

REVIVE!

I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches hidden in secret places so you may know that it is I the Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name (Isaiah 45:3)

Doesn't every author of the New Testament warn of trials, troubles and suffering? It would seem so! Theirs is the neglected message – 'Expect hardships!' Has there been a generation since then when this has not applied?

God's love for you; the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus which brings salvation and eternal life to all who believe; hope; peace and comfort; help from the Holy Spirit ... are some of our more preferred Scriptural themes, but we do well to acknowledge that nowhere does it say life in Christ excludes times of hardship. I wonder what your present hardship is?

It's faith-building reading the New Testament with an eye on its context. The authors, and those they write to, are faith-filled people – how is that different to faithful people? Trouble is most often addressed like this — how to deal with it and notice its benefit! Their emphasis

is: God is love, good, sovereign and to be trusted, period.

February's REVIVE! Newsletter theme is '**Treasures in the Darkness**' and I'm reminded of Gerard Hughes' book, '*God of Surprises*', whose purpose is to provide signposts to detect the hidden treasure in ourselves!

When James says '*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds*' (James 1:2), is this a signpost to finding treasure within? James later refers to financial difficulties, illness and persecution – some of the trials they experienced, and we do too! And James' exhortation as we go through them? '*Seek joy!*'

James also says pray when going through trouble, and ask for prayer when needed. We all need help in trials. Ask, and it shall be given.

With love and prayers, Steve

Treasures in the Darkness

“Life is difficult” is the opening line of *‘The Road Less Travelled’* by M Scott Peck. These are words we can all relate to as we continue to battle through this global pandemic, which over the past year has brought so much suffering, loss and loneliness. What would God be saying and doing in our lives during these times?

The Isaiah 45:3 Scripture verse on the front cover was spoken originally to the great Persian conqueror Cyrus from the 6th century BC, who would find the treasures of the surrounding nations despite their best efforts to hide them deep underground. But it is true generally that treasures are found in dark and difficult places, often where you would least expect.

Take a moment to reflect on your life right now. Bring what is ‘dark and difficult’ to the Lord and place it at His feet. Can you see any gleams of treasure in the darkness, perhaps a little hidden, but wanting to shine through?



**Snowdrops – ‘gleams of treasure’
seen after the recent cold snap
here at Crowhurst**

Pearls of Great Price!

Nature is full of some amazing treasures, often found in the most inhospitable, unpromising and darkest of environments. Look at the beauty of a diamond, formed at high pressure and temperature over millions of years, buried deep and out of sight under the earth's surface. And what about a beautiful, shiny pearl, formed by irritants such as parasites causing oysters to produce a protective hard casing around it, with its beauty only revealed once the shell is opened? A hidden treasure revealing its beauty only when brought into the light.



And submerged in the depths of the sea is an amazing array of bizarre and colourful fish living in the deepest parts of the ocean where even light doesn't penetrate. (For some examples on Youtube, check out the amazing Flapjack Octopus and the Lantern or incredible Anglerfish — if you're not worried about being scared!)

- ▶ Can you think of any surprising forms of life growing or living in dark or hidden places?
- ▶ What examples have you seen recently of unexpected indications of life in unusual places?
- ▶ As God brings something to mind, what is He saying to you through it?



When faced with suffering and difficulty, we have many deep (and valid) questions, such as, how does it all make sense if God is a God of love, light and power? We, as modern westerners, are used to comfort and security, and struggle when it isn't our experience.

Carlo Carretto in *'Letters from the Desert'* describes the dark sky as being necessary to see the stars. Interestingly, the original root of the word 'eclipse' has the meaning of 'abandonment'. In an eclipse, the 'abandoned' darkened heavenly body brings to light something glorious behind it.



The Cloud of Unknowing, a 14th Century classic, encourages us to rest in mystery, in not knowing all the answers, and to meet God there. Despite the trials we face, there is treasure to be found if we take time to look.

Bring to God whatever perplexes you at this time and meditate for a few moments on the short Psalm 131. Put yourself in the place of the psalmist ... and rest in Him!

▶ He moulds us. We become aware of our limitations and vulnerability. Sometimes our self-focus and self-obsession come to light. Consider the pot being moulded by the Potter in Jeremiah 18:1-6.



- ▶ He invites us to rest in mystery, unanswered questions, in unknowing ... to trust Him, as a weaned child with his/her mother. Psalm 131.
- ▶ We find a deeper intimacy and sense of belonging to Him. Sometimes He strips away our dependence on our feelings, the desires we want met ... just to come to a new place of loving Him for who He is. Song of Songs speaks so powerfully of His longing for us, see especially 1:4; 5:1.
- ▶ He prepares us for future service. Luke 4:1-15 says that Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. There He resisted the enemy and came out 'filled with the power of the Spirit' to begin His ministry. Henri Nouwen writes in his book *'The Wounded Healer'*, the scars of battle equip us to better minister to others who are hurting. See 2 Cor. 1:3-7.
- ▶ He gives us fresh perspectives and opens up new horizons. Because of the darkness we can see the stars. When we struggle and see the fallenness in ourselves and the world, we see more clearly that He is the Light of the world (John 8:12). The secrets of the kingdom are for those who look and go deeper (Luke 8:10).
- ▶ He provides what we need and comforts us, sometimes in surprising ways. Read the story of the flour and oil which never ran out (1 Kings 17:7-16).

The Light Ahead!



In John 3, we read how Nicodemus comes to Jesus 'by night.' This phrase is undoubtedly significant. The darkness must have represented many things, such as his despair, doubt, fear, confusion, questions and ignorance. He struggles to understand as Jesus speaks of the need for new perspectives, new birth and God's purposes of salvation for him and the world. It is a long journey for him. But later, somewhere on this journey with Jesus, seeing Him suffer and die, the light turns on and revelation dawns. After Jesus' death he then risks his own life and anoints Jesus' body with the most expensive of spices, the outpouring fragrance of a new love and transformed life.

And supremely, Jesus faced the long agonising suffering and darkness of the Cross, as well as the horrific separation of Easter Saturday ... before the transforming explosion of new life and possibilities of Resurrection Sunday. If this moment for you seems long, without a future in sight ... take hope and courage from the example of Nicodemus ... and from Jesus Himself!

"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

1 Peter 2:9.

CCHC Prayer Corner

Thank you Lord for Your leading and hand this month on our daily prayer requests, the Trustees' meeting, the Quiet Days and online ministry. You have been so faithful!

Please pray for:

- Our going forward with more focus on being a praying and an online community.
- All our staff, for health in body, mind and spirit.
- Continued financial provision.
- Our country, the pandemic and the subsequent strain on all people in every sphere of life ...

**that the light of Christ may shine
BRIGHTLY!**

**I have come as Light
into the world, so that
everyone who believes in
me should not remain in
the darkness.**

John 12:46 (NRSV)



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