said we are like kids who've got our baby hands 'round the strings of a bunch of balloons. The balloons go all the way up. We don't have hold of the balloons; we have only

the strings. We have no idea how many balloons are up there or what they all look like, but we really do have our fat little hands on the connections. What we have is true, even testably true, but not exhaustive. As eight-year old Anna of "Mr. God, This Is Anna,"

once said, "When you begin with the Answer, you can get a squillion questions right."

Why do we always have to put up with a partial revelation in which we always have to trust? Why doesn't God just come down and give us "no choice" but to believe? Why

doesn't God just give us
(as He no doubt could)
overwhelming proof?

Because that is not the
rule of the game.

"Overwhelming" is not
the way God interacts
with His children.

Here's the God of the
universe who knocks
on your door. It is not:
"Behold, I freak your

head out and kick your door in." It is: "I stand at the door and knock" (Revelation 3:20).

It is in this area that we appreciate mystery because what we have is God who is utterly wonderful, yet reveals Himself in testable ways. I recently released a

book on God that I've been working on for more than eighteen years. But it was not finished; it was abandoned. It never will be "finished." You never "finish" a book on God. In this world or the next, you will never stop thinking and learning about God.

So what if our basis for trust in God is not properly understood or solidly based? The best way to correct this kind of weak foundation is to do some reading and study. We must do it, not leave it for some expert or religious professional. Where are your own areas of

inadequate or inaccurate vision? Find out for yourself. It will feed your faith to dig into some of the wonderful truths that await you. You will get excited to see just how powerful the answers and evidences of the Gospel really are. There are many good books

out today that deal with the facts and truth of the Christian faith. They deal with what we call "apologetics" or evidences for the truth of Christianity.

Josh McDowell has some excellent compilations in his writings on the truth of Scripture and the

uniqueness of Christ in his best-selling books like *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, and *More than a Carpenter*. Michael Green and John Stott of England, John Warwick Montgomery, Clark Pinnock, Bernard

Ramm, and Norman Geisler are just some of the scholars and theologians who have written powerful studies in apologetics that will be of help to you. Some of my favorites in this area are in the "Inklings," a small group of British literary figures who were also

committed to Christ,
like Dorothy Sayers, G.
K. Chesterton, and C.
S. Lewis. Thinkers from
European ministries
such as L'Abri like Os
Guinness and the late
Dr. Francis Schaeffer,
men who minister in
Eastern as well as
Western cultures like
Ravi Zacharias and the

late E. Stanley Jones, have helped hundreds of thousands simply to reconsider the claims of Christ in the modern world.

Reading is an eternal investment, and study in this area will be deeply rewarding to you. If you are a parent, some of the most

important and profound questions ever are not first mentioned in universities, but posed instead by your children. The best way to build truth into their lives is when they first ask, and you will find that you do not really understand something yourself until you are

able to explain it to a child. On the job, important questions in life are always linked with the ultimate ones, and knowing some of the whys of Christianity will not only help you stay strong in your witness, but help you "give a reason for the answer that is in you." If

you are an artist, a poet, or a musician, this will help develop your vision; you have a responsibility not just to be creative and moody, but to think deeply, too!

Sometimes people use Abraham and Isaac as an illustration of faith not involving any thinking, but that isn't

true. It is precisely *because* Abraham knew *who* God was that he could trust Him in the dark when he didn't understand the *why*. He didn't know why, but he knew why he trusted God who did know why.

Faith without truth can pass as fantasy. How do you know that

what you have is not
fantasy? Perhaps this
thing called Christianity
is only a wish-
fulfillment. What if
you're just part of some
sociological trend,
some religious reaction
to the emptiness,
barrenness,
meaninglessness of our
time? Truth is the

answer to that. Faith without truth seems like fantasy. That is why a lot of kids are so cynical. They have no basis for trusting anyone or anything. In a *Roger Rabbit* world, when people are no longer able to distinguish between fantasy and reality, your

best corrective after
putting on display some
working models of love
and wisdom is a solid
dose of truth.

Our Failure to Really Commit Ourselves

A lot of doubt
begins here at this
fourth most common
cause of doubt.

Commitment cements

belief into conviction.
You only really believe
something when you
commit yourself to it.
Have you ever met ex-
church people who
have dropped out?
They will sometimes
blame their defection
on what they did or
didn't believe, but that
usually isn't the

problem. The problem is, they don't want to commit themselves to what they found out was the truth.

I once talked to a young Red Guard who was actively promoting radical Communism in the West at a time when the Cultural Revolution in China

was in its heyday and Chairman Mao was really hot news in the world. This guy had the armband, the button, the whole thing. He apparently once had some sort of church background, but had thrown it all away and embraced instead The Little Red Book and

The Thoughts of Mao.
For some reason he
came to a service in
which I spoke about
commitment and
happened to mention in
passing the Red
Guards. He came up to
see me afterward to
say what it meant to
him to be a Mao
follower. He said, "I

don't believe in Jesus Christ. I don't believe in the Bible."

I said, "Have you read the Bible?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "If you knew the Bible was true and that Jesus

Christ really was
God, would you
have to make some
major changes in
the way you're
living?"

He said, "Well, yes, I
would."

I said, "It's not a
question of whether

you believe in Jesus and the Bible or not; it's a question of whether you really want to commit yourself to what you know. That's right, isn't it?"

He got very quiet. His eyes filled with tears and he said, "You

don't understand. I train young people for Maoism in this country.”

I said, "I really want to change the world, too. If Jesus were not who He said He was, and the Bible were not what it claimed to be, if

there were no God
and I was sure, I
would probably be a
Marxist or a Maoist
like you. But the
simple fact is that I
cannot ignore the
truth. I must deal
with Christ. You
know why it is easier
to be a Marxist than
to follow Jesus?

Because you can keep your selfishness and be a Maoist, but Jesus calls you to die.”

Marxist thought requires unselfishness for revolution but cannot deliver it.

Failure to commit ourselves. We are to

take truth and personal convictions seriously.
How do you know if you really have convictions? You have to have an invisible sign hanging around your neck. (Mine reads, for instance: "This ministry is not for sale.") No conviction is truly your own unless you're

prepared to hold it even if all others are against it.

I've sometimes told young Christians, "You need to follow Jesus even if everyone you know who is supposed to be a Christian turns his back on both Him and you." Here is a test of

whether or not you really do hold a conviction. Can you say it succinctly, put it into a sentence? If not, it's just some vague idea. Can you put into a single statement, "This is what I am prepared to covenant with God"?

In Joshua 24:15
Israel's young leader

calls the people to conviction: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve."

This was a situation of doubt for Israel, in which the people were called to make a decision. "Why," says Joshua, "do you stagger about between two things?"

Today we are called to make up our minds, and "put our money where our mouths are."

Daniel 3:16-18 gives us another wonderful insight into Christian doubt. Three boys are about to be thrown into a blast furnace. The king has

had a sell-out concert. Everybody who was anybody in the whole Babylonian world was there, all the big bands were combined for this concert, and there was not an empty seat in the house. Everyone had to stand until the band played. Then everyone was

supposed to bow. And they all did-all except three Hebrew guys who despite their extensive royal training did not seem to understand plain Babylonian.

They stood there alone and upright in the crowd and the king called them out. He said: "Don't you

understand? If you don't bow, I'll throw you into this furnace!" (It's an extremely hot blast furnace, probably fired with bitumen and oxygen.)

Nebuchadnezzar goes on. "You may be my favorite helpers, but this is embarrassing. You had better bow or you

are going to burn. I am the king of the world and unless you show that you worship my statue along with everyone else I really will permanently take care of you."

What would you do? Would you smile and, so as not to offend, go ahead?

Would you bow
(certainly not
enthusiastically) and
mutter to yourself:
"Well, God knows I am
not really bowing 'in my
heart.' After all, He has
gone to all this trouble
to put me in a place of
some leadership and
influence with these
ungodly pagans and He

certainly wouldn't want
all that to come to an
end now because of
some silly little external
show. I'll bow
(outwardly only, of
course) just to please
the king, but God
knows that it is all only
an outward
appearance. In my
heart of hearts, am I not

still following God?"

These boys didn't have the benefits of our modern understanding and could not adequately conceptualize some sort of contextual, cross-cultural, relational, and situational posture of influence. They had

apparently also not yet learned how to spell compromise in either Hebrew or Babylonian. And this is what they said:

"If it be so our God whom we serve *is* able to deliver us... But *if not* ..."

That *if not* is a Christian affirmation.

It's doubt. It says, "I don't know if He will or not. I know He *can*. I don't know if He *will*."

These boys knew who God was. They knew something of His wisdom, His character, and His power. They knew what He could do. They also knew some way or other, in life or

by death, they would shortly be out of the king's power. They knew God could intervene. But they did not know, for them, for then, if God *would*. And knowing the king as they did, knowing that he would do exactly as he said, knowing fully the consequences of a

polite but firm refusal,
they refused anyway.
But if not, we will not
bow down." That's
conviction. It has to do
with commitment-even
if you don't understand
the whole thing, even if
you don't know what's
going on, even if you
don't know what is
going to happen to you.

As Os Guinness says,
weak convictions act on
the drive train of faith
like a slipping clutch.

Lack of Growth

Number five on
the list of what brings
on doubt is *lack of
growth*. We have seen
now the early reasons
for experiencing doubt-
having faulty *premises*

as a Christian. The next two types of doubt have to do with our daily *practice* as Christians. This is not a problem of holding onto wrong ideas; it has to do with loss of freshness. One of the major reasons God will allow doubt in our lives is because we have not grown. Thirty

years at one devotional level is not going to be sufficient if we hope to take on demons in a nation.

We're not talking about a deficiency in understanding about becoming a Christian but a deficiency in actual practice.

Basically, it is this: We

must always be developing a Christian world view. Ordinary living is a reality test for faith. This is why young people sometimes get wiped out spiritually even in a Bible college. They are not in the normal situations of life; they are often isolated from ordinary living.

They don't meet real secular people who would challenge their small, smug answers and send them weeping back to God for something more. They don't run into people who have absolutely no concept about God and could not care less. If we want to win the

world, we have to live in it and know both why and how it is lost. We need to rub shoulders often with people who, like ourselves once, are outside of God.

Some people are innocent in their rottenness. They have no great battles with spiritual claims. To

them "*Jesus*" is only a swear word. They plow on in life apparently blind to spiritual reality until it hits them in the face. And often they are the easiest to win.

Jesus really loved lost people who knew it, the drunks, the hookers, the rejected street people of His time.

What He *said* and what He was struck them like spiritual lightning. It was said of Christ that He taught "as one having authority, and not as the scribes." He *lived*. He was full of goodness and compassion and excitement. Jesus did not seem to be religious; He was real.

Recently I was having lunch with a friend in a small Washington, D.C., hotel coffee shop. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed a man near us at a single table who seemed to be listening to our conversation, which revolved around some of the fun things

God was up to in our lives. I didn't look at him, but from that point on I cut out of my vocabulary any specifically religious buzz words and kept on talking. The man finally finished his lunch, paid the bill, and left. But just minutes later he returned to his table

and ordered a glass of water! He sat there sipping, ostensibly studying the door of the coffee shop, but gradually he moved his chair more and more around, until he was all but sitting facing us. Finally he could stand it no longer, and just plain interrupted. "Excuse

me," he said, "I'm sorry to interrupt, but, hell, this is the most exciting thing I've ever heard!"

It turns out he was a businessman, a totally secular engineer with no spiritual background at all. He had known nothing about God and cared nothing about Him until

his wife (who had apparently become a Christian) was killed in a car accident leaving him with two boys to bring up alone. It suddenly hit him that he had been relying on his wife to give the boys something spiritual; now that she was gone it was up to him. This

man had never (as far as I was able to find out) been to a church; he wasn't going to one now. He knew less about God than the average seven-year-old Sunday school kid, but he had just gotten hold of a Bible and was reading it day and night. He was excited

out of his mind with what he found. And this was the first time he had ever heard anyone else talking about it. God is constantly at work in His world.

What keeps you fresh? For me, it is keeping myself exposed to reality. Life is a reality test case.

I've been out there 25 years saying, "Jesus is the answer." When I first said that, I didn't even know what the questions were. It's one thing to say something like that when you start, but it is quite another thing 25 years later still to be able to say the same thing, with ever-

deepening conviction:
"Jesus Christ really *is*
the answer."

That answer must
be practical, fresh, and
contemporary. We
either grow or we
retreat. One reason
doubt can creep in is
that we're lazy. We
don't want to grow.
We're stuck where we

are and contented.
We're not constantly exposing ourselves to new risks, new ideas, new challenges. If you don't practice truth, after a while you begin to think that perhaps it is impractical. And truth that is impractical will soon be discarded as being untruth, and

that's where doubt comes in.

Runaway Emotions

This sixth pathway to doubt is one most of us have faced but not understood. Doubt can come from *runaway or depleted emotions*—and I'm not just talking about Christians. There are Buddhists with

runaway emotions who have doubts. There are atheists with used-up emotions who have severe doubts about atheism. It's a human problem, not a peculiarly Christian one. Everyone has doubts at times that stem from runaway emotions.

Doubt can sometimes be a good thing, because we live in a world that is fallen. This means that not everything is true though it often purports to be. Doubt doesn't buy at face value. So doubt doesn't have to be all bad; it can sometimes be good.

The idea of skeptic comes from a word that means "to check it out," to investigate to find out if it's true or not. But some doubt comes from emotional reaction and is not a mental or philosophical difficulty at all.

Let's look at a classic biblical

example. We see Elijah (in 1 Kings 19:4) as a suicidal ninth century B.C. prophet. Imagine this: You have the most awesome experience of your entire life. A giant confrontation between God and Baal. All the priests of Baal come out. They're all there in force and there's just

you (and Jehovah).
There's the altar they
built. They're dancing
and cutting themselves
with knives and crying
out to Baal to answer
by fire. Nothing is
happening. People are
getting a bit bored, so
you provide a little side
entertainment with
suggestions like:

"Better yell louder!
Maybe your god went
on a vacation. Perhaps
he's on the toilet
somewhere."

That's what Elijah
yells to them all day ...
but they have no fire,
nothing. They're ticked
off. They've slashed
their nice Sunday
clothes to ribbons and

nothing has happened.
Then it is Elijah's turn.
He rebuilds the altar of
the Lord, digs a trench,
and soaks the sacrifice
in barrels and barrels of
water. (There is always
the skeptic in the
audience who nods and
says, "Ah. It was a
rather hot day and
rather dry wood.

Spontaneous
combustion. I've heard
about it.")

Then Elijah prays
a small prayer: "Lord,
let it be known, I've
done this according to
Your word. Hear me
that these people may
know You are God."
The fire falls on the
rocks, the bull, the

water—everything. The fire licks up the bull, the rocks, the water in the trench, leaving just a big smoking hole, a lot of shocked Baal-worshipers, and a lot of very impressed Israelites. The people who are quite swift at recognizing the supernatural in this sort

of thing all say: "The Lord, He is God!" (I Kings 18:20-40).

After this supernatural act—the most awesome experience in Elijah's whole ministry—what do you think he is like from now on? A giant of faith? Far from it. This woman Jezebel puts a

contract on his life and Elijah splits. When we find him, he's under a tree praying to die.

Isn't that the way it often is? *How is it that after the greatest experience of your whole life you suffer the greatest doubts and the greatest temptations? Why is that?*

The answer is simple. When you carry a huge amount of emotional intensity and then suddenly it drops, something snaps. It can be successes or failures. It can be after the greatest miracle of your life, or it can be when you're exhausted or lonely or tired or

undernourished.

Perhaps it's when you've suffered from a long illness, and an accident happens to you or a bereavement. Maybe you've gotten really angry over something, or something doesn't turn out as you really wanted it to, or perhaps

the problem is a battle with deep feelings of jealousy. All those things use emotions.

And when those emotions ebb, as they must, you can't handle it. There is this sense of numbness, of coldness, of loss. You feel empty, but cannot really see why. There is

apparently no logical reason why you feel the way you do, but what you may lack in facts in this area at this time you can make up for in drama and imagination. There are no apparent reasons why you should be like this, but in your own mind you come up with one: "God

is dead. Or if He is not dead, He has probably abandoned me." Your world has fallen apart. You can behave totally irrationally at this point, but it all makes sense to you . . . somehow! '

Have you ever been in that situation? Isn't it a weird thing? There's apparently no

reason for it. Something just snaps. You'd think after such an awesome demonstration of the power and presence of God in his life that Elijah would say, "Nobody is going to put out a contract on me! Fire fall on you, Jez." But here he is, the man of God, the one full of

faith and power, asking for a quick death at the hands of God.

What is under fire here is not the *truth*, but individual *faith*. The facts are not the issue, not *what* you believe or *why* you believe it, but *how* you believe. Your own perception of truth is being challenged.

The facts of what God is and what He says are not at all determined by what you know of Him now. It's not God's faithfulness, but your own faith that is in the fire, and in this case it is because your emotions have simply unloaded on you.

What is God's

prescription for this? A
refresher course on
systematic theology,
Divinity 1? A list of all
the Scriptures that
promise divine
protection from demon-
possessed queens in
authority? Perhaps
some stirring up of the
prophet, something to
keep him firmly

reminded of his task
and holy calling?
Something in the order
of:

"Elijah? What in
the fat are you doing
out here? Don't tell me
after all I've done for
you that you're afraid of
one 'devil woman.' Get
off your tail, cut out this
pity-party, and get your

act together. You get back to work. And, oh, Elijah, remember the fire that fell on the mountain? I can do that again, on anyone, anytime I want to, remember..."

No. You know what God does? *He bakes a cake for him* (1 Kings 19:5-8).

You sit down and pray
that He will kill you and
He brings you a cake!
He says, "Have a little
rest, all right?" What
kind of God is this?

The answer to this
kind of doubt from
shattered emotions is
not to increase your
religious activity, but
just *rest and relax*.

Take a break. Play. If you're doubting because you're tired, the answer is not to pray more, but to sleep. Overwork may not need a spiritual heart search but a day off at the beach-maybe three days off at the beach.

There are ministers who have

driven themselves to burnout because they feel the responsibility of always being spiritual for other people and no longer have time to enjoy being saved themselves. There are housewives who suffer a crisis of faith. They cannot understand why they feel the way they

do about God. The fact that their new baby is crying at odd hours of the night and their two-year-old is wrecking the house does not have anything much to do with it. It's just that their weekly requests for prayer at the ladies' luncheon (sent in by proxy because they are

too tired to go) do not seem to be relieving the pressure. But the answer here is not intensified religious activity but relief of the pressure and relaxation.

It always amazes me how much material Charles Haddon Spurgeon put out. From

the time he was
seventeen he just
churned out words. My
Spurgeon library in
New Zealand takes up
an entire wall of thick
volumes, with
thousands of sermons
in his *Metropolitan
Tabernacle Pulpit*
alone, not to mention
his *Treasury of David*,

Lectures to My Students... He just preached and preached. Yet I hear that every summer he went down to the beach and snorkeled and lay around in the sun. Then he went back to his pulpit full of fire and fresh zeal and put out all this material that is

still ministering to people a century after his death.

It is as much a command of God that we rest as that we do not commit adultery. Yet sincere and godly people who would not think of lying or stealing or dishonesty, let alone murder or immorality or

blasphemy, habitually and regularly violate this divine provision. They are to be found grim-lipped and devout, continually pushing themselves beyond their human limits, meanwhile quoting to themselves and others various sacred imprecations like "I'm

not going to rust out,
I'm going to burn out. . .
for God."

The "for God" is
always added for its
devotional overtones.
Without it, the drive
might be recognized for
what it often is:
ambition, guilt, or
religious fantasy posing
as spirituality. Burn out,

not rust? Go ahead.
The only difference
between rust and fire is
time. Both are the
results of oxidation; one
just goes quicker than
the other. When the
wick in a lamp starts to
burn, the lamp is
running out of oil. And
the solution is not more
fire, or a lament for the

wick, but more oil. Sons and daughters of God are led, not driven.

Sometimes we lose it all because we are wound up and overburdened and this becomes a major crisis in our faith. We say, "I don't know what to do. Heaven is blank." Have a sleep! Eat a cake!

And after a couple of treatments of this, God shares some things with Elijah that will help put him back on the track to finish his course.

The rest and food first. This is not the final or only answer, of course. We must learn as well to recognize this

sort of doubt and learn to retrain our emotions so we don't get overwhelmed in situations like this.

When this happens, we have a short-term answer: Take a break.

But we can also work on a long-term answer: Learn not to trust your feelings and thoughts in

such situations, as they often run wild.

Understand that when it comes, as it came to Elijah, that emotional overload may be the reason for your doubt. Learn that you can have those times.

They Doubted For Joy

This last one is

probably the hardest of all to handle. When the disciples saw Jesus return from the dead, Scripture (Luke 24:41, RSV) says: "They disbelieved [doubted] for joy." What does that mean? It means this: You want so much to believe in the unexpected good news

that to discover it isn't true would just totally destroy you. It is a doubt that comes in the very area you most want to believe, because of some hurtful experience in the past.

They saw Him die!
For a long time it was just talk. Jesus said:

"I'm going to be taken.
I'm going to be
crucified." They said to
themselves: "Oh, yes.
He'll be crucified but at
the last minute the nails
will come out by
miracle, the messianic
reign will begin, and
we'll, of course, be
there to share in it."

And then He didn't

do it. He didn't fight. He let Himself be laid down and the Romans did nail Him up and He really did die. The soldier put the spear into His side and the blood really came out and He really was dead. And the disciples wrapped His body themselves and they

laid Him in the grave.
Talk about doubt! They
were devastated. I'm
sure some of them
thought about packing it
all in and going back,
somehow, if they could,
to their old lives.

But suddenly there
on the shore was
someone who looked
an awful lot like Jesus

and they couldn't believe it. They wanted so much to believe it was true, but they couldn't. They couldn't believe it because they knew it was the very thing they most wanted to believe. What if it turned out only as another crazy wish-fulfillment fantasy, like

the one they just had followed? Jesus had said He was the Messiah. They had seen the miracles(^d the love and the power and they had believed He would rule the world. But then they had seen Him really die and all their dreams had come crashing

down in the dust.

Now there was someone standing on the shore that unaccountably looked like Him and sounded like Him, but how could it be? Their fresh scars were in danger of being ripped again, this time for good.

That is probably

the hardest one of all. In all of our lives there is usually one place that still hurts. There's one place still sealed. There's one place where final healing has not been allowed, one place that we keep away from complete openness. We would love to believe it. It is

the one thing we most want to believe out of anything and everything we have ever wished. But what if with all our hopes at their highest, it doesn't turn out to be true after all? It would be the final devastation. It would hurt so much we would never recover. So we don't

want to think about it.
We don't want to talk
about it. Leave us
alone, okay? We don't
want to look at that
figure on the shore.
We're not able to
receive.

And what have we
done? We have let a
problem take God's
place and become the

controlling principle of our lives. So our problem becomes our idolatry. And in the best of polite, sad, well-chosen spiritual words I may say to myself: Well, I'd really like to believe that. It's true, I suppose, for some people, but I can't look because (though I'd

never tell another living soul) I'm afraid it won't be true. So the problem becomes god to us. We look at God through the eyes of the problem instead of looking at the problem through the eyes of God. We won't let Him be God in the situation, and it becomes the secret,

absolute center of our whole lives.

What is the answer to this last sort of doubt? First of all, get that doubt out in the light. Perhaps write it down on paper so you know exactly what it is. You've lived with it hidden too long. Articulate your doubt;

make sure you know clearly what it is and what it isn't. "This is what I am most afraid of. I really wish this were true, but I don't know if it is." Identify it so that it's not some lion lurking in your subconscious ready to pounce on you.

When C. S. Lewis

went through that terrible time of watching his wife, Joy Davidman, die, he went through real doubt. He said that during that time of doubt, it wasn't that he doubted that God wouldn't turn out to be there after all, but that maybe God would not turn out to be the God

that Lewis had always thought he was.

"Sooner or later," he said, "I must face the question in plain language. What reason have we except our own desperate wishes to believe that God is, by any standard we can conceive, 'good'?...I wrote that last night. It

was a yell rather than a thought. Let me try it over again. Is it rational to believe in a bad God? Anyway, in a God as bad as all that?"

Lewis went on to say in *A Grief Observed* that too-human pictures of God forged during hurt and grief leave no room for "something

older than yourself,
something that knows
more, something you
can't fathom." In the
preservation of mystery
there is hope. If by
some sort of "extreme
Calvinism" our fears of
God being
unreasonable,
vindictive, vain, unjust,
and cruel were urged

on us as "actually true but count as virtue in Him," we would lose all our basis of thinking and living. Then reality is in its very root meaningless, and "what is the point of trying to think about God or anything else? This knot comes undone when you try to pull it

tight."

"The doubt of joy" is a hard one because we want so much to believe that God is really the way that He says He is. But what if He really isn't? What if I trust in that area and am devastated again?

What does Jesus do? It's a beautiful

thing. He's there on the beach doing the most ordinary thing. He is cooking breakfast! He does something so simple, so common, so natural. He doesn't glow with light from another world, float out toward them in the boat, and speak with a voice enhanced by

heavenly echo
chamber. He eats
breakfast. *Ghosts don't
eat fish.* What He does
is give them a whole
fresh context, and that's
what you need for this
final area. You've got to
step out of the circle of
your own pain for a
moment and see things
in a totally different

light. In the disciples' minds, it can't possibly be Jesus. He's dead. This is a ghost, some alien.

Yet He stands there and says, "Have you had breakfast yet?" And He eats. And something shifts deep inside and they suddenly see. "He

really is alive! He really is!"

Elijah at Kidron: When the Brook Dries Up

Elijah was a man
taken care of by God
when the land was
under His judgment.
Although drought and
famine filled the nation

of Israel, Elijah was fed supernaturally.

Although Christians may share to some extent in the consequences of a judgment that comes on a nation because of sin, God's provision and care continue for the individuals, in this case the prophet.

Then the brook
dried up.

Why did it
happen? And what do
you do when
supernatural provision
stops?

Henry Sloane
Coffin looked at this
theme in his 1930s
message *Inspirations
that Fail*. If we were to

paraphrase and amplify that message in the light of the situations of our time, it might look something like this:

God has a course for His children.

Everyone's curriculum is different. The only thing that remains the same is its *aim*: to keep you confident in

*depending on
resources outside of
yourself.*

Elijah was a man who knew how to hear from heaven. He was a man we recognize as the greatest of all the prophets of the Old Testament. He knew how to talk to God, and he knew how to listen.

A bad king gave a series of bad calls, and Elijah's response under God was to face that king with the consequence of his sin and to tell him that God was going to bring judgment (1 Kings 16:30-32, 17:1).

Judgment on the Nation

Elijah's word to the king was that the heavens would give no rain and though, as James says, he was a man of "like passions as we are," he "prayed earnestly...and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months" (James 5:17, KJV). If we do not

listen to His Word, God has, of course, other ways of getting our attention. There are four major ways in which God can bring up judgment on a country (Ezekiel 4:13-23).

First, through the economy: He can "cut off the supply of

bread." Money gets tight, food and water are in short supply, essentials get scarce. Sometimes people start thinking seriously about God only when things start going wrong.

Second, through ecology: He can "cause wild beasts to pass through the

land." God is sovereign Ruler of the whole creation. Even one small creature let loose in the judgment of God can fell a ruler. For Pharaoh it was frogs, lice, flies, and locusts; for others it might be a wasp, an ant, a medfly. It could be a change in weather, in the

relationship of the sun or (in Elijah's case) the dew and the rain. The worldwide concern over the greenhouse effect may not just be about fluorocarbons and exhaust emissions. When the very air and weather begin to change in unpredictable ways, people start

thinking about their own personal behavior. For Egypt, the pests were a testimony to the fact that something was supernaturally wrong in their land. For Israel in Ahab's day, the drought was a sign of the displeasure of God.

Third, through disease: He can "send

a pestilence." When God removes His hand of protection from a nation something too small to see begins to bring sentence on whole cities. There are yet more dangerous plagues possible than AIDS; sometimes people begin to take eternity seriously only

in the face of incurable illness. In Naaman's leprosy he sought God; in Herod's death great fear came on the court.

Fourth, through civil or international war: He can "bring a sword on that land." It has happened in history before and it can happen again. When

we do not listen, the judgment of God can "bring a sword"- that is, He removes His peace from a country and allows another nation to invade or go to war with the land.

Elijah was a man who lived in a nation, like some of us today, under divine judgment.

People were hurting financially. Jobs were lost, crime was on the rise, people were struggling. There was political division, collapse of leadership, bad public examples, murder, and suicides. The land was in famine; but through it all Elijah was personally taken

care of. God faithfully provided food and water every day; He commanded the ravens to bring meat, and the river kept running (1 Kings 17:3-6).

No one has all he needs in himself. Elijah needed the brook and the birds. And no one can live a truly

independent life.

Besides basic physical needs like food and water and shelter we all have other needs.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," Jesus said, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." A genuinely *poor* person has no resources in himself to meet essential needs.

And no one, especially not a man or woman of God, has all the required wisdom, abilities, and means. As John Donne wrote, "No man is an island."

We tend to focus on people or situations or things that seem to meet those needs: friends, teachers,

books, ideas, a place, a work, a church. A *friend* can stimulate our minds, satisfy our hearts, and stir our souls. A *teacher* can catch our admiration, awaken our appreciation, push open a mental door for us to new realms. A *book* we come across

might capture our imagination, reset our priorities, restructure our whole world view. A *place* we live in can become a home, a castle, a refuge, a security that sends us out armed with determination and courage and welcomes us back to rest and

sympathy. Our *work* can be the dominant drive of our lives, giving us a reason to get up in the morning with purpose and vision. Our *church* might be the focus of our hopes and ideals, the friendship and encouragement of others much like us who are learning life

together. Or we may be gripped by a *great idea* that lights up our whole world with a vision of what can be done. All these and more may be to us as a river of God full of water.

When the Brook Runs Dry

Imagine what it was like for Elijah. Each

day his every need had been met. He never had to worry like the rest of the nation where his next meal was coming from. God was in charge of things, God was going to take care of him. All he had to do was trust and pray and wait. And then one day the brook dried up.

What happened to Elijah can happen to us. Things or people we relied on, depended on, built our lives around suddenly change, move on, or move away.

Your *friend* is still your friend; but somehow, insensibly, you have grown apart and now it seems

irreversible. It is not that you have quarreled; it is just that now your paths are moving in different directions. You may see him or her almost as much as before, but somehow it now seems less. It is sad and it wrenches at something deep inside you, but there is really nothing

either of you can do.
Just like the brook, the
water you once drew
from in your friend's life
has dried up.

You still get to
hear your teacher, but
the man at whose feet
you sat in wonder at
twenty you may have
outgrown at thirty or
forty. It is not that what

he says is now no longer true; it is just that you judge things more critically now. You have grown. You see things somewhat differently with the passage of the years.

That *book* moved you once, and perhaps it still does; but you do not care to read it over

again and again. Many like it have passed from dominating your thoughts and attention into pleasant and sometimes quaint memories; like old songs they have moved into nostalgia and history.

Maybe you return to the place you loved

and remembered
before but to your
surprise, everything is
changed. Someone
else lives there now
and he has made it
almost unrecognizable.
Perhaps the house
where you lived is
gone, or it has become,
by neglect or disaster, a
ruin. Or circumstances

have changed and you must move somewhere else, find another home, change everything you were always so contented with: The brook dries up.

The *work* you are still doing but is it the same for you now? Maybe you can keep on

doing it until you die;
some do. But then
again, perhaps the
brook here, too, has
dried up. Perhaps your
job is gone now. They
did not need you any
longer. Either someone
else has filled the ranks
instead or you can no
longer do what you did
before.

The *ministry* you were given: Is it coming to an end?

And your *church*, the place that was such a haven for your spirit: What has happened there? It is not as if it had to split or fail; it may still be as before, perfectly able to meet others' needs. It may be

simply that for you it has somehow lost its appeal. The water from which you drew has been diverted to other side channels. The people you were close to have moved, the pastor has changed, the ministry you previously relied on has begun to dissolve or

disband. It hurts, it is uncomfortable to think about, it bothers you deeply, but the outcome is certain: The brook has dried up.

But you, like Elijah, should know this could happen to anyone. It can happen over anything we try to count on always being

close to us. It happened *even to Jesus*. There was a time when He couldn't rely on His friends, His family, His ministry, His home church, or even His best and closest disciples.

There were things happening to Him that weren't in the Book He

knew and loved from childhood. Of His ministry He said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work," but there were times when even He could do nothing.

He had grown up going to the synagogue. He had

been the central focus of the teachers there when He was only twelve. Then later, giving His first personal message, what He said came into violent conflict with the elders and they "cast Him out."

There came a day, even to Christ, when His family seemed to

fail Him, when He was misunderstood and interfered with, when even His relatives told people that He was out of His mind. There came a time when He said, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His

head."

And there came an awful hour when He could not rely on even His closest friends. The disciples went to sleep during His agony of prayer and the man He had called "friend" sold Him to His enemies for thirty pieces of silver.

There was even

that one frightening moment when it seemed as if the Great Vision that moved Him all His life hung in the balance. In Gethsemane He prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." And on the cross He cried, "My God, My God, why

have You forsaken
Me?"

If it happened to
Elijah, if it happened to
Jesus, it will no doubt
happen also to you.

No One Should
Possess a Private
Brook

All the land is
drought and famine but

Cherith is still flowing
when Israel is dry.
What would have
happened to Elijah if
the stream had kept on
flowing?

(1) His blessings
would have become a
barrier. Elijah "was a
man of like passions"
but it certainly doesn't

seem like it. This man is like something out of a fantasy movie-some holy Lawrence of Arabia figure, twice as large as life, not your average Christian! The brook had to dry up. God was behind it. That is what happens; people need to be reminded they are

ordinary after all. The
godly especially
sometimes become
inhuman. They find the
invisible so satisfying
they are hard on their
fellow mortals.

What might have
happened day after day
sipping from the cold
stream when all the
land was parched and

dying? Elijah might have lost his prophet's sympathy for people. He might have been tempted to take the attitude, "People are starving and thirsty, but they deserve it. If they would only learn, like me, to trust God they wouldn't be in such a mess."

(2) His privileges might have turned to pride. Elijah had a high standard for his own life. Like all prophets he knew what is expected of the godly. As a child he had great dreams. He had no doubt set his heart as a boy to be the very best he could be. To fail that calling in

any way is, for an Elijah, utterly devastating. Later in his life Jezebel put out a contract on his life and Elijah, the fearless prophet, ran away. The sense of failure so overwhelmed him that he wanted to die.

His words reveal the danger of a high

self-set standard that is somehow compromised: "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for *I am no better than my fathers!*" (I Kings 19:4). Did he really think he was? The brook had to dry up. Elijah had to be reminded that the only thing that makes us

special is that we are made in God's image, and the only thing that sets us apart is the grace of God.

(3) His rest might have made him a permanent recluse. We all need time to recover from the pressures of life; it is part of both the design and

commandment of God to take off from daily labor. Jesus told His disciples to "sit by the well and rest." "Come ye apart," the old adage says, "or ye will come apart." But too long in the safety and shelter and security of Cherith may have worked to hurt him instead of help

him. Elijah may have become content to stay near Horeb, supplied by God and quit the battle. God is out to do three things, said an old writer: "Get us out of the world, get the world out of us, and then send us back into the world." No one can live forever at Cherith.

Elijah Driven to Zarephath

Here is a man who has challenged the might of kings, a solitary man who has stood alone, unaided by anyone except God. All through his life and ministry he has been dependent on no one but God, and needed

nothing but God's word.
But now that word
comes to him and calls
him to a place of
embarrassment: He is
to go to a home for
shelter and sustenance
where a widow and her
son are about to make
their last meal before
they starve to death.

Sometimes your
Cherith must fail
in order to force you to
hurt with other people.
If the brook had kept on
flowing, Elijah might
have counted on it and
forgotten the God who
gave it. *The means by
which God maintains us
are always in danger of
becoming the barriers*

that shut us out from Him. Cheriths can't be permanent.

Now, more than ever, we live in a future shock world. Nothing seems to last. People change; friends come and go; the world keeps shifting gears. Best-selling books are now in bargain bins. Ideas

change as fast as rock stars and we are wholly not the same people we were ten years ago.

Thomas Hardy wrote:
"It is the ongoing of the world that makes it sad.

If the world stood still at a happy moment there would be no sadness in it. The sun and moon standing still

on Ajalon was not a catastrophe for Israel but a type of paradise." But a stationary heaven or earth would become dull at last. All change is risky, but some change must come. God has given us seasons. Without the winter, summer's warmth would not be as

welcome; the reds and
golds of fall set off the
coming green
freshness of spring.

And so with the
seasons of our spirit;
each is necessary for
all the colors and
flowers of our lives.

Don't mourn your
Cheriths. *In the growth
of your spirit, the next is*

always better. Thank God for what they meant to you as reminders of His love and move on. You will one day see the hand of God in the drying up of your brook. The dwindling of the stream will mean in time not only help for you, but help for others. Elijah

left Cherith for
Zarephath, not only to
save a mother's life, but
to learn something
more of God's love. A
brook and birds don't
show you as much of
God as a mother and a
child. And though you
may miss your brook,
you will not miss God;
your new course will

take you all the way
from the valley to a
foretaste of Bethlehem.

Prayer

*O Jesus, we
thank You. We thank You
for the river that rises,
touching our loins, and
we thank You for the river
we are going to hit that
we can't swim in anymore.
It will carry us. We can't
carry it. It is a river not
only that we can't pass
over, but that cannot be*

*passed over. We thank
You for calling us to
abandonment to You, to
being swept along, not in
chaos, not in the same
thing we were in long,
long ago, but in a sense of
abandonment to the
purposes of the river. We
believe out of this river
will come healing
wherever it goes.*

*So we pray that
You will take our own
doubts, our own struggles
and suffering, and
translate these into life.*

*Feed this river, we
pray, with our own
suffering and our own
struggle for the help of
others who may face
probably the scariest time
in our century with*

***courage and joy and
faith.***

Level Four

Waters to Swim In

**"BLESSED ARE THEY
THAT HAVE NOT
SEEN AND YET HAVE
BELIEVED."**

Jesus to Thomas

**AGAIN HE
MEASURED A
THOUSAND; AND IT**

**WAS A RIVER THAT I
COULD NOT FORD,
FOR THE WATER
HAD RISEN, ENOUGH
WATER TO SWIM IN,
A RIVER THAT
COULD NOT BE
FORDED.**

Ezekiel 47:5, NAS

Abandonment to Mystery

And now the last stage of the river-the scariest stage of all. All the while the river is rising, first flowing under the door, to the *ankles*, to the *knees*, to

the *loins*. And now, at last, to the *very limit*; it is no longer something you can carry, it is something that must carry you. The last step in God is one that takes you beyond your own control.

Our Call to
Abandonment
We all should

know what it means to
surrender to Christ, but
*how deep does that
surrender go?* Ezekiel
faced something that
was finally beyond his
limit. The previous
measures into the river
were all right; they
could be managed,
handled,
accommodated. But

now this was the end of wading. He knew he could not ford this crossing; it was now bigger than he was.

Do we really know our limits? A characteristic of our Western culture is our deep need to be able to control our own lives, to be able to get a handle

on everything we meet. In the U.S. Bill of Rights every citizen under the government of this nation is guaranteed protected personal rights; but in the Bible mandate, every citizen of heaven under the government of God is called to give up the self-protection of his or

her rights and come wholly under the provision, care, and shelter of Another. We are not used to being unable to control things; it bothers us intensely when things happen that we cannot manage. But to meet and follow the living God is to deliberately

hand over the reins of your life to Another. As the bumper sticker says, "If God is your co-pilot-switch seats."

Ezekiel's call to the last level was not, however, a situation of despair. It was too high for walking, but it was high enough now to swim in. God always

calls us, as Catherine Marshall said, "beyond our selves." Nothing of faith is ever quite safe.

We have a habit of looking at things out of our depth as barriers instead of possibilities, as signposts of discouragement instead of opportunities to trust and learn. We firmly

resist things we have never attempted: "No, thanks; I can't do that." But there is so much that God wants us to do that we cannot do ourselves. When we run out of our natural resources, God is ready to show us His supernatural ones. Risk, challenge and

adventure are the heart of all growth and life. It is in the early shallows of the river that our first tests come; if we are not found faithful there, what will happen to us when the river really rises? Whether we like it or not, situations and circumstances will come to us like

Ezekiel's river, in which we will either have to learn to swim or drown.

"If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do

in the flooding of the
Jordan?"

Jeremiah 12:5

A. J. Gossip was a famous preacher at the turn of the century. Like his congregation, he too had his share of shock and the unexpected floods of life; yet in the midst of

his own great personal grief and hurt, he was still expected to minister and be a comfort and blessing to others. In 1927 after his beloved wife died, Gossip preached a message from this text in Jeremiah that he called "*But When Life Tumbles In, What*

Then?"

It is one thing,
Gossip said, to complain
to God about the
bewilderment of life when
all you have faced are the
"little rubs and frets and
ills of life that fall to
everyone."

[But] if these have
broken through your
guard, pushed aside your

religion, made you so sour
and peevish and cross
toward God- God help
you. What will happen
when sudden as a shell
screaming out of the
night, one of the great
crashing dispensations
bursts in your life and
leaves an emptiness where
there had been a
home, a tumbled ruin

of your ordered ways, a heart so sore you wonder how it holds together? If you have caught your breath, poor fool, when splashing through the shallow waters of some summer brook, how will you fare when Jordan bursts its banks and rushes as far as the eye can see, one huge wild

swirl of angry waters and
you, your feet caught
away, half-choked, you
are tossed nearer and
nearer to the roaring of
the falls and over it? ...

Do you think
Christ always understood
or found it easy? There
was a day when He took
God's will for Him in His
hand and turned it round

and looked at. "Is this what You ask of Me?" He said and for a moment His eyes looked almost incredulous. And another day, puzzled and uncertain, He cried out, "But is this really what You meant that I should give You, this here, this now?" Yes and another still, when the cold

rushing waters roared in a raging torrent through His soul; yet He would not turn back, fought His way to the further bank, died still believing in the God who seemed to have deserted Him. And that is why He is given a name that is above every name... you people in the sunshine *may* believe the

faith, but we in the
shadow *must* believe it.
We have nothing else...

[And when]
standing in the roaring of
Jordan, cold to the heart
with it's dreadful chill,
and very conscious of the
terror of its rushing, I too,
like Hopeful, can call
back to you, who one day
in your turn will have to

cross it: “*Be of good cheer, my brother, for I feel the bottom and it is sound.*”

A River that Could Not Be Passed Over

Notice how much this last level in our scriptural lives looks like the first; we are not in control of ourselves. At the level of chaos we

are at the mercy of our own lusts; at the level of mystery we are at the mercy of the Lord Himself. At the first stage of chaos we are borne along by something we cannot control; like Paul we can say, "What I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I

hate, that I do"
(Romans 7:15). Our
lusts are lord of our
lives. The river rises all
the time, from chaos to
principle to doubt and
now to mystery; and
now at this last stage,
too, we are no longer in
charge. We are about
to be carried along by
someone who has a far

higher and better purpose than just letting us do what we want.

And as Ezekiel noticed, it “*could not be crossed.*” It was not just something beyond his own personal limits-"I could not pass over"; it was something beyond anyone's personal limits. What God has in

mind is not for some special saint, some rare individual with unique gifts and calling. God is out to bring His people all to the end of their limits; this is a river no one can pass over.

This stage takes you beyond your own control of things. It not only answers the

questions, it takes you beyond the questions because it is touching something more than you can comprehend. It is called *abandonment*. It is the level of loving service that all the great saints and lovers of God sought and many experienced over the centuries that made

them strong in the face of great hardship and difficulty.

A Thirst for God

A book was published centuries ago called *The Cloud of Unknowing*. It was written in the Europe of the fourteenth century, a time of great distress,

social unrest, and
violent insurrection.

There was famine, war,
and terrible plagues. In
England the Black
Death killed multitudes,
including many of the
clergy and ministers of
that time, spiritually
impoverishing the
world.

Yet this terrible

century produced at the same time some of the greatest contemplative Christian saints and mystics of the Church, who not only "possessed their souls in peace," but wrote of their experiences with God with profound thought, vivid expression, and

contagious enthusiasm.

Richard Rolle,
Lady Julian of Norwich,
John Tauler, Henry
Suso, and St. Catherine
of Siena were some of
the greatest devotional
writers of the Church.
They all lived joyously,
even radiantly through
this same time. They
were not just a few odd

hermits and recluses;
they were practical men
and women with active
lives and sometimes
major responsibilities in
leadership and society.

Not all the depths
they explored are
recommended or even
advised for everyone;
they took pains to point
out that God calls

people into a work, that the effort itself depends on God, that it is "never gotten by study, but only by grace," and that it is a mistake to imagine all Christians are to apply themselves in the same way. Indeed, most of them were at a loss to explain or recommend

methods, principles, and approaches to others, as it was their conviction that God alone would provide for each individual.

"He is a jealous lover," wrote the author of *The Cloud*, "and suffereth no fellowship; He liketh not to work in thy will unless He be

only with thee by
Himself. He asketh no
help but only thyself.
He wills thou but look
on Him and let Him
alone." They knew only
that the key to entering
into the mystery of God
Himself was to set the
heart on loving God
past our human limits of
understanding Him, that

this devotion should not be "artificial or violent, but spring gently and sweetly from love to love."

They all shared this one thing in common: a thirst for God and a depth of desire for Him that is largely missing in our shallow century. Their

writings show us that
"in spite of all this, and
perhaps because of all
this- a man could
possess his soul in
peace and that there
were many more like
him. They are evidence
that through all
difficulties there
persisted a Christian
life which was superior

to secular disturbance .
.. " (from the
introduction of *The
Cloud of Unknowing*).

Into the Depths of
Mystery

Mystery. The Bible
is full of it. The
Kingdom of God
operates in "mystery"
(Mark 4:11).

Lawlessness is called a "mystery" (2 Thessalonians 2:7) and so is *godliness* (1 Timothy 3: 16). The *Church* is a mystery (Ephesians 5:32). The *Gospel* operates in mystery (Ephesians 6:19; 1 Corinthians 1:17-25). The *resurrection* is a

mystery (1 Corinthians 15:51) and God *Himself*, our Uncreated Triune Creator, is the ultimately Mysterious One (Colossians 2:2).

But *mystery* in the Bible does not mean quite the same thing as it means to most people today. *Mystery* in the dictionary primarily

signifies something hidden, withheld, strange, or secret; Oxford defines it as a "hidden or inexplicable matter." Mystery, of course, does mean this, but it means something more in the Bible; it is spiritual truth divinely revealed. Although mystery is something

only God can show us, it is something He *can* show us. Mystery is indeed a secret; but in the revelation of God, it is an "open" secret.

Mystery, says Vine's *Expository Dictionary*, simply denotes "something outside the range of natural unassisted

apprehension." Mystery is something you can't grasp with just personal study, effort, and training; mystery is something you cannot know at all unless God shows you "in a manner and at a time appointed by God and to those only who are illumined by His Spirit... In the

ordinary sense, mystery implies knowledge withheld; its Scriptural significance is truth revealed" (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*).

In mystery, the divine plan is concealed from all until God's time and even then revealed only to His chosen; but

He does show His purpose to the right people at the right time. And what is the foundation, the secret, the heart of receiving any such divine revelation? Not knowledge, but *love*.

"He who has My commandments and keeps them," said

Jesus, "it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21). Notice: *A manifestation of Christ to the soul follows the obedience of love.* Not knowledge first, but love. Not information as

a start, but devotion.
Not understanding to
begin with, but
abandonment. Indeed,
without that love, even
an exceptional degree
of religious insight is
worthless. "Though I
speak with the tongues
of men and of angels,"
said Paul, ". . . and
though I have the gift of

prophecy, and
understand all
mysteries and all
knowledge ... but have
not love, I am nothing"
(1 Corinthians 13:1- 2).

God, who is the
Maker of both the
power to love and to
know, says the
unknown author of *The
Cloud of Unknowing*, is

to the knowing power
alone "ever more
incomprehensible": but
to the loving power "He
is, in every man
diversely, all
comprehensively to the
full.... One loving soul,
alone in itself, by virtue
of love, may
comprehend in itself
Him who is sufficient to

the full-and much more
without comparison-to
fill all the souls and
angels that ever may
be.

And this is the endless,
marvelous miracle of
love, the working of it
which shall never have
end; forever shall He do
it and never shall He
cease for to do it. See

who so by grace may see; for the feeling of this is endless bliss and the contrary is endless pain."

It is, he says, *the work of the soul that most pleases God*. All the saints and angels "have joy of this work and hasten them to help

it with all their might; all friends be mad when you do thus, and try to defeat it in all that they can Have no wonder that I stir thee to this work. For this is the work ... in which man should have continued if he had never sinned. And to this working was man made, and all

things for man to help him and further him to it. And by this working shall man be repaired again. And for want of this working a man falls ever more deeper and deeper into sin and further and further from God."

Learning How to

Swim

I learned to swim in a New Zealand primary school. At least, I was *supposed* to learn.

What actually happened is that I splashed impressively with my arms, kicked with one foot, and hopped along the bottom with the other; it

looked like swimming
and it passed for it as
long as we were in our
shallow little school
paddling baths. Fine, as
long as there was a
bottom I could always
feel and touch.

Then one day my
aunt took my younger
sister and me to a

country swimming hole. A narrow ledge of rock went out from the bank for a few feet before a big drop-off into the dozen-foot-or-so- deep hole. I was hopping along this narrow ledge kicking and saw a long branch lying near me in the water. I thought, *I can probably hold onto*

that stick and float with it. So I grabbed the stick and continued kicking along the ledge until I suddenly ran out of rock. My foot went off the end, I lost the branch, and went under. The next second I was drowning.

I didn't know how to swim. I had had the

illusion of swimming as long as I had one foot on the bottom, but now it was the real thing.

There was nothing left to stand on. They say your life passes before you die; I was only little, so mine passed very fast. The next thing I remember was being pulled out of the water

by one of my aunt's
boyfriends, who had
just happened to notice
me going under for the
last time.

And you- have *you*
had the floor pulled out
from under you? In this
area of mystery, God
takes the ledge away
from us in order to bring
us into reality. Like

children, we have
hopped too long with
one foot on the bottom,
secure in the illusion
that we were really
swimming; now there is
no bottom to touch in
this river, and we find
out just how much of
our splashing around
was only a show. The
river is rising, and we

are not to be children forever.

"Right well have you said," noted the author of *The Cloud*," 'for the love of Jesus.' For in the love of Jesus shall be your help. Love is such a power that it makes all things to be shared. Therefore we love Jesus, and all

things that He has are thine."

This love, of course, is not a feeling; it is an act of will.

Agape love in the Bible is an unselfish choice for the highest good; of God first, and then His creation. You can love with this love when you do not like; you can

choose when you cannot feel; and you can set your heart on pleasing God when you cannot comprehend.

"For of all other creatures and their works-yea, and the work of God Himself-may a man through grace have fullness of knowing, and well can

he think of them; but of God Himself can no man think," reports *The Cloud*. "And therefore I would leave all that thing that I can think, and choose to my love that thing I cannot think. For why, He may well be loved, but not thought. By love He may be gotten and

holden; but by thought
neither....

"And although it be
a light and a part of
contemplation,
nevertheless in this
work it shall be cast
down and covered with
a cloud forgetting. And
thou shalt step above it
stalwartly, but listily[with
pleasure or delight],

with a devout and a
pleasing stirring of love,
and try to pierce that
darkness above thee.
And smite upon that
thick cloud of
unknowing with a sharp
dart of longing love;
and go not hence for
aught that befalleth."

All-Out Faith

What does it mean to trust Christ? Blondin (Jean-Francois Gravlet) was a famous acrobat and tightrope-walker in the nineteenth century. His most famous achievement was crossing Niagara Falls

by tightrope, usually without a safety net. He did it many times in different ways: blindfolded, in a sack, on stilts, even sitting down to make and eat an omelette and make a cup of coffee with a primus stove and water drawn up from the river!

Perhaps one of his

most daring feats was to push a wheelbarrow loaded with a heavy sack of cement across the wire. With all that weight, the slightest overbalance could wrench the barrow out of his hand or twist him off the wire and into the river. But Blondin, the supreme

showman of that time, was the master of the high wire; he took the wheelbarrow all the way across without a hitch.

After one such successful stunt, Blondin asked an impressed reporter: "Do you believe I can do anything on a

tightrope?" "Oh, yes, Mr. Blondin," said the reporter, "after what I've seen today I believe it. You can do anything." "Do you believe, then," said Blondin, "that instead of a sack of cement, I could put a *man* in this wheelbarrow- a man who has never been on

a tightrope before-and wheel him, without a safety net, safely over to the other side?"

"Oh, yes, sir, Mr. Blondin," said the reporter, "I believe it."

"Good," said Blondin. "Get *in*"

It is one thing to give mental assent; it is something else again to

"get in." When you "get in," that's faith, and faith, of course, is a doing word. It is not something you discuss, it is something you do; it is not just something to learn, but something to live.

We are not told what happened to the reporter, except that he

probably suddenly
remembered an urgent
appointment elsewhere.
To put your life totally
into the hands of others
on the bare record of
who they are and what
they have done is faith
indeed.

But that is not the
end of the story.
Blondin did, I

understand, finally find some daredevil willing to ride in his wheelbarrow. He tipped out his sack of cement, put the man in the barrow, and started across.

Wagers were flowing on both sides of the Falls. One man in particular had tendered

a very large bet Blondin would not make it.

Blondin set out, wheeling the man carefully on the tight wire, who you can imagine was white-knuckling it all the way, clinging to the sides of the barrow and not daring to look down. Blondin breezily passed

the halfway point on the 1,600- foot rope.

The man on the other bank who had made the large bet knew that unless something drastic happened he was surely going to lose a fortune. Surreptitiously he slipped away. He went to one of the

support ropes that kept the main tightrope taut and stopped it from all side-to-side movement. And when no one was looking, he cut it.

Twa-ang!

Suddenly this tensioning rope flew free. Blondin still had his man in the barrow, with many feet to go.

There they were, 160 feet above the water, with Blondin's tightrope vibrating violently like a plucked bowstring. The row pitched crazily from side to side. Any moment now, the rim of the wheel would come off the rope.

With no safety net both men would be pitched

into the raging grave of
Niagara Falls below.

Blondin's brave
passenger was now out
of his mind with fear,
screaming bloody
murder, and they were
only seconds away
from death. Then
Blondin spoke, and his
voice snapped like that
of a military

commander.

"*Stand up!*" he commanded the terrified man. "Stand up!

Grab my shoulders!"

The man stared at him in unbelieving desperation.

"Let go and stand up! Let go the wheelbarrow! Do it or

die!"

In total terror, the man somehow let go and fought his way up from the rocking barrow.

"Your arms-'round my neck! Now, your legs-'round my waist!" What choice did he have? This was life or death; whether Blondin

was right or wrong, he was all he had. It was obey or die.

He threw his arms around Blondin's neck; he wrapped his legs around Blondin's waist. Blondin took the strain and stayed balanced there, every trained and honed muscle in his body reacting

desperately to the singing, swinging wire under his feet.

The wheelbarrow, empty and abandoned, somersaulted down more than sixteen stories into the Falls and smashed into the water to be swept away. For all I know, it is down there still.

Imagine the sheer terror of this man. He had nothing left to cling to now but the man with the power and skill, the expert who had dared the rope before, time and dangerous time again, and still lived. Blondin somehow was still standing on the crazily swaying rope,

arms stretched wide and shifting every second for balance, with his passenger now locked in a death grip around him. And it was then he heard Blondin say the final thing that saved his life.

"Hold on," said Blondin. "But don't fight. If we are going to make

it alive, you must not fight me. You must move when I move, give when I give. You must become one with me. *For just this little while, you must become Blondin.*" And in the reality of that command, he carried him safely to the other side.

You and I, too,
have a long and
dangerous journey to
make. There are some
who bet we will not
complete it. And they
may be right. Indeed,
they are surely right if
all we have to make it
with is what we are.

Martin Luther
understood the

situation very well when
he wrote:

Did we in our own
strength confide,
Our striving would be
losing;
Were not the right
Man on our side,
The Man of God's
own choosing.

The danger is real;
the fall is real.

But we are *not*
alone. There is
Someone with us, and
it is Someone who has
crossed the rope-over
the waters- before. Our
hope, our only hope, is
to hold on so tightly to
Him that to all intents
we share in what He is,

and become part of His purpose. *Faith is not something you hold, but Someone who holds you.* We can trust Him; we *must* trust Him. And He will carry us safely to the other side.

The Darkness of God: Trusting When You Cannot See

I am no prophet
nor the son of a
prophet, but I do
believe we are headed
for some very dark

times in this decade. I really believe in some places it is going to be rough to be a Christian. In other nations believers have already faced trouble and pressure. But what I want to look at here does not come about from the persecution of the world. This is a

problem that will happen to every single Christian who wants to be involved in the work of God, or to any ordinary Christian who has set his heart on pleasing God. This is not just a problem that comes from other people; neither is it 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." Isaiah 50:10- 11

When I first read this passage, I assumed it was written to an unbeliever. After all, it deals with darkness. I knew in Scripture of only three kinds of darkness 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). And again, "What communion has light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). God has called us to be a "chosen generation, a

royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood

of Jesus Christ His Son
cleanses us from all
sin" (1 John 1:7).

Secondly, there is
a darkness in the Bible
that is actually
ignorance. The
opposite of this
darkness is the word
light. This is one of the
most basic statements

of God in the entire Scriptures: "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

Now this word *light* as used in the Bible means "that which is most wise." The Bible word *light* used of God says that He is the total criterion, the ultimate

standard and example of all that is most wise and most holy in the universe. When the Bible says that "God dwells in the light," it means God lives perfectly according to that which is most wise and most intelligent. And when He asks us to "walk in the light,"

God is asking us to live according to the highest intelligence.

The Christian life calls you not only to be good but to be wise. One of the meanings of the word *darkness*, then, is "ignorance," not really understanding the ways of God.

Then, thirdly,
demonic power is
sometimes referred to
as "the power of
darkness" (Luke 22:53;
Acts 26:18; Ephesians
6:12; Colossians 1:13).
So the satanic world is
sometimes involved in
the word darkness. I've
done battle before with
darkness that was

demonic.

But the darkness Isaiah spoke of is none 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, who love God, 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. When this happens we must learn to deal with it

Fears The Lord

Let's look at the person to whom this verse is addressed. God says, first of all, "Who among you fears the Lord?" *The fear of the Lord is the awesome reverence of God.*

I have often
prayed that God will
reveal Himself to me.
When I was a new
Christian, I wanted God
to talk to me in an
audible voice! I didn't
know what I wanted
Him to say, I just
wanted Him to say
something. I had been

saved about six months so I said, "O Lord, how come You have never spoken to me? You've spoken to some of these people in the Bible. You spoke to Your Son."

I had forgotten that, as far as we know, Jesus lived thirty years before his Father spoke

to Him in an audible voice. And there I was, a six-month brat, who wanted God to do all kinds of audible, supernatural things for me.

So late one night in a Christian campground I said: "God, I'm going to fast and pray... I'm going to

die unless You come down and speak to me. Amen."

Then I got my Bible and my sleeping bag and went out into the woods. I started to pray, "Lord, come down." I was yelling out in those woods at two o'clock in the morning. Suddenly I realized that

all the crickets had
stopped chirping. All
the birds and owls had
stopped hooting.
Everything had
stopped. It wasn't just
that I was making a
racket. I was on my
knees with my Bible in
front of me and I
thought, *why is
everything so quiet?* So

I shut up a minute. It was very, very still right then. I think I stopped breathing. And then, without turning around, still on my knees on the sleeping bag, I very slowly looked behind me. And it seemed to me that something white was standing there.

Do you know what I did? I did not turn around. I did not dare. Without looking back, I picked up my Bible and my sleeping bag. I headed straight for my bed, got in, closed my eyes tight, and went to sleep immediately. I never prayed that prayer again. I realized

that when the God of the universe appears, you don't have anything to say at all. When He comes down, the whole world shuts up. Nobody talks. Before, I had had all these questions I was going to ask God. In the morning all the answers were right there in my Bible.

This Isaiah verse is addressed to a person who "fears the Lord," who has this awesome reverence for the Lord. This isn't a cheap, shallow, one-time-in-the-presence-of-God person. This is someone who has revered His presence. The Bible

also tells us "the fear of the Lord is to *hate evil*." Since the fear of the Lord is to hate evil, and "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," the one to whom this darkness comes is not someone living in sin or ignorance. This is a person whose life is set

against evil, who does not want to do evil. This person already knows some things about God, someone perhaps who has already had a long walk with God.

Habitually Obedient

There is a second thing we know about

this person: The Bible says this one will "*obey the voice of His servant.*" The great Servant of servants is Jesus Himself. We may be justified here in capitalizing "His Servant"; the passage refers ultimately to someone who is obeying Christ Himself.

This person is not lost; this person is a true believer. The one this verse is talking about is somebody who is an obedient follower of Jesus Christ.

This is not someone habitually living in disobedience to God. People sometimes say they are

"pretty much a Christian" or "fairly Christian." You can't be half-Christian any more than you can be half-pregnant. You can only be "in Christ" or out of Him. There's no moral halfway in Scripture. God says, in effect: "There's a big, wide freeway that leads to

destruction. There's a narrow little road that leads to life" (Matthew 7:13-14). There's no middle-sized motorway for people who can't make either. The Bible says, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal

to the one and despise the other" (Matthew 6:24). You can't fool around in sin or live to please yourself and still match what the Bible says when it describes a Christian.

I remember one time when I was in San Francisco. I was witnessing in Golden

Gate Park. I met a young lady there who was reading something with a bunch of hip kids around her. She was smoking grass, rolling a joint. I approached. The place was so blue with smoke I was afraid I'd get high just standing around and talking. I noticed that the book

she had was the Bible. That was not too unusual in those days in San Francisco. A lot of kids would do drugs and see if they could get into the imagery of the book of Revelation with all its dragons and things.

"I see you're reading a Bible," I said.

"Yes."

"Do you enjoy
reading the Bible?"

"Oh, yes, I love it."

"Do you know
about receiving Jesus?"

"Oh, yes, praise
God, I'm a Christian."

"How much of the
Bible have you read?"

"Oh, a lot of it."

"You're reading

Revelation. Are you aware of the word there that is translated 'witchcraft,' the word *pharmakia*?"

(Revelation 18:23).

She said, "Yes, I know that word."

"Do you know the meaning of the word *witchcraft* there? It means to induce a

religious experience
through the use of
drugs."

"Oh, yeah,
someone told me that
once."

"Do you know that
this is expressly
forbidden in Scripture?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Then you know
that using drugs is a

sin?"

"Oh, of course."

I was looking at the joint in her hand that she was blowing. I said, "Then why in the world are you smoking that grass?"

She said, "You don't understand. My *body* is sinning, but my *spirit* is worshiping

God."

I couldn't help but wonder which part of her was talking to me.

What is this darkness? It is something we are rarely made aware of in this hi-tech hungering for hi-touch century; it is something that the old

saints and mystics often spoke about as an essential element in the development of the depth of the spiritual life. It has been largely neglected, untreated, or unknown in twentieth-century evangelical speaking and writing. It is something that comes from the hand of

God.

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 guru- 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." The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* wrote:

For the first time ...
thou findest but a
darkness, and as it were a

"Cloud of Unknowing,"
thou knowest not what
save that thou feelest in
thy will a naked intent
unto God. This darkness
and this cloud ... is
betwixt thee and thy God
and hindereth thee, so that
thou mayest neither see
Him clearly by light of
understanding in thy
reason nor feel Him in

sweetness of love in thine affection. And therefore shape thee to bide in this darkness as long as thou mayest, evermore crying after Him whom thou lovest. For if ever

thou shalt see Him or feel Him as it may be here, it must always be in this cloud and in this darkness.

Each writer dealt with this differently and on different levels, but the experience is common. It is not the darkness of wrong or guilt or demonic oppression. It is not sin; it is instead an inexplicable sense of loss, uncertainty,

perplexity. It is above all a *withdrawn sense* of the presence of God.

Now it is natural to live in His sunshine. We believers don't have to sing "Don't Worry-Be Happy." We take for granted that "in the presence of God is joy and at His right hand are pleasures for

evermore." Yet a lot of heaven's journey must be made at night. Happiness is not always the test of holiness. It is possible to be happy and not holy: "As the crackling of thorns underneath a pot, so is the laughter of fools," said Solomon. "This also is vanity."

There is a false laughter and an empty lightness of heart that the Bible calls the sin of levity, foolishness and shallowness in the things of God and life and reality. And this is a characteristic of much of our public popular image today: Christians are often perceived as

happy idiots, like people in some asylum, who are happy only because they have lost the ability to live in reality.

But God never designed real life to function in an artificial environment. Without doubt, conversion often takes place with an

accompanying jolt of pure joy. In the glow of that first meeting with Christ, you get a taste of an excitement and release that seems as if it will last forever. When you first get saved you think it will be all music, dancing, and steak on the hoof. You come home like the Prodigal

and there is the welcome party. But it doesn't take long at home before you hear from your elder brother who is getting mad at all the excitement over your return. The party is fun, you get a new set of clothes and a ring; but the morning after the party there'll be

dishes to wash, a room to clean, and a farm to run.

St. John of the Cross, in his classic work *Dark Night of the Soul*, spoke of two levels of this darkness. The first, and the one we focus on here, deals with our attachment to the world of sense; the

second, on a deeper level, with our spirit. The first dark night, which is "bitter and terrible to sense," he wrote, "is common and comes to many; these are the beginners." Even this kind of darkness, so basic to elementary solid Christian growth,

is little understood today, let alone the second dark night, something "horrible and awful to our spirit" that John said is "the portion of very few..."

These men and women of God are walking with Jesus. They "obey the voice of His Servant." Nothing

matters to the Lord
Jesus like obedience.
They know this. They
live in it; they love it.
Then out of the blue
this awful thing
happens to them. Right
in the middle of much
glory and praise of
God, there comes an
inexplicable darkness.
Suddenly all the lights

go out in their Christian experience and nothing they do seems to change it.

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, take
your usual notes, and
the message is great;
but this time there is no
answering chord of
response in your heart.
When everyone else is
feeling something, why
don't you 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! You go to hear teaching that has always excited you; you sit down like an addict needing a fix, stick out your arm for a Gospel shot- and nothing! You

walk out of the service in which everyone else "touched God" and you say to yourself: "What in the world have I done?"

Perhaps, you think, it is *unconfessed sin*. You get on your knees and have a big response session. You apologize to everybody.

You write letters of
confession to your
grade school teachers.
You forgive your cat.
You go through
everything you can
possibly think of, but it's
all 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.

"Well, I think I'd better go check with a Christian brother who can help me." So you go to the local godly authority on everything.... "Brother, can you tell me what's happening to me?" And

horrors- you know what? He can't help either. He's counseled you for two hours, prayed, given you Scripture- and still you have the same darkness.

By now you are getting seriously concerned. What if you are in some really deep

deception? So deep you can't even see what it is? You pray quite intensely, even desperately now: "God, *show* me! What am I doing wrong?" And again 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 (Genesis 15:12). It came to Moses on the mountain waiting to receive the Commandments in the "thick darkness" where God was (Deuteronomy 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. In the middle of great trouble, when all of his enemies seemed to rise up to mock him, "deep called to deep" in David. All the flood of the waves

and billows of God
seemed to go over him
and he cried out in
agony and anger to the
God whom he knew as
his Rock: "Why have
You forgotten me?"
(Psalm 42:9). "O God,"
said the psalmist, "why
have You cast us off
forever?... We do not
see our signs; there is

no longer any prophet;
nor is there any among
us who knows how
long" (Psalm 74:1,9).

It came to the
prophets and they
wept. It came to the
godly kings and they
humbled themselves.
One dark day it came
even to Jesus the Son
of God Himself. And if

you set your heart to seek God, this darkness will come also to you. You will not be exempt. You will not escape it. It is the 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, the days of clouds and rain. Light and darkness alike are essential for plant growth; nothing but sunshine makes 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.

Satan will perhaps come and use this opportunity. A world of scoffers may surround you and taunt you as they taunted other men

and women who trusted God. Your own failures and weaknesses and temptations may rise up out of nowhere and you will face a time of testing to the very roots of your life.

Dealing with Feeling
An unsaved girl
who had been

attending a Christian college once asked me a profound question. It is just the kind of question we need to ask for the time of great trouble and testing that faces our world now. It is the question that centrally has to do with this unique kind of darkness.

She said: "Do Christians really love Christ or do they just love the good feelings that come from loving Christ?"

Good question. Do you love Jesus or do you love the results of loving Jesus? Or put it another way: Would you still love Jesus if

you could feel or sense
no immediate benefits?

How do you wean
a generation away from
its love of pleasure as
an end in itself? How
do you teach a person
to endure hardness, to
practice patience, to
handle suffering and
loss victoriously, to lose
something precious in

order to accomplish a much greater goal of good in the end? If you were God, how would you teach your child what trust really is?

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 reverences you. Why not? You are his celestial Santa Claus. Take away the presents and he'll be just the same as one of my crowd" (Job 1:8-12). So God let Satan test Job. And Job came through-but barely.

Do Christians
really love Christ or do
they just love the fringe
benefits of obedience?

Saul, the proud
and brilliant Pharisee
with a driving ambition
to be the most holy
man of his time, faced
the same awful
dilemma: How do you
covet holiness when

covetousness is sin
(Romans 7:7-13;
Philippians 3:4-14)? Or
to put it still another
way: Babies always
want to see that their
parents are there, but
they have to grow up
one day and that
means there has to
come a time when they
learn to realize their

parents still love them even when they can't see them.

And so we have the special darkness, the darkness that is the most fearsome of all to the child of God. Not the darkness of sin, not the darkness of ignorance, not the darkness of the

demonic, but the divine darkness, the darkness of the *withdrawn sense of the presence of God*. God simply takes away the feeling of His nearness. He is always there; the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent Lord never sleeps, and His ear is always open to our cry.

But He is a God who hides Himself, a God who dwells in darkness (Isaiah 45:15; 1 Kings 8:12). Divine darkness comes in different levels and at different times in each believer's life; but it is necessary and it accomplishes much that nothing else can do.

Tests of the Divine Darkness

First, it tests your courage. There is something universally scary about dark. When I was little my parents managed a shop. Friday night in New

Zealand was late shopping night. They put us kids to bed early in our house behind the shop with the radio on in the darkness to keep us company until they came home again about 10:00 in the evening.

My younger sister usually dropped off to

sleep right away, but I was always a night owl. Lying awake in a totally dark house was fine with the radio on quietly tuned to a classical easy listening program. But this particular night the station changed its format.

There I am in bed, trying to get to sleep,

when the announcer introduces a new horror show: "Blood On the Cat"! It opens with the purported taped account of a reporter who has been murdered while spending the night on a dare in the darkness of a waxworks museum. The show opens with a

courtroom full of people listening to his last recorded words. He is giving his impressions of the room in which they found him dead with the tape still running.

For the first five minutes he is full of bravado, thinking out loud. And there I am,

also alone in my totally darkened room. The reporter is looking at the wax statues: "There is Frankenstein's monster," he says. "There is the axe-murderer. Over there in the corner is Jack the Ripper."

Now I have lived in my bedroom a long

time, but tonight it has become the Twilight Zone. The man is talking terror, and now everything in the room is starting to look strange.

"Funny," says the doomed reporter. "I know I'm here alone, but these things look almost alive."

Twenty seconds of silence. . . . You can hear the hiss of the tape. Then: "What was that?"

Silence "Is anyone there?"

The radio is only in the front room, about twenty paces away from my bed, but to get to it I have to cross

Jack the Ripper
darkness, get past
Frankenstein's curtains,
and make it safely past
the axe-murderer
doorway. So do I do it?
Not on your life. I lie
there and listen while
my heart does
handsprings and tries
to climb right out of my
mouth.

"You're crazy,"
says the reporter to
himself. "There's
nobody here with you."
A nervous little laugh.
"It's only your
imagination "

Ri-i-ght, ri-i-ght! I
think desperately to
myself. *Imagination!*

More silence.
Then, in the darkness,

a tiny, almost imperceptible sound. Is it on the tape or is it in my room?

"Hello? Hello?" says the about-to-be-murdered man.

"There *is* someone here!" It seems like forever before finally he screams.

My parents come

back home a little later
on to look in on me.

They find a rigid, boy-
shaped board in bed
instead of a child.

There is
something universally
scary about the dark.
Things always look
better and safer in the
light. It is one thing to
be out in the jungle

wilderness or an unfamiliar lonely city street in the day; it is something else again to be there when darkness falls. And so it is with your soul. The darkness tests your courage.

Second, it tests your convictions.

When the darkness comes down, the first thing you do after you've tried everything else is begin to wonder what you really believe in. The first test comes to your convictions. You say to yourself: "I learned some principles. They are biblical. These

principles work. You do this first and then this result happens. Now I've done this and nothing has happened." So you say to yourself: "Did I learn something or didn't I?"

How does God deliver us from a love for what He gave us? How do we deal with a

biblical idolatry? How can we be freed when we are so entranced with the beauty of an idea *from* God that we are in danger of forgetting the God who yet has all kinds of new ideas to share that we cannot see?

We have all these things we know about

God, and we try (as we have many times before) to put them into action. What if nothing happens this time?

What if, inexplicably, the reliable thing does not work? Everything we have ever heard or thought about God comes under question.

Darkness has

power to magnify not only fear but also dread- what we call *angst*. It isn't what we see that bothers us in angst, but what we don't see. In the light it is easy to be sure. In the light it is easy to be strong. In the light it is easy to have convictions. But when

darkness comes down
on our hearts and
souls, we start to
question everything we
have and even are. "Do
I really believe what I
think and say I
believe?"

You have said
some things with utter
conviction. You have
said, "This is what I

know, and I would die rather than deny it."

You have been utterly sure of some things, and you have said that no matter what happens, you will never change those convictions. Indeed, that is the test of a true conviction: It is something you will not

change no matter what. And then the darkness comes- and what is this? You find yourself questioning everything you were once so sure of. The worst thing is, you can't even judge your own conduct in the dark.

Third, it tests

your calling. You had a sense of purpose when you met Jesus. You were chosen, you were called, you knew whom He wanted you to be and what He wanted you to do. But now comes your day of darkness; and suddenly everything is unaccountably unsure!

You ask yourself,
"Did I really dedicate
everything I have to
God or not?"
Something is
happening to you that
you can't track down.
There is just no
communication with
God. No answering
chord of response. "Did
God really call me? Do

I really have a ministry?
Am I really in the right
place?" The darkness
comes down, and what
was once clear is now
hard to see.

Much of the
conduct of young
Christians, said John of
the Cross,

"has much to do with

their love of self and their own inclinations.... God desires to lead them further. He seeks to bring them out of that ignoble kind of love to a higher degree of love for Him, to free them from unworthy and unbefitting sensation-hungry pathways of devotion and lead them to a kind of spiritual exercise

wherein they can
commune with Him more
abundantly and are freed
more completely from
imperfections. For they
have now had practice for
some time in the way of
virtue and have
persevered in meditation
and prayer; whereby,
through the sweetness and
pleasure they have found

therein, they have lost their love of the things of the world and have gained some degree of spiritual strength in God. This has enabled them to some extent to refrain from creaturely desires so that for God's sake they are now able to suffer a light burden and a little aridity without turning back to a

time which they found more pleasant.

When they are going about these spiritual exercises with the greatest delight and pleasure, and when they believe that the sun of Divine favor is shining most brightly upon them, God turns all this light into darkness, and shuts the door and the

source of the sweet
spiritual water which they
were tasting in God
whensoever and for as
long as they desired.

And thus He
leaves them so completely
in the dark that they know
not whither to go ... their
inward sense being
submerged in this night
and left with such dryness

that they not only
experience no pleasure
and consolation in
spiritual things ... but, on
the contrary, find
insipidity and bitterness.
For... God now sees they
have grown a little and are
becoming strong enough
to lay aside their
swaddling clothes and be
taken from the gentle

breast; so He sets them down from His arms and teaches them to walk on their own two feet, which they feel to be very strange, for everything seems to be going wrong with them.

The very ministry you have seems at stake when the

darkness comes on your life. All kinds of strange thoughts may come in during this time; these may very well be satanic. Suggestions may come: "I told you this Christianity business was just a big laugh. You should have listened to me the first time. Now you've become a Christian and it's a joke.

If you had stayed with me
you would have gone to
hell, but at least it would
have been fun on

the way some of the
time. So what have you
got now? Nothing."

So you begin to
question: "Did I really
have a call from God?
A ministry? To what?"

You really begin to wonder.

**Fourth, it tests
your consecration.**

Left in the darkness long enough, the questions get deeper and even more searching: "Why won't God speak to me? What is wrong with me?"

Why can't I get an answer? I've tried everything I know and still there is nothing but silence. Am I really right with God?" You begin to ask serious questions about what you are supposed to be doing.

How do we know it is the darkness of God

and not the darkness of guilt and sin? One key sign is this: You not only find no pleasure in the things of God; you find no pleasure in anything else in creation either. Not so with the one who has his heart straying back to the world; he finds greater delight in it. And

if you are truly in the darkness of God, your mind and heart are centered on Him during the whole bitter experience. You are still thinking deeply about your relationship with God. This is not the mark of a backslider.

Fifth, it tests your conversion. The deep treatment of the darkness can go further. There may come a day when you get desperate on a level you never knew before-a level that strikes at the root of your very spiritual security. It has come to

all the saints before you. If you have set your heart to be like Christ, it will come to you.

The question for you is now no longer one of being brave for Jesus, or being faithful to the truth, or being obedient to a call. The question for you now is

more basic, more
elemental, more
foundational: “Exactly
what does it mean to be
a Christian? Am I really
a Christian? If
Christianity is true, do I
actually 'have' it, or
have I been living in
some religious fantasy?
Am I really saved?”

Sixth, ultimately it tests your commitment. The final stage of darkness searches you to your very depths. It shakes everything that can be shaken. It is the absolute bottom line. You are no longer asking questions about Christian obedience;

you are now asking the ultimate question:

"Is there a God? How can I be so sure that there is? Is that God really Jesus Christ? And if so, do I really know Him?"

When your sonship is in doubt, the darkness is darkness indeed. When a clear

sense of God's love is gone from your heart, the night that follows looks as if it will never end. You feel as though your heart is stone-dull, dead, stupid, unfeeling-when once you could jump for joy. You read the Bible and the promises don't promise. You try to pray, but

your prayers seem to bounce back off the ceiling. And your favorite Christian counselor has nothing whatever to say to you that can help you now.

So here you are, as Spurgeon said, a "child of light walking in darkness." Clean as you know how to be,

you have set your heart
on pleasing God, and
you are alert for
spiritual war. But here
you are, still in the
darkness; there has
been no word from God
for a long time now.

Cheer up, child of
God. You have not
been abandoned! We
have not been left

comfortless. God has
given us a word.

What to Do in Darkness

"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." Isaiah 50:10

What can you do to get out? Answer: *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 will fail, all your counselors draw a

blank, 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
there wrestled a Man

with him until the
breaking of day"
(Genesis 32:24). You
cannot escape it, but
you can surely live
through it, and God has
told you what to do
when you go into it.

If chosen men had
never been alone
In deepest silence,

open-doored to God,

No greatness ever had
been dreamed or done.

**First, do your
duty nevertheless.**

What do you do when
you are going through
the darkness? The
funny thing about this is
that in this darkness,
you can't get any

guidance. That's the worst part of it. 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 our text, Isaiah 50, doing? Look carefully: He is

walking.

What is the first thing that happens to us when all the lights go out? Imagine yourself walking out of an auditorium with a crowd of people and all the electricity goes out- every single light. It is pitch- black, outside and inside. What do

you do?

What is the first thing we ever do when darkness drops suddenly on a familiar path? We stop. We freeze. We do not want to move. A moment before we saw the way in the light, and it was simple, straight, and clear. Nothing was

ahead to trip or interrupt us and our path was plain. Now the darkness has fallen and we have stopped.

But notice the description of this child of light in the midst of darkness: He or she is *still walking*.

And that's what you will have to do. 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. A. W. Tozer has a very heavy thing to say about this in his book *That*

Incredible Christian, in what he called "The Ministry of the Night":

If God sets out to make you an unusual Christian, He is not likely to be as gentle as He is usually pictured by the popular Bible teachers. A sculptor does not use a manicure set to reduce a

rude, unshapely piece of marble to a thing of beauty. The saw, the hammer and chisel are cruel tools, but without them the rough stone must forever remain formless and un-beautiful.

To do His
supreme work of grace
within you, He will take
from your heart

everything you love most.
Everything you trust in
will go from you. Piles of
ashes will lie where your
most beautiful treasures
used to be...

While in this
state you will exist by a
kind of blind will to live.
You will find none of the
inward sweetness you had
enjoyed before. The smile

of God will be for the time withdrawn or at least hidden from your eyes.

Then you will learn what faith is. You will find out the hard way but the only way open to you that true faith lies in the will, that joy unspeakable is not itself faith but a slow-ripening fruit of true faith, and you will learn that

present joys will come
and go as they will
without altering your
spiritual status or in any
way affecting your
position as a true child of
your Heavenly Father.
And you will also learn,
probably to your
astonishment, that it is
possible to live in all good
conscience before God

and men and still feel nothing of "peace and joy" you hear talked about so much by immature Christians.

So what did God say to you *before* you went into the darkness? What were you supposed to do when the path was filled with

light? What was your call, your command when the voice of God was clear? Then do it still. Do not stop because it is now dark. Keep on walking. Nothing has changed on the path except your perception of it. Do what God said for you to do before the

darkness came. Do your duty nevertheless, and determine to keep walking in His previously revealed will regardless of the fact that now you cannot see. Keep walking even when the lights go out.

Second, trust in His name. We are to

"let him who has no light trust in the name of the Lord." Notice: It is not to trust in the Lord; it is to trust in the *name* of the Lord.

And what is the Lord's name? Moses asked that question, too. This was God's answer out of the bush that burned with fire: "I

AM THAT I AM."

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. 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,
regardless of your
character or
circumstances, "the
same yesterday, today,
and forever" (Hebrews
13:8), the One who bids
you "be still, and know
that I am God" (Psalm

46:10).

God says, "You are to trust *in My name*." The most basic thing about God is that He is always there and He always will be. Even if you don't feel He is, *He is!* You say, "But I don't know where I am." It doesn't matter. He knows where He is!

Trust in the name of the Lord. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10). "Those who know Your name will put their trust in You" (Psalm 9:10).

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."

"If we believe,
not," said Timothy, "yet
he abideth faithful: he
cannot deny himself"
(Timothy 2:13, KJV).
"God may not give us

an easy journey to the Promised Land," wrote Bonar, "but He will give us a safe one."

Third, remember who God is. Here is something else you can do: In this time of darkness, go over in your mind what God has already done.

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.

Those things may seem very far off to you at this time, but now is when you're going to have to remember. Go

back in your mind. Say, "God, You've done this before. You were like that before. You're not going to change now."

Remember what His character is like. When you can't see the way, open the Book and see again what He is like. F. B. Meyer said, "There is nothing

indeed which God will not do for a man who dares step out upon what seems to be a mist, though as he puts down his foot he finds a rock beneath him."

Others before you have walked in the darkness; they, too, have found that *faith is not something you hold, but*

*Someone who holds
you.*

Recall what God has already done in your life. What have you seen of God in your own experience? Then you said, "I will never doubt Him again. I have seen His hand, I know what He is like, and I am committed to Him

forever."

Now, did you mean it? If you don't trust Him now, you will have cause to suspect whether you ever did. If you don't trust God in the dark, it would seem your faith is in light or in your own eyesight. Unless we trust in God and in God alone, we

don't trust Him at all.

People in Bible times sometimes built memorials to the mighty acts of God in their history. They put up stones of remembrance, built permanent records in rock that would serve as witnesses to their children and to their

children's children as to what God had done for them. Christians in the past often kept journals, diaries of their spiritual experiences with Jesus. From the records of both Scripture and Church history, we know that the God who acted in times past still acts today, no matter

what we presently feel.

Fourth, there's a time to stay, a time to lean. What else do you have to do? Stay-or lean. What does that mean?

Years ago one of my friends and I went out to fish off the coastal waters of a

place called the Great Barrier Island in New Zealand. We went out in a little rowboat and, ridiculously enough, took our wives with us.

It was the first and last time we ever did that. Our wives are great to have along except on a fishing trip, for three reasons: First,

they knew even less about rowing than we did; second, we had two extra passengers in a very small boat; and third, they talked the whole time we were trying to fish.

Faye and Kathy were having a great time fellowshipping while Tony and I were

having a greater time
learning how to row.

We took our boat out to
the middle, threw our
lines over, and waited
for some fish to come
along. The fish were a
lot smarter than we
were; we didn't catch
anything except colds.
For over an hour we sat
there while the girls

talked and nothing happened. Finally we looked up and saw all these dark clouds.

Tony and I looked at each other.

"Shouldn't we go back?"

"Sure."

The wind by now had started blowing offshore out toward the

sea, so we started rowing back to shore. We rowed for fifteen minutes before we realized we were in exactly the same place. Our efforts had just balanced out the wind. Out there was only open ocean, and once we ran out of rowing steam, the next stop

1,200 miles away was Australia. It was getting darker and starting to rain. We had to take a break and then make a full effort to get back to shore.

Do you know what we did?

In the boat there was an anchor. What do you do with an

anchor when a storm is blowing and you have to stay in the same place? You don't throw that anchor on deck where you can see it; you throw it out into the deep where you can't see it. You let it hook onto the unseen reality of the rock at the bottom of the ocean.

Then it grips and there you stay until the storm blows over.

We did that. Hours later, wet and shaken, we were able to row back to safety.

And here is an *anchor for your soul in the day of darkness.* Here is a permit issued specially to you. It

allows you to trust God in darkness. It is a command. It is an order. It is to be obeyed to the hilt. God says, "*Lean.*" You can take this word in your hand and say to the Lord: "This is all I have. Here will I rest my case. You said it, and I will lean on Your love like a child."

You have said you would trust Jesus forever. Now you get your chance.

What do you do with your faith? You can't see it. It's too dark. You have to send it out where you can't see anything. Let it touch the great I Am. Lean on His arms. Say,

"God, I can't feel anything. But I just lean on You." Your song is going to be that old chorus: "I'm leaning on Jesus; contented am I." You're going to sing that every day until the darkness comes off.

You have taken Him to be your God; He has taken you to be His

own. "Let him stay upon his God." This is His covenant, said Spurgeon; lean on it. You are not dealing with a liar. It is bought by blood. It is sealed by an oath. You can say, "Lord, I cannot be overconfident in what You have said. I do not know and I cannot see;

but I can trust You and I
can lean."

Nothing you go
through in this darkness
is outside of His love;
everything is filtered
through His careful,
caring hand. "Who is
this," said the biblical
writer "coming up from
the wilderness, leaning
upon her beloved"

(Song of Solomon 8:5)?
Paul Pastnor put it like
this in his beautiful
poem:

”Child of My love-
lean hard,

And let Me feel the
pressure of your care.

I know your burden,
child. I shaped it;

Poised it in Mine own

hand;

Made no proportion in
its weight

To thine unaided
strength.

"For even as I laid it
on, I said,

'I shall be near, and
while she leans on Me

This burden shall be
Mine, not hers.

So shall I keep My
child

Within the circling
arms of My own love.

Here, lay it down- not
fear

To impose it on a
shoulder which upholds

The government of
worlds.

"Yet closer come:

thou art not near enough.

I would embrace thy
care;

So I might feel My
child reposing on My
breast.

Thou lovest Me? I
knew it. Doubt not, then;
But loving Me- *lean
hard."*

The Purpose of Darkness

Why is God doing this to me? Why this darkness? And 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 these: Will you obey Him whether you feel like it or not? Will you do what He asks you to

do? Will you hold onto the truth He's given you, whether you feel He's there or not?

You say, "Of course I will!"

How about with no sense of His presence?

It's easy for us to say, "O God, what I've just learned is so exciting that I'll never

doubt it, never, never,
never. ... "

God says, "I heard
that. You feel good
now. You say you
believe this; you *think*
you understand it. We'll
see."

You learn the
principle. Now the
problem comes. You
use the principle but

this time there is no flash. You say, "Hey, what *is* this?" When the Prodigal Son returned home to experience forgiveness, after all, he got a new suit, a ring, and a steak dinner. If he had gone out to the harlots and the pigs again, he would have been lucky to get a fast-

food hamburger.

God doesn't want us addicted to the joy of returning. But does the fact that we can't feel it as before change the principle?

We have to learn that. It's easy for someone to tell us, but it's a lot harder when we're going through it.

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 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. This is it. Hear

me, Lord. I dedicate my life to You. Amen. I'll never turn back."

Then darkness comes.

Do you still trust Him when you don't feel Him? Suppose you have been praying for a miraculous confirmation of a *call*. Perhaps you have even asked God

for a "fleece." A brick falls out of the sky, hits you on the head.

There's a text on it: "Go to Africa." The very next week the sky lights up with lightning. The swirling clouds spell out a message in the sky: *Africa*. You come home from work and there is a spear embedded in

your door. Engraved on the shaft are the words *Come over and help us.* And so you say, "God, I think I know where You want me to go."

Now it's only a few months away from getting the tickets and the darkness comes down. And you wonder, "Was it Africa or

Australia?"

What about your *conversion*? Remember the day you got saved? You may have been reared in a loving Christian family who taught you how to love Jesus from the time you were a kid. You may have come from a family that was rotten or

just plain nuts.

Or perhaps you know what *lost* means. You were once really bad yourself. You ran around chopping people up; you rode with Bonnie and Clyde. You shot fifty innocent citizens before you got saved, and those were just your friends! You

had quite a cosmic change take place in your life at your conversion. Then you said, "I got so saved you won't believe it. I'm going to make Billy Graham look like a backslider!"

That's what you said. Then, the darkness. How are you

doing now?

We say: "Salvation is not dependent on feelings." We tell young converts: "Now understand, it doesn't matter how you feel. Take it by faith." You said that to others; now you've got to live it yourself.

How long will the

darkness last? A week?
Maybe not. Maybe
more. Maybe a year.
How long will it last? *As
long as it takes God to
confirm those four
things in your life.* And
no amount of resisting
the devil, searching
your heart for sin,
praising God, or any
other normal thing that

is supposed to bring
release will ever do it,
until God is finished
with you.

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.

Benefits of the Darkness

First, you will learn what you really know about God. We live in an age in which communication technology has given us the most advanced

methods in history of gaining access to knowledge. We have cassette tapes, tracts, books, videos, radio and T.V. programs transmitted by satellite. We have church meetings, seminars, teaching crusades, and home Bible studies. We have scores of different

translations of Scripture and access to all kinds of lexicons and word study books; we can now disobey God in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic.

There is danger in much light; it is not the same as spiritual sight. It is perfectly possible, especially for us in the

information age, to learn spiritual truth without ourselves becoming spiritual. As A. W. Tozer wrote in *That Incredible Christian*:

Spiritual truths differ from natural truths both in their constitution and in the manner of their

apprehension... The truths of the natural sciences, for instance, can be grasped by anyone of normal intelligence whether he is a good man or a scoundrel... A man may study philosophy for a lifetime, teach it, write books about it and be all the while proud, covetous and thoroughly dishonest

in his private dealings. The same thing may be said of theology. A man need not be godly to learn theology. Indeed I wonder whether there is anything taught in any seminary on earth that could not be learned by a brigand or a swindler as well as by a consecrated Christian.

The difference between "light" and "sight," said Tozer, is in the revelation ministry of God the Holy Spirit. In "light" we can learn *about* God, but only when we learn *of* God are we given "sight." Spiritual light is a discoverable fact, and we can get as much of

it as we want by close attention to reading, work, and study. But spiritual sight is a *gift of God*, and it comes only in humility of heart. Again, Tozer (from *Born After Midnight*):

To find the way we need more than light; we need also sight... Between

light and sight there is a wide difference. One man may have light without sight; he is blind. Another may have sight without light; he is temporarily blind... Religious instruction is not enough. It brings light, but it cannot impart sight... There can be no salvation apart from truth, but there

can be and often is truth without salvation. How many multiplied thousands have learned the catechism by heart and still wander in spiritual darkness because there has been no inward illumination? The assumption that light and sight are synonymous has brought spiritual tragedy

to millions.

Because of our particular strength in the West in communications and information access, we are exposed through many means to much religious content. We know all kinds of things *about* God. But what do

we really know of God?
What are the actual
realities He has
imprinted eternally on
our souls? What is
revelation and what is
just information? In the
darkness, all we are left
with is what we really
know. Darkness
teaches us the
difference.

Second, you will be humbled. Are you the one with such a history in Christ that you are used to being the source of all the helpful and practical answers? Are you the one with the light and the way and the truth? You may be a leader, a

challenger, an intercessor; perhaps you are used to telling people what to do and what is wrong. And it has been a habit of yours to give help and counsel to those less fortunate or blessed than you. Possibly you no longer ask for help yourself much

anymore; you have spiritually "arrived." As John of the Cross said:

As the beginners feel themselves to be very fervent and diligent in spiritual things and devout exercises from this prosperity (although it is true that holy things of their own nature cause

humility), there often comes to them through their imperfections a certain degree of secret pride which they come to have with their works and with themselves. And hence there comes to them likewise a certain desire, which is somewhat vain and at times very vain, to speak of spiritual

things in the presence of others and sometimes even to teach such things rather than learn them.

How can you tell the difference between what you have really learned and what you have simply passed on as information to others that you have enjoyed

without embracing?
You need God to show
us what is truly yours in
Him and what is only
mental assent. And so,
the darkness. You are
in real need yourself
now; but now you don't
know what to do or
what to say. The "one
with all the answers"
has no answer for his

or her own life.

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

There is more than one kind of fast in the Bible. There is also the fast in which we set our hearts under God to cut ourselves off from religious unreality, to determine to act in truth and compassion, and from the brokenness of our own lives feed others. "If you extend

your soul to the hungry
and satisfy the afflicted
soul, then your light
shall dawn in the
darkness, and your
darkness shall be as
the noonday" (Isaiah
58:10).

**Third, you will
learn again the
feelings of the lost.**

Do you remember what
it felt like when you
were lost from God?
Perhaps you don't.
Some of us have been
saved so long that we
don't know anymore
what it's like to be lost.
We have nothing now
to say to a broken,
hurting street kid.
People may be dying in

front of us, but we've forgotten what it felt like.

How is God going to teach us what it's like to be lost? What does a sinner go through each day? No conscious sense of the presence of God. God is going to have to teach us compassion, and the

darkness of God will teach us well. When it is finished, we will learn again the feelings of those outside the Light of the world. And next time we talk to a lost man we'll be able to say, "I know what you feel like. I really know."

I went to work for a summer years ago at

Teen Challenge in New York. I had grown up in New Zealand near a beach-a really beautiful country. A murder in New Zealand when I was a child was something nationally shocking that we seemed to hear about once in a blue moon. A generation ago, New

Zealand hotels rarely even had locks on the doors.

Can you imagine coming from New Zealand for the first time to a big city like New York? I mean inner-city, rundown-ghetto, gang-warring New York in the summer. There was a

murder every eighteen
hours in the city then, a
major robbery every
three minutes. Like
many a huge
metropolis with gangs,
drugs, and violence,
New York was
Paranoia City at night.

And there I was
trying to minister in the
heart of the city's worst

crime districts. You went up to somebody to ask directions and they thought you were going to mug them. Nobody looked at you on the street; everyone walked fast in case you were a panhandler, a lunatic, or a desperate drug addict.

A friend of mine

from New Zealand once visited New York. He parked his car outside a police station, put his camera underneath the seat, locked the doors, and went in to ask directions. When he came out just a few minutes later, there was a hole smashed in the back of the car window

and his camera was ripped off. In horror he ran back inside and exclaimed to the officer, "Hey, my camera got stolen! I had it under the seat of my car parked right outside."

"Too bad," the policeman said.

"What do you mean, too bad? Aren't

you going to find it?"

"You've got to be kidding."

Then my friend snapped, "I demand to see the chief of police."

But when he eventually got to see him, the chief of police said the same thing. My friend got so angry he stormed out only to

discover someone had stolen his car.

So there I was in the middle of New York, feeling I just couldn't take it anymore.

I remember walking one hot, dangerous night in all this filth and I said to God: "Lord, this is ridiculous. I can't stay in

this place. I can't even breathe here without eventually dying. I'm used to home with beaches and blue skies and white clouds where you can lie down right on the grass... no snakes to bite you, no human snakes to jump on you. And you don't get

beaten up or mugged
just because you have
change in your pocket.

"Lord," I said, "this
is it. New York is a filthy
place. I can't stand it."
And then this poem I
had heard one time
came burning back into
my mind:

I said, "Let me walk in

the fields."

God said, "No, walk in the town."

I said, "But there are no flowers here."

He said, "No flowers, but a crown."

I said, "But the sky is black.

There is nothing but noise and din."

But He wept as He

sent me back;

"There is more," He
said,

"There is sin."

Do you remember
what it was like to be
cut off from the love of
God? To wake up each
morning without a
sense of God's
forgiveness, of divine

purpose and security
and hope? Perhaps you
met Christ years ago. It
has been a long time
since you felt the
wonder of that first love.
You have said you want
to have His compassion
for unsaved people.
Perhaps you have
prayed that God would
give you a heart for the

lost.

And then came this darkness. You cannot feel or sense the presence of God anymore. You wake up in the morning without any conscious sense of His nearness and His care. You no longer are sure He is speaking to you.

Do you know what it's like to be without Christ? Darkness will teach you. You will learn what you really know about God. God can come at the end of darkness and comfort you in an incredible way, but during that time you will have learned what you really

know about Jesus.
You'll learn the
difference between
feeling and doing,
feeling and obeying.
Nothing matters to
Christ like obedience.
You had forgotten what
it was like to be lost, but
now you know again.
The darkness of God
teaches us to care.

Fourth, you will prove the power of prayer. “If you always have bread,” said Spurgeon, “you’ll never know the power of the prayer ‘Give us this day our daily bread.’”

If a man sneers at prayer and tells you the name of a dozen

cynical philosophers
who say they prayed
and God did not answer
their prayer, *believe it*;
God doesn't have to
answer the prayers of
professional cynics.

Jonah, the
prophet, like all of us,
knew something of
perfunctory prayer. A
man of God, he no

doubt dutifully put in his daily devotional time.

Then one day God told him to "arise and go to Ninevah." He arose and went, all right (so far, so good!)-to Tarshish. (Not so good!) After a short and scary voyage in a vessel targeted for divine interruption, Jonah was pitched

overboard and got to spend three days and nights in the belly of Jaws Five. You can bet he really learned to pray! The last thing he remembered as he dropped beneath the surface of the sea was a rush of water, a huge open mouth, and a certain sinking feeling

that he was really out of the will of God.

Thank God for obedient whales. The fish didn't say to God, "O God, you know I can't stomach preachers!" And Jonah went down whole.

When he finally woke up he was in a place that was dark and hot.

Can you guess what he was thinking? "I knew was a bad preacher, Lord, but I didn't know I was this bad!"

Scripture records the essence of his prayer. Out of the belly of hell I cried, and You heard my voice." And with weeds wrapped around his neck he

really learned to pray.
For three days and
three nights he prayed.
He did nothing but
pray—past “short”
requests and
“important” requests
and “quite urgent”
requests into *absolutely*
desperate requests, the
sort of life-or-death
agonizing that the

impending destruction of an entire city is all about. And in the School of the Whale's Stomach Jonah probably learned more about reality in prayer than he ever had in Bible college.

His eventual obedience resulted in the largest recorded

awakening in the Bible:
an entire city humbling
itself, repenting an
turning to God.

**Fifth, you will come
out into a greater
light.** Darkness often
follows great light. The
darkness of God often
comes immediately
after some of the best

teaching and deepest
revelation you have
ever had. Like the fact
that your greatest time
of temptation
sometimes strikes right
after your most
wonderful time in the
things of God, spiritual
darkness follows hard
on the heels of a time
when you have learned

much.

As children my sister and I sometimes rode into town with our relatives by train.

Earlier New Zealand railcars had no lights on in the daytime. When one entered a short tunnel, the carriage where children sat became for a brief time

totally dark.

You know what happens in such darkness. The pupils of your eyes, which in the sunshine had shrunk almost to pinpoints, now expand wider and wider in the darkness. And when the train suddenly bursts out of 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.

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. The tunnel is not eternal.

You will not remain in darkness forever. And you will come out of the darkness into a greater sense of light than you

had when you went in.
"Unto the upright there
arises light in the
darkness" (Psalm
112:4).

The Danger of False Fire

I want to show you
what God can teach
you in darkness, and

then give you a beautiful promise. But first a *warning*.

"The way in which they are to conduct themselves in this night of sense," said St. John of the Cross, "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 in that state 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. 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."

"Sparks," says the Lord. 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; you can trust Him to take you out. If you light your own light, your little match, and go and do your own thing, you will see in that manmade light a destruction of much that is beautiful that

God had for you.

You cannot afford to do your own thing if you do not feel the presence of God. Walk in what God has already given you to do and remain faithful until new light comes. Light your own path and you can expect nothing but grief. You say, "No

light. O. K. I'll light my own fire." Then this will be your swan song: "I did it my way."

The Bible has a word for you: "Walk in the light... you have kindled-This you shall have from My hand: *You shall lie down in torment*" (Isaiah 50:11).

Wrote St. John:

Spiritual persons
suffer great trials; not so
much of the aridities
which they suffer, as of
the fear which they have
of being lost on the road,
thinking that all spiritual
blessings are over for
them and that God has
abandoned them since
they find no help or

pleasure in good things...

These souls turn back at such a time if there is none who understands them; they abandon the road or lose courage; or at least they are hindered from going further by the great trouble which they take in advancing along the road of meditation and

reasoning. Thus they fatigue and overwork their nature, imagining they are falling through negligence or sin. But this trouble that they are taking is quite useless; for God is now leading them by another road...

It is well for those who find themselves in this condition to take

comfort, to persevere in
patience and to be in no
wise afflicted. Let them
trust in God, who
abandons not those who
seek Him with a simple
and right heart, and will
not fail to give them what
is needed for the road,
until He brings them into
the pure and clear light of
love

God is the One
who dwells in thick
darkness
(Deuteronomy 5:22).
The darkness and the
light are alike to Him
(Psalm 139: 12). There
are treasures that can
be found only in such
darkness and He will
show you there things

about Himself and
about yourself that you
will never learn any
other way.

And the things you
will find 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." You will go through it, beloved; make the most of it. He will speak to you in that very silence.

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.
And we must have it.
Christians are going
through this darkness
now.

On my
grandfather's wall for
many years hung a
small plaque. I was not
a Christian when I first
read it, nor then was
my grandfather. Many

years later, on that first night Granpoppy came to hear his oldest grandchild preach, he responded to the invitation to surrender everything to Jesus. Only a short time later he died. His house was eventually sold. I don't know what happened to that little plaque, but I

still remember what it
said:

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."

Prayer

*Heavenly Father,
we praise You for
the light of God. We
thank You for Jesus
Christ, the Light of
the world. We thank
You, O God, that on
a rainy day the sun
has not vanished,
just gone behind a*

*cloud. We thank
You also, O God, for
the night, because
plants need the
darkness as well as
the light to survive.*

*Father, we forget
that we're the
planting of God. We
want sunshine all
the time and we
forget that nothing*

*but sunshine makes
a desert." Teach us,
dear God, the
meaning of the
darkness. We don't
care, Lord God. You
can run us through
as much darkness
as we can possibly
bear so long as it's
not from the devil
and it's not from sin.*

*Prepare your saints,
O God, for the dark
times that will come
by giving them a
taste of what it's like
not to feel Your
presence and yet
obey. And we thank
You that we can
learn a lesson of
faith that will last for
eternity.*

*Dear God, we
pray for those right
now who are going
through times of
darkness and have
not understood.
They have lit their
own lights and gone
out their own way
and seen much
destruction and
sorrow. We hear the*

*awful warning of
Your Word: "From
My hand: You shall
lie down in torment."
We pray, O God,
that You will minister
to those. Give them
another chance, O
Lord, and this time
encourage them to
go through in faith.*

We pray, O Lord,

*for those going
through times of
darkness- who have
felt no blessing,
experienced no
excitement. Nothing
seems to move
them, yet they've
checked their hearts
again and again to
see if they have
walked away from*

*You and found
nothing. Dear Lord,
encourage their
hearts. **Give them a
great and mighty
challenge to go
through this time
and to learn their
lesson from You.***

*In the name of
Jesus we pray.
Amen.*

