

### Heart of Darkness

In his novel *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad explores the savage descent of a man, Kurtz, who distances himself, both physically and socially, from his family, friends and associates, choosing to live deep in a wilderness land. His friends try to reach him but he is too far gone, so they eventually hire someone to locate Kurtz and bring him home. What the explorer finds is a man very changed from the Kurtz his friends described, a man whose heart is now darkened by the choices he made. And it is too late; before the explorer can return Kurtz to his homeland, the lost man is dead.

The Bible talks about separation as well, separation from God into a darkness that leads to eternal death. But it also describes another kind of separation, a separation from the world so that we can live in God's light, a separation that gives us eternal life with God through Jesus Christ. The Bible calls this second type of separation *holiness*.

This holiness is not a call to be "holier than thou" (or, as some people put it, "being so heavenly minded as to be no earthly good"). Rather, one reason God calls us to holiness – a life with him – is so that we can live better with the people around us. Let's spend this week learning more about the holy life God offers us.

#### Monday – Walking in the Light

*"The issue is now clear. It is between light and darkness and everyone must choose his side."* G.K. Chesterton

1. Please read 1 John 1:5-7. What does it mean for God to have no darkness in him at all?
2. Why do you think John says that to "walk in the darkness" is at odds with a life of fellowship with God?
3. What similar theme(s) do you see between James 1:16-18 and 1 John 1:5-7?

**Digging Deeper (optional):** Read John 1:1-14 and 8:12, and describe the nature of Jesus as God's light.

#### Tuesday – Confession and Truth

*"Though the light shines on things unclean, yet it is not thereby defiled."* Augustine, 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. North African theologian

1. Please read 1 John 1:8-10. What is the problem with claiming to be without sin? At first glance 1 John 1:5-7 seems to be at odds with verses 8-10. How are we to reconcile the two?

**Text Insight:** "Confess" comes from two root words which, when combined, mean "to admit together." To confess means to be truthful and agree with God about what you have done.

2. How do we maintain fellowship with God even though we are guilty of sin (v. 9)?
3. Take a look at Romans 3:22-24 and 5:6-8. Combining the thoughts of these two passages how has God set out to deal with our sin? What is our role in this?

**Making it Personal:** When we confess ourselves to God, we are not telling him anything he does not already know. You might liken it to a parent who already knows of his child's disobedience. When the father and child can talk it out and find agreement, then they are free to move forward. Similarly, our confession is for our benefit, restoring us to fellowship with him. Is there anything you are inclined to confess now?

#### Wednesday – Prepared for Action

*"Our grandly business undoubtedly is, not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand."*

Thomas Carlyle, 19<sup>th</sup> c. Scottish writer and historian

1. Please read 1 Peter 1:13-16. How can setting your mind fully on our hope in Christ lead to self control and being prepared for action?
2. What is the connection between your body and your mind in Romans 12:1-2?
3. What actions are listed in Romans 12:3-8? Which do you think you can carry out for God?

**Making it Personal:** Romans 12:8 provides just a few of the ways God's people can serve him. Ask God to guide you in being prepared for whatever action he is calling you to.

#### Thursday – Obedience, not Ignorance

*"A man may be theologically knowing and spiritually ignorant."* Thomas Charnock, 17<sup>th</sup> c. English pastor

1. Please read 1 Peter 1:14. What kind of ignorance is Peter talking about? How can ignorance of what is good lead to pursuing evil desires?
2. Now read Galatians 5:16-21. How does our sinful nature battle with the Holy Spirit?
3. How can we tell if we are following the Holy Spirit's leading and not following our own sinful nature according to Galatians 5:22-26?

**Making it Personal:** When does your sinful nature and its desires become most obvious? Ask God to help you follow the Holy Spirit's guidance during those times, and always.

#### Friday – Holiness

*"Sainthood lies in the habit of referring the smallest actions to God."* C.S. Lewis, 20<sup>th</sup> c. Anglo-Irish writer

1. Please read 1 Peter 1:15-16. What is your first reaction to being told that since God is holy you should be holy too?

**Text Insight:** The concept of holiness relates to God calling his people into his presence. In calling us to be holy, God is calling us to be with him where he is, not to remain in our worldly ways apart from him.

2. What does God promise to do for us regarding his holiness and ours in Leviticus 20:7-8? How does this reassure you about the instructions in 1 Peter 1:15-16?
3. Now look at Isaiah 61:10-11 and Hebrews 9:14-15. Where does righteousness originate? How does God see us?

**Text Insight:** Righteousness can be a hard word to pin down. But quite simply it means "right relatedness." To be righteous is to have the kind of relationships with people and creation that God always meant us to have.

**Making it Personal:** Thank God for offering you all you need for holiness and righteousness, and ask him to help you in living out your relationship with him each day.

**For the Weekend:** Read Matthew 5:13-48. What connection do you see between verse 16 and verse 48? How does everything in between tie these two verses together?