

THE DARK HOUR

Finding Victory in the Place of Pressure & Pain

"The Dark Night of the Soul" is a poem written by St. John of the Cross, a 16th Century Spanish poet and Roman Catholic Mystic. In this poem he describes the painful pathway to spiritual intimacy with Christ. The poem is divided into two books which discuss the two phases of the soul's dark night: the purification of the soul and the purification of the spirit. "The Dark Night of the Soul" as a concept has re-emerged in popular thought through the book "Mother Theresa: Come Be My Light" which was published in 2007. This book consists of 66 years of previously unpublished correspondence between Mother Theresa and her confessors. In these letters, Mother Theresa agonizes over the decades of terrifying dryness, darkness, and loneliness she experienced in her relationship with God.

"Lord, my God, who am I that You should forsake me? The child of your love- and now become as the most hated one-the one you have thrown away as unwanted-unloved. I call, I cling, I want-and there is no One to answer- no One on Whom I can cling-no, No One. -Alone. The darkness is so dark-and I am alone. -Unwanted, forsaken. -The loneliness of the heart that wants love is unbearable. -Where is my faith? -Even deep down, right in, there is nothing but emptiness and darkness.-My God-how painful is this unknown pain. It pains without ceasing. -I have no faith. - I dare not utter the words and thoughts that crowd in my heart- and make me suffer untold agony. So many unanswered questions live within me- I am afraid to uncover them- because of the blasphemy. -If there be God, please forgive me. -Trust that all will end in Heaven with Jesus. -When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven- there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul. -Love- the word- it brings nothing. - I am told God loves me- and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul. Before the work started- there was so much union-love—faith-trust-prayer-sacrifice. - Did I make the mistake in surrendering blindly to the call of the Sacred Heart? The work is not a doubt- because I am convinced that it is His not mine. -I don't feel- not even a single simple thought or temptation enters my heart to claim anything in the work."

Whether one agrees with the validity of St. John's concept (I believe there are

problems with it), it is clear in Scripture that serious Christians can experience prolonged periods of darkness and struggle.

1. Everyone will find themselves in places of darkness at some point
 - a. Yet God is always in the midst of it to work transformation
 - b. It may be caused by circumstances – sickness, personal struggle
 - c. Sometimes it is in our context – our business, or nation is in difficulty
 - d. Sometimes it flows out the core of our being
2. Throughout the book of John we find Jesus preparing His disciples for one of these dark times.

John 9:4

As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.

John 11:9-10

Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light. 10 It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.”

There will be a time of great darkness...

John 12:35-36

Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. 36 Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

Don’t waste your time; become children of light – let the light be such that it fill you on the inside so there will be light even when it is outwardly dark

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and

truth.

Luke 22:52-54

Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour —when darkness reigns.”

How do you endure in times when it seems God is no longer enthroned?

Even Jesus, in his humanity, may have under-estimated the impact on his own soul that the weight & pressure of circumstances would place upon him. He worked to prepare his disciples to be ready for the time of great pressure and difficulty.

The Picture

In the Garden of Gethsemane (Oil Press) and some of the critical events leading up to it, we find both the response of Jesus and His disciples to the beginning phase of the dark hour. In this powerful narrative we find some of the essentials for surviving the dark hour.

Matthew 26:36

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

This was the place of “crushing” where the oil of the Spirit rendered from difficulty is brought about.

These were the darkest hours...

The Principles

A. Preparation

Don't meet the moments of your preparation; God always prepares us for the difficulty to come, but we often miss those moments – we see them for

something other than they are and we miss the moment's value.

Peter, James, & John went with Christ up the Mount to prepare them for what was to come. They needed to see Jesus glorified with Moses and Elijah

Luke 9:28-32

About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.

Matthew 26:31-35

Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

B. Practice

Luke 22:39

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.

Jesus regularly went out to the Mount of Olives for prayer. We must learn to seek God when it is easy to do so.

We must practice and learn how to hear from God when it is easy to do

so; only then will we be able to seek and hear him in the time of pressure.

Recurring struggle and issues is often evidence of a heart that doesn't listen for God's voice in the times of ease and are not able to hear his voice in the time of trouble.

Every day we need to hear God's voice in the Bible

We must practice hearing from God so that we can be strengthened in the midst of the issues.

C. Partnership

Matthew 26:37-38

He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Even Jesus had people He relied upon to stand with him in the midst of difficulty

Jesus didn't wait until He was deeply troubled.

Why do we wait to reach out to people; don't wait until crisis to find a friend. Build your friendships now before you need them.

D. Proximity

Matthew 26:39

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Luke 22:41

He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed...

The people who are closest to you, you bring in to a degree of your life.

We are to bring our friends in, but you must be in close proximity with God as well.

You need to know your Peter, James, & John when hell knocks at your door. But you need to hold those relationships with your earnest prayer to God. Both are needed.

Jesus stood because He prayed. Most people run to one or the other – to people if they don't have a good relationship with God or to God if they don't have any people in their lives.

E. Prayer

Matthew 26:36

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray.

Matthew 26:40-41

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.

Luke 22:40-45

On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." 41 He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." 43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow.

Finding strength in God comes only by prayer.

F. Perspective

Matthew 16:21-23

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Matthew 26:55-56

In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Acts 2:23

This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

Even when God seems de-throned in our lives, He is in the middle of our circumstances working his will: to build us into the people He intends and to over rule the enemy and his work.

G. Power

John 18:4-9

Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they said. Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you

are looking for me, then let these men go.” This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: “I have not lost one of those you gave me.”

Matthew 26:51-56

And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?” At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled.

Jesus demonstrated the power of God in the midst of darkness.

We must understand that the will of God will break the power of the enemy, but we will see that, have the light to understand and believe that, requires finding God in the time when there is no pressure.