

Why God Hides Himself

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

A dwelling place for the Lord had been established; King David's beloved son Solomon, obedient to the vision, built the temple. Everything was set in place exactly according to God's specifications. All the vessels, the gold and the silver that had been dedicated for the Lord's service were "put among the treasures of the house of the LORD" (1 Kings 7:51).

At last, came the event all of Israel had waited for. The priests assembled with all of the elders and carried the ark of the covenant into the most holy place in the tabernacle. There, it was set under the wings of the cherubim. But once the staves were withdrawn and the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord. No one could stay, and the priests could not minister because of the cloud, for the *glory* of the Lord filled the place (1 Kings 8:1-11).

"Then spake Solomon, The LORD said that he

would dwell in the thick darkness” (1 Kings 8:12).

When we think of ‘glory’, we usually picture an exceeding brightness. And what is our first response when something very bright appears? Turn on a lamp after several hours in darkness, and the average sighted person will shut his eyes tight. As we become accustomed to the light, we are able to see some of the things that creep around in darkness, scattering to escape the light. But that too causes us to turn away, hoping the evil will just disappear.

This booklet will help us to understand that sometimes God hides so He can stay near in the times when we could not otherwise stand in His presence. As we learn to trust in Him whom we cannot see, God promotes us to greater degrees of glory, vessels fit for a King among the treasures in the Lord’s house.

Chapter One

THAT WE WOULD KNOW HIM

“Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression?” (Psalms 44:24). Many of us have experienced times when we could say that God is hiding. But it’s what we do with those times that makes the difference.

“Why are You hiding Yourself from us, Lord?” the psalmist cried out. “Have You forgotten our affliction? Have You forgotten how our enemies oppress us? Lord, it seems that You really do not care.”

Don’t cast aspersions upon the psalmist. We have all been there! Oh, we may have been very careful with our words because we know that God is omnipresent. Of course, according to Psalm 139:2, even if we don’t say a word we know that He knows our thoughts (which reveal what we would have said if we dared!) afar off.

“LORD,...why hidest thou thy face from

me?" (Psalm 88:14). God deliberately hides Himself in His plan toward believers. It is for us to search the Scriptures to find out why.

First of all, we know that faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not yet seen (Hebrews 11:1). And we know that without faith, it is impossible to please God. Everyone who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Therefore, it is necessary to understand that God has ordained faith for every thought and for every step we take. He has ordained that only faith can please Him.

Forget Not His Benefits

For example, several people I know were going through very lean times—some spiritually, others materially. They were not being blessed the way they wanted to be. Then they prayed, and others prayed for them. They heard the Word of God preached and began to receive blessings. In twelve months, their lives have turned around. But here is an interesting observation. There were actually people among them who didn't recognize what God did for them in that year. Some who saw it have since forgotten

what God did. Yet, they have been totally blessed by God. He met their circumstances with a providential reversal.

Whatever happens, never forget the Lord's benefits toward you (Psalm 68:19, 103:2). Remember, God always honors commitments to the Cross. He honors a man's commitment to Resurrection life, and He always honors a person who practices faithfulness as a good steward of God's mercy.

Be Glad and Give Thanks

As we consider why God hides Himself, thank God that He does!

God always has a provision for His people, "who passing through the valley of Baca [which means weeping] make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools" (Psalms 84:6). But notice the next verse: "They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God."

In the valley of trials, we, the children of God, left there a well. The well was dry, but the rains filled it, and we went from strength to strength in a terrible valley. We were able because God dwells in thick darkness (1 Kings 8:12). Clouds and darkness are round about Him (Psalm 97:2), and He was there in our darkness.

I heard the most beautiful prayer from a blind man who said, "God, I thank you for the *gift* of blindness." He had prayed for healing and attended healing services for several years. But one day he said, "I thank You for this, and I dedicate my handicapped life to glorify Jesus Christ"—a wonderful commitment. He wanted to be healed, but in his case it didn't happen.

Dedicated to God's Purpose

Ralph Montanas along with his wife, Bea, traveled to sing in churches across many states. When visiting our area in Maine, they would stay at our house. I remember when Ralph became blind. He tried everything to be healed. As he traveled across the nation, he told everyone he knew of who prayed for the sick, but his eyesight kept becoming more dim until finally he was blind.

Ralph tells the story of how he beseeched God for a healing. He pleaded with God, and then God said, "Now why don't you dedicate your life as a blind man to Me?" "But," he argued, "I want to always be able to see the faces of my three children!" And God only said, "Will you dedicate your blindness to Me?"

Ralph had a family prayer meeting where he

dedicated his blindness to Jesus Christ. Through his ministry of providing Gospel literature in Braille text, he began to reach hundreds of people. Scores of the blind got saved. He also had a program to teach them the Word and to make disciples of them.

God said, "Because you identified with my suffering, you have a ministry not to hundreds, but to thousands you have led to Jesus Christ." Yet when Ralph Montanas prayed for healing, God hid Himself. At first, he didn't understand, though God was hiding in his darkness.

The Word of God says in Isaiah 50:10, "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the *name* of the LORD, and stay upon his God."

To trust in the 'name' of God means to trust in His character. So that verse is saying that when you walk in darkness and you have no light, trust in the character of God. Let your mind stay upon the character of love, mercy, kindness, longsuffering, and forgiveness—His character that so loves you. Trust in who He is.

Chapter Two

THAT WE WOULD
WALK BY FAITH

One reason why God hides Himself is so that we will learn through experience to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Then we can study the character of God in the Holy Spirit's power, and as a result we learn to trust in His character. That glorifies God, and the Bible says in Isaiah 43:7 that we were created to glorify Him.

A woman had waited for years to have her first baby, but at two months old, the baby died suddenly. Screaming in anger, she came to my home. Angry, hurt, and wounded, she didn't want to serve that kind of a God.

But God knew that deep within she was harboring a spirit that didn't know His character. She had a spirit that couldn't walk by faith and wouldn't go from strength to strength in the valley of suffering. God desired to work that out of

her as He worked *His* life in, but she wouldn't draw near and she refused to come to church.

I called her often, but she never returned my calls. After one year, I finally went to her home and said, "Have you let God deal with your infectious heart so He can heal you?" It seemed harsh, yet the Holy Spirit led me to confront the issue directly, with a heart of love.

That woman responded beautifully and with such brokenness. She wept as she began to share some of the sorrow that had caused her to resist God instead of run after Him. The next Sunday, she came back to church and we anointed her and prayed that she would have another baby. She has had three children since then, and they have all been well. It took her fourteen months before she would draw near to God, but she responded by faith, got right with God, and was healed.

"For thou wilt light my candle: the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness" (Psalms 18:28). God shines a candle on a mind that is in darkness, and by His light, we walk through darkness. The light is the Word of God (Psalm 119:130).

Friends, we are always going to go through something, but we *will* go through it—always.

We will walk *through* darkness.

Testing for Maturity

We read in Job 28:3, “He setteth an end to darkness...”—but what was the darkness for? The verse continues, “...and searcheth out all perfection: the stones of darkness, and the shadow of death.” “Darkness” here refers to the shadows of death—the suffering and the trials—that God allows us to go through to make us aware of how short our life on earth is.

While we think we are living in the shadow of death, the Lord is searching out who is mature. When God sees that we *are* mature and that we will go from faith to faith, trusting His character and love no matter what happens, He gives us a glimpse of the shadow of death.

“He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death” (Job 12:22). Another reason that God hides Himself is so we will discover the deep things of darkness.

What are the deep things of darkness? In the midst of pain, there is a purpose behind the pain. Even in the midst of dying, there is dying grace. Behind whatever God does, there is something that He is going to teach us.

I love the precious verse in Isaiah 45:2-3: "I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And *I will give thee the treasures of darkness*, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel." There are treasures in darkness, and it is there that we learn to trust the Lord.

For Ralph Montanas, the treasures in darkness were the thousands of people who were saved through his ministry. For Amy Carmichael, who continued her ministry to needy young women in India despite an accident that left her bedridden, it was her volumes of devotionals that still minister to Christians in every part of the world today. She understood Numbers 31:23, that if anyone can abide in the fire, let him go through the fire, that he may be purged and helped by the waters of separation. If he cannot go through the fire, put him through the water.

God will put us through whatever we will give Him the right to do in our lives. We are visitors in Satan's world system, and God is saying, "I am taking you through exactly what you *can* go through. I have treasures in darkness and

hidden riches in secret places.”

God Has Surnamed Us

According to Isaiah 45:4, “For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have *surnamed* thee, though thou hast not known me.” Where many people share the same first name, a surname is given to describe more specifically who a person is. Often we think of it as the family name, but it may be a name derived from a personal characteristic or relevant circumstance that identifies the individual. Because of His omniscience, God calls us according to who we are in the Finished Work.

“And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (Genesis 32:28). In other words, God said, “Your name Jacob means ‘double-minded one’. But from now on you will be known as Israel, ‘a prince with God who has power with men.’ You will prevail. Before you know who I am, I have known you and named you.”

Of course, if you study Genesis 28 through 35, you see that “Israel” kept going back to being “Jacob,” the double-minded hypocrite.

But God never took back His name. He said, "I am adding to you a wonderful name. I will know you not after the flesh but by your new surname. I will gird you, though you have not known Me. It is all by grace. I will bring you through everything that's been going on in your life. When I do, *My name* will be glorified."

As we consider the secret riches, the treasures, think of this: We can measure everything by the unsearchable riches of Christ. No matter what happens in our lives, those unsearchable riches of Ephesians 3:8 should be our standard.

Get to Know God's Name

What do you measure your life by when you are going through a valley? The unsearchable riches of Christ. What do you measure your life by when there is a conflict in your marriage? The unsearchable riches of Christ. How do you do that? Walk by faith and get to know the name of Love, the name of Kindness, the name of Longsuffering, the name of Forgiveness, the name of Mercy. That is God's name, and it reveals His glory. But people who do not walk by faith through darkness will not discover Jesus Christ hiding in the plan of God as a faith provision for everything. I know this from personal

experience.

The measure of your anointing with God today is the measure you have gone through darkness. The measure that you are broken before God is the measure that you were broken because of His love. That brokenness never stops living inside a man who has been broken by God.

A lot of people don't understand broken preachers. The apostle Paul suffered for the Gentiles (Acts 9:16), and he wept day and night for three years (Acts 20:29-32). The Holy Spirit called Jeremiah "The Weeping Prophet." Why did they weep? Because those men had been where God was. They discovered God in darkness, and they discovered that He dwells there!

So beautifully the Bible says that we discover "deep things out of darkness" (Job 12:22). What is it that we discover in darkness? We find that what is real in life is simply Christ in us.

Chapter Three

THAT WE WOULD BE SET APART

God gives “momentum tests” in order to sanctify His people, setting us apart to Himself. Though these tests may include sickness and undeserved suffering, they are often tests of blessings and material prosperity.

Some people cannot handle the momentum tests of blessing because they tend to withdraw from commitment. But anyone who is going to reign with Christ must discipline his life through suffering. In 2 Timothy 2:12, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.”

We need to be taught suffering from the viewpoint of the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and the apostles. Otherwise, we will never learn to find the treasures of darkness. We will never find hidden riches in secret places, and we will never get to know the name of God nor how to have our mind stayed upon Jesus Christ.

When we are in darkness, we are not in *utter* darkness. According to Psalm 18:28, “For thou wilt light my *candle*: the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness.” The “candle” represents my human spirit. Though darkness is still my experience, the Holy Spirit causes my candle to shine, bringing light into my darkness.

The next verse says, “For by thee I have run through a *troop*” (Psalms 18:29a). Though we see *people* coming against us, God has clearly defined who our enemy is: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the *rulers of the darkness* of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). We can run right through a troop of demons because God enlightens our darkness. He gives us His Word for the moment we are going through. He gives us a revelation of Jesus Christ. And because we know there is a purpose for the situation we are facing, we can run through the troop.

To See the End of Darkness

“He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder” (Psalm 107:14). “He setteth an end to darkness, and searcheth out all perfection: the stones

of darkness, and the shadow of death" (Job 28:3).

Thank God for the times when—for whatever reason—you were hurting so much that you couldn't see God and you couldn't feel His presence. Nothing made sense, and yet He took your hand in darkness. You met Him in thick darkness. You met the real Christ there, and He held your hand. You met His love without necessarily being blessed by sight. You met His character, you met His compassion toward you, and you went away with treasures that you discovered in darkness and hidden riches in secret places.

But, God sets an end to darkness. So now, the question is, "When?" He does it when we have glorified Him in the angelic conflict. It is when a person becomes a broken vessel who doesn't rely on the flesh, on pride, on circumstances, or on people. When we come to the place where we simply rely on God, He sets an end to our darkness.

When we, as Christians, enter into this amazing blessing, we enter into really knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as all and in all, intimately, moment by moment. We are richly blessed because we realize that we have been in the furnace with the Fourth Man and that not a single

thing can hurt us (Daniel 3:13-30). In the darkness, we began to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. In the midst of our calamity, the Lord was our stay, and we came out into a “large place” (Psalm 18:19).

To Identify with Others

Now that we have been through darkness, our identification with others is much greater than ever before. We can identify with failure. We can better identify with the sick and the weary, and we begin to enter into intercession for people because of that identification. Everything about us is more spiritual.

We are no longer self-centered; we are Christ-centered. Eventually we may be able to say, “Though he slay me yet will I trust him” (Job 13:15).

The man said, “Lord Jesus, I thank Thee for the gift of blindness! I dedicate my handicap to glorify Your name.” He discovered hidden riches. And when that man gets up to speak, you *know* he has been with Jesus Christ. When he just walks into a room, you sense that he has been with God.

The woman I mentioned who lost her first child became a wonderful, broken, precious

woman of God. She found God in her thick darkness. God took her baby home to heaven so that she could find treasures in darkness—so that she could see herself as God sees her.

God Sees, He Knows, He Cares

God tests us. He tests our hearts and our emotions so we can see that He knows what our need is. He knows where we should walk. He knows exactly what we need to go through to become real as we walk by faith and not by sight.

It is an amazing thing to have Jesus Christ personally living in our hearts. It is no longer a religious experience or legalism. No longer do we settle our problems by somebody laying a trip on us, but we settle them with an indwelling Christ.

Deuteronomy 31:17 says that God hides His face from those who refuse to get right with Him, who refuse to get saved. There are times when God hides His face from those who will not come to Him while they are still unclean because of iniquity and sins—and He is the only one who can take care of their filthy garments (Zechariah 3:3-4).

Remember this: God hides Himself so that

we will get to know His character by faith, and faith alone. That is His ultimate purpose. Get to know Him, to be just like Him. Then you will come to Him with praise and thanksgiving on your lips and in your heart. You will come to Him, not because you are hurt but because you have fallen in love with Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

Glory is who God is. It is the revelation of His name, His character. Because Moses' face shone with the glory of God, the children of Israel could not look at him, so he covered his face. Wherever impure flesh is around, God must shroud His presence in darkness. It is for our sake, because no man can see God and live.

But the day is coming when we shall see Him face to face. We shall behold Him in all of His glory. "*He setteth an end to darkness....*"

Very soon, we will see the Lamb of God, who is the light of heaven. Until that day, we are being conformed to His very image. And when it seems the darkness will overwhelm you, draw near instead of withdrawing. There are vessels among the treasures in God's house prepared to reveal His glory in the measure that you will receive it.