

MORNING DEVOTIONS

Are you Living in Denial?

Because life can be difficult and unpredictable, sometimes it's easier to live in denial. Have you heard this statement before? It's an unusual topic, but an important one for us, nonetheless.

The dictionary explains living in a state of denial is *a coping mechanism that gives you time to cope with a distressing situation*. You are basically trying to protect yourself from something or someone that is causing trouble. I think we've all done this to one extent or another.

Of course, it depends on what the situation is. The most extreme example I can think of is being diagnosed with stage-4 cancer, the most aggressive form, and being told, *there is no hope for you*. And then denying the reality of this terrible news saying, *That is not going to happen to me*.

It is a way to avoid and uncomfortable truth—I prefer to avoid the bad stuff that's going on in my life, or around me, so I pretend it's not real. We want to soften the impact or totally refuse to accept the truth. *To live like that is to look at things in life as you would like them to be, not as they really are*.

I'm not judging anyone who may do that – it is something that happens, and I can understand why. It is such a complex issue, and I can only skim the surface in a few minutes.

Living in denial will give you a temporary sense of comfort – but not in the long term. In some cases, initial short-term denial can be a good thing, giving you time to adjust to a painful or stressful issue. It might also be a precursor to making some sort of change in your life. Sooner or later, you will need to face the truth. To be brutally honest, *it's about telling lies to yourself rather than facing up to the truth*.

It's much better to be honest with yourself and face reality and make your choices accordingly. This is the route to good mental health and healthy relationship. Pretending is a big strain because underneath it you cannot really fool yourself. By denying there's a problem we don't have to feel bad about the fact that there's a problem. Unfortunately, this doesn't solve anything or make our lives better. It just sweeps our problems under the rug. They're still there. Still gnawing at us and still getting in our way.

It is fascinating to study the life of Jesus as we see Him in the New Testament. Jesus never lived one moment in denial. He faced up to every situation, the good and the bad. And I'm impressed by the way He handled life and its problems. He always acknowledged His own feelings. If He was angry, He showed His anger and expressed it if necessary.

He knew the feelings of sadness and helplessness. He saw and acknowledged what was going on around Him and never retreated from the unpleasantness of life – and there were some very challenging days as the Jewish leaders were set on destroying Him. They saw Him as a troublemaker who made their lives uncomfortable. He faced up to each situation with a calm that we can only imagine. So different to our reactions.

The Old Testament gives us the amazing story of someone who lived in denial but came through the other end. King David had a troubled past. He was a liar and committed adultery and arranged for a man's death. He lied to himself by acting as if what he'd done really wasn't all that bad, that he could get away with it, and that there would be no major consequence to suffer.

Above all, David lied to God by attempting to cover his sin and refusing to acknowledge and confess it.

For nearly a year David lived with God's convicting Holy Spirit pressing down on his soul. Being silent about his wrongdoing—refusing to confess his sin—only deepened David's anguish. He deteriorated physically, emotionally, and spiritually. In Psalm 32 we read about his turnaround as he confessed his wrongdoing and in humility accepted the sin in his life.

The renewing power of God helps us face life in a fresh and honest way, taking on both the bad and the good. Who knows what tomorrow will bring? Looking at Jesus' life it encourages me to be honest about what I feel. All emotions are valid. We don't need to be dragged down by despair, but we do need to face and feel the emotions. How? By taking these feelings straight to Jesus and telling Him how we feel, asking for His help and guidance.

The writers of the Psalms honestly wrote how they felt. Psalm 73:22 says, "*I saw myself so stupid and so ignorant*". Yes, he had forgotten God was in control. But he realised the error of his ways.

Why do we pretend things are not bad or unsettling, when they really are? It may take years but sooner or later we have to face whatever is bothering us. It is understandable you want to feel protected from harm – but avoiding life and its bumps leads you nowhere.