"Hope in the Darkness" True Riches #6

INTRODUCTION

All of us face "dark times" in our lives. You may be in one of those times right now. For the Christian there is hope, even in the deepest darkness. We have the treasure of God's presence to see us through the dark nights. Whether you are challenged by a struggle with pain and suffering, fear of scarcity and lack, the uncertainty of the future, or anything else, God's grace is available to you. In this study we examine God's word to gain an understanding of that hope in the darkness.

Ice Breaker (Optional - 8 min)

Have you ever been a place of complete darkness (a cave or closet perhaps)? What emotions did it evoke?

STUDY QUESTIONS (45 MIN)

Decide Who is Your Lord Q1. Read Luke 9:23-25; John 8:12; Psalm 23:1-4

The Lord of your life is whoever, or whatever you allow to have dominion. All of us have a choice of who or what we will follow. According to Luke 9:23, what does it cost you and what will you gain if you follow Jesus? Why is it that those who follow Jesus will not walk in darkness? (see John 8:12) The shadow referred to in Psalm 23 is a "very thick darkness." In verse 4 David gives the reason he has no fear of that shadow- because God is close beside him. Share with your group any experienced you've had in "the valley of the shadow" and how God's presence or absence made a difference.

Discern What is Your Idol Q2. Read Matthew 6:31-33; 1 Kings 17:12-15

In Matthew 6:31-33 Jesus warns us about focusing on our need, rather than on who provides for our need. He describes a misplaced priority that leads us away from placing our whole-hearted trust in God. When we trust in anything more than God, we have made it an idol. How does Matthew 6:33 help us bring back the proper perspective? In 1 Kings 17:12-14 the widow of Zarephath had given up hope of surviving – she had given up on God. In1 Kings 17:14 God what was God's plan to provide for her? Was there a time in your life that God provided for your daily needs while you waited on Him to reveal his greater plan for your future? If so please share that with your group to encourage those who may now need their faith strengthened that God is faithful to provide now and in the future.

Develop Healthy Spiritual Practices Q3. Read Matthew 6:6; 2 Peter 1:19

God has given us spiritual tools to help us overcome the darkness, including worship, fellowship, the Word of God and prayer. If we are going to overcome the darkness, we must develop healthy spiritual practices, utilizing what God has provided for us. Matthew 6:6 directs us to pray to our Father who is in the secret place. What happens to us in "the secret place" with Jesus? How are we changed to better face the trials and temptations of the dark times? In 2 Peter 1:19-20 we are told to pay attention to the prophetic word of scripture because it is a lamp shining in a dark place. What kind of darkness have you experienced that the light of scripture has illuminated? What spiritual practice has helped you the most in times of darkness: worship, prayer, fellowship or the Word?

WRAP-UP

No one can totally avoid the dark times of life. But because of Jesus, we are not without hope. If we are following Christ, we have the light of the world to guide us. We will not fear the darkness because He is always close by, shepherding us even through the valley of the shadow of death. We must not lose sight of God as our ultimate provider because turning to anything else instead of God is a kind of idolatry. But if we develop healthy spiritual practices including worship, prayer, fellowship and reading God's word, we will be strengthened against the dark times and firmly established in God's light.

Memory Verse

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:12 ESV

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in
your life:
Pray for your group members' needs: (see back for more space)

Challenge

Spend time this week in the "secret place" alone with God, allowing Him to strengthen you for the challenges ahead.

Q1

Luke 9:23-25 ESV - 23 And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. 25 For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

John 8:12 ESV - 12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Psalm 23:1-4 ESV - 1 A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. 3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

$\mathbf{Q2}$

Matthew 6:31-33 ESV - 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

1 Kings 17:12-15 ESV - 12 And she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die." 13 And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. 14 For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.'" 15 And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days.

Matthew 6:6 ESV - 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

2 Peter 1:19-20 ESV - 19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.

Prayer requests con't	