

# The TASKMASTER SHADOW

For Religious People, Non-Religious People,  
and People Like the Rest of Us



Daniel H. Miller

*Six words from a college professor brought seeds of a life changing insight that would eventually enable him to understand a realm of humanity, hidden deep within the human soul. As Daniel uncovered the power and quality of this realm it...*

## **The Taskmaster Shadow**

By Daniel H. Miller

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Print ISBN: 978-1-961267-59-6  
Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88532-508-0

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

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Contact information: [dan@millerz.info](mailto:dan@millerz.info)  
<http://taskmaster.anima.glass>

First Edition

## **Praise for The Taskmaster Shadow**

With quirky chapter titles, Dan Miller entices the reader as he exposes the enemies' tactics, much in the vein of C. S. Lewis's Screwtape Letters. A fun and serious read

Del Wisdom  
Owner, Wisdom Books  
Kennewick, Washington

Dan Miller is one of my life heroes. I affectionately call him Pastor Dan. He was my pastor during a very difficult period in my life. He helped guide me and countless other young people toward a life dedicated to God's service.

As I read through his manuscript, I found myself reflecting on many messages from Pastor Dan's sermons. Developed over 50 years of experience, these messages offer very important points for our benefit. We are often ushered into the routines of the "Taskmaster," but Pastor Dan Miller challenges us to follow the wisdom of Jesus and the teaching of St. Paul, encouraging us to maintain a pure, simple relationship with God. I was deeply encouraged by this book, and I know the reader will be encouraged too.

Randy Rowe, Ph D- President  
Teen Challenge, NorWestCal -Nevada  
[YouTube.com/TeenChallengeNWCN](https://www.youtube.com/TeenChallengeNWCN)

Dan offers a refreshing, engaging treatment of the fundamental truth that undergirds our entire lives. Here the reader will find both the conviction and joy of good theology

Judy Klaustermeyer  
Ba, Ma in German Literature  
MDiv; B.S in Crop Science

If you want to experience “elder” wisdom then read this book. Dan brings years of faithful ministry service into these pages to give you nuggets of wisdom that only come from a life lived in the trenches.

Mark Warren-the Calling Coach

Mark Warren Associates.com

I recommend this excellent book in which Dan Miller has laid bare his soul. He offers unique insight from his life-time experience of helping individuals and families find peace and freedom through Christ. Dan Miller has a true pastor’s heart. I met Dan as a freshman at Northwest University. Through all the years since Dan has remained faithful to his call. Once you start reading the Task Master Shadow you will not be able to put it down.

The Taskmaster Shadow carries the universal theme of good over evil; drawing the heart and mind to the eternal. There is something for everyone: Young people will find a relevant message of hope in today’s post-Christian world. The unbeliever will see the gift God has offered to mankind. The mature Christian will be challenged to stand strong in God’s power against deception. This Book is a classic in the field of Christian apologetics.

Michael Shoemaker  
M.A., M.Div. D.Min

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## **Chapter 1: What You Choose, Or What Chooses You?**

It is evident to most of us (sometimes painfully), that the years between toddler and teenager significantly impact the remainder of our lives. The first eighteen years are filled with constant positive and negative information. Some of this can be insightful and scholarly, while — at other times — it may be overshadowed by copious amounts of silly conjecture, worthless speculation, or unfounded bias.

How much of what we become in Life is due to Nature, or is our future framed more by Nurture? How much of our identity is shaped by what we choose — or how much of our identity is the result of what chooses us?

Those delightful, sometimes chaotic, early years are formative and far from completion. According to neurological specialists, the undeveloped cerebrum area of that “melon” attached to the top of our necks has not yet ripened enough to contribute fully to logical conclusions.

There were times when we were expected to make far-reaching life decisions out of that naïve, emotionally half-ripened part of our brains. Whether we enjoyed positive, well-planned, stimulating beginnings — or were burdened with the blunders of a dysfunctional, crippling environment — the script composed on our vulnerable young frameworks seems, in many ways, to have been drawn with permanent ink.

Like the foundation of a master painter’s artwork, our childhood environment colors aspects of our lives into old age. Our early history provides limitless scenarios, each producing unique consequential twists and turns, and all contributing to the distinctive journey that ultimately describes everyone who has ever walked Earth’s steep trails.

Does your life fit into one of the following scenarios, possibly summarizing your early years? If so, can you identify some of those traits today?

1. Some were raised in a family system that was strategically built for success. These fortunate people were favored with a significant ideology implanted by caring, mature influences. The grafting of solid Life-skills were imparted to them. To this day, they rejoice in the blessings of those few but highly impactful years.

Their childhood memories consist of a rich environment immersed in joyful affirmation, positive relationships, laughter, stimulating motivation, and abundant encouragement. Social and academic excellence describe their adolescent years. Those advantages followed them through their higher learning experiences. They fit perfectly into a fulfilling, prosperous career, seemingly designed just for them. They married, and raised a positive, successful family. They are admired by many, seem to not have a care in the world, and — to this day — the sun tends to shine ceaselessly on their pathway.

2. The introductory chapters of others' life stories could present more of a challenge. Their early years may reveal a story of an individual immersed in a concoction of irrelevant traditions imposed on them by parents with myopic objectives, if there were any objectives at all. Possibly they endured unthinkable, highly destructive abuse of some form. They may have struggled in a thick, suffocating fog of horrible family dynamics, enduring the fatalistic projections of very sub-par role models. Some emerged into adulthood feeling poisoned, somehow cheated by their childhood environment, leaving them with a constant, bitter feeling in their souls.

For good reason, they may go to great lengths to erase their pasts and fabricate entirely new identities by rejecting as much of the input of their early, home-made years, as possible. They have found it to be a lifelong process to work through the deficiencies of their formative years.

Interestingly, there is a typical pattern with some adults who still struggle with a harsh beginning. Some have over-reacted to their pasts so intensely that their disdain for it became their lives' "emotional focus." Perhaps it is at a different level, but the essence of the very thing they resisted — that is what they become. Ironically, the Life Lens through which they see becomes the same one from which they are running! Some do the same hurtful things which they had tossed into the "garbage pail of irrelevance." For example, they may have resented an excessively rigid moral stance of the meaningless rules of controlling parents.

Overreacting, they ended up displaying the same deficient intensity by adopting extreme political views, or living by a self-imposed code of stringent health regulations, or imposing on their own children a life of strict edicts espoused in some current, usually short-lived psycho-fad. By totally trashing their past, some were left without a trace of the foundational building materials to construct a life of value and purpose. They become vulnerable to whatever presents itself as "the antithesis" of their yesterdays.

3. There are always a few who — from early childhood — seem to be wearing a forehead tattoo screaming "Rebel ... Trouble-maker ... Problem Child" or, later in life, even "Anarchist." They seem to be driven by pent-up anger, painful confusion, or some mysterious force from the Dark Side. This mentality prohibits them from living for their best interests or for the common good of others. Without correction, they may become "Bonnie and Clyde" types, live above (or without) the Rules, and every day exploiting their short-lived universe. Over time, they may level out ... or they could take steps to self-destruct, possibly leaving them with permanent scars and painful consequences, even death.

4. Then there are still others who — feeling insignificant or taken advantage of in a big, unpredictable world — may follow the magnetic pull of some sugar-coated deception bubbling out from some smooth-talking "guru" who slithers into their lives. They easily become

mesmerized by the words uttered by their private “priest of chaos,” becoming so thoroughly indoctrinated in what initially looks like a glorious pathway to personal peace. Temporarily, this mirage seems to answer their quest for meaningful identity — but ultimately, it leads to a maze of dead-ends, and they become lost in the chaos of a desolate philosophical labyrinth. This Shadow had been quite successful in its intent.

5. Breaking through the protective cocoon of childhood, morphing into the freedom of adulthood, can be a tedious, lengthy procedure. This process may seem more challenging for some. Individuals with healthy self-images — secure in who they are — live daily in a completely different universe than those constantly struggling with self-worth issues. How did it happen? How did some become imprisoned by the scourge of self-rejection?

At one time, at least briefly, they were innocent babies without a worry in the world, confident in their simple existence. Yet, in a few short years, their naïve innocence somehow experienced the harsh betrayal of human rejection. Their deteriorating confidence became an ever-expanding internal suspicion of being “handed a rotten deal.” To this day, the way they interpret Life is continually reinforced by the harsh realities of negative daily experiences.

Internally, they ask a thousand times: “Why am I of less value than others?” When did all this start? Did they experience some unusual degree of physical or traumatic emotional pain during childhood or adolescence? Did some physical imperfection torpedo their self-concept? Was the implosion of their self-worth caused by breathing in toxic fumes of abuse, scorn, or belittlement? A broken self-image slowly crushes the heart of its owner.

Victims of a shattered self-image may suffer inwardly, but some may be able to camouflage their pain by becoming either “class clown” or “social bullies.” Most simply “put on a happy face” while they are weeping with great pain inside.

The following verse is a sobering description of many struggling with the pain of self-worth deficiencies:

Behind my smile is a hurt heart  
Behind my laugh, I'm falling apart  
Look closely at me, and you will see  
The person I am ... isn't me.

6. Finally, we have all encountered those who grazed through the fifteen or twenty years after birth, void of vision, resisting most input that has to do with personal ambition. Instead of acquiring the necessary building blocks to construct a meaningful future, adulthood abruptly appears — and they are unprepared. When the whistle signaled the end of their irresponsible “romper room years,” not only did they not know how to run the race, they didn't seem to know there even was a race! Unprepared, they wake up in the middle of an organized, focused, goal-centered world — but leaving them as if they were a neglected, vacant lot, covered with weeds. Is it possible that “another force,” a “dark compulsion” has injected its influence with the intent of encouraging the destruction of potential in this person's life?

Could your story be like a home-made hodgepodge stew consisting of bits and pieces of one — or even several — of the above scenarios? Look back for a moment at your beginnings. For most of us, the entrance into the wild and wonderful future arrived suddenly, without fanfare, flashing lights ... or warning signals.

Our initial new world welcome was a well-placed slap on the rear given by the cold hand of an overworked doctor. Indeed, we were not anticipating that! No warning date was marked on some inner-womb wall calendar. In the warm comfort of the womb, no instructions had been offered to prepare us for the harshness of life in the years ahead. But there we are, in the flesh, buck-naked, and probably expressing some form of grief in the immediate realization of the sudden loss of the only environment we have ever known: the cozy security of a warm

womb, overseen by a distant, benevolent parent-figure. Instantaneously, Life is upon us, with no apparent direction and no guarantees.

As children, we were entertained by fantasy messages that always ended up with the Good Guy winning and the Bad Guy defeated. Superman, the Road Runner, Popeye the Sailor, Scooby-Doo — to name a few. We would one day find that, in real life, Bugs Bunny does not always escape his enemy's traps while still proudly chewing on his stash of carrots. Instead, he is caught ... and an hour after his capture, Wile E. Coyote gets ready for a sun-drenched nap while he burps up fuzzy hairballs.

We were doing well; everything was functioning correctly. But one day, without our awareness (or consent), a Dark Shadow crossed our path. Could this be why some of us experience an unfamiliar reaction to a harsh period at some time in Life? We will ask ourselves, "What the heck happened?" Suddenly, this thing we call Life, feels instead like a train wreck. It may be a heart-wrenching relationship misfire ... a significant financial disaster ... a personal moral failure ... an extreme physical peril ... a biting tragedy ... or some of the other pain-filled servings offered at Life's "Buffet of Sorrow."

For some, the moment's pain may be too great, may become like a neon sign hung over their heads, announcing defeat. During harsh times, it's not uncommon to hear the siren song of the past, calling, enticing us to come back, to retreat into the comfort of yesterday's ritual. The temptation is very appealing, even though yesterday's door was closed. Like an old southern hound dog, content to lay his tired body inside his flea-infested, dilapidated doghouse, some of us want to snuggle into the threadbare security blanket of the familiarity of our past, even if it is worn-out and rank-smelling.

The dark clouds of that ominous period in our lives were no small thing. We were smacked head-on, shook to the depths of our souls, and challenged in what we assumed would be a "consistently safe reality." We still may not realize the excessive influence applied by another

world force at the same time. However, although that part of our lives endured a harsh, uninvited event, instead of a label announcing “Defeat!” — is it possible that a “pearl of tremendous insight” was produced? Absolutely! But the pain experienced during what seemed to be a relentless dark period was severe, and it left a mark on our souls that will always be remembered.

Our life message could become even more significant if we are able to embrace a degree of personal growth during these challenges. The result of the process could identify us for generations to come. The high-priority word is growth but growth requires change.

“Change is hard because change leads to loss. Loss leads to pain. What we lose is the same way things used to be. So, we resist change, and stay stuck ... or we embrace change, work through the loss, and continue to grow as a person.”

However, if by embracing yesterday’s pain and using it as an excuse or alibi for today’s failure, will that pain become a significant part of our life’s message? Even more critical: if our past colors our present — if it lives in our heads like some powerful magnet — can those events attract hostile forces from the dark, unseen world around us? Will “remembered pain” be like putting out the welcome mat for cruel forces that delight in exploiting our vulnerabilities? Could those forces attach to our internal, mental, and emotional systems, as a subtle reminder of all that is negative or wrong concerning past pain? What can we do to arm ourselves from the influence of the Dark Shadows of the Universe?

## **Chapter 2: Derailed Ambition**

I was about to experience a whole new reality. A dark storm was preparing to unleash a torrent of pain and sorrow. I was not equipped for — and certainly did not plan for — the harsh deluge ahead. The advancing storm would unleash its wrath on my innocent existence and spread its blasting downpour on others.

It was the autumn of 1965, in the small town of Tigard, Oregon. I had walked the halls of Tigard High School for almost four years, trying to discover the profound combination that would unlock the hidden passage leading to my success. I was a typical “mess of a young man,” trying to determine my identity, my talents, the direction of my life, and — most importantly — the degree of my appeal to the opposite sex. I often felt I should have won the Shyest Kid in School Award. I learned to hide behind jokes, and anecdotes I picked up from old Reader’s Digest magazines. On rare occasions, I also tried to be a student.

During those years, I liked to think of myself as a top-tier high school wrestler. I enjoyed the encouragement, support, and camaraderie of the team experience. Our team had grown close to each other through the shared experiences of our three junior high and four senior high school years together.

I was confident. I had learned how to embrace the painful experience of our coach’s creative discipline, the obvious growth in skill and strength, and the formidable conviction I had gained to successfully face any adversary for six minutes on the wrestling mat. The accomplishment of my dream would be all up to me.

I worked year-round lifting weights, running sprints, and practicing relevant exercises many days during the off-season. I would be ready when the calendar said, “Wrestle!” I wanted no excuse in my quest to defeat any foe on the mat.

My well-tuned wrestling technique was rehearsed repeatedly. As the season approached, I planned, ate, slept, breathed, and dreamed of winning the 148-pound weight division Oregon State Wrestling Championship. My commitment to conditioning increased as I realized my most vigorous opposition — whoever that may be — would be doing the same.

Facing a muscular unknown opponent on the mat is a daunting experience, especially if you haven't had prior participation with this opponent and you're unsure if he will ring your neck ... or if you will have your arm elevated as victor. When the referee says, "Wrestle!" you give everything. Experience, strength and intelligence are paramount. Draining every ounce of physical strength your body can provide is the only requirement. While you work your technique, simultaneously you are anticipating your opponent's next thought. His slightest move — just a muscle twitch — requires an instantaneous response. It may determine if you will leave the mat as conqueror, or as conquered.

### *Two Crushing Events*

I was sufficiently prepared for the battle that would give me the State Championship. My coaches felt confident I would do very well in my weight division. But this year's Wrestling season suddenly had a completely different tone. It would be couched in a myriad of unfamiliar, complex emotions. Two crushing events had a sobering effect on our team, and on many within our Student Body for this school year. A tragedy had blindsided our school in the final weeks of summer, before our senior year started. Mac Williams was a classmate, an all-around-good guy, and my most vigorous competition for the starting spot of the 148-pound weight division. I looked forward to the challenge.

On an ominous Saturday, Mac and two buddies were hit head-on by a drunk driver. Mac Williams and Jeff Rankin did not make it. Another friend, Gary Peterson, was in critical condition. These wonderful friends

planning for successful lives, were suddenly gone forever. We were all stunned to the core of our being.

A few weeks later, the school year began. The atmosphere was heavy with shared sorrow. Being together for the first time revealed a Student Body trying to process the grief of losing our good friends.

Three months passed quickly. Wrestling season was about to start. Our coach called a meeting for all wrestlers the night before our first practice. I sat next to Joe — my best friend and now a powerful competitor — as we suddenly realized we would be in the same weight division for the first time since the seventh grade. My most excellent friend would now become my biggest competition.

Joe had always been two weight divisions below mine, but nine months of hard work and a generous supply of testosterone kicked in, adding pounds of lean muscle to his once-skinny frame. We enjoyed a few minutes of good-natured jabs, a little trash talk, and some serious conversation about the exciting season ahead.

Later that cold, rainy night, Joe drove his car down a hilly road close to his home. He had driven the same route hundreds of times before. He rounded a sharp corner — the same sharp corner he had rounded many times. For some reason — no one will ever know why — he lost control of his car. The horrible sound of two tons of steel crashing against unforgiving concrete pavement pierced the innocent quiet of nearby homes. His car tumultuously flipped, then rolled, and Joe's body was thrown through the jagged hole where the windshield was exploding into a thousand shards of glass. Within seconds, Joe's last breath escaped him.

News traveled much slower in those pre-cell phone, pre-Internet days. At that time, we had good music on the radio, and telephone lines shared with several neighbors. When I woke up the following morning, I wasn't feeling well, and decided to stay home — unaware of last night's incident with Joe.

I turned on the radio, hoping to fill an empty house with the sounds of the Rolling Stones, Righteous Brothers or Elvis, or possibly that new group, the Beatles. Instead of music, my soul was instantly pulverized with the most horrible news I had ever heard in my life. The radio announcer casually said, “An auto accident last night claimed the life of Tigard High School student Joe Schultz.” Wait! No! No! No! It couldn’t be!

“There must be some mistake! My best friend, my pal, my buddy ... was dead? Joey is gone?” I was utterly stunned. There had been no warning. We had been joking, planning, and laughing just a few hours before!

The tragic reality of the unthinkable began consuming my pitiful existence. I could not believe it. I would never enjoy his company again. We would never, ever wrestle each other. I didn’t get to say goodbye. It was so blunt, definite, and cruel.

After the initial shock, came the unanswerable “Why?” questions. There were plenty of them. Each one seemed to shout at me during the day, and gnaw at my soul into the evening as I tried to process this unwelcome pain, this tragedy that had suddenly afflicted me.

My Wrestling season took on a new dimension. I thought of Joe continually — I wanted to win for myself and especially for him. I discovered a deeper level of motivation. The impact of Joe’s death sharpened my focus and intensified my preparation. I was on fire!

So far, I won every league match and placed first in every pre-season and mid-season tournament. It was now the final match of the regular season. We were wrestling an unrelenting Lake Oswego club. I was ready. My opponent was the toughest competitor I would face in our district. He was good, but I had already beaten him in a tournament earlier in the Wrestling season.

I had him on his back in the second round, ready to finish him off. Our slippery, sweat-covered bodies helped him wiggle out of my hold. He stood up. I was behind him, irritated that I had not finished him off. However, I was still in complete control. I decided to lift him, then slam him to the mat. This had to be done just right, not to draw a penalty.

I lifted and turned ... or did I turn and lift? I am not sure how it happened or what I tripped on, but it turned out ugly. We both came crashing down, his body hit me just wrong. I let out a cry of intense pain. The match was over.

I later learned the cartilage holding a large area of my rib cage had been torn. I remember the appointment with the doctor the next day, as if it were yesterday. My doctor — addressing the terrific pain I was experiencing — told me there was not enough intact cartilage to hold that portion of my ribs in place if there was even the slightest stress in the injured area. Any excessive pressure could be dangerous, impacting my ability to breathe. The pain I was experiencing verified the doctor's assessment. It would take a few months to heal. If I wrestled, I risked a rib or two puncturing my lungs and possibly more vital organs. My season was over.

What on earth had happened? A few months before, tragedy, sorrow and grief were foreign concepts to my eighteen years. My boyish naivety had been traded for the reality of unwelcome real-life issues. Suddenly, my life became tormented by painful reminders that were somehow intertwined with many confusing thoughts bouncing off the walls of my mind. During the weeks that followed, I wrestled a different kind of match — a battle erupted in my soul.

Outwardly, it was quiet. It was my private wrestling match. Often, it haunted me as I tried to sleep at night. Other times — in class, or on the school bus, mired in the obscurity of a cloudy daydream — I would be caught up in moments of despair. “Was there more than the obvious at play, as painful as the obvious was? What could hold my soul in a state of suppression beyond a period of ‘acceptable’ grief? Was it

normal for me to live in a cloud of unrelenting incompetency?” I had worked hard since seventh grade, but my realistic goal vanished in seconds. My best friend Joey was suddenly gone forever. I was through with wrestling forever. I could not see any purpose for my future. My faith in God was being tested more than I realized.

Looking back on that time, I now believe something I was ignorant of then. Along with the expected shock and pain of the loss of a long-awaited vision, and the sudden tragedies of that year, another “influence” was involved. A Shadow had crossed my path for a second time. Another “force” was waiting to plant seeds of destructive thoughts which would have misdirected me for years to come

## **Chapter 3:** **“What’s It All About?”**

In 1994, the often-quoted philosopher, “Forrest Gump” made a profound statement; his wisdom swept the planet. You probably know it. “Professor” Gump said, “Life is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you’ll get.”

Our days on Earth march on. Our bodies begin to break down. An unexpected reversal of the good life, accompanied by disappointments, heartaches — or even a moment of honest introspection — gives birth to a haunting question: “What is this life all about?” As we age, our thoughts concerning the meaning and purpose of our lives come more often, encompass a greater perspective, and last much longer.

We might think, “I’ve been around for 50 (or 60 or 70) years. I have accumulated some wealth, respectability, even possessions. I live in a degree of comfort which the rest of the world cannot fathom. So, now what? Is that all there is?” This question must be answered, yet it is a question we usually keep to ourselves. This may be one of the most provocative questions of our private times of introspection and self-examination.

In 1967, Dionne Warwick sang Burt Bacharach’s classic song, “Alfie.” The tune immediately rose to Number 5 on the top R&B singles list. The song prodded the souls of millions of fans — not only because of Miss Warwick’s enchanting voice — but also because it was that ubiquitous question.

She sang:

“What’s it all about, Alfie?

Is it just for the moment we live?

What’s it all about, when you sort it out, Alfie?”

Life has quickly flown by since my high school days. For the second time in my life, I am now reflecting on my existence from the “glorious vacation spot” of a Northwest Washington hospital bed.

The past twelve months have added a sober perspective, a stark reminder of my post-high school days almost sixty years ago. I am now realizing the hourglass of my life is turned upside down, and the sands of Time are quickly pouring through. There is nothing I can do to reverse the flow.

At the exact moment when the last grain of sand empties, everything I have committed my strength and time to — all I have worked for every hour, every day of my life — will mean absolutely nothing to me. I have enjoyed my time on Life’s stage, never fully comprehending much about the inevitable ... until now. Today, I am looking through a different lens, fully appreciating the moments left in my life. It is somewhat sobering to anticipate the voice of the “Stage Manager” one day very soon, quietly whispering to me: “This will be your last act.” It is common to ask this vital question in solemn moments like this. What’s it all about?

An attitude-check I often put myself through is: “Is there any relevance, significant purpose or valid reason for my remaining days?” Could I alter, tweak, or change my present-life perspective? Could some discipline or compelling concept be activated to produce fulfilling results? What would it cost me? Am I up to it? Or shall I adopt a passive lifestyle, and just gently coast into the confines of an expensive coffin? What are my final days about?”

These questions may arise for young people after graduation, or loss of a friend, or other life-changing moments. They are valid questions. Struggling with them as early as possible is not a bad idea.

Scripture gives us profound insight regarding the question. Solomon took over for his father, the renowned King David at the young age of nineteen or twenty. Blessed by God, his efforts resulted in accumulating

more wealth and power during his successful reign than anyone on Earth. He had three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines. He was highly respected throughout the known world. He earned the reputation as “the wisest man on Earth.” Yet his conclusion to “What’s it all about?” The answer was very revealing ... and his answer was not what anyone expected!

The words of the Teacher [Solomon], son of David, King in Jerusalem: “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” Ecclesiastes 1:1

Solomon had everything. He had a sterling worldwide reputation, incredible wealth, plenty of ladies to keep him happy, ultimate respect, and he was loaded with immense wisdom. And yet ... “meaningless”? Solomon’s lifetime conclusion is: “Everything is worthless without God.”

Today, followers of Christ understand that without a valid connection with the Creator of the Universe — lacking an authentic walk with Jesus Christ, with no expectation of Eternal Life — all is vanity. All else is gone with our last breath.

The commotion created by our busy lives encourages us to bury this vital message somewhere in the basement of our souls. It is my conviction that this private inner message speaks to us throughout life ... However, we are tone-deaf to that message. We are too busy to listen very well.

When we do hear it, we need to understand its paramount significance. This can be an apex moment, a sobering reality in our present life. It is a critical moment! Whether young or old — religious, non-religious or just one of the rest of us — this question has been intentionally placed deep in the soul of everyone — not to spawn guilt, fear, or regret — but to trigger hope. Its purpose is not to birth despair,

but to activate fruitfulness throughout our life — in our youth and middle age, but especially during the last pages of our story.

When we hear the “what’s it all about” question, it is not a time to close, to retreat or surrender. It is not intended to convey to us: “The road to the future is now closed; the trip is over.” Rather, this question — “What’s it all about?” — is a theological moment. It is a valuable opportunity worth pursuing. It is the most profound invitation to draw near to our Creator. He is the One who renews strength, provides a sustainable purpose, and clarifies eternal perspective. He holds the invitation to the fullness of days. He is the Timeless One who tells us, “There is more. It is not over. Do not stop or live without meaningful purpose, but step on the gas!”

Lifetime is long until we near the end — and then it seems just the opposite: The days seem to simply disappear!

During the years given to us, there are no guarantees of what we will face around the next corner. Whoever we are, we may face significant setbacks or challenges that suddenly seem too big to conquer. It is imperative to realize that a wrong interpretation of a challenge can be disastrous. Sinister forces lurk in the bushes, waiting for the perfect moment of emotional frailty. This is a moment when the dweller of the Shadow tries to pierce us with a poisonous dart soaked in a concoction of self-defeating information. Caution! If this poisoned dart lodges in our souls, its payload can produce the debilitating effects of disillusionment, hopelessness, and bitterness. It can derail our lives, change our course, and provide ample reason to self-destruct. The forces of darkness can use us, abuse us, and manipulate us towards their depraved purposes.

The following are life illustrations of two men. Both faced potentially life-ending situations; their responses and their outcomes are genuinely revealing.

*The Legacies of Two Men*

After reading several ambiguous accounts of his early life, I believe something like this may be what happened on a cloudy day in 1952. A 26-year-old copywriter for Esquire Magazine stood on the Brooklyn Bridge looking down into the waters 135-feet below. He was extremely discouraged and disappointed with the life fate had dealt him. He was asking himself, “Do I have a future? Will these be the last moments of my hollow life?”

A 2005 article from Time Magazine quotes his recollection of those days. “Saddled with family responsibilities and a less-than-thrilling job, I grew depressed. I remember standing on a bridge and thinking my life was going nowhere. Tears filled my eyes.”

The same article mentions that: “Years before, he had rejected the strict Puritan heritage that had framed and given some context to his early life. Later in life, Hugh would often tell the story of his home-life as a child, stating, ‘Most of the credit — or blame — belonged to his parents, Grace and Glenn Hefner. Grace, a former school-teacher, and Glenn, an accountant whose job kept him away from home for long hours, were devout Methodists, morally strict and emotionally reserved.’”

“Such restraint was in the bloodline,” Hugh would later point out. “For Glenn Hefner was a direct descendent of William Bradford, one of the English Puritan Separatists who sailed to America on the Mayflower in the early 1600s.”

The irony was not lost on Hugh Hefner, who would routinely cite this lineage when explaining his hedonist lifestyle. “Our family was Prohibitionist, Puritan in a very real sense. Never smoked, swore, drank, danced, or hugged. Oh no! There was no hugging or kissing in my family” Hefner told the Chicago Sun Times in 2004.

Nothing more is known or written about that dreary day on the bridge. Could it be — though he was probably unaware — that a Shadow passed over him? It usually does mean that. It is possible that, suddenly, in this dark moment of extreme vulnerability, a Force from the wretched Underworld found common ground, a mighty reservoir of receptivity, the perfect place to shoot its poison-tipped darts.

Hugh may have walked away that dismal day with the seeds of a new mission, a perverted theology, a corrupted philosophy, and an absolute commitment to a new “god” planted in his soul. The guy seen in his bathroom mirror revealed the central being of his life, the person he would spend far too much time admiring and worshipping for the remainder of his life. He became his “almighty deity.” His “theology,” now totally twisted, would expand itself into a ghoulish caricature with a corrupted purpose.

The following year, Hugh Hefner launched his new magazine, *Playboy*. Sure, this was not something new. Pornography existed before Hugh Hefner, but from that time on, it was no longer confined to dark alleys and seedy dens. Sex was commercialized. The world quickly began to change. “What *Playboy* offered to readers went beyond smut — it signaled membership in a tribe of gentlemen hedonists across the globe.”

The time-tested moorings of many families worldwide weakened, crumbled, and disappeared. The lives of men were altered as many found their souls captured by the seductive lure of pornography. A large portion of manhood lost its innocent, abdicated moral leadership, and abandoned lifelong purpose. Multitudes of marriages calcified and then dissolved. Moral absolutes were scoffed at and vacated for the temporary moment of self-gratification, producing raw hedonistic fulfillment and uninhibited self-indulgence.

Women were devalued, and to many men, became nothing more than sex objects, toys made just for the pleasure of the male population. Life was cheapened; it became much easier to justify sin. This new

basement-level “moral standard” became responsible for a monstrous cultural change, which — in part — opened the door to the unthinkable practice of baby-killing for personal convenience.

Today, like a leaking cesspool, the toxin from this multi-billion-dollar industry seeps into the homes of anyone of any age who knows how to go online. We are sadly experiencing catastrophic societal decay right before our eyes! A Dark Shadow visited Hugh Hefner that day on the bridge. He heard the voice. His response became a world-changing disaster. No doubt — the Evilest Force in the Universe threw a Party!

*A Cop on a Harley*

Look at a completely different response to the Shadow. My friend, Officer Mark Sigfrinius, a motorcycle policeman in Seattle, Washington, loved his job. It was a beautiful day in May 1989. Officer Sigfrinius was well-liked by his fellow officers, respected deeply by the public, and loved immensely by his wife and their two young children. Mark lived with a conviction that he would do his part each day to make the world a better place.

He was on top of the world. He often joked about how grateful he was that he could ride a motorcycle and get paid to do it. But things were about to change forever for Officer Sigfrinius.

Mark had just pulled over a suspicious car. Unknown to him, at that moment the people in the car were involved in a drug deal gone wrong. One man was driving the car, and one of the two people in the backseat was tied up. He was the subject of that bad drug deal, and the other two were planning on killing him in revenge.

Officer Sigfrinius cautiously approached the car. The driver had been slowly rolling down his window. Suddenly, just a few feet away, a loaded handgun quickly appeared through the open window. Shots were fired ... and then Officer Sigfrinius was down, lying on the roadway, in a rapidly expanding pool of blood hemorrhaging from his

body. Yet while falling, Officer Sigfrinius had been able to draw his revolver and empty it on the car, which sped away. Within a short time, the vehicle would be identified because of the fallen officer's six bullet holes decorating its exterior.

Other police officers, the Medical Aid car, and a crowd of onlookers quickly arrived. Officer Sigfrinius, lying on the cold roadway, was in extremely grave condition. He was immediately transported to a significant Trauma Center. For the other cops, the overwhelming concern for their friend's life became a harsh reminder of the daily dangers of their jobs.

As he fell backward, immediately Mark realized he could not move his lower body. One of the bullets that had sliced through his body had fractured a part of his spinal column. He was paralyzed. The team of specialists did everything they could to save his life. During the many surgeries that ensued, and after months of complex rehabilitation, there was ample reason for Mark to embrace the Shadow that tried to penetrate his soul. He was painfully aware if he lived, he would be paralyzed from the waist down. His life would never be the same.

Mark kept his faith intact through months of grueling pain, the mental struggle arising from the permanent loss of his career, his many physical abilities and the black hole of an unknown future.

Several years later, Mark and his family moved to the small town of Goldendale, Washington, over 200 miles from Seattle. Friends had purchased a custom-built, hand-controlled Harley Davidson motorcycle, with a side-car, and all hand controls. After thirty years of marriage, Mark and his wife have logged many hours and thousands of miles on this specialized bike.

Mark served as Mayor of Goldendale, for twelve years, and has served on the County Hospital Board for eight years. His profound love for his God, his family, and his life has taught him how to stay strong when the Shadow attempts to define his life.

What if our lives are always perfect, with no dark days, no storms, no worries? What if we never face problems or challenging situations? What if we could count on our tomorrows being the same as today? What if we never suddenly lose dear friends in tragic accidents, or to an invasive disease? What if we never face the disappointments of having dreams shattered?

That would be nice — but it won't happen.

# The TASKMASTER SHADOW

For Religious People, Non-Religious People,  
and People Like the Rest of Us



Daniel H. Miller

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