

A JOURNEY OF ENCOUNTER



Chapter 6:

All kinds of darkness - one glorious light

Based on John 5:1-9; Luke 8:43-48; Luke 13:10-17; John 8:12; Matthew 5:14

This month's content is written by Lyndall Bywater, speaker and writer on prayer and member of the UKI Territory Prayer Team.

INSPIRE

Things changed when Jesus was around. We know about the dramatic miracles, but there was more to it than that. Even if you were not healed - and many weren't - he changed the atmosphere. Heaviness lifted, fear backed off, darkness gave way to light.

In Chapter Six of our Into the Wild adventure, we meet three people whose lives all changed the day Jesus walked by. Between them they had racked up 68 years of pain and despair, but all that darkness fled before the Light of the World. Now that's what you might call 'wild'!

Even wilder is this - Jesus called us 'the light of the world'. It is one of the few names we share with Jesus himself. That means we too can put darkness to flight, and over the coming weeks, as we journey through Halloween, Remembrance Sunday and the ongoing effects of the pandemic, we will meet many people who need the light of hope to break the power of their darkness.

Read alone or with a friend, reflect on the discussion questions over the phone with someone or in an online small group / Bible study, try the prayer activities... and see what happens when you let light break through.

If you'd like to receive regular updates throughout the 'Into the Wild' journey over the coming year, including invitations to our regular Zoom prayer gatherings, [sign up here](#).



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EXPLORE

Introduction

Darkness can be bad for us. If we spend too much time out of reach of daylight, we lose track of time, we are more likely to feel depressed and we are more prone to lose touch with reality. Scientific research shows that prolonged exposure to darkness can very quickly disrupt our internal rhythms, our sense of self and our relationship with the world around us. We are diurnal, we are creatures of the day, and though we need darkness in order to sleep, we need light in order to live.

Not all darkness is physical. Most of us can access as much daylight as we need - but what if we are stuck in emotional, psychological or spiritual darkness? The effects are much the same - we lose track, we lose heart and we lose hope. It is no wonder that Jesus called himself 'the Light of the World'. To meet Jesus was to have the darkness in your life shot through with the most exquisite light. It didn't necessarily mean all your problems got solved, but it did mean darkness lost its power over you.

Three encounters

The Gospels are full of stories of people who encountered Jesus and found that darkness lost its grip on them. Let me introduce you to just three of them today.

We begin on a road in the middle of a crowd. There is a woman here who has had excessive menstrual bleeding for 12 years. Hers is a hellish darkness: stuck with an incurable, probably very painful physical illness; impoverished by charlatan doctors who think nothing of swindling her out of all her savings; locked away behind the shame of such an embarrassing condition; excluded from worship because of her ritual uncleanness.

Rallying all her courage, she touches Jesus' cloak and is instantly healed - but that is not enough for Jesus. He stops. He brings her forward and asks her to tell her story. Perhaps he knows that the physical healing has only banished part of her darkness. There are still the suffocating shadows of shame and isolation to deal with. They stand together, Jesus not shying away from her or rebuking her for touching him but welcoming her, commending her on her faith and calling her 'daughter' (a term he seldom used for anyone). In those moments, she goes from shameful outsider to member of the family. That's how darkness gets put to flight!

Now let's make our way to the Temple, very early in the morning, to meet a woman who is literally bent double. At first glance, it looks like a severe spinal deformity, but Jesus seems to think otherwise. He heals her, then tells the onlookers that she has been bound by Satan for 18 years. 18 years held captive by the enemy of her soul - that is a dark, dark place to be.



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We know very little of her story or their conversation with one another, but we know Jesus has set her free, and so does the crowd, because Luke tells us that there is a palpable sense of delight in the place. Light has broken in. Oppression has lifted off her and she is standing tall. That's how darkness gets dispelled!

Just one more stop on our wanderings, this time by the pool at Bethesda, where we meet a man who has been disabled for 38 years. As if the disability wasn't bad enough, he has spent years and years waiting for someone to plunge him into the pool at just the right moment. He has been waiting for life to give him a break, for something to go his way - but it never does. His story is one of hopeless despair, the conviction that nothing will ever change. That is a profound kind of darkness.

When it comes, the healing is simple and matter-of-fact. There is no drama, no angelic visitations or crowds gasping in awe, just a rabbi who can get people unstuck from even the most debilitating kind of darkness. The man used to be a body on a mat, at the mercy of the world - now he is a man on his feet, with the power to shape his own destiny and a mat to give to someone else. That's how darkness gets defeated!

Deepen

These were three remarkable encounters, but the physical healings were just part of the story. There was something bigger going on. Light was cracking open dark, locked-down corners where shame, isolation, fear, oppression, despair and hopelessness had taken hold. You almost get the feeling that the power of that darkness would have been broken even if the physical circumstances had not changed. We long for God to change our circumstances and heal our diseases, but do we regularly encounter the One who is light in every kind of darkness? Do we reach out to touch him? Do we let him touch us and lift our heads? Do we invite him in as he passes by?

Conclusion

We too are 'the light of the world'. That means we get to banish darkness wherever we find it. Let's pray for healing, and let's expect nothing less than Jesus saw, but let's look for opportunities to banish all kinds of darkness wherever we find it. Let's love so lavishly that no one feels excluded or isolated by shame. Let's have the courage to pray till we see people set free from the enemy's oppressive stranglehold. And let's reach out a hand to help people throw off hopelessness and get to their feet, so they too can become light-bringers.

A truth to hold on to

No darkness is too dark for Jesus.



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Challenge

- Have you got too used to darkness, either yours or someone else's? Next time you find yourself 'just getting on with it', stop for a few minutes and pray that the light of Jesus will break the power of the dark.

WATCH

This month some of our Salvation Army Prayer Strategy Team talk about what darkness looks like for them, and how they've known the light of Jesus break in.

[Watch this video here](#)

DISCUSS

- Three different types of darkness are outlined in the EXPLORE text: the darkness of shame and isolation, the darkness of enemy oppression and the darkness of hopelessness. Which of these three would you say you experience most in life? Or is there another kind of darkness you are familiar with?
- Can you think of a moment when you were in a dark place and light broke through? What happened? What was it that brought that chink of light? Was it a friend, an event, a Bible verse, a prayer time, something in the natural world... or something else?
- Has anyone ever told you that you have brought light into a dark situation for them? What did you do?
- Sometimes we come across someone we would love to help, but their darkness seems impenetrable. Where do you start? What can you do to help them, even when everything seems hopeless?
- In first-century Palestine, disability and chronic illness brought much darkness because they left people isolated and unable to fend for themselves. What would you say brings the most darkness in our society today?
- How can we, the church, be the light of the world in our local communities during this time of pandemic and lockdown?



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PRAY

1. Tenebrae

Tenebrae is an ancient prayer office, traditionally held at dusk and involving the lighting of candles. Find time to pray when it's dark, and turn off the lights. Notice how it feels to be sitting in the dark, both the good and the bad, then light a candle. As the tiny light of the candle breaks the darkness apart, pray for those situations you know of where darkness has become overwhelming and where you long to see light break in.

2. Lighted windows

As we approach Halloween in lockdown, we are likely to see lots of houses and front windows decorated in a style that has become traditional for Halloween. Think about your own front window and how you could make it instead a celebration of light at this dark time of year. Imagine you are planning a prayer station for your street. What could you put on display to make people smile and to inspire them to invite light into their own darkness?

3. Praying for healing

Healing was one of the main strands of Jesus' ministry, and his instruction to his followers was to do the things he had done (John 14:12). That means we should also be praying for people who need healing, speaking blessing over them and expecting miracles. (Whether healing comes by so-called supernatural means or by science and medicine, it is still a miracle!)

Who is God prompting you to pray for today? Have you told them you are praying for them? If not, drop them a line. It might just bring light into a dark day for them.

4. Dealing with darkness

In this broken, fallen world of ours, we humans are used to living with pain and struggle. That means we get used to darkness. We find ways to cope with it, and we learn to trust God in it. But sometimes we get the nudge from the Spirit not to put up with it any more. Sometimes we sense God stirring us to pray to break the power of darkness over ourselves or others.



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Is God calling you to pray for a person or situation to see the power of darkness broken? If so, grab the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, and start declaring some truths about who Jesus is. Then invite the Spirit to come and shatter the darkness so that light can shine in. Finally, think about light, what it is and what it does, then turn those thoughts into blessing prayers, speaking out the blessing of light over the person or situation you are praying for.

WEBSITE AND CONTACT EMAIL

For resources and sign up: www.salvationarmy.org.uk/resources/into-the-wild

Email Prayer Network: saprayernetwork@salvationarmy.org.uk



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