

David Larson - The Shadow We Cast

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The title that I chose this afternoon is the Shadow We Cast. No matter who we are or in what time we may have lived, all of us have cast a shadow. Shadows are so common that we generally don't even notice them. Everything that stands in the light casts a shadow. People, plants, animals, objects, everything.

Our shadows fall on other people, and in so doing we have, without our intention, some level of interaction with them by affecting them, however slightly. With our shadows, it's not good or bad, it's just a fact. However, our behavior as new creatures is noticed by other people. Our characters and actions can affect them sometimes without our awareness, just as our shadows fall on them without our knowing.

During our time together, we'll consider shadows and some of the spiritual lessons we may see in the casting of shadows.

We'll examine some of the uses of shadows in the Bible and how they convey both positive and negative concepts.

We'll reflect on the three general ingredients to making a shadow and some possible spiritual applications for them.

We'll consider some of Stephen's traits and how they help form a shadow that others recognized as reflecting a heart that was consecrated to God.

And lastly, we'll reflect on the shadow cast by Paul and how it continues to provide a beautiful example for consecrated hearts today to follow.

So let's start off by looking at uses of shadow in the Bible.

The word shadow in the Bible is often associated with darkness and therefore with negative concepts. As an example, the phrase shadow of death is used to describe the threat or inevitability of death, the cessation of life, and the darkness of oblivion. The phrase first appears in Job 3:5 and is subsequently found several other places throughout the remaining chapters of the book. It's repeated in several of the Psalms, perhaps most famously in Psalm 23:4.

In some scriptures, shadow is used in a more positive way, usually referring to relief or protection from the heat of an extreme experience.

Psalm 17, 8 and 9 offers a plea to be hidden under the shadow of God's wings from enemies.

Psalm 36, 7 and 8 describes the shadow of God's wings as a place of safety or abundance, and Psalm 91:1 and 2 describes the shadow of the Almighty as a place of refuge.

These uses of shadows suggest potential applications to Christian characters. Characters that inspire others to sin or disobedience to God could be thought of as casting shadows of death. Characters that inspire others to seek the glory of God and the beauty of his plan for Mankind and reflect on the principles of God's laws could be thought of as places of safety and refuge from the turmoil and trouble of the world.

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Before considering further potential spiritual applications of shadows, let's look at the three necessary ingredients that all work together to make your actual shadow.

First, you need a light source. Second, you need an object to block part of that light to create the shadow, and third, you need something for the shadow to fall upon. So let's look at these briefly, each one first of all, for a shadow to exist, there needs to be a light source. For any consecrated person, the ultimate source of light in life is as easy to identify as the sun on a bright summer day.

First John 1:5 6 declare that God is light and that it's not possible to have fellowship with God and walk in darkness.

God is also the strength that is behind every consecrated action and walk.

James 1:17 emphasizes that every good and perfect gift originates from God, identifying Him as the Father of Lights. God's light in our lives is solid and dependable, not varying or flickering between light and dark. Verse 18 assures us that it's God's will for us to walk the path of consecration to Him, and as God Himself declares in Isaiah 55:11, his word will accomplish that which pleases him and the thing he sends it to will prosper.

Another source of light in our lives is our Master, Jesus. During his ministry, Jesus referred to himself as the light of the world. By providing his life as a ransom for mankind, Jesus provides the only light of hope for mankind's salvation, whether now for the church or in the future for the remainder of mankind. He taught that no one can approach God except through him, meaning that the only way to experience God's light is through him. For his consecrated church members, Jesus promises that those who follow him shall not walk in darkness.

Jesus so perfectly reflected God's will that he taught us that he and His Father were one in harmony. In a similar fashion, Jesus can be thought of as the light that stands behind every consecrated person who strives to be in harmony with God.

The second thing needed for a shadow is the object that stands and blocks or absorbs the light.

In this example, the object is us who have been called forth out of darkness to stand in God's marvelous light. The human body was made to need sunlight. Sunlight helps the body produce vitamin D and also is a potential tool in combating mental health issues such as seasonal affective disorder. Similarly, mankind was created to have a relationship with God. Only by standing in God's light can mankind have any hope of salvation.

It was only through disobedience that our relationship with God was thrown into disharmony.

God cannot tolerate sin. His justice requires perfection, and as Paul teaches us in Romans 6:23, the wages of sin is death.

Yet we are imperfect. Through our fallen natures, we've all committed sin in our lives. Paul in Hebrews 10:31 teaches that it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands or judgment of God.

Just as we can't bear the full magnitude of the sun without protection, we still being imperfect, cannot stand in front of God on our own.

Paul's words that the wages of sin is death was only half of his sentence.

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Although the wages of sin is death, the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. For those consecrated to God, Jesus is promised to act as an advocate between the sinner and God, and through Jesus merit, God will forgive sin. Just as we need protection to stand in the physical sunlight safely, Jesus advocacy allows us to stand in God's light despite our imperfections.

Before moving on to the third and final component of shadow casting, consider one additional teaching of Jesus.

In Matthew 5:45, he says that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven, for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.

One of the exceedingly wondrous glories of God's plan is that it provides a means of salvation not just for a few, but but for all mankind. Through Jesus, the light of God's love shines on the consecrated church now and will shine on all mankind in the future.

For us to fully appreciate God's light and love now, in the present age, it's necessary for us to give our hearts and minds, our all to God.

In so doing, as in Jesus words in the first part of verse 45, we have the hope of becoming sons of our Father. To do so, we must follow Jesus command not only to hear his words and understand his lessons, but to put them into practice in our lives.

When delivering the parable of the man who built his house on a foundation of rock, Jesus teaches that the wise man is the one who hears his words and does them.

He also teaches the very plain lesson that if we truly love Jesus, we will keep his commandments. So our lives aren't just meant to be standing in God's light and casting any sort of shadow we want. The consecrated life is about casting the correct kind of shadow, one that is, to the best of our imperfect ability, a copy of Jesus, the Son of God, And then moving on to the last of the Ingredients. Lastly, to cast a shadow, a shadow needs something to fall upon. From some respects, this third element can seem not as necessary as the light source or the object standing in the light.

But does a shadow really have any meaning if it doesn't fall on something and affect it? From one perspective, Jesus didn't seem to think so.

In Matthew 5, 14 and 15, Jesus talks about his consecrated followers, the Church, and teaches that the church is the light of the world. He points out that a candle, once lit, is not placed under a bushel, but positioned so it can give light to the whole house. He instructs us to let our light shine before men that they may see our good works and most importantly, glorify your Father, which is in heaven. This third part of the picture, then, is vitally important in order to obey our Master's commands. It's not enough that we stand in God's light.

It's not enough that we mold the shape of our shadow to the likeness of Jesus our head.

If we are to fully obey, our shadow must fall on those we encounter, whether they are our consecrated brethren or people we encounter in the world.

During the course of our lives, we may never fully know how the shadows we cast serve God's plan. We may see the shadow cast by others and feel our own shadows are insignificant in comparison.

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At other times, we may feel our past shortcomings so keenly that we despair of ever being able to cast the kind of shadow that our hearts desire.

These types of concerns are nothing new to those striving to walk the narrow way. In his wisdom, God has ensured that the Scriptures record accounts of two faithful followers of Jesus, whose life lessons provide examples of the kinds of shadows that should be cast by those consecrated to him.

As our first example, let's consider the characteristics of Stephen.

The early church had a problem. As the number of people in the church began to grow, the responsibility for providing for the needs of those members grew too. The situation became so acute that the apostles called a meeting with a large group of the Church's disciples.

The apostles directed the disciples to choose seven men from among their multitude to oversee the physical needs of the church members.

The apostles understood the importance of selecting the right characteristics for the job at hand. They gave the disciples three requirements to look for when selecting the candidates.

All three of these characteristics mix together to form a clear description of the character the disciples were to look for in their choices. Each of these characteristics is a good trait for any of the Lord's consecrated. So let's take a look at each of these three characteristics, the first one was to be of good report.

During their years of traveling with Jesus, the apostles counted Judas as one of their number.

According to John 12:6, Judas was in charge of the bag.

On page 286 of volume 6, Brother Russell suggests that the Jewish people were used to donating money and resources to those things they associated with God. The bag could have conceivably held money and funds given by the people to Jesus and the apostles during their travels.

The apostles were a witness to the effect that money had on Judas. The seven men selected for the position were going to have to deal responsibly with the resources of the church.

Having had firsthand experience with the corrupting influence of money on a character that was susceptible to temptation, the apostles may have been wisely sensitive to appointments involving the use of resources prompting the requirement of being of good report.

Being of a good report meant that the selected brethren were judged to be casting shadows that made the substance of their minds and hearts evident to the multitude today. Just like then, each consecrated heart has a responsibility to be of a good report to God regarding any resource, temporal or spiritual, that God entrusts to them.

The second of the character traits that the disciples were to look for was being full of the Spirit.

The apostles were first hand recipients to many of Jesus teachings and eyewitnesses. To many of Jesus experiences. They surely remembered Jesus confrontations with the Pharisees who were in a position of leadership of the Jewish people. In Matthew 23, Jesus disciples witness his condemnation of the Spirit of the Pharisees who bound the people with heavy burdens.

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Jesus described their works being seen of men, showing the Pharisees cast long shadows wherever they went. However, even though the Pharisees sat in Moses seat, their shadows which were generated from their love of worldly respect, power and influence were not pleasing to God.

The apostles no doubt saw the clear difference between the Spirit of the Pharisees and the Spirit of Jesus.

Imagine the profoundly humbling experience of Jesus, their master, finishing his supper, taking water in a towel and proceeding to one by one wash their feet.

Through this experience, the apostles were clearly shown the difference between hearts under the shadow of the world compared to a heart under the shadow of God's Holy Spirit. The spirit of servitude to one's brethren is a fruit of God's Holy Spirit and one that the apostles surely felt was necessary for the role that was opening.

Further, although the apostles understood some of Jesus words and actions while they traveled with him, their understanding of God's Word and plan deepened after they received the Holy Spirit. Like those who have been blessed to receive God's Holy Spirit today, the apostles doubtlessly saw the clear distinction between their understanding and heart intentions before and after its receipt, making a character that that was backed by the Holy Spirit an obvious requirement for serving the needs of the church.

And the last of the three characteristics that the disciples were to look for was wisdom. The role of serving the church would have many practical requirements, including planning and logistical decisions, making wisdom an obvious trait for the position.

The apostles understood the Scriptures and through them doubtlessly were familiar with Solomon's request to God for wisdom that he might better judge and serve God's people. Solomon's request and its motives pleased God.

True wisdom isn't something that can be fully measured in written exams or interviews. Knowledge is neither good nor bad. It relies on facts that don't have a moral dimension to them. Wisdom, though, is different than knowledge. True, honest and good wisdom is a reflection of God's character.

After all, wisdom is one of God's four attributes.

The seven brethren chosen by the multitude are listed in Acts 6:5. Each one must have cast a shadow on the church members around them that reflected the good character required by the apostles godly standards. However, Stephen, listed first in verse five, is specifically listed as a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 8 shows that Stephen's shadow had a wide reach across the people of his time. Stephen is described as full of grace and power, which led him to demonstrating great wonders and signs among the people.

When Stephen falls into a dispute at a synagogue, the people on the other side of the dispute weren't able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which Stephen spake. Incensed by their defeat, they stirred up public sentiment against Stephen, which led him to be taken to trial and ultimately stoned to death. Such was Stephen's character that his last recorded words were a prayer for the people who were stoning him that their sin would not be held against them.

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Stephen's shadow was cast from the light of God's Holy Spirit.

His shadow touched many of the members of the early Christian church. Hundreds of years later, in the present day, Stephen's shadow of good report, fullness of the Holy Spirit and wisdom still falls broadly and deeply as an example across Christians everywhere.

Now let's turn our attention to another example of consecration. The Apostle Paul.

Acts 7:58 records that the people who planned to stone Stephen laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul.

Acts 8:1:3 record that Saul, a figure of significance in the religious leadership of the time, consented to Stephen's death. Saul made havoc of the church and committed many early Christians to prison. Saul cast a long and broad shadow of fear across the early members of the church, but even in this God's purpose was served. Acts 8:4 records that the members of the church were scattered abroad, but still preaching the Word everywhere they went.

Although Saul was passionate in his persecution of the disciples of the Lord, it was not in God's plan for that persecution to continue.

Acts 9:2:8 Record Saul receiving a vision of Jesus which changed the entire course of his life. His mind now opened to the truth of God's plan and Jesus role in that plan. He devoted the remainder of his life to spreading the truth of salvation through Christ, explaining the high calling to consecration to any who were receptive to it, and supporting the very group of people he had been persecuting who he now realized were not his enemies but his brethren.

In reprint 1884-1886 in an article titled Pressing Toward the Mark, Brother Russell examines Paul's character as a consecrated follower of Jesus.

In the first two paragraphs of this article, Brother Russell writes that through Scripture we are assured that the 12 apostles of whom Paul was one made their calling and elections sure.

The evidence he cites is Revelation 21:14 and the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Brother Also's conclusion is that the apostles, having been successful in their consecration vows, are worthy examples for us to follow as we run the same race for the prize of the high calling.

He also points out that each one of us should also strive to be worthy patterns or shadows of Christ ourselves, and this is an excerpt from that reprint article.

There is one other thought suggested by the above words of the apostle, which we would do well to consider, and that is, that as his faithful and successful course was a worthy and safe example to the Church, so likewise should each disciple of Christ in turn consider that his example will have its influence upon others.

Every Christian should strive to be a pattern worthy of imitation, a pattern of earnest and faithful endeavor, to copy Christ in his daily life and of active zeal in his service, patterns of perfection, of the ultimate moral glory and beauty of holiness. We cannot expect to be in this present life such a pattern we only have, or we have only in Christ our Lord. In no such sense did Paul ever say, follow me or follow us, but he did say, be ye followers of me, even as I also am in Christ.

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The apostle was a grand example of earnest endeavor to attain perfection, but not of the ultimate perfection which was in Christ only, and it is his zeal and intense earnestness in striving to copy Christ and to accomplish his will that we should imitate. Let us mark all such worthy examples while we also press toward the mark of character for the attainment of the prize of our high calling.

The reprint article then, presents five aspects of Paul's consecrated character.

As we'll see, these character traits overlap with each other, but in their interweaving they form a strong foundation for the consecrated heart and mind to use as an example. So let's take a look at these five characteristics. Each one the first thing that Brother Russell cites is that the apostle made a humble, sober estimate of his spiritual standing and strength.

Although Paul had a profound impact on the early Christian churches, he didn't use that influence to elevate himself above any of his other brethren. He realized that the pattern set for the church by its head, Jesus was a perfect one, and that his imperfect mind and heart could not fully live up to that pattern in his lifetime. He understood that advancing toward that goal would be a lifelong work.

By realizing that his imperfect nature was still subject to temptation and failings, Paul continually sought the Lord's grace to help maintain equilibrium in his standing. We see this in his words in Philippians 4:13, where he declares that he can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

He combined that confidence in Christ's strength with a humble heart and character, which allowed him to understand what he relied on. The Lord's grace for his humbleness is evident when, in Acts 20:19, Paul refers to his service to the Lord as having been rendered with all lowliness of mind and tears, and with trials by understanding where he was in terms of falling short of the perfect standard of Christ. He also maintained a soft and compassionate mind and heart for the shortcomings of others.

In Romans 12:1 he is recorded as beseeching, not berating, his brethren to maintain their full sacrifice of consecration to God. He understood the difficulties of fully letting go of the world's priorities, and he didn't demean or shame his brethren. He appealed to them to strive to better maintain Christ's pattern like he did. You know to get to any destination you need at least two things. You need to know where you're going, and you need to know where you are.

By understanding the perfect pattern of Christ the Church's head, and by having a realistic grasp of his strengths and weaknesses, Paul was able to set clear goals for himself achievable through the grace of God and Jesus. By being humble, he was able to see the next step of growth he needed to make by being sober, his goals and progress remained clear, not overly positive so as to make himself think where I am is good enough, but not overly negative so as to make himself think I'm too far away to ever make it. For us today, having that same humble and sober self awareness of where we are in our Christian development remains just as important as it was for Paul.

The second of Paul's characteristics that Brother Russell calls out is that we observe the apostle's singleness of purpose. This one thing I do. He did not try to do several things. If he had, he would surely have failed.

In any journey there's a danger of becoming distracted and straying from the intended destination.

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Brother Russell notes that through his single mindedness of purpose, Paul was relieved of many of the temptations to turn aside and enjoy some of the good things of this present life or to pursue some of its elusive bubbles. I like that thought, elusive bubbles. It reminds me of when my daughters were little and we'd be out in the yard blowing bubbles and they looked so beautiful in the air and my daughters would run after them and chase them and sometimes they would pop or sometimes they would actually catch them. But regardless of whatever happened, that beauty was just gone elusive. The bubbles popped away into nothing.

I think that's a very apt description of pursuing the priorities of the world. This is certainly an opposite of the modern teachings like the prosperity doctrine, which erroneously teaches that God's people would expect worldly success.

Paul certainly did not devote his time to the accumulation of worldly wealth. He invested his time in spreading the gospel, encouraging his brethren, and furthering his own consecrated character. He didn't split his time with politics or trying to change the systems of the time. Instead, he focused on the priorities that Jesus taught his followers to have.

God selects and calls each consecrated heart to him for a reason. We might not all be like Paul and be able to travel the world establishing churches and spreading the gospel, although some certainly do. We might not all suffer imprisonment or physical punishment for speaking God's word, although some certainly do.

For each one of us, that one thing we do is our consecrated service to God. But what that consecration looks like is as different in some ways as the different people being called forth. Consider Romans 16. The entire chapter is a record of Paul greeting members of the church. Perhaps one of the reasons why God overruled to have this chapter included in the Bible was to give us a glimpse of the diversity of called ones.

Even in the early days of the church. We all have one thing to make our calling and election sure. While working to glorify God, there will be many similar experiences that we may all share with our brethren. But in the end, the exact path before us is to some extent ours to walk uniquely with our Father and our Master.

Third of the characteristics that Brother Russell brings out is that we observe he determined to forget the things left behind.

Paul firmly turned away from the things valued by the world that he left behind. Saul of Tarsus had worldly success in terms of position and respect. The people looked to him in the events leading up to Stephen's stoning, demonstrating that to some extent he had the power of life and death over others.

Acts 3 shows the influence Saul had which allowed him to oversee the arresting of men and women even in their own homes. In Acts 9. 1, we're told that Saul had an influence with the high priest. Yet after his vision, he turned his back on all of that power and prestige and became one of the very people that he previously persecuted.

History doesn't record many instances of people in such positions of power willingly walking away from that power.

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In Philippians 3, 8, Paul writes that he considers the things he lost as refuse, as translated in the RVIC, or dung as translated in the King James. It's hard to think of a stronger statement about his feelings on what he left behind than that.

Further, Paul didn't allow his past failings to hold him back from what he knew his service to God demanded from him. He didn't forget those failings. He expressed contrition for them to the point of considering himself the least of the apostles. In First Corinthians 15, 9, as he continues his thoughts in verse 10, he declares that by the grace of God, I am what I am.

He accepted forgiveness through Christ's grace, labored all the more diligently to testify about his gratefulness for that grace, to inspire others.

Have you ever failed at something, whether in service to God or at your job or otherwise in life? Have you ever felt, I don't want to deal with that anymore and kind of shy away from it or even dread it in your mind?

Sometimes the best antidote is to just continue forward like Paul did. If we want to be in the church, if we want to serve God and be with our master, the problems we face and the work we have, public or private, isn't going to go away, and if it does, how lost we would truly be.

The fourth characteristic of Paul that Brother Russell brings out is that he reached forward to the things that were before his faith took hold of the promises of God, with such tenacity that to him they were living realities, inspiring zeal and faithfulness.

Paul's words in Philippians 4. Eight are well known to each consecrated heart. We had a beautiful study that included Philippians 4:8 just last Sunday. Paul exhorts the church to concentrate on things that are true, honest and lovely. What we choose to consistently focus our shape.

Excuse me, what we choose to consistently focus on. It shapes our thoughts and in turn that shapes our beliefs and hopes, and hopes are the foundation of faith.

Brother Russell comments that a Christian's habit of thought has much to do with his spiritual progress or retrogression.

When our minds are at rest, what thoughts flash through them? Are they spiritual thoughts, thoughts on work that we can be doing in God's service? Or are they focused on fleeting distractions, those elusive bubbles of the world?

Paul's mind reached forward to the good and true promises of God. They were his central thought, his default focus. Following Paul's example and advice in Philippians 4.8 about what to focus our thoughts and energies on is good advice for each consecrated mind because it gives us a set of guidelines for the types of things that our minds should drift back to whenever they can.

The fifth and last of Paul's characteristics that Brother Russell calls out is that we notice the apostles' energetic zeal which not only reached forward in contemplation of and desire for the beauty of holiness and the heavenly glory, but also earnestly pressed toward the mark for the prize.

Paul demonstrated that it's not enough to consider and desire the things of God. We have to run for them, strive for them, study and endeavor by the grace of God to obtain them. In Hebrews 12:1, Paul tells us to lay aside every weight and run with patience the race that is set before us. You know, we're used to thinking of a race as a competition, that if we're running to win a race, we'll

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need to elbow aside our fellow runners, in this case our brethren. But I don't think that's Paul's meaning here.

He tells us to lay aside every weight, meaning the things of the world that we're holding onto that are burdening us from more fully meeting our vows of consecration.

A race takes effort to start and an effort to finish. Paul tells us to run with patience. Every runner knows that you don't wake up, just wake up one morning able to run a marathon or even a 5k. You train day after day, building strength and endurance until the goal of running the race is achievable. Just like physical training, our progression in the narrow way takes courage and dedication and patience.

Paul never gave up on changing his heart and mind, and little by little he turned it into a clearer copy of the perfect example of Jesus.

The harder we work to accomplish the Lord's will in ourselves and that part of his work committed to us, the greater is our peace of mind that God sees our efforts and helps to guide us. In general, we appreciate longer and deeper the things we work hard for and are much more hesitant to let such things go. We tend not to care as much if we lose the things that come easy to us. Our consecration to God and the ability to glorify his name is to be the central purpose of our lives. We should expect something so valuable to require so much of our time and energy.

It can be hard to find time to study, to work in God's service, to further the work of the harvest, to sometimes even motivate oneself to find a piece of that work to do in the harvest. But from my experience, God is always quick to reward us when we do, with peace of mind and heart and guidance toward the next step that he would have us take.

Before leaving the example of Paul, let's consider one last suggestion. The New Testament provides two patterns that consecrated hearts need to recognize the perfect head and pattern Jesus and the Apostle Paul, the imperfect body member who strove to conform to that pattern.

Paul knew he wasn't perfect, however. He trusted in God's promises of forgiveness toward the merit and advocacy and strength of Jesus as his motivation to keep pressing forward. He knew his own weaknesses and shortcomings, but instead of allowing them to mire him down, he used them as fuel for his path forward in the narrow way. He understood that knowing what you don't want to be is as critical for understanding what, excuse me. He understood that knowing what you don't want to be is critical for understanding what you do want to be and to use that knowledge to make a straight, unswerving path with your feet.

By providing us with an example of a person who, like us, struggled with weaknesses of the old mind and body, yet was still successful in his consecration, God in His wisdom, gives us a realistic pattern to follow and a solid foundation to believe, really believe, that we too can be successful despite whatever doubts our own fallen natures may whisper to us.

As we conclude, I'd like to note that there were many revisions to this Discourse and many examples of casting shadows that I had to cut out due to lack of time. Jesus, the head of the church, whose shadow provides us with the perfect pattern. A section on Peter, who walked with Jesus physically and spiritually and whose journey along the narrow way seems so familiar to us even today. A section on the shadows cast by the seven messengers, Brother Russell in particular, a section on the beautiful shadows that the brethren who have gone before us continue to cast on

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us. A section on the shadows of our brethren here with us now that we are blessed to interact with on a regular basis and how they are such indispensable parts of our Christian lives.

A section on our brethren across the world who have different backgrounds and experiences but are running for the same prize as us, and how though even distance separates us, the shadows of their beautiful hearts and actions inspire us and draw us together, and finally, a section about the brethren in general, precious to us beyond all treasure, who were and are instrumental in providing us help and guidance and encouragement in our consecrated walks. All cast a shadow on us.

First Peter 2, 9 reminds us that we have been called out of darkness into his marvelous light. We have so much light now at the end of the Gospel age, so much understanding of God's work and plan, so many resources to study, development and harvest work to use.

While we stand in the light. We will cast a shadow. We can't help but doing so. It's how God has arranged the laws of his universe. Our hearts, minds and actions will be shaped by the light that we choose to stand in front of.

The shadow that we cast will fall upon those around us in the world and our fellowship. It's our responsibility and our life's work to shape our shadows so that they don't follow the picture of the shadow of death, but that they follow the perfect pattern of our head Jesus. That they testify to the condition of our hearts as clearly as Stevens did, and that they use the patterns forged through striving and efforts of faith such as Paul's did. That our shadows may become soothing and encouraging areas of comfort and encouragement for our brethren and for the world.

And in that we bring all the more glory to the ultimate source of all light, our God, who we are so privileged to serve, and may the Lord add His blessing.