Visiting Randy

At last we all go to the hospital
  in Cadillacs and Chevrolets, regardless of our purse,
  when our stay is finally done, we all leave in a hearse.
It strips us of all earthly status:
  property is the first to go—Rolex or Timex,
  tailored suits or overalls,
  imported silk or polyester;
Then dignity is peeled away
  by the imposition of pseudo-clothing
  that would not have protected Adam and Eve
  half so well as the fig leaves—
  a suit to make a stripper blush;
Then identity and reputation slowly melt away
  within a closed, hierarchical society
  where no one has a past—no achievements to claim,
  and only white coats and stethoscopes receive respect;
Then the freedom to act and control one’s destiny
  disappears in the antiseptic penal colony
  where every decision is made by someone else
  and those who do not submit are strapped to their beds.
Death is scarcely noticed when it finally comes;
  there’s nothing much left for it to take away.

—Harry Lee Poe
One of the great relative values in human experience is the meaning we attach to colors. A green light means “go” and a red light means “stop.” Or does a red light mean “prostitution”? Colors are universal, but the values we attach to them vary with every culture. In South Carolina, the color orange means Clemson, but in Tennessee it means the University of Tennessee. In a church wedding in the West, the color white means purity, but in Africa where living people are dark, the color white means death for a corpse and its bones are quickly bleached out in the climate. We can assign any meaning we want to colors. When I was a little boy, a flashing red light on top of a speeding car meant a police car or fire truck was coming. Since then, blue lights have replaced the red lights. Does this mean there are no reliable absolute values?

The existence of relative values does not mean there are no absolute values. The symbolic meaning of colors lies on the surface of understanding and does not penetrate to the level of values. They merely symbolize ideas. In contrast with the variable ways people understand colors, however, we find a common attitude toward darkness and light. Darkness and light are not colors. They make it possible to see colors or not see them. Darkness and light are primary experiences that penetrate far deeper than the experience of color, while their experiential meaning has virtually universal application and understanding. As C. S. Lewis observed, “It is the very nature of thought and language to represent what is immaterial in pictureable terms. What is good or happy has always been high like the heavens and bright like
the sun. Evil and misery were deep and dark from the first.”1 From the yin and yang of China, to the dualism of Zoroastrianism, to the pagan worship of Druids and Canaanites alike, darkness is understood as a negative experience and light is understood as a positive experience. Darkness is bad and light is good.

The idea of darkness belongs to the vague, imprecise world of poetry rather than to the exact world of science. Darkness begins with shades and shadows where light is hindered or obstructed. Darkness has a subtle character that evades definition and neat boundaries. It is not necessary to be in the darkest of darks to experience darkness. Darkness comes by degrees that have no specific measure. The old folks in the country used to speak of “first dark” at the end of the day, but they could never explain to my satisfaction when “first dark” came. They knew, but they could not explain it. The degrees of darkness depend upon perspective, and perspective involves relative values. The degree depends upon the extent to which the light has withdrawn. When we apply this metaphor to spiritual experience rather than to the sensory experience we have with our eyes, we find that different people experience different degrees of darkness.

In a truly relativistic world, we would expect a person experiencing a slight degree of darkness to regard it as light compared with the person experiencing an intense degree of darkness, but it does not happen that way. Misery loves company, but it does not discount its misery because someone else is more miserable. More often than not, we discount the misery of the other person while we focus on our own. Such is the power of the perpetual shadow over the human race that our minds work the way they do.

Nonetheless, people do experience darkness as a relative value. Instead of being relative to the experience of other people, however, darkness stands in relation to something else that it is not. Darkness is never light. Darkness is a deprivation of light, the absence of light, the withdrawal of light. Though there may be varying degrees of darkness (both physical and spiritual), darkness is never light and light is never darkness. For every person, some days are darker than others. The relativity of darkness involves the changes from one day to the next. Spiritual experience that may involve the intellect, the

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1. C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 44. While Lewis is quite well known for his popular treatment of Christian themes, his literary criticisms and monographs on poetry especially offer great insight into the human experience.
emotions, the character, and the will fluctuates and varies as people have their ups and downs. Their common point of reference is the light.

The transcultural awareness of darkness and light finds expression in the clichés of pop culture. We are told that “every dark cloud has a silver lining.” We are reminded that “there is light at the end of the tunnel.” The clichés contain the value judgment about whether darkness or light is a preferable experience. The clichés also suggest the need for hope in the face of darkness. Darkness may also pertain to ignorance, deceit, lies, and error. Many educational institutions have as part of their seal a lighted lamp that represents truth, knowledge, and wisdom. Perhaps the most irreligious period of the last two thousand years could not escape the metaphorical power of light and darkness in human experience when it thought of itself. The intellectual movement that rejected religion and superstition during the eighteenth century referred to itself as the “Enlightenment” and contrasted itself with the period between itself and the Classical world that it regarded as ignorant and dubbed the “Dark Ages.” The Enlightenment might also be called the Great Illusionment for its refusal to deal with the spiritual dimension of reality.

Darkness belongs to the vocabulary of everyday experience. Darkness is the terminology of movie makers and comic book writers. It belongs to the popular culture of children and adults. Everyone knows what it means from their own experience. Peter Pan refers to Captain Hook as that “dark and sinister man.” Harry Potter’s enemy is the dark Lord Voldemort. There is no question in the Harry Potter stories that darkness represents danger and evil. There is also no question in these stories that darkness begins in small ways and spreads its influence broadly. Darkness also has its own seductive power as it nurtures injuries, insults, and slights into malicious revenge. It twists the one who indulges it until the person is no longer recognizable. The dark lord himself becomes a grotesque figure, more serpent than human as he embraces darkness for his identity. Little wonder that Harry Potter and his friends are interested in defense against the dark arts.

A half century ago, J. R. R. Tolkien wrote of the dark Lord Sauron who sought to dominate Middle Earth and subjugate it to the exercise of his power. There is no ambiguity about darkness in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. People who experience darkness on the receiving end have no question about the undesirability of it. The curiosity of darkness is that people have the capability to ponder it for others and to contemplate how they
might inflict it upon others while not desiring it for themselves. Thus, every human heart knows darkness as a potential ally. Within the human heart we nurture a quiet resting place for darkness to reside unmolested and unchecked until we need to call upon it. How could a nation like Germany, of all places, with its high level of education and culture, have become the great agent of darkness in the twentieth century except that darkness already lurked, waiting for opportunity of expression?

Hollywood’s film noir of the 1940s depended upon the tacitly understood convention of darkness for its detective and murder stories to work. Scenes at night in dimly lit dingy warehouses and back allies created the expectation of dark and sinister events. Darkness created an expectation of evil and mistrust. Gothic novels since the nineteenth century depend upon their dark setting to create a mood of anxiety, fear, and foreboding. Something bad is bound to happen. The unhappiness of Jane Eyre is mirrored in the gloom and shadows of an isolated English country house. The murders on the moors in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles* are shrouded in dense fog on a moonless night. Even Snoopy set the great American novel on a “dark and stormy night.”

Even while championing a relativist approach to values, the original *Star Wars* trilogy cannot relativize the dark side of the force. Even though the darkness and the light are described as two sides of one reality, darkness is at war with light. An inescapable value system exists with the inescapable reality of darkness and light. Some choose darkness rather than light, but they do not choose it because they believe it is light. It is not a matter of some people’s light being other people’s darkness. They choose the darkness because it *is* the darkness. They embrace the darkness to use it against others.

Where ambiguity exists in relation to darkness and light, the ambiguity does not lie in knowing which is which, but in the frailty of human character that struggles over how much darkness to imbibe. Some aspects of darkness we recognize as negative on the front end as we experience the malicious actions of people who yield to darkness or as we experience the debilitating tragedies of life. On the other hand, we have great difficulty recognizing what harm eventually may come from indulging darkness that gives us pleasure. It sucks us in until we lose all perspective; then it is too late. Drug addiction is an easy form of this tendency to see in others, because most nice people are not hopeless drug addicts. Darkness, however, can come
through almost anything that brings us pleasure when we cannot control
our appetites. The perversion of a good thing results in darkness.

From the earliest pages of recorded human experience, darkness has rep-
resented something evil and dangerous, something that poses a threat to
people, and something that clouds our thinking. Darkness rises above a
mere cultural symbol that requires the assignment of value and interpreta-
tion when explained from one culture to another. In the old stories, mon-
sters reside in the darkness. In the modern stories, the monsters still dwell
in the darkness. The Phantom of the Opera withdrew into the hidden world
of darkness beneath the Paris Opera House. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the
monster Shelob hid in the caves of Mordor and the savage Orcs dwelt in the
vast mines of Moria. Darkness belongs to the category of universal myth. It
is deeply ingrained in human consciousness. It requires no explanation or
translation from one culture to another or from one time to another. Cul-
tures may have different attitudes toward it, but they share a common ex-
perience of it. Darkness may be worshiped, but the worshipers know what
it is that they have embraced. Those who choose a path of darkness realize
the choice they have made.

**The Experience of Darkness**

In our most primitive moments and our earliest childhood, we fear the
darkness. It hides something evil. We sense it when our eyes can no longer
help us to know where we are. In the darkness we cannot find our way. In
the darkness we stumble.

**Danger**

When we first moved into our new house, we decided that one of the
first things we would have to do is paint the bedroom. Our bedroom had
been painted mauve. You may like the color mauve. The last empress of
Russia had a mauve bedroom, but she also liked Rasputin. It has its attrac-
tion. You may even like it in a bedroom. But I found it a bit morose, just a
tad depressing, especially since our bedroom does not get much light any-
way. In the midst of the day it was a dark, brooding sort of a room. Five
years later we had not yet painted the bedroom. Finally, I plunged in and
started on the work, which first of all involved removing a border that had
been pasted at the top near the ceiling—one of those foot-wide strips of wallpaper. We moved all the furniture to the middle of the room, which must be done to paint the walls and not get paint all over the furniture. After the initial flurry of activity, however, it took six weeks before we finally finished all the trim. In those ensuing six weeks, I discovered something again about the darkness. Every night, when I turned off the light to our very dark bedroom and made my way from one side of the room to the other, past all the furniture that was in the middle of the floor, I never failed to bump my knee or stub my toe against something that I knew was there, but that I could not see. If you walk around in the dark, you get hurt.

Danger takes many forms other than physical harm. For many people the threat of danger is experienced as anxiety about the future. Here the possibilities for anxiety are as endless as the human imagination. The cares and worries of the world overshadow people and have an amazing power that can lead to physical illness. Headaches and high blood pressure, ulcers and sleeplessness accompany the subtle form of fear that we experience as anxiety. Part of the strangeness of anxiety consists in its object. If we are afraid of a person pointing a gun at us, our fears inform us about a real situation. When we fear that someday a person might point a gun at us, our fears relate to our own imagination. So much of the experience of darkness resides in the human imagination as we worry about what might happen.

Ignorance and Deception

The threat of darkness is more than normal danger, however, because it also involves "unknowing." For most dangers we know what to fear. With darkness, however, we cannot see ahead. Sometimes referred to as a "cloud," people experience the darkness of uncertainty and indecision. In the swell of darkness, people who normally have no difficulty in making decisions find that they are overwhelmed by indecision. Under the pressure of cares and anxieties, the darkness that overtakes the mind makes it difficult to focus or concentrate on what we must do. We are like a hunted animal that feels it must run but does not know which way to go. Presented with alternative courses in life, we may grow paralyzed when faced with making a choice. In this respect, darkness has an intellectual dimension to it as emotion and reason collide. This disorienting aspect of darkness may result in the feeling that we are lost (something we will pursue in a later chapter).
Darkness involves an intellectual dimension that blinds or hides the truth. It takes many forms, but it may involve the active participation of the victim of darkness. Prejudice and bigotry involve intellectual darkness that defies rationality. A darkened mind has developed its own habits of thought that distort its own perception of the world and the other people in it. A darkened mind has chosen to respond to the experience of threat, danger, and other bad things in the world with an equally bad response. A darkened mind harbors grudges, whether based on objective experience or imagination, and seeks ways to get even. The vengeance may take the form of actual deeds or, more in keeping with the darkened mind of a “nice” person, may live only as a fantasy. Such a mind can rationalize any behavior based largely on how it has “created” its world. A darkened mind slowly destroys itself. In its extreme forms, this experience of darkness develops into serious mental illness. Jesus warned that murder, adultery, and all manner of other expressions of evil first hatch themselves in the human heart, where creative imagination twists and bends our feelings and relationships into some ghastly form that could not stand up in the presence of God (Matt. 5:22, 27–28). When we grow comfortable pondering sin in our hearts, however, we have grown comfortable with darkness.

Coming to the light does not mean that people have acquired an esoteric or secret knowledge so much as it means that basic reason is no longer clouded by the dark frailties of human nature. The long-cherished grudges and resentments that we nurture no longer have the power to distort our capacity to think and understand. Our selfish and self-serving motives are exposed as what they are and no longer serve as the determiner of our conclusions and decisions.

Despair

Darkness also involves a corruption of what was once good. It can mean a person who has gone wrong. It involves the banishment of truth, wisdom, and knowledge. It can also mean the absence of joy, happiness, and delight. In the Harry Potter tales, the most fearsome creatures of all are the Dementors. These dark creatures suck the happiness out of a person and shroud their victims in darkness. Darkness describes the state of depression. The more acute the depression, the more we may feel that life has stopped. Instead of life we are left with a dull, numbing ache that shuts out
all light and meaning. It even shuts out the memory of light and meaning. Furthermore, this kind of darkness feels as though it is sucking us down further. It may feel bad now, but this is only the prelude to something far worse. When this captivity to darkness becomes too great to bear, we contemplate suicide. The effect of darkness on the mind can convince people that they can stop the descent by killing themselves. The darkness of their depression has led to complete despair, the land of darkness. When this sort of darkness sets in, people ironically retreat into the darkness and solitude rather than searching for a renewal of the light. Serious depression often involves withdrawal to bed and sleep, where we seek solace in dreams rather than in reality. In this frame of mind we retreat further and further into the darkness of our own clouded imaginations.

Light and Darkness

Many times in the Bible, when the people of God find themselves encountering a different culture and people who do not know God, the first question they deal with is “What kind of God exists?” We find Jonah responding to the sailors from the bottom of the boat: “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land” (Jon. 1:9). We find Paul doing the same thing in the introduction to his sermon in Athens: “For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands” (Acts 17:23–24). We find it in the opening words of the Old Testament: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). We also find it at the beginning of the Gospel of John. John wrote his Gospel for Gentiles, people who did not know the prophets, who did not know the Law, and who did not know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. John begins by explaining what kind of God exists:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the
light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. (John 1:1–9)

This opening passage of John's Gospel explains that the kind of God that exists is the Creator who has made everything. Everything is separate from God. John also talks about light. This passage is almost a commentary on the first chapter of Genesis. Light is much more than simply the thing that allows us to see the physical world. Here John describes light in terms of life itself: "In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (John 1:4). Light and darkness are intriguing things, both physically and spiritually. Here we are told that the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. When I was pondering these words, I looked at a number of different translations to see what exactly these words mean. The New International Version of the Bible reads, "The darkness has not understood it." The New Revised Standard Version reads, "The darkness did not overcome it." The Good News, the Phillips translation, and the Contemporary English Version all say that "The darkness has never put it out." The King James Version says that "The darkness comprehended it not." The Williams translation reads, "The darkness has never overpowered it." The New American Standard version says that "The darkness did not comprehend it."

It seems that there are two schools of thought about the light and the darkness. One is that the darkness does not understand the light, and the other is that the darkness cannot overcome the light. The Greek word (phos) is a broad word, and one of the problems in English is that we want to decide that it is either one or the other, when in fact the Greek word is both.² It is a matter of understanding, intellect, knowledge, thought, and comprehension, but it is also a matter of conflict, turmoil, and struggle. At different times of life we experience darkness in different ways. Sometimes we do not understand things, but sometimes we are in the midst of a struggle that is pulling us down, sucking us in, and crushing us. We experience

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² While "light" has a double meaning in Greek, the verb that governs the action may also be variously understood, and all of the translations are valid renderings of katalambano.
darkness both ways. John is telling us in his gospel that this light from God is the life for people. This light is not overpowered by darkness, nor can it be understood by darkness.

If we go back to the opening words of the Bible in Genesis 1:3–4, we find a description of light being called into being. Was this physical light or spiritual light that God called into existence? Whatever it is, God makes a distinction—a separation. He makes a distinction between physical light and darkness. He makes a distinction between spiritual light and darkness. There is a separation between them in physics. Darkness does not exist. That may seem strange. You can turn off the lights in your room and there would be darkness, but not really. Actually a negative state occurs in which there would not be light. Light is a thing that can be measured. It has a speed of 186,000 miles per second, and it can be investigated in a number of different ways. It has physical properties. It does not have mass—you cannot hold onto it—but nonetheless it can be studied by physicists. It is really there. It is a real thing. Darkness, on the other hand, is nothing. It does not exist. There is nothing to count, nothing to measure, nothing to evaluate. Spiritually, you have this same curious situation. The darkness is the absence of the light.

God made a qualitative judgment about the light. The light is good (Gen. 1:4). Spiritually, darkness is a matter of closing our eyes to the presence of God. God is here; he is everywhere. Yet from time to time, people experience spiritual darkness, not because God is not present but because in one way or another we cut ourselves off from God’s presence.

The Lure of Darkness

In the summertime, have you ever turned on a light outside in the garage, or on the front porch, and the moths were attracted to the light? They swarm about it. It is a strange thing about moths being attracted to light. The Bible tells us that people are attracted to darkness. Perhaps we should say, “People are attracted to themselves.” People are fascinated with themselves, and the lure toward ourselves as our source of direction condemns us to darkness. We are told later in John’s gospel that “light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil” (3:19). We seek anonymity when we pursue our dark indulgences. The Internet provides the sort of anonymity that indulges our darker impulses. We can feast upon data that clouds the senses and the emotions with every
possible distortion of humanity. We can safely pursue evil without fear of exposure. Our thoughts and desires along with our deeds and obsessions remain concealed from the light of day. In Britain, the local pub is brightly lit and filled with conversation and friendship. In America, however, the bars are dark and loud. They are places of hiding. They are not for conversation. They are not for building community. They are rehearsal grounds for hiding from the light.

This preference for the darkness was observed by Paul: “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom. 1:21). Paul explained that atheism has never been the problem with the human race. The awareness of God, a basic concept of God, the perception of God, is universal. It is what we do with God in our minds that creates the problem. We distort the God who is there as our minds are foolishly darkened. We darken our minds and make God over into something comfortable for us. People want a God that will justify their attitudes and their behaviors. This is basically the history of comparative religion. It is not just other religions that can do it. We all have the capacity for darkening our minds.

In one of his letters John writes, “But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him” (1 John 2:11). Thus, we can blind ourselves to God by the way we nurture feelings within ourselves, especially feelings toward other people that conflict with God’s attitudes. We have a preference for our own attitudes and biases and opinions and self-indulgences rather than a preference for those characteristics of God. We blind ourselves. Rather than loving the light, we hate the light. We hate exposure.

Doing evil is basically doing what is not consistent with the character of God, and we do not like to have it exposed. So people avoid the light. They avoid exposure. One who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that her or his deeds will be exposed. Here is a curious by-product of darkness: fear. We live with fear of exposure, fear that our dirty little secret will become known. Fear of exposure is one of the main dynamics of judgment day as it is described in the Bible and as it has come to be understood in the life of the church. I was trying desperately to find that familiar passage in the Bible that speaks about the secrets of the heart being
disclosed. I looked through one concordance and could not find it. I looked through another concordance and could not find it. Then I realized that it is not in the Bible at all. It is in the Book of Common Prayer of the Anglican Church as a part of the wedding service: "I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed." The horror of judgment is this idea of exposure—complete exposure—before the light and the radiance of the glory of God.

In one of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, a man is willing to go to the gallows rather than risk exposure of his little secret that he has been earning a living for years dressing up as a derelict and begging for money. This was a dirty little secret for him because he was a middle-class gentleman living in the country, going into London from time to time to do the begging and making quite a nice fortune at it. But there was shame attached to his dirty little secret in a class-conscious society. In judgment, Christ tells us that those who prefer the darkness will receive the darkness as their reward. "Cast into outer darkness," is the way Christ describes it (Matt. 8:12 KJV). If darkness is your preference, darkness will be your reward.

If everyone who does evil hates the light, what is the alternative to doing evil? As I was reading through John 3, my mind was racing ahead and I already guessed what was going to come in the next verse. It would have to be "doing good." Is that not the alternative to doing evil? Doing good? That is the way we think, but it is not what the Bible says. What we are told is not what I expected. I had read this passage countless times over the last thirty or forty years but I had missed the point: "But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God" (John 3:21, emphasis added). The passage does not talk about doing good deeds. It talks about doing things through God. Once again, the focus is off of myself. The alternative to an evil deed is a deed inspired by and nurtured by God, because God alone is good. Doing things through God becomes the way of experiencing the light. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (8:12).

If we experience this spiritual darkness into which we sometimes fall, Jesus has already told us in effect, "You're not following me; you're off the

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path. I am light, and if you are with me, you’re not experiencing darkness. If you’re experiencing darkness, then you’re not where you need to be.” He told a parable about two groups of bridesmaids at a wedding feast (Matt. 25:1–12). One group had oil for their lamps, and another group had no oil for their lamps. The point is that light is not something we generate within ourselves. We must have some resource that will provide the light. It is external to us, and light requires a source. The final evaluation of the “oil-less” bridesmaids was, “I never knew you.” That is, “You have never known the source of light; therefore, you’re in the dark.” David understood this. In one of his psalms he sings, “You, O LORD, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light” (Ps. 18:28).

At some point in elementary school, almost all children grow beans in paper cups. They put them in the windows, water them a little bit, and eventually the little bean sprouts come up. Then the children perform experiments. They examine the effect of light deprivation on the beans. Once the beans have sprouted, some of the beans are put in the shade and some of the beans are put in the darkness. Some of the beans have colored cellophane wrapped around them so that the full light does not affect the beans. The result of light deprivation is either deformity or death. Total deprivation is death. Filtering causes deformity. A similar thing happens spiritually to people in terms of deprivation of the light of Christ. It is not that darkness is a real thing; it is the absence of the light of Christ.

Perhaps you have seen little children play hide-and-seek when they were very, very young. A favorite hiding place for them, of course, is to pull the blanket over their heads and sit in the middle of the floor. If they cannot see anyone, then no one can see them. Grown adults still play this game of hide-and-seek with God. We place our own filters around our lives to inhibit what we find inconvenient about God. We will take certain aspects of God. God is fine, just so long as God does not meddle in our dirty little secret.

Choosing the Light

Experiencing the light of Christ is not the goal or the purpose for which he shines his light into our hearts. It is the beginning of the goal and the purpose. He does it in order that we may become light to others: “let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Peter leaves us with this word: “But you are
a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to
God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of dark-
ness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). People live their lives either ori-
ented toward darkness or oriented toward God. We live our lives as citizens
of kingdoms. Neither kingdom is democratic, yet one provides freedom.
Our only choice is to decide for or against subservience to God. Many people
consider this relationship too much to ask, regarding this relationship as a
restriction to human freedom. Actually, the alternative means slavery to the
darkness. It involves a slavery in which our addictions, idiosyncrasies, and
disorders control us.

In our darkness, we are not slaves to Satan. We are slaves to our own
sinfulness or separation from God. Our own darkness restricts our free-
dom, leaving us confused and dissatisfied yet craving more of what has failed
to satisfy. Martin Luther called Satan the Prince of Darkness, but he is only
a prince and never a sovereign Lord. Always a fake and never the real thing,
he poses neither threat nor rivalry to God. The Bible calls Satan the prince
of demons (Matt. 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15) and the prince of this
world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Always a prince, but never a king, Satan
survives in the shadows and enjoys a certain spiritual camaraderie with all
who prefer darkness to God. Jesus Christ came into this world to call us out
of darkness and into his marvelous light. When you walk around in the
dark you get hurt. The Lord of glory came to relieve us of the hurt and the
bondage of the darkness in which we wander.

Jesus made rather extravagant claims about himself related to light. He
said, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12; 9:5). Claims of this sort leave
little room for ambiguity or various interpretations. He represented him-
self as equal with God. Light makes visible what could not be seen before,
and by entering the physical world of human experience, God made him-
self visible and knowable through Jesus Christ. He did this in order to bring
people out of their darkness by choosing to follow him. Jesus claimed, “When
a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who
sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. I have come
into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in
darkness” (John 12:44–46).

John wrote again in one of his little letters, “This is the message we have
heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness
at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we
lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:5–7). Part of the miracle of walking in the light comes when the children of light encounter darkness. It no longer poses the same danger or elicits the same fear. It continues to contain danger, but not the kind of danger it once contained. It no longer has the same power for those who have experienced illumination from Jesus Christ. The light of Christ allows people to view life from a different perspective. It is even possible to see the beauty in dark places. The night itself becomes the tableau of God’s creation in which the heavens declare the glory of God. The storm reveals his majesty. The light of Christ has come through the darkness of death and the grave to rise again in blazing and glorious triumph. Jesus Christ entered the darkness of human experience and went before us into the darkness that awaits us all. By his death, he embraced the permanent darkness that no one had ever escaped, yet he rose from the dead.

The Light of Life

Darkness drives the joy out of life. Light drives the darkness out of life and restores the joy. Life involves more than the mere circulation of blood and the repetitive inhaling of oxygen and exhaling of carbon dioxide. The expression “get a life” suggests an awareness people have that something more is possible than the maintenance of basic bodily functions. Jesus said that he came into the world so that people could have life and “have it more abundantly” (John 10:10 KJV). When the Holy Spirit of God embraces a person and causes that catalytic change that makes union with God not only possible but a certainty, more is involved than going to heaven at death. Abundant life begins in the flesh or it never happens at all. Because the Holy Spirit enters into the lives of those who believe that God has come to seek the human race, the light of God now resides in every follower of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul reminded the Ephesians that the riches of God do not lie out in the misty future somewhere to be attained after fulfilling a set of tasks, disciplines, or requirements. Instead, Paul wanted the Ephesians to understand that God himself is the gift and that we already have the gift of his life in us when the Holy Spirit comes. The implications for dealing with
darkness necessarily follow. The same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is at work within everyone in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. If Jesus Christ could overcome the darkness of rejection, death, and the grave, no darkness is so dark that the light of his presence cannot prevail over it. This reality forms the basis for hope in the midst of darkness and for understanding in the midst of confusion (Eph. 1:18–21). The Holy Spirit brings the light of Christ into everyday experience.

The Holy Spirit operates on the darkness of danger by putting all fears into perspective. Underlying all anxiety and worry is a basic fear and doubt. Anxiety is the opposite of faith and hope. Faith and hope are not merely optimism and viewing life through rose-colored glasses. Things may very well be very bad. Ignoring the badness does no good. Faith and hope without any valid basis can be as great a prison as despair. Faith and hope must be grounded in some reason. God always gives people a reason for trusting him, even in the darkest times, especially in the darkest times. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the big reason. None of his followers understood who he was until after Jesus rose from the dead. The Romans did not have the same level of cultural accomplishments in the fine arts as the Greeks, but the Romans excelled at killing people. If there was one thing the Romans knew how to do and do well, it was how to kill someone. The Da Vinci Code overlooks this great historical certainty! When the Romans killed Jesus, the followers of Jesus disappeared because it was all over. When he rose from the dead, they no longer feared the threat of death, even though hundreds of Christians would be killed by the Romans during the first three centuries of the Christian faith. The followers of Jesus discovered that life is more powerful than death.

Paul reminded Timothy that God does not give “us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7 KJV). Fear is alien to the nature of God. The presence of the Holy Spirit means that empowerment for living in the face of darkness has taken place. The power of the love of God to transform the emotions from domination by darkness to light begins. The ability to think clearly in the face of dark and confusing alternatives emerges. Darkness cannot exist in the presence of light. Bit by bit, the Holy Spirit opens the doors to the secret places of the heart and radiates them with the nature and character of God. No one gets a full measure of God in every aspect of his or her life. God allows us as much of himself as we can stand at one time, but the tiniest degree is enough.

The Holy Spirit actually does something positive to dispel the light. It
involves the work of changing the human heart. The predisposition to darkness is changed to a desire for God. The darkness is pushed out by how the Holy Spirit affects a life. Paul refers to this effect as the "fruit of the Spirit." In other words, it is the by-product of the presence of Christ. Darkness manifests itself in ways such as "sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like" (Gal. 5:19–21). In contrast to these, the Spirit of God produces "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (5:22–23).

These positive virtues that Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit describe the character of God that God produces in his children through his Holy Spirit. Just as a baby is a person, yet not grown to the fullness of what she or he will be, people only gradually over time begin to manifest the character of God on a regular basis. At the beginning of his own ministry, Paul did not seem to manifest these characteristics consistently. By the end of his life, as he is in prison awaiting execution, however, we find a kinder, gentler Paul as he expressed it to the Philippians:

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phil. 4:10–13)

Paul could make such a statement because he had come to grips with the darkness of anxiety. He had learned that the mind cannot concentrate on God and anxiety at the same time:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (4:6–7)
In place of anxiety, God brings peace. In place of despair, God brings hope. There is also the conscious awareness of the human heart or mind in all of this.

The human mind creates much of its darkness by how it chooses to deal with life. The human mind functions on a plane far short of the glory of God even though it is made in the image of God. For this reason, the Holy Spirit does something about the intellectual dimension of darkness. At this point, God calls for a little cooperation. Because we are rational beings, God invites us to be rational about our lives. Darkness and sin have an irrational quality about them that appears ridiculous when we stand back and examine the dynamics. Shakespeare understood the fine line between tragedy and comedy.

Jesus promised that when the Holy Spirit came, he would give guidance into truth. A guide points the way to go. The light of Christ that provides hope is future-directed. It points beyond the immediate darkness that a person may be experiencing. When the darkness crowds around us, we cannot see what lies ahead, but God already lies ahead with our future. Jesus also said that the Holy Spirit would teach his followers. A teacher helps people understand what would otherwise be inaccessible to them. The Holy Spirit relates to the mind as well as to the emotions and the character. The new birth means that we have the capability of a new way of thinking. This does not mean that a Christian can add one plus one better than a non-Christian. A machine can add one plus one. The mind does far more important things than act like a calculator. The Holy Spirit enables the mind to exercise wisdom and to recognize when it is at odds with the Spirit. Eternal life is a relationship with God that involves interaction and communication. For this reason, we either cooperate in our transformation or we choose to be spiritually deformed. The transformation of the mind involves self-conscious recognition of ourselves and what God has called us to be. The biblical word repentance does not mean to feel sorry or to do things to make up for what we have done wrong. Repentance means to change your mind. It involves a paradigm shift in how we view life and ourselves in life. Thus, Paul could exhort the Romans, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). To the Philippians he would say, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5 KJV).