

**Tuesday, September 22, 2020**

**SERIES: GROWING AND GOING**

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**TITLE: Let There Be Light Pt. 1**

This past winter, I turned on a space heater in my basement because it was chilly, and the kids were going to be playing a game down there. I don't know when your house was built, but ours was built in the 1950's. And because of that, it's experienced various upgrades over time. One upgrade that's still needed is a new circuit breaker. Now, maybe you've experienced this in your home. But with an older circuit breaker, you have to decide – do you run the microwave or do you run the toaster? You can't do both at the same time, so you have to choose. I forget that from time to time.

Well, after an hour I heard “Dad? The power's out downstairs! I think we blew a fuse!” I don't know how your home is laid out, but our basement is a parent's obstacle course: Legos all over the ground, swords and Nerf guns resting against walls and chairs, Lego table placed in the most awkward location. Now with the lights on, the basement can be annoying; but in the dark, it's a nightmare.

Naturally when the power went out, I couldn't find a flashlight, so I decided to “man up” and try to navigate my way to the circuit breaker. Just one word describes that decision: “stupid”. A secondary one is “dangerous”. I first attempted to go fast, but only ended up stepping on Legos with brute force, stubbing my shin on the Lego table, tripping over Nerf guns. Painfully I found my way to the storage door, only to remind myself I never put away a variety of boxes and items, which now blocked my path to the circuit breaker. After finally falling down again, and having items smack me in the head, I eventually found my way to the circuit breaker and flipped the switch. Let there be light!

That night I was reminded, life in the darkness is dangerous. And for the believer, life in the darkness is unnecessary. Many people today live their lives the darkness just like I did that night. They're tripping and falling in life. They're hurting themselves and others in the dark. Life in the dark is dangerous! But isn't there a better way to live, than living in the darkness?

There is, and that's what we want to talk about today, in our series called *Growing and Going*. It is all about growing in our faith, becoming all we have been called to be, and all we have been saved to be, for the sake of Jesus Christ. And when we *grow*, we will be inclined to *go*. Go where? Go and make disciples. Every one of us was saved *on* purpose, and *for* a purpose. That purpose is to glorify God, and one of the ways we glorify God, is by making disciples.

Now today, we want to see what the Bible has to say about light in contrast to the darkness: What does darkness and light have to do with our growing in faith? Well, I'm glad you asked, so

let's begin by understanding what the Bible says about darkness. In the Old Testament, darkness can represent literal or metaphorical darkness. Genesis 1:1-3 (NASB) says, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.”

So what is darkness? It's simply the absence of light. Literally speaking, we know how dangerous darkness can be. When I was in high school, my buddies and I would go out to my grandfather's farm. He had this 20-acre tree farm that we would go and play nighttime tag in. What that means is, we would all spread out throughout this farm, and I'm talking 20 acres, but we would do it at night. We had a flashlight, of course, and if you got tagged with a flashlight, you had to go back to the base. But as most teens do, people break the rules, and they make a few alterations to the game. Well, my buddy, he decided that it would be a funny prank to bring a chainsaw to the game! Now for the record, he didn't have a chain on the chainsaw, but we didn't know that at the time. One of my friends was hiding, and as he was moving around, my other friend with a chainsaw said, “Hey I see you. I hear you. I'm coming for you.” And then he pulled the cord and, *Vroom*. Well, my buddy *dropped* the flashlight. And remember, this is pitch black. We are out in the middle of a farm. My buddy goes running as fast as he can, from a guy who has a chainsaw. Suddenly, I heard a thud, and a cry, and scream. My friend was running in the dark, and ran square into a barbed wire fence.

You see, living in the dark is dangerous. So we know that literal darkness produces many hurdles, uncertainty, and dangers. But what does darkness mean metaphorically? Darkness in the Bible can refer to evil and sin, death, imprisonment, confusion, punishment, spiritual darkness, and so on. But there are two key realities of darkness found in the Bible we want to look at. The first is: **Darkness is living apart from God.**

When you continue on in Genesis, you find that God continued in His creation. He created the stars, the oceans, the plants, the animals, and finally, He would make man and woman. But according to Genesis 3, Adam and Eve would sin, and therefore be separated from God. Their perfect relationship was now jeopardized, and their fellowship would be broken with Him.

Today, by our very nature, we are alienated from God. Our desire changed from Him to ourselves; from loving God, to loving the sin of the world.

This is what Ephesians 2 teaches, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Eph. 2:1-3, ESV).

We, by our very nature, are children of wrath, separated from God. We are born in the darkness. We don't live in the light, we don't want the light, and we don't want God. We live for ourselves. Paul would say as much in Romans 3:

Romans 3:10-11 says, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.” Darkness is the perpetual state of spiritual confusion. It confuses our desires. It confuses our minds. It confuses our emotions. That is life in darkness.

But there’s another term that is associated with darkness. And that is wicked. When we talk about living apart from God, we’re really talking about wickedness. In fact, the Evangelical Dictionary says darkness describes everything that is anti-God; therefore, wicked.

Proverbs 2:11-14 says, “discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech, who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice in doing evil”<sup>1</sup>

## **DISCUSSION:**

N: Now, let me turn to my discussion partners, Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. So, I’d like to hear from each of you – how easy or hard is it to identify evil today?

C: Well, in some ways it's easy, but in other ways, evil is disguised as something good. And they say that this is love - they disguise it as love - but because something makes someone happy, or the law says it is acceptable, doesn't always make it good.

A: Yeah, I think I said, we're doing a lot of research on evil - good versus evil - and what motivates people to turn from evil. One theme I see from Satan - he's so tricky - is divisiveness can be evil. And also, calling out evil in different places, such as in church or places like that, is very hard, because you know, you can be accused of being divisive - and which you're not supposed to be, that's for certain. But if there's evil, I mean, it's just - Satan is one clever, clever dude (would you call him a dude?). I don't know if you'd call him a dude or not - he's a clever little devil, a big devil. But even the way things are in our society today - it's so polarized, so divisive, even in the church. It's everywhere.

C: I think there's a pattern there, like what Arnie’s talking about, you know - we overlook it. Okay. And then we start to permit it, and then we make it legal to do it. And then we actually promote it. And then, we have a Pride Parade to celebrate it. I think the scary thing is - here's the kicker - at some point, this world is going to prosecute those of us that still call it wickedness and evil. And that's what we're heading into.

N: Well, I think so many of us in America today, we've become very soft and we don't like discomfort. I'm not even talking persecution. We don't like discomfort. We don't like name calling. I think we have just become very soft in our faith, and probably, just as a whole, as individuals. But I think you're exactly right - The evil is good, and good is evil in the culture today. And the reality is, if we're going to play it by the Book, and we're going to follow God's Word, and we're going to turn daily back to the Bible, to see what God has to say, and act as we should, then persecution is going to come. And it's going to come harder and faster for the

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Pr 2:11–14). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

churches and for the individuals, but we know that following Christ was not meant to be easy. Arnie, you would talk a lot about this battleship mentality. We are in a war, and therefore we need to live like it. And yet we don't want to buy it. And I think so many Christians today, have believed the lie: that real evil doesn't exist - the spiritual realm is, you know, a minor piece of the puzzle. But that's not what you found out at all in your time in the Center for Bible Engagement, and at Back to the Bible. Evil does exist, and we are called to do something about it. Isn't that right?

A: Oh yeah. Yeah. And I have a hunch that a lot of Christians in America today don't really believe much in evil. And I think that is a tremendous, horrendous problem. To me, if you can't acknowledge evil, you've missed why Christ came.

N: Yeah, I think you're exactly right. Well, we need to be understanding of - being able to recognize - willing to call out evil, and help other brothers and sisters in Christ recognize it as well. The reality is - those who are living in the darkness - it's very hard for them to see, and they won't want to see it. They suppress the truth of God. We know that, but as believers, let us strengthen each other up, call each other out lovingly, and help each other discern truth for what it is: evil for evil, and good for good. And let us do something about it.

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Those who live in the darkness are wicked. Those who live apart from God's saving grace are children of darkness. Paul punches this, in 1 Thessalonians 5:4-7 (ESV), "But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup>For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. <sup>6</sup>So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. <sup>7</sup>For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night."

So it's clear that darkness is representative of living apart from God. Darkness is what defines the life of a nonbeliever. They live in the dark, period. They love the dark, because they feel it's safe there. They are free to do as they please. They live for themselves, and they live for their sinful desires. In fact, that's the other part of darkness we want to discuss.

As we said, darkness is living apart from God. But **Darkness is also living for yourself and your sinful desires.**

In fact, John would say, "The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup>For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed" (John 3:19-20).

Though we live in a time where people's sinfulness is being captured and exploited by cameras and smart phones, the vast majority of people's sins are pre-meditated in the dark, and carried out in the dark, because their actions are evil and punishable if caught. Again, darkness is living for your sinful desires - For yourself. What kind of sinful desires? Paul would give us a list in Galatians 5, though it is not exhaustive. Paul says: "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,<sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,<sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you,

as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Such behavior drives us into the darkness, because it is evil and against God.

Paul lists a large amount of sin and sinful behaviors: Sexual immorality is doing anything outside of God's design for sex - Anything that is outside the boundaries of one husband and one wife in a marital relationship. Anything outside of that is sexual immorality.

Paul says sensuality – I think a better translation would be licentiousness - which I know is a word we don't use anymore. Another way it's translated, it means debauchery. One commentator said, this particular vice is “a love of sin so reckless and so audacious, that a man has ceased to care what God or man thinks of his actions.”<sup>2</sup> I think this is the clearest depiction of those in the darkness. This debauchery or sensuality is the idea that there is no limit, and no self-respect - Anything goes. It is a true life of destruction.

Paul says idolatry. We know what that is. It is putting anything before God. Pagan worship was prevalent throughout the culture in Paul's time. But today, it looks different in a lot of the U.S., and maybe wherever you are - in Jamaica or South America - but it is still putting ourselves and our things before the God of the Universe.

He mentions sorcery. Some have said this isn't what it seems to be, but that is wrong. Witchcraft and traditional sorcery were very common in Paul's time. It was prevalent 1000 years before Paul's writing, and it's even around today. Now what Paul uses here is the word we get the word pharmacy from. It was often referred to as the use of drugs, whether for medicinal or evil purposes, like poisoning. Medicine or drugs were used for abortions back then. They were used to disorient the mind, and they were used in sorcery and the occult. I've traveled around the globe, and I can tell you that witchcraft and the occult is alive and well today. In fact, it is even gaining ground in the U.S. So the use of drugs to kill an innocent life, and the use of drugs to manipulate the mind, and the use of drugs, or playing with the occult and sorcery, is clearly living in the darkness. Paul is addressing those all here.

And then, Paul goes on to point out some very common sinful behaviors, including jealousy, anger, being quarrelsome, being drunk -- All of these are examples of living in the darkness, living for ourselves, and living for our sinful desires.

Here is Paul's point in all this: he says in verse 21, [those who do such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God](#).

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N: Okay. Let's have some fun, and let's bring in my discussion partners, Arnie and Cara. And I want to switch things up just a little bit. Do you guys have any questions for me about this passage we've been working through?

A: So Nat, in verse 21, can you clarify for me, does this really mean that anyone who stumbles in sin in one of these areas is going to go directly to Hell?

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<sup>2</sup> George, T. (1994). [Galatians](#) (Vol. 30, p. 393). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

N: I hope that's not the case, because if so, then we're all doomed, right? I think what's trying to be conveyed here - and actually you just see throughout Scripture - is this idea of perseverance in the faith.

People who press on in their faith - those who are truly saved - will inherit the Kingdom of God. There are people who would say, "No, no, no, no salvation and inheritance are two separate things." But the reality is, they're not. Those who inherit the Kingdom are those who are the children of God. Who are those? Those who are saved. So the point here, and the point throughout the Bible, is not that you can lose your salvation, but rather those who are truly saved will be sold out for Christ. Yes, they'll stumble. Yes, they can fall into sin patterns, but the difference is, they don't want to. There's remorse, there's repentance, and a desire to submit our lives to Jesus Christ as Lord, so that He will transform us. But no, if we struggle with sin, it's not that we lose our salvation; but rather, when we are truly saved, it transforms how we view sin, and how we approach sin, and how we respond to Christ in our life.

Well, and speaking of living in sin, as we talked about today, we're really talking about living in darkness. We're living for ourselves, for our sinful desires. Arnie, one of the phrases you've coined here at Back to the Bible is: *resist the darkness, engage with the light*. I think this is really appropriate for today. Talk a little bit about this phrase.

A: Well, you know, when we talk about witnessing to other people, and getting on a person's level that you and Cara are so excellent at - one thing that we have discovered as researchers is - that everybody has their own darkness. And that's, you know - so it's not judgmental. It's basically, resist your darkness, and it's not relativism. It's just - everybody is aware of their own darkness. So resist it, and engage the light - Jesus is the light. Now, but Satan can pose as the angel of light as well. So yes, it's tricky. But what really, what we're trying to say is, people, take a look at yourself, and that darkness that you have inside. There's actually a solution, and it's not despair. It's one of hope, and freedom, and light, and it's Jesus Christ. So it just all kind of flows together.

N: Well, and one of the great tools that we've developed here at Back to the Bible, is the spiritual assessment. And what I found really frustrating - to be honest - is it's really accurate. You know, you take this assessment, and it helps you identify areas of struggle, and ways to grow. And so again, on one level you're like, "Oh man, it really got me", but it's great, because then we can grow in our faith. We can begin to overcome those struggles. And the research you've done is the Power of Four, and how it relates to us growing. Can you talk about that for a moment?

A: Well, and what we've found is, the more you're engaged in Scripture, the more your life is transformed. And so, four more times a week, where you read, reflect and respond in God's Word, your life will look radically different than anyone else's.

N: Right. And that's why these tools that we've developed here are so powerful. And it helps us honestly, to recognize darkness for darkness, light for light, evil for evil, and good for good. And so Cara, I want to ask you - the reality is, we all know at the end of the day, that evil exists, and good exists - there's wickedness. But the Bible teaches that the world suppresses that truth of

God, right? So from your experience with non-believers, what's their read on wickedness and evil? Do you think that they really recognize it and grasp it, or do they just continue to suppress that truth?

C: I think they don't recognize it. One of my favorite movies is *The Usual Suspects*. What's the line in it? "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was to convince us he doesn't exist". You know, you have TV shows on Netflix and things, called *Lucifer*, and they make him look like he's this being with reason - that he's capable of love. You know, Satan's a counterfeiter. So he likes to disguise his wickedness as something other than what it is, you know? As Christ followers we're called to love. So when we're accused of being unloving when we call something wicked, it goes against what we're trying to do. Right? A lot of things are disguised as something good - where abortion is disguised as healthcare, or marriage in our culture is defined in ways other than what God has defined it. So these are wicked things, and they try to put a loving spin on it. And then they pretend that we don't - or they try to accuse us of not loving or caring.

N: And we know true love does involve parameters, barriers and/or judgment, right? [Correct.] So when we call something out for evil, we're actually being more loving than those who are saying, "anything goes", because within those parameters that God has laid out for us - it's actually beneficial, and it helps us discern good and evil.

C: Well, what's the first thing you think about when you look back on your past - when you realize how it's destroyed you? Later on you go back, and you go, "Man, I should have listened".

N: Yeah. I had a conversation with a friend a while back, and we were - guys - I've noticed when you get together with old buddies - what do you do? Well, you rehash the old days. You don't talk about the future. You don't really talk about the present. You just talk about the past. And we were talking about those days in our early twenties. And as I began to recount those instances, I got really sad, because I recognized it for what it was - sin. It was destructive. It wasn't beneficial to anyone. And my buddy kept laughing, and saying, "Weren't those times great?" And I said, "I can't - My perspective's changed. I understand that was bad and destructive and sinful." And his response was, "Well, you know, for me, it just made me who I am today. And it really wasn't bad or sinful." In that moment, again, I was like - Okay, that is the difference between living in darkness and living in light - you see the truth for what it is, and those in the darkness, they can't see it. They don't have a desire to see it, and they just won't see it. So that reminds me, what do we need to remember about people who are living in the darkness?

C: You can't expect nonbelievers to act like believers. So don't get frustrated - just love them - be gentle - always speak truth - always - every time, because you don't want to be unloving by not speaking the truth.

A: And be patient - be patient - allow the Holy Spirit to work. Give the Holy Spirit room, use prayer and be gentle. Because they're in darkness - they're lost.

C: You're doing it Nat. You're still talking to your buddy. I mean, that's the thing. You don't become a Christ follower and ditch all your friends. [Right]. You know, they're with you, and you want them to be with you in Heaven. So your goal is to just love them. And when your friends say stuff like that, go, "You know what? I just look at it and I'm embarrassed by it now", you know? And then hope one day, they'll have that perspective.

N: Right. Yeah. At the end of the day, we don't do the saving. We are called to pray for the lost, engage with the lost. As you've both said, remember that they don't know any different. They live according to what they know, and what they know is darkness. And for me personally, I think the hardest part in all this is the patience - waiting on God to do the work. And I think as we are praying for the lost, pray that God will get them to the point where they are driven to their knees - a place of brokenness - so that they cry out to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And thanks be to God, that it's not on our time, but it's on His time, which is always perfect.