

Getting Used to the Dark (Alternate)

by Vance Havner

The sermon emphasizes the importance of staying focused on the light and not becoming desensitized to it, while also being aware of the spiritual forces at work.

Duration: 26:10

Scripture: Psalm 119:37, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 11:28, Romans 12:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:8-9, 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Topics: "Apostasy"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the destructive trends in society, particularly in the behavior of children. He emphasizes the importance of self-assertiveness and discipline in raising children. The speaker also criticizes the commercialization and performance-oriented nature of modern Christianity, calling for a return to the true essence of the faith. He shares his personal realization that he needs to be more focused and impactful in his preaching, as he recognizes the weight of the message he delivers to people between life and death. The sermon concludes with a reminder to hate evil but not evil people, and a reflection on the speaker's own mortality and the desire to make the most of the time he has left to preach the truth of God's word.

Transcript

1 Thessalonians, the 5th chapter, we have a most interesting collection of verses that I didn't discover not long ago. You know how it is, you read the Bible for years, and then all of a sudden a verse or several verses jump out from the text and grab you for the first time. And in these few verses Paul is writing to the Christians, but he's also writing about the other crowd.

There are only two kinds of people in the world, Christians and everybody else, that's all. No third class, whatever. And it's interesting, and I hadn't seen this, but of the times and the seasons brethren starts off with the Christians.

Ye have no need that I write unto you, for yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they, that's the other crowd, shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman or child, and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

Ye are all the children of light and the children of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober.

For they that sleep sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us keep coming back to that. Now we don't belong to that crowd.

There should be no points of similarity, only points of contrast all the way through. And we make a great mistake when we try to act like them. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love and for an helmet the hope of salvation.

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us. And whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, or build one another up, even as also ye do.

I want you to think with me just a few moments about getting used to it. This is the greatest peril that faces preachers, churches, Christians in general today. Getting used to two things.

Getting used to the dark. We'll get no further than that, I think. But on the other hand, getting used to the light.

Think it over by tomorrow, because both sides are true. Frank Boggs set me thinking about this years ago. We were at a bookseller's convention in Chicago.

And he took me out to a place to eat that night's supper below the street level. Whoever ran it must have loved darkness rather than light. I stumbled into that dimly lit dungeon and fumbled for a chair and mumbled for a flashlight so I could read the menu.

When the food came, I ate it by faith and not by sight. But gradually, you know how it is. He made an intelligent comment.

You know how it is when you sit in a dark place. At first you can't see a thing, but gradually you begin to be able to discern various objects in the room. Frank said, isn't it funny how you get used to the dark? And I said, man, you have given me a sermon subject.

And I've been preaching about that ever since, because it's a dangerous thing for Christians, young or old. You see, we are up against... Now this translation I like best of all, of Ephesians 6.12. We are up against the unseen power that controls this dark world and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of Eva. We ought to know what we're up against.

If we don't, we're in for trouble. We've got to know who our foe is. I heard of a fellow who had a little old dog that was always getting in a fight, always getting licked.

Somebody said, not much of a fighter, is he? Oh yeah, he said, good fighter, just a poor judge of dogs. So if you don't know what you're up against, you're going to get into plenty of trouble. The closing of the age.

You say, well, they've been saying that for a long time. And some of the Bible scholars say that the last days refer to time from the birth of Christ on. Well, I don't know about that.

But even if it does, we could be in the last days of the last days, after all. And we are in last days, I feel from my heart. The night is far spent.

Men love darkness rather than light. There never has been more artificial light than we have now. We can dazzle the sun with the glory of the kind of illumination we can produce.

But modern man, left to himself, is still for all of that, walking in darkness, even as the Bible says so. I believe that the depths of rottenness today, not only in America, but worldwide, are too vile for any words in our vocabulary to describe. I heard of a faithful old preacher who had preached a great sermon on the depravity of the human heart.

It's a great subject, but an awful subject. And a fellow came down after the benediction and said, I just can't swallow this depravity of the human heart you've been talking about. The old preacher said, you don't have to, it's already in you.

And so I said, whether you like it or not, you've got it. It's already there. I used to say civilization is going to the dogs, but I don't say that anymore out of respect for dogs.

I believe that human beings are guilty of things today beneath the dignity of any dog. And isn't it significant that when they ask Jesus, what will it be like when you come back, do you realize that I'm going to live up to my old country-fied bringing up in Catawba County, North Carolina, and I'm not ashamed but proud of it. I grew up a country boy and I'm a country preacher to this day.

I tell them I'm from Hickory, North Carolina, River Free Delivery Route 1. And I don't mind saying so wherever I go. I'm going to stick to my original word. We never heard of a vulture back then.

All we knew was turkey buzzards. And so when the Lord said that, how's it going to be like when you come? He said, in effect, look out for the buzzards. Where the carcass is, there were the vultures.

Not eagles, as it is in the King James, because eagles don't feed on carrion. But as buzzards. And that's a perfect picture of the putrefaction of all the various groups of civilization.

Because some of these society folks, although they live in the top brackets, they're still out in the far country with the prodigal. They may not be in the pig pen part of it, but they're out there, though they're clad in purple fine linen. But the trouble is, and I warn you, if I had old folks here tonight, I'd say the same things to them.

We not only live in the dark today, because it's everywhere, but unfortunately the best of Christians get used to it. God never, there are some things, as one of our secular papers said the other day, not a church paper, there are some things we have no right ever to get used to. Had to do the think over.

And there is a sinister and a subtle and a slow brainwashing process going on today, gradually desensitizing us to evil. We're not aware of it, and we fall for it ourselves. And little by little, sin is made to appear less sinful until the light in us becomes darkness.

And how great is that darkness. We get acclimated. Lucia Bowles said the other day, I'm shocked because I'm not shocked.

Well, if she could say that, it looks to me like a lot of church members ought to wake up. In our condition today, we accept the literature of this age, the music of this age, the art of this age, the lifestyle of it, and without ever an outer or an inner protest, although the Bible says hate evil, abhor evil, abstain from the very appearance of evil. I read of an Irishman who came over here and stayed a year, and his wife came over to join him.

She said, don't they talk funny over here? He said, you ought to have heard of me a year ago when I came over. Well, they were just talking like always, but he got used to it, you see. And that illustrates perfectly what I'm trying to say.

We accept all this, and one reason is we are becoming homogenized. You see, Christianity turned the world upside down for several centuries until Constantine became emperor and became a church member, and that nearly ruined us. We've never gotten over that.

He started out to Christianize paganism, wound up paganizing Christianity. And we had the same thing in the double business up in the New England states, the double contract, whereby they took members of the church and said, come on in, get converted later on. That's not only not Baptist doctrine, it's not Bible doctrine to begin with.

And we find ourselves using new words, adultery is just free love, and the drunkard is a respectable alcoholic. You hear today a lot about the wrecks on the highways on account of liquor, and the awfulness of kids drinking, but nobody says much about the liquor. And the trouble is we're trying to mop up the floor while we leave the faucet running.

But you can't get that over today, because you're not something if you say anything about it. And then homosexuality, well, I still say that the human race was started by Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. The murderer, well, he just got off to a bad start, pushed the oatmeal off the table as a baby, then grew up and pushed his wife off Brooklyn Bridge, and it always fits into one picture.

These smart alecks, don't you get tired of these books by psychiatrists trying to explain why a junior acts like he does? Well, nobody knows why a junior acts like he does. But Junior bit the meter man, Junior kicked the cook, Junior's antisocial now, according to the book. Junior smashed the clock and lamp, Junior hacked the tree.

Destructive trends are treated in chapters two and three. Junior threw his milk at mom, Junior screamed for more. Notes on self-assertiveness are found in chapter four.

Junior tossed his shoes and socks out into the rain, negation that and normal, disregard the stain. Junior got in Grandpop's room, tore up his fishing line. That's to gain attention, see page 89.

But Grandpop seized the slipper and took Junior across his knee, for Grandpop hadn't read the book since 1893. Maybe we need to reinstate Grandpop, I don't know. Get some of them out of the retirement places where they're sitting so lonesome and want to go back home, get them into action.

We get, not only as young people, but as oldsters, it takes a little different form, so, laugh at the Puritanism of our earlier days. Oh yes, I thought this was a sin, I thought that was a sin. Well, Pilgrim's Progress, that immortal work of Bunyan, tells us that when the Christians went to Vanity Fair, which represented the world of flesh and the devil, they didn't like each other, they couldn't get along, they seemed as barbarians to each other.

And they couldn't agree because they didn't agree. But church members today are generally accepted by Vanity Fair because the average church member is no different anyway. The devil's biggest business today, believe it or not, is getting people to join church without being saved.

If he can get enough of them doing that, he's got it made. And I don't know what the statistics are, nobody knows, but it's frightening when you come to think of it. Tragedy becomes comedy with us, we learn that.

We think it's smart to laugh at sin, and it isn't in any day, and tolerance and acceptance and permissiveness and peaceful coexistence, black and white are just smudged into gray. Some time ago, Billy Graham said something that I appreciate his honesty and forthrightness. I've known that fellow since 38 when he was a student.

I went down to Florida Bible Institute to talk, and a good-looking, long-legged, toe-headed fellow came out and said, I'm from Billy Graham, I'm from Charlotte. He said, may I carry your bag in for you? Boy, I'd like to have a picture of that today, him carrying my bag around. But God had a hand on that boy from the start.

But he said the other day, he said, I find myself laughing at things on TV now that I didn't laugh at a couple years ago, and I don't like that, and I've got to do something about it. Now, he's very careful about grieving the Holy Spirit, because if he ever does that and gets it out for the Holy Spirit, he'd be through. That's what keeps him going, and he knows it is.

So he's very careful about it. And I got to thinking a little bit. You have to watch these things that aren't bad, you don't go to hell for doing that, maybe, but you've got to watch it because it's half-kinned to something that is dangerous, and you get the whole family in before long if you don't watch.

You know that the tennis tournaments, so many of the best parts of them come on Sunday afternoon. Well, I like to watch tennis tournaments. I don't care much about baseball.

It takes too long for that pitcher to make up his mind what kind of a ball he's going to throw. I want something that keeps moving. Well, I sat there looking, you know, at that, and it seemed as though a voice spoke to my inmost soul.

It said, now, this is nothing awful, but tonight you're talking to people between life and death, between heaven and hell, and there's a better way to get ready to do it. And I said goodbye. We've had our last experience of this together.

You've got to draw a line somewhere and be hard on yourself, and oh, they'll say you're this, that, and the other thing, but we've got to do it. Black and white, you see, are being gradually smudged, and it's not, we're not aware of it at the time. So I appreciate Billy Graham setting me on that course.

Jim Elliot, you know he was stabbed to death by the savages in South America. A fine-looking, happy fellow, always in good spirits, but with the heart of a mystic. And he put this in his book.

A friend of mine asked me to go over to his house and look at television. God spoke to me by Psalm 100 in 1937. Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.

That's a good one to hang in front of the set. You can't get around that one. It's dangerous.

Don't get used to the dark. It's hard to resist. I know some of you are saying, how can you possibly get used to the light? Couldn't have enough of that, could you? Yes.

Turn to Matthew 11. And Jesus is talking to the old hometown, his hometown. Nazareth for a while.

But his home, finally, was Capernaum. And he went there in order to fulfill prophecy that the people that sat in darkness saw great light, and that them who sat in the region in shadow of death, light is sprung up. And they just took him as a matter of course.

Oh sure, good citizen. But they never got converted. They never repented.

And he said some of the most terrific things about them. Can you imagine him saying it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for you nice people? They didn't crucify him. They wouldn't have touched a hair of him.

But they just did nothing. And he had some awful words about better off Sodom and Gomorrah because they'd never had the light and you've had it. And I never get over that because there's some serious things sitting here.

Alexander McLaren, great preacher that he was, stood before his congregation in London one morning and they were nice, fastidious people and they must have been shocked to death when he said this. How many in this congregation have sat there through these years and I've stood here through the years and you've got to where now you take me as a matter of course saying the nice things that I'm supposed to say on Sunday morning. And you have gotten to the place that you have habituated yourself to preaching.

And then he made this illustration. I can't shake it. You can live so long beside Niagara that you don't hear the water anymore.

That'll do the think over. I wonder if we aren't getting to the place. I'm talking to myself.

We're used to Jesus and used to the Bible and used to church. That's dangerous business if you ever get over the wonder of it. I stand amazed in the presence.

Not amused. Amazed in the presence of Jesus in Nazarene. And you don't have to go around and look miserable all the time.

That's not at all. You don't have to be funny and button saying I'm a Christian. The Bible is as big as a sales and road book catalog.

You don't have to be like that to be what I'm talking about. I believe in humor. I wouldn't use humor if I didn't.

I believe there's a time for a laugh but there's a time every once in a while we need to take ourselves by the back of our necks and march ourselves down the path of duty and say we're all wrong here on the point. If you don't do it, who's going to do it? Walk circumspectly because the days are evil. How did they get into that condition? Then Jesus told about the children playing in the marketplace.

Playing, waiting, and nobody laughed. At the funeral, nobody cried. That's Sunday morning church anity.

We're suffering from Sunday morning church anity instead of seven days in a week Christianity today. It's just become one of the nice things. A lot of folks in church, I get nervous sometimes to see a congregation of well-fed, well-housed, well-dressed Americans.

To the old rugged cross I'll ever be true. It's shame and reproach gladly bare. Lord have mercy.

Sometimes I feel like saying what are we going to... They might as well be singing Mary Had a Little Lamb. As far as any seriousness about it. I sometimes get in church and back with the choir before we come out.

They come out sometimes giggling and I come out in my self-importance and walk up in the pulpit and the voice says to me and who are you? You ought to walk into that pulpit as though it were the first time. As though it might be the best time. And as though it could be the last time.

Now you give me a bunch of people that will take over for church some Sunday morning like that. You'll have a revival before 12 o'clock. But we're not going to church like that.

It's the thing to do with a lot of people. Over in Korea, one of the missionaries had preached to the natives. I said you must go to bed.

The meeting's over and they said we can't. You've just told us that God so loved the world that he gave you sons. If we trust him we can live forever.

Who could sleep tonight after hearing that? God help us, we go to sleep listening to it. All over America today. It becomes a matter of fact.

We're playing marbles with diamonds, beloved. Tourists in Africa. Back where they mine diamonds.

I felt that's what was up and it went up sure enough. Playing with marbles, with diamonds, playing marbles. We take the holy things of God and make a joke almost out of it.

It started out Christianity did as an experience. It has become a performance. Especially on Sunday morning.

You don't run a church like you run a department store. It's run by the Holy Spirit or it's not run. It may be running the fastest it ever did but it's in the flesh.

We need to hang up in every Sunday school room in America that verse, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Now flesh doesn't just mean your body there. You got to have a body to run around in.

But it means the old nature that you got from Adam and you still got it. And you cannot please God in that old nature unless you've been filled with the Spirit. Baptists are so scared of talking about being filled with the Spirit.

We're so scared we'll get out on a limb we don't even get up the tree. There is such a thing as being filled with the Spirit. I don't mean you got to go anywhere or odds about it at all.

But there's a great danger today if we aren't careful. And we shall lapse into this same condition. Billy Sundale used to hear him preach.

He used to say that a worldly Christian, you might as well talk about a heavenly devil. Well that's a little rough to put it but he was that kind. Never been anything but a ball player but he shook this generation as no man ever did.

What are you going to do with a fellow like that? Gratia Machen who was a scholar went to hear him and wrote back to his mother and said I went to hear Billy Graham. I couldn't exactly get some of the asides of things he said but when I reflect that 20,000 people are waiting twice a day to go hear him for six weeks.

Who am I? You see God's hand was upon him.

And that's why I said you can find everything in the church today from a hummingbird to a turkey buzzard. Now that isn't elegant at all. Nothing elegant about that but God uses some people, surprises us to death because God uses who's usable.

You're going to reach the day if you should and I hope to God that there are preachers to be listening to me right now and I feel quite sure of it. And will you let this old worn out preacher from North Carolina and I was just down in Gardner Web a few weeks ago in the gymnasium and that crowd of kids, all hilarious yes, but came up by great numbers and talked sense after that meeting was over. Because they're thinking and you're thinking.

Some of you are going to preach. You don't have to be a preacher to be a messenger for God. In the honest job you can be a witness for Jesus.

The devil is going to try to get you to become lenient toward evil. I'm not as firm in my stand as you once were. I don't want to be like that.

The Bible says to hate evil. Not evil people but hate evil because it's of the devil. And the fact is that four letters are found in the word devil.

So, please remember. I can't be around much longer. I've been asking God in the last year to just turn 82 a few weeks ago.

I said, Lord, what can I say that's most worth saying in the little time I've got left to say it? I don't want to ramble all over creation today. I'd rather make people mad and tell the truth and shake up somebody for God. Preaching of God's word makes people sad, mad, or glad, one of the three.

I'd rather they'd go out mad than just go out. Nothing takes the heart out of me more than folks that have been to church, been nice this morning, haven't had a thought after God's years. You're justified, I think.

My work is the work of a prophet. I'm not an evangelist. And when I say prophet, I don't mean in the predictive sense, always talking about when the world's coming to an end.

I don't mean that. But we do need. And we need some prophets among the young men of today who will cry out aloud, it's a hard job.

You won't be rewarded much for it. The ones in the past were killed for it, John the Baptist's own. But I'd like to think maybe I've got a coming prophet here who will preach the truth to both the nation and the church.

They never needed it more. And when I stood on the top of that old hill where I grew up as a boy, I said, Lord, I want to do two things. I'd like to write, and I'd like to travel all over the country and preach.

I don't know how to begin. Talk about a dream, friend. I not only didn't know anything, but I didn't even suspect anything.

And yet, delight thyself in the Lord, and he'll give thee the desires of thine heart. God has given me the desires of my heart and led me to people who could open doors I couldn't open with a crowbar, starting with Donald Gray Barnhouse and on through a long string of wonderful men of God who for some reason

or other took an interest in me. And Dr. Criswell, down to later times, the first man to open his church to me for an evangelistic conference.

And they say you've got to know key men. No, you don't. You have to know the keeper of the keys.

If you know him, well, he's got a bunch of keys. There's not many keys in the world that you need to get to know. I appreciate the fact that you have listened with such attention.

Do, when you run a little short on something to pray about, do think of me, because I'm preaching the most I ever have in all my life. I don't understand you. I don't even sell my books.

I try to keep all that out of it. I just want to go about and tell them this is the way Wokey in it and we need this message as never before. And I like to think there's some girls and fellas that are coming in one way or another on the trail saying, well, you're not the only one.

We're going to take up the flag one of these days. And I hope you will. God bless you.

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