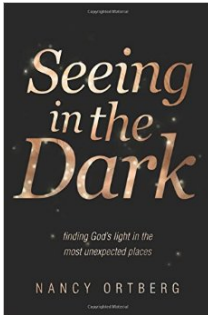


Seeing in the Dark: Finding God's Light in the Most Unexpected Places

by Nancy Ortberg

Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2015. 192 pages. ISBN: 978-1414375601.



The foundational premise of *Seeing in the Dark* is that all of life is spiritual. We can perceive the circumstances of life in terms of ‘darkness and light.’ We not only behold darkness and light with our eyes, but we also ‘see’ with what we experience in our souls. But we have a problem: we cannot see or experience the light that we need and long for clearly or completely. This is where faith comes in. Weaving modern examples with Biblical narratives, Ortberg proposes that God not only allows pain, described metaphorically as darkness, but he purposes it for good in our lives.

Ortberg begins by explaining that the Old and New Testaments are ripe with metaphors of light and darkness. God creates light and is called the Light, and light is synonymous with truth. It is even used to describe God’s people. In the absence of light, from Genesis to Revelation, God’s people have been asked to take the next step when they cannot see the road ahead (or even the stepping stone in front of them). That’s also the invitation believers in the 21st century have been given. That is faith.

The book’s intended audience is the Church of today, the believers in the West in particular. And western Christians have much to learn. We learn that we are not alone. Ortberg reflects on the reality that Christians were hunted and persecuted centuries ago in present-day Turkey. Therefore, ‘we were not the first to stumble and see in the dark.’ Just as believers throughout the centuries have been called to take the next step, so we too must forge ahead. This requires faith, courage, and a determination to go through the darkness of life.

The people of God in the Bible were called to walk by faith in the midst of darkness. Pictures of darkness are stark in the scriptures: Psalms 58 and 88, where the psalmist faces his pain head-on; the three-day period when darkness reigned and Jesus fully embraced the darkness on the cross; and when Jesus spoke into Martha’s pain before the grave of her brother Lazarus (Lk. 10; Jn. 12). Ortberg reminds us that God clearly states in 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 that he uses our sufferings to comfort others, and in Isaiah 42 that He will be with us, and it will be a reminder of who he is in the midst of it all.

The life of faith can be described in short: keep moving. To take the next step, no matter how dim the light, requires courage. Courage is putting one foot in front of the other when all you can see is a faint outline of the future. Yet faith is more than courage alone. Faith that is made true is tried. ‘Someone once said that faith is not a personal possession until you have suffered. That person understood that the very nature of faith requires the grit and courage to be in the dark so you can eventually see in the dark. Then faith becomes faith’ (7, Kindle edition).

All pain is a sign that there is more. There is a longing for something better. There is a tension between the reality of now—life with all its pain—and eternity with no pain.

This in-between space is where God meets us and grows us in our understanding of who he is. Only tested faith is a personal possession. As uncomfortable as it is, when we surrender to live in these gaps and in these contrasts, we allow God to do his most profound work in us. This rhythm of Jesus—leaning in, going deep in times of great pain—also mirrors the rhythms of God throughout time. (14-15, Kindle edition)

The ‘torn place’ is felt when we are enjoying life, yet distressed in the knowledge that others are suffering. An example is given of an ‘Amber Alert’ that broadcasts via cell phone that a child has been abducted. Ortberg enjoys her hike on her day off, but the reality of the warning remains in her thoughts. ‘The dissonance that is created when things are in such a state of conflict—when we go through experiences that are so opposite it is nearly impossible to resolve them—makes us go just a little bit crazy. Social psychologists refer to this contrast as cognitive dissonance’ (32-33, Kindle edition). And yet, when we embrace the pain—the ‘darkness’—not denying or rejecting it, we allow our eyes to adjust to the dark. We get stronger, and we reflect more of God’s light.

Ortberg continues to grapple with the metaphor of darkness and light. She explains in Chapter 14 the term *chiaroscuro*, used by fifteenth century artists to describe the interplay between light and dark in art. These artists discovered the beauty of contrast as they added brightness and shadow in their work, creating a feeling of deeper dimension. In a similar way, we grow in our spiritual journey with Christ as we embrace the ‘dark’ seasons of life—the times when His light is less evident (or non-existent to our senses), when trials attempt to overwhelm us. We are made more beautiful because of them.

Modern-day experiences of darkness may take the form of our own offspring—young and full of life and promise—taking their own lives, dealing with addictions, dying of drug overdoses, or suffering from cancer. This darkness is no less real or raw than what was faced by our forefathers of faith in the scriptures and in history.

This book benefits lay people who need encouragement that God has not and will not abandon them. It challenges every believer to embrace pain and suffering for a higher cause: God's refining fire in our lives. For those who desire to serve God through everyday life, whatever their occupation, it could be used as a model to follow. It is an example of a faithful person taking every opportunity to do good in her life.

One cannot help but be inspired and encouraged by Ortberg's plethora of examples of faith-filled life. From praying over a sleeping child to walk with God after taking her first steps, to her own childhood struggle of divorced parents, to being tested for MS as a child, to a college sweetheart break up, and the fear of infertility, this is a testimony of a sincere follower of Jesus. Ortberg allows the reader to walk with her on her own journey of faith, and as she comforts parents who have lost children, counsels couples who have miscarried, visits with dear friends in their last days of fighting cancer. Ortberg describes a range of suffering as she ministers to her and her husband's congregants at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in northern California, giving us a worthy model of ministry to follow.

Ortberg's book is well written and delightful. It's refreshing to hear self-awareness and to see such transparency in a church leader in our day.

Reviewed by Mimi Agers

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Walking with God through Pain and Suffering

by Tim Keller

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Reading books by authors who will challenge your faith and spark curiosity to learn more is important for any believer. It is especially important for those of us who are serving in the mission field. Isolation from others, not by choice, is something that most of us have experienced as we often we do not have others to turn to when we go through difficult times.

In this book author Tim Keller focuses on those difficult times. He addresses all audiences, including those who want to have a discussion of the age-old question of the problem of evil. First, he looks at the phenomenon of human suffering and the myriad of ways other cultures and religions

