

A Hand in the Dark

When was the last time you had a real job interview? I believe most of you are retired now, and you have long stopped reporting to a 9-5 job, or whatever specific time applied to you. Some of us are still working, like me, and I am a bit jealous of those who are retired. However, I have heard more that one retiree tell me "I am busier now than when I was working." and "How did I ever have time to work?" Hmm .. I don't quite understand that --- yet --- but what if suddenly you HAD to get a job or go back to work. I know, it is a stretch, but just pretend you must now go find a job and you prepare for a job interview. It has probably been a while since you last applied for any position, so you might find that these days applicants must be prepared for almost any question. Here are 4 real examples I found on a website named "13 Ridiculous Interview Questions That Awesome Companies Will Actually Ask You" Just take a moment and think how you would answer them....

Google: "Why are manhole covers round?"

Because manholes are round. A square cover might fall in if turned sideways.

Apple: "If you were a pizza delivery person, how would you benefit from scissors?"

Since when does Apple sell pizza? Cut pepperoni dolls.

Living Social: "What's your favorite song? Perform it for us now" Does anyone have a guitar handy?

American Heart Association: "What's the color of money?" "It depends on the country"

Job seekers are often challenged to think creatively – so would it surprise you that even youngsters are subject to "interviews"? I want you to think how you would answer this next question which was given to kindergarteners.

This is from an article in the Presbyterian Mission Yearbook website dated March 2017. Reverend Jon Brown had delivered a message on "restoration that leads to action". In that sermon, he gave an account of his daughter's kindergarten assessment, where she was asked the following question (are you ready?):

"What do you do when you want to go into a room that is dark?"

Do you have your reply in your mind now? It may be obvious to many of us, right?

Reverend Brown's daughter gave a quite insightful and unexpected response.

When the teacher asked her "What do you do when you want to go into a room that is dark?" the little girl replied,

"You hold someone's hand."

The teacher then looked at the guidebook she was using, scanned it front to back and then back to front; then looked at Reverend Brown and said, "It's not in the book but it's the best answer I've heard all day".

Leave it to the innocence and honesty of a child to touch us with her simple yet beautiful observation.

Of course, I am guessing that most of you thought "You turn on the light" – as I did when I first heard the question.

To a child a dark room can be a dreadful thing. It is a place not to enter alone, but rather one must seek the comfort and presence of another's guiding hand to face the unknown – where one cannot see clearly.

The teacher was trying to assess how the child would handle facing the scary thought of a room with no light. Now I want to ask you another question – one that is a more “grown-up” version of the kindergarten test:

“What is your dark room?”

What do you now encounter that arouses fear, uncertainty, dread, or other responses that can cause suffering or grief or anxiety?

Some might say “Should believers in Christ have such gloomy problems? If God is with us, aren’t we beyond talking about something that can be compared to a dark room?”

And doesn’t the Bible teach us that darkness is evil? God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. And the scriptures teach us that as Christians we walk in the light.

This is indeed true, so when I use the term “dark room” in this message, I am not referring to spiritual darkness, such as those who live in opposition to faith in our Heavenly Father. I am using dark room to refer to those shadowy things in life that we must face and deal with; troubles that can create anxiety and fear.

Things like loss of friends and loved ones; the older we get the more people we lose; fear of the future; we don’t know where we will end up in our later years; health issues and concerns; for example, are you worried about the corona virus? And what about loss of income with an unstable stock market; or loss of mobility due to aging or accidents; these kinds of experiences will come regardless of faith or no faith.

And that fact resonates with the words of our Lord Jesus who said, "In this world you shall have tribulation". The Scriptures do not paint a rosy picture of freedom from troubles; although in some ways I selfishly wish such liberty was true.

The Greek word for tribulation is thlípsin– this can also be translated troubles, trials, sorrows – it means coping with the burden of a misfortune; The word indicates not only the outward circumstances that we face but also the internal way we handle such events.

And there is not a lot we can do about many of the external happenings that affect us; it is really much more important to know how to manage our responses to the unavoidable.

There are no easy answers to why we must face troubles and trials in this world as people of faith; and if it were a matter of faith, then why have so many wonderful Christians suffered persecutions and difficulties and pains of every kind imaginable?

Just look at the reality of this world. If there were no "dark rooms" then how could the Psalmist write these words:

"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."

The valley of the shadow of death. Sounds terrifying to me. A place like the "dark room" that the little kindergartener was picturing. And what wisdom that little girl had in her simple response to the scary idea of what to do when you go into such a place.

"You hold someone's hand."

Isn't this close to the idea of the Psalmist and his words about how to tread through the shadowy valley? King David is credited with this writing, and he said in essence, "when I go into that place of the unknown, I know my God is with me, holding my hand and carrying me in His power"

Like the girl facing the room with a caring person to hold onto, David can face that dark valley if he knows God is right there with him.

And let's go back to the words of our Lord I referenced earlier, "In this world you shall have tribulations." Jesus was explaining that the time was coming when His own disciples would forsake Him.

Yet, instead of focusing on His own suffering to come Jesus was preparing them for their future. Listen to His words that I am paraphrasing from John chapter 16:

"But the time is coming near when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows and tribulations. But take heart and do not fear, because I have overcome the world."

Here is our Lord giving the disciples the reality about their future. He did not deride them for their coming desertion. He clearly spelled out the awful truth that they would in fact abandon Him. But He said those words so that they would know

- when that dark valley comes
- when that day of failure presents itself
- when all hope seems lost

... in spite of this – they will Have peace in Christ!

This is just a pure gift of forgiveness and grace from the Lord for them to receive. A promise of restoration even before failure.

It is that simple. The Lord is the one who carries us through the shadowy times. If we lose direction, if we feel that hope is gone ... Jesus says

“Do not fear!! I have done the work for you by overcoming the world! I understand your pain and will never forsake you. Just realize that I am with you and will give you peace.”

As a simple act of faith, at times I raise my hand to the Lord and ask him to please take hold, to help me through this day; or this valley; or whatever I am experiencing at that moment. You can do this as well, just as a prayer and a recognition that you do need His heavenly support.

In conclusion

It is God who helps us face our “dark rooms” – those shadowy valleys that are not meant to be entered alone - places where we cannot see clearly. Like the little girl who needed that guiding hand in the dark, we have a loving Savior ready to take our hand. Jesus freely offers us His help and His peace in such times of tribulation.

.....Let us pray