

The Shadows

Text: Job 14:1, 2; Job 8:9; Ecclesiastes 6:12; Psalm 144:4

We are living in the Shadowlands that C.S. Lewis referred to in the “Last Battle” in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. “Farewell to Shadowlands” is the title of the last chapter of the book. On the last page Lewis writes: “There was a real railway accident,” said Aslan softly. “Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.”

Our days are likened to a shadow. Job 8:9: “For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow.” Psalm 144:4: “Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away.” King Hezekiah was about to die, but he turned his face to the wall and cried his heart out, praying for an extension to his life (II Kings 20:2, 3). Metaphorically, the added years to Hezekiah’s life were measured by the shadow of the ancient sundial (II Kings 20:8-10). Ecclesiastes 6:12a: “For who knoweth what *is* good for man in *this* life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?” Ecclesiastes 8:13 refers to man’s days “...which are as a shadow.” With this thought in mind, consider these three admonitions:

1. ESCAPE THE SHALLOWS OF THE SHADOW

Paul said, “Till I come, give attendance to reading...” (I Timothy 4:13).

Nicholas Carr wrote a book entitled *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*. His argument is that in this fast pace of internet usage, we are losing our ability to concentrate. We get easily diverted to checking our mail or googling. Getting needed information through Google or Wikipedia is often like strip mining for relevancy. It takes a lot of time in deep reading to go through a book. Carr points out that we are losing something by abdicating the deep reading for the fast-paced internet. He is not opposed to internet; he is simply saying don’t let the internet take the place of deep reading. In deep reading, we are open to the argument that the written page inculcates.

I would like to challenge everyone, especially the children, teens and young adults this summer to move away from the shallows and get into some deep reading. C.S. Lewis said, “No book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and often more) worth reading at the age of fifty and beyond.” Research has shown that reading can work on the brain to help deter the affects of Alzheimer’s disease. The brain is a muscle; therefore to prevent atrophy, we must exercise it. What better way to exercise it than to read?

Character is formed in the early years of our life. What better way to reinforce the proper attitudes than to read classics, especially those books that lift up our Lord and wholesomeness? Robert Pitman said, “It is the books we read before middle life that do most to mold our character and influence our lives.”

Reading takes us to different places and different times with different people. Vartan Gregorian said, “Any book creates for the reader a place elsewhere. A person reading is a person suspended between the immediate and the timeless.” Emily

Dickinson likened reading to a frigate (sailing ship) that had the ability to take even the poorest of us to other places: "There is no frigate like a book, to take us lands away, nor any coursers like a page of prancing poetry. This traverse may the poorest take without oppress of toll- how frugal is the chariot that bears the human soul."

As you read this summer, may you escape the screaming demands of the nonconsequential and delve into timeless, transforming truths. Books have the power to transport, increase our creativity, and connect us to the wealth of human experience. You need no expensive fare, just a library card or a few well-spent dollars at your local bookstore. I wonder if Paul's key that could unlock his prison door was a good book, because in the last days of his life he requested, "The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments" (II Timothy 4:13).

Reading makes us think. I know this may sound too simplistic, but hear me out. The deep reading required in good books will bring timeless truths to our attention. And it is some of these timeless truths that will set us free from accepting the non-thinking status quo.

The Puritan, Thomas Brooks said, "Books may preach when the author cannot, when the author may not, when the author dares not, yea, and which is more, when the author is not." Rene' Descartes said, "The reading of all good books is like a conversation with the finest men of past centuries." Italo Calvina said, "A classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say." The Bible tells us, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise..." (Proverbs 13:20). What a joy to become acquainted with (and friends with) a person by walking with them through a book! So, allow me to encourage you to read what great books, even the ancient books, are still saying to us today. Clifton Fadiman said, "When you read a classic you do not see more in the book than you did before; you see more of you than was there before." A truly good book has the ability to bring out the real you and turn on those creative juices.

Reading will give answers to important life questions. Victor Hugo, who wrote *Les Miserables* said, "It is from books that men derive consolation in the troubles of life." Reading provides comfort in knowing others have gone through similar experiences we have and survived and often conquered. One reason Ezekiel was a great prophet is because he placed himself into the skin of the people to whom he was writing: "...and I sat where they sat..." (Ezekiel 3:15). So, pick up a book and "sit where they sat."

2. ENGAGE WITH THE LIGHT BEARERS

Matthew 5:14: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid." Philippians 2:15: "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world."

Gordon MacDonald's thought-provoking book that arrested my attention is entitled, *Renewing Your Spiritual Passion*. He lists five kinds of people that ignite your spiritual passion: The Very Resourceful People (VRP's): They *ignite* your spiritual passion. The Very Important People (VIP's): They *share* your spiritual passion. The Very Trainable People (VTP's): They *catch* your spiritual passion. The

Very Nice People (VNP's): They enjoy your spiritual passion. The Very Draining People (VDP's): They sap your spiritual passion.

Compare: II Corinthians 6:14 and I John 1:3-7.

3. ENRAPTURE WITH THE SAVIOR

Isaiah 9:2: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." This was fulfilled when Jesus came: Matthew 4:16: "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up."

Be enraptured with the Savior, because death is approaching but, thank God, so is the rapture of the Church! Amos 5:8: "Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning...." See Song of Solomon 2:17 and Song of Solomon 4:6.

The poetic beauty of these two verses in the ancient Canticles stand out like a welcome beacon in this storm tossed sea of life. "Until the day break, and the shadows flee away...." I have patiently watched the day ending as the beams of sunlight slowly fade beneath the darkening horizon. I have also watched on many more occasions the sun rising with at first a soft pink tincture, following the curvature of the earth, chased by a burgundy red, then an orange hue appears with rays shooting into the ionosphere, as described in Psalm 139:9 as, "...the wings of the morning...." Then finally a bright yellow that goes white and by then you must turn your eyes away as the day engulfs the shadows of the night. The sunrise is always a good time to praise the Lord that one day Christ will return in a similar manner: Malachi 4:2: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings...." What a day that will be! Going back to *The Last Battle*, Jewel the Unicorn says, "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now...come further up, come further in!" Revelation 4:1b: "...Come up hither...!"

Psalm 23:4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

There is a beautiful illustration of how the wise Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse gave his four young children, comfort after their mother's death.

-Pastor Pope-