

# **“THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL”**

**by Dr. D. W. Ekstrand**

*(A collection of studies from various writers)*

**The Dark Night** — This material was provided by Art & Sue Renz of “Global Missionary Church Ministries” (Address: P. O. Box 840625, Houston, TX 77284 — Phone: 281-858-0423) [http://hissheep.org/deliverance/the\\_dark\\_night\\_of\\_the\\_soul.html](http://hissheep.org/deliverance/the_dark_night_of_the_soul.html)

What Is "the Dark Night"? What happens to our faith in the night seasons? We know that faith is simply being fully persuaded that God will do all that He has promised to do in His timing and in His way. We also know that God continually pushes us to the limit in order to strengthen our faith and transform us into His image. When we willingly allow Him to purge our souls of sin and self, He can then easily accomplish His will. However, when we block and prevent God from doing these things in our lives, either out of ignorance or disobedience, He sometimes will take matters into His own hands; i.e., the night seasons.

The dark night or the night season is simply the transition we make from depending upon our own sight and our own selves to a total dependence upon Christ and His faithfulness. This shift brings us into a new way of knowing God. During this time God moves us from simply "feeling good about Him" to a deeper awareness of Him and an intimacy never before known. Although we already belong to Christ and we already love Him, our union with Him will be incomplete as long as our mind, our judgment, our desires, our habits and our ideas are still our own. God wants to rid us of our preoccupation with sight and feelings and bring us into a new freedom and liberty of faith. Unfortunately, this freeing process does not happen automatically.

Most of us do not jump for joy when faced with the prospect of brokenness. Naturally, most of us run the other direction. But God loves us so much that He doesn't let us get very far. The dark night is God's way of turning us around and forcing us to allow Him to do whatever is necessary in our lives to purge our souls and spirits so that we can have intimate fellowship with Him.

God is not a "mean" guy up in heaven waiting to send us bad things — He is a loving Father who knows exactly what we need in order to accomplish His will in our lives. He knows that we will never be content, never enjoy real freedom and never be truly fulfilled, until we are "experientially" one with Him .

## **Different Labels for the Dark Night**

- The Dark Night of the Soul
- The Night Season
- The Divine Darkness
- Journey into the Desert
- Cloud of Unknowing

There is a deeper and more abiding union – an experiential oneness with God – that He desires for every one of us where we can experience His presence and His joy and rest in the midst of any circumstance. This experiential union does not happen automatically, but only as we become more and more sanctified or holy in body, soul and spirit. In our journey inward towards intimacy and experiential oneness with Jesus we will encounter seasons of darkness. This "darkness" can simply mean the absence of any understanding or knowledge as to what's happening to us or where we are going. It simply means being deprived of the light (the seeing, the feeling and the understanding) that we are so used to. During these seasons, God is teaching us to walk by faith and not by feelings or sight. As our faith begins to grow, the light of understanding will also begin to form.

This darkness does not come from the enemy, but from God who loves us. God is the One who initiates the darkness. Remember Isaiah 50:10, "Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness, and has no light?" Don't misunderstand – Satan is often involved when difficult things occur in our lives. And he rejoices when we react poorly to God's chastening, cleansing and purifying process. What God allows in our lives for good, Satan obviously wants to use to destroy us. So the enemy of our souls is definitely involved in the night seasons, but he is not always responsible for sending the darkness.

### **Jesus Had His Own Dark Night**

All throughout the New Testament, we are told that we are to keep our eyes focused on Jesus, because He is our example. The apostle Peter makes this fact very plain: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind [attitude]" (1 Pet 4:1). "For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps" (1 Pet 2:21).

Jesus is not only our Savior, our Lord and our King, but also our "role model." He walked the Christian walk perfectly. He showed us how it should be done. Again, we will never be able to walk it "perfectly" as He did, but Scripture tells us we are to emulate or try to follow Him. Because of this truth, how can we overlook Jesus' own dark night in the Garden of Gethsemane? As one writer says, "Gethsemane was the dark night of the soul for Jesus Christ; it was the test of His ways." The way Jesus became perfect, complete or fulfilled (teleioo), is by suffering. If He had to go through suffering and His own dark night, then it's reasonable that this will be our role also.

In Jesus' painful night, Scripture tells us that sorrow and deep distress so marked His inner spirit that He actually sweated drops of blood (Lk 22:44). No one was ever called to greater suffering. Mark tells us that He exclaimed, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful unto death...." (Mk 14:34). The magnitude of Jesus' agony is beyond our understanding. When the revelation of what He was about to endure became fully apparent, He fell on His face and prayed, "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done" (Lk 22:42). When the Romans put Him on the cross, a pall of thick darkness cut Him off and He cried out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34). It seemed that at the very moment Jesus needed His Father the most, God had left Him. Matthew tells us it was then that Jesus yielded up His Spirit and the temple veil of the Holy of Holies was rent from the top

down (Mt 27:50). Jesus endured what no other man has ever had to endure. But, as a result of the gift of His Life, His blood has atoned for the sins of all mankind. Because of His death, anyone who accepts His free gift of salvation now has full access to the Father at any time. The result of Jesus' dark night is eternal life for all of us.

**Isaiah 53 is one of the most incredible chapters in the Bible** – it describes Jesus' dark night in perfect detail. The prophet Isaiah foretells us exactly what would happen when the Messiah came: He would be despised, rejected, a man of many sorrows, acquainted with grief, wounded, bruised, oppressed, afflicted, cut off – exactly what Jesus had to endure. In verses 4-8, Isaiah writes: "Surely, He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all... He was taken from prison and from judgment... For He was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of My people was He stricken." Then, in verse 10, Isaiah's words are absolutely astonishing. "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief. When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin.... " In other words, out of His infinite Love for us, God used the way of suffering to accomplish His will –salvation for all mankind. In like manner, God deals with us. He uses the way of suffering to accomplish His will – the sanctification of our body, soul and spirit.

## **The Fellowship of His Suffering**

No matter what is occurring in our lives, keeping our eyes and our focus upon Jesus Christ is essential. He is not only our Savior and Lord, He is also our role model and example. As Matthew says, "Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His footsteps" (Mt 26:38). Suffering is the means by which God has chosen to bring redemption to a fallen world. Jesus suffered for us, giving us His example to follow. Just as He "bore our griefs and carried our sorrows," so we are to participate in His suffering – by barring ourselves from sin and self and choosing instead to follow what He would have us do. Thus, we are to identify with Christ, not only by verbally assenting to, ascribing to, and holding on to what He did for us on the Cross, but also by daily experiencing the crucifying of our own "self."

The apostle Paul speaks to this topic in Philippians 3:10 where he declares, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." The Bible tells us that only through death can there be life. As 2 Timothy 2:11-12 states, "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him; If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him...." (Rom 8:17). Maybe this answers the question of "why" some Christians experience greater suffering than others. The result of suffering with Christ is the privilege of reigning with Him.

**An example of one who suffered greatly for Christ is Corrie ten Boom.** Corrie lived in Holland during the 1930s and 1940s. She and her Christian family soon became sympathetic to the plight of the Jews and harbored some of them in their own home. Soon the ten Boom house became known as a "safe sanctuary." Eventually, finding out about the secret room in their home, the Gestapo began rounding up all who were involved. They picked up Corrie, along with

her sister, brother, and father. The police abused and slapped Corrie around as they tried to find out about the others involved. They finally ended up taking all the ten Booms to prison where they were put in 6 foot by 6 foot "cages."

Corrie was put in solitary confinement because she was believed to be the "ring leader." The only break in the monotony of her days without human contact, came when a little "ant" began visiting her. At first he came alone, but later he came back with his family and friends. Corrie would actually get down on the floor and watch him for hours. The other thing that lifted her spirits was when she realized there was a window in the ceiling of her cell. Even though it had 28 squares of bars, nevertheless, she could occasionally see the sun.

What sustained her throughout her ordeal was the fact that she could read the Scriptures. When she had first come to prison, she had asked a nurse to get her a Bible – it became her lifeline. Daily, she would read verse by verse until she had gone through the entire Word of God. Then she would begin all over again. Continually, she would ask herself, "What would Jesus do?" "How would He have handled this situation?"

Finally, one of the guards allowed her to speak to him and, after several weeks, he even allowed her to talk to him about the Lord. This was the biggest and greatest blessing of all – not only to be allowed to talk to another human being, but to be able to talk to them about her precious Lord. Eventually, the guard opened up and shared how much he hated working in the prison and shared some other personal matters. Because of their friendship, Corrie was finally reunited in the same cell with her sister, allowed to take a shower once a week and even given a new sheet for her cot.

Even though Corrie suffered greatly the year she survived the horror of solitary confinement, she, nevertheless, committed herself to God every moment of every day. And, just as He had promised, He was faithful to never leave her or forsake her. As she used to point out, "there is no pit so deep, that Jesus is not deeper." Eventually released from prison, Corrie has ministered God's Love to hurting people all over the world. In the same way, God desires to make our souls a reflection of His own, just like He did Corrie's. In order to reflect Him, however, we need to be willing to walk as He walked. He entered in by the "narrow gate" and He walked the straight and "hard road."

**This is "Brokenness"** – John Collinson wrote a short piece about suffering and "the narrow road" that I think sums everything up perfectly. Sometimes it is asked what we mean by brokenness. Brokenness is not easy to define but can be clearly seen in the reactions of Jesus, especially as He approached the cross and in His crucifixion. I think it can be applied personally in this way:

- When to do the will of God means that even my Christian brethren will not understand, and I remember that "neither did His brethren believe in Him" and I bow my head to obey and accept the misunderstanding, this is brokenness.
- When I am misrepresented or deliberately misinterpreted, and I remember that Jesus was falsely accused but He "held His peace," and I bow my head to accept the accusation without trying to justify myself, this is brokenness.

- When another is preferred before me and I am deliberately passed over, and I remember that they cried, "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas," and I bow my head and accept rejection, this is brokenness.
- When my plans are brushed aside and I see the work of years brought to ruin by the ambitions of others, and I remember that Jesus allowed them to "lead Him away to crucify Him" and He accepted that place of failure, and I bow my head and accept the injustice without bitterness, this is brokenness.
- When in order to be right with my God it is necessary to take the humbling path of confession and restitution, and I remember that Jesus "made Himself of no reputation" and "humbled Himself...unto death, even the death of the cross," and I bow my head and am ready to accept the shame of exposure, this is brokenness.
- When others take unfair advantage of my being a Christian and treat my belongings as public property, and I remember "they stripped him," and "parted His garments, casting lots," and I bow my head and accept "joyfully the spoiling of my goods" for His sake, this is brokenness.
- When one acts towards me in an unforgivable way, and I remember that when He was crucified Jesus prayed "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," and I bow my head and accept any behavior towards me as permitted by my loving Father, this is brokenness.
- When people expect the impossible of me and more than time or human strength can give, and I remember that Jesus said, "This is my body which is given for you..." and I repent of my self-indulgence and lack of self-giving for others, this is brokenness."

Someone once said there will be no revival, either personally or otherwise, until there is first a Gethsemane and a Calvary in each of our own lives.

**Life Includes Suffering** – I purposely ignored studying the sufferings of Job for years because it scared me. Eventually, in God's timing, the story of Job became incredibly real to me as I began to experience deep suffering in my own life. I learned I had a choice: to either let the suffering accomplish the goal and purpose that God wanted in my life; or, let the suffering crush and destroy me. God put the book of Job right in the center of the Bible for a very good reason: it's an example of faith in the night seasons. God intends for all of us to use it as a "road map" on our journey through the dark night, always keeping in mind that at the end of the road, Job finally "saw" God as he never had seen Him before, and it changed his life forever .

Suffering has as its goal the sanctification, the purification, of our souls and spirits. Suffering comes about as God unrelentingly identifies the most potentially damaging hindrance to our relationship with Him, and then lovingly begins to strip that thing away from us. He crushes us, He breaks us, He shakes us and removes anything that is in the way of His accomplishing His will in and through our lives. Some important points to remember when we are going through suffering are:

- God allows our troubles to drive us to our knees and to bring us back to Himself. (Ex 2:23-25)
- God allows trials in our lives so we may turn around and minister to others in similar circumstances. (2 Cor 1:3-4)

- Sometimes our troubles must get worse before freedom comes. Satan, obviously, does not want that – therefore, he does everything he possibly can to stop it.
- It's important to realize that we can't get ourselves out of trouble. If God has allowed the trial, then He is the only One who can get us out of it. Therefore, it is not our battle, but His. (Ex 6:6-8)
- Our troubles should always push us towards God, not away from Him. If they push us away from Him, we should check to be sure who is the instigator of the trial. (Ps 77:2; 2 Chron 33:12)
- Once we understand that God is involved in our trials, it should give us great hope. (Eph 1:17-20)
- God wants to use our trials as a way for us to learn His statutes and His laws. (Ps 119:71)

God always has a reason for the things He allows into our lives. He is preparing us for a future which He alone knows. He is preparing us as His "bride," not only perfect (holy), established, strengthened and grounded in Him, but also joint heirs with Him. One of my favorite poems about suffering and brokenness was written in the early 1800s by **G. D. Watson**, a Wesleyan Methodist minister. This poem has brought my focus back to Christ countless times in the past ten years, as I have found myself straying from the "narrow path." I pray it will bless you as much as it has me. It's called...

### **"Others May, You Cannot."**

If God has called you to be really like Jesus, He will draw you to a life of crucifixion and humility, and put upon you such demands of obedience that you will not be able to follow other people, or measure yourself by other Christians, and in many ways, He will seem to let other good people do things which He will not let you do.

Other Christians and ministers who seem very religious and useful may push themselves, pull wires, and work schemes to carry out their plans, but you cannot do it; and if you attempt it, you will meet with such failure and rebuke from the Lord as to make you sorely penitent.

Others may boast of themselves, of their work, of their success, of their writings, but the Holy Spirit will not allow you to do any such thing, and if you begin it, He will lead you into some deep mortification that will make you despise yourself and all your good works.

Others may be allowed to succeed in making money, or may have a legacy left to them, but it is likely God will keep you poor, because He wants you to have something far better than gold, namely, a helpless dependence on Him, that He may have the privilege of supplying your needs day by day out of an unseen treasury.

The Lord may let others be honored and put forward, and keep you hidden in obscurity, because He wants you to produce some choice, fragrant fruit for His coming glory, which can only be produced in the shade. He may let others do a work for Him and get the credit for it, but He will make you work and toil on without knowing how much you are doing, and then to make your work still more precious, He may let others get the credit for the work which you have done, and thus make your reward ten times greater when Jesus comes.

The Holy Spirit will put a strict watch over you, with a jealous love, and will rebuke you for little words and feelings, or for wasting your time, which other Christians never seem distressed over. So make up your mind that God is an infinite sovereign and has a right to do as He pleases with His own.

He may not explain to you a thousand things which puzzle your reason in His dealings with you. But if you absolutely sell yourself to be His...slave, He will wrap you up in a jealous love, and bestow upon you many blessings which come only to those who are in the inner circle.

Settle it forever, then, that you are to deal directly with the Holy Spirit and that He is to have the privilege of tying your tongue, or chaining your hand, or closing your eyes, in ways that He does not seem to use with others. Now when you are so possessed with the living God that you are, in your secret heart, pleased and delighted over this peculiar, personal, private, jealous guardianship and management of the Holy Spirit over your life, you will have found the vestibule [entrance] to heaven.

**We have been exploring the topic of faith – faith in the night seasons.** For some this is a difficult subject, but for others it's of the utmost importance. The latter group sees the trials and tribulations that Christians are now facing becoming more intense than ever before, and they are longing for understanding. In 1 Peter 4:17, Peter tells us that as God begins to wrap up time as we know it, He will allow events to happen in the body of Christ that will try us and test us to the max. How will we make it through this time of testing, if we don't understand what God is doing, and if we crumble at the first hint of suffering? We desperately need to have a grasp of what God's purpose is for allowing these kinds of trials and, most importantly, we need to understand what to do and how to act in them.

**What Is a "Night Season"?** In his book *Abandoned to God*, **Oswald Chambers** states, "The mystics used to speak of 'the dark night of the soul' (or 'night season') as a time of spiritual darkness and dryness, not the direct result of sins committed, but rather a deep conviction of sin itself within the heart and mind. It is a time the person 'is being brought to an end of himself,' and made aware of the utter worthlessness of his own nature when stripped of all religious pretensions. Moreover, there was the willingness to abandon all for Christ's sake, to deny – not only his evil self but also his good self."

During a night season, God initiates a purging, a cleansing and a purifying of our souls from everything that is not of faith. At this time, God crushes our self will, so that He can merge it with His own. In other words, it's our own private Gethsemane. As Jesus cried in the garden, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful unto death... nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt" (Mk 14:34-36). During this dark season, God teaches us to say, just as Jesus did, "Not my will, but Thine" (Mt 26:39).

By depriving our soul of spiritual blessings, God can begin to transform our reliance on soulish and sensual things to things of the Spirit. He wants us to learn to walk by faith, not by our senses, our feelings or our understanding. God wants to teach us how to detach ourselves from all physical, emotional and spiritual supports, so that we will be able to respond with "Not my

will, but Thine." Because this season can often be a time of desolation, of dried bones and ruined hopes, many Christians – because they don't understand what God's will is or what He is doing – get so discouraged and defeated that they give up and turn back.

Many will feel like Job, who "looked for good" but only "evil came"; and for "light," but found only "darkness" (Job 30:26). Or like Isaiah, who uttered, "We wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places like dead men" (Is 59:9-10).

If we can only remember during our night season that the Holy Spirit has led us into this darkness on purpose. He desires not only to "replace us with Himself," but also to make us holy so that we can fellowship and commune with Him.

As Moses was led into the wilderness to experience God's presence (Ex 20:21), so this dark season is the very path God has chosen to put us on. It's a path that will lead us to greater light than anything we have ever known before. "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness" (Ps 112:4).

The whole purpose of the sanctification process is not only to learn how to reflect Him, but also to learn how to have intimacy with Him.

**Who Experiences the Dark Night?** As stated earlier, the Lord allows the dark night to happen to all of His beloved children, and especially those who are the most faithful, the most loving, the ones who want all of Him. As Revelation 3:19 states, "God chastens those He loves" (also cf. Heb 12:6). This night season happens to people walking with the Lord for a long time; people who love Him with all their heart, mind and soul; people who have surrendered their lives to Him; people who are obedient to Him; and, people who fear Him. Again, remember Isaiah 50:10, "Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of his servant, that walks in darkness and hath no light?"

Joy Dawson, a wonderful author and Bible teacher, shares that if we live righteous lives, then there is an inevitability that all of us will, at one time or another, experience God's fire or a night of faith. Therefore, the longer we walk with the Lord, the more we can anticipate this experience, unless we choose to moment by moment surrender everything to Him. Great Christians are made by great trials. Pain, sorrow and failure are what produce men and women of God. Those with the greatest dreams are often the ones who receive the greatest trials. Eternal lessons seem to require hard places. As Scripture declares, the way we are made "perfect," or whole or complete, is by suffering or by barring ourselves from sin and self (Heb 2:10).

Only by uncovering and exposing our defects can God really heal us. First, He must take away all our external and internal supports other than Himself, then He can strengthen our inner man, enabling us to experience His fullness. The dark night of the soul happens to people who have already accepted the Lord; those who have already given their lives to Him; those already filled with the Spirit; those who have already dedicated their lives to Him; those who have already asked for intimacy; and those who have already been set aside for God's purposes of ministry.

**Why Does God Send the Dark Night?** There seems to be three things that God is looking for in each of our lives: our conversion (or salvation), our conviction and our consecration (or sanctification). God wants to know the full proof of us. He wants to know our real heart. Will we be obedient in all things? (2 Cor 2:9) Will we obey Him, even when we can't see Him or feel Him? Will we hold on to His truths even though we don't understand what He is doing? The kind of Love that God wants from us is a love that reaches to the point of full and total surrender. Remember, to really love God (agapao) means to totally give ourselves over to Him.

If we are discontent with what God has allowed in our lives, it's a sure indication that we have not completely surrendered and abandoned ourselves to Him. Just as God had to keep testing and proving Israel, so He must continue to humble, abase and weaken us. That way, He will perceive if we love Him, and we will see our total inability to live without Him.

The Lord wants believers who have faith like Job, and who can utter like he did, "Though You slay me, yet will I trust You." When Job sought the Lord to know why the bad things were happening to him, he got no answer from God. And it's often the same with us. God only tells us that He does have a plan for our lives and even though we don't understand what that plan is or how it is going to work out, we must trust that He always has our best in view.

We must learn to rely upon Him in spite of our circumstances, in spite of our logic and in spite of our human reason. Human circumstances, logic and reason are not sources for spiritual guidance. We must trust that only God knows what is best for our lives; therefore, whatever He allows into them He will use it for our good. Lamentations 3:33 tells us that God does not afflict us to punish us or to be mean – He does so only to accomplish the sanctification that will ultimately bring us abundant Life.

**Goal and Purpose of the Dark Night** – God's purpose for all of His actions towards us is that Christ might be formed in us and that we might experience intimacy and fellowship with Him. God wants to purge our souls from sin and self, so that we will be open and willing to follow Him at any cost. Our will controls everything in our lives. Thus, God wants us to have a will that is completely yielded and at one with His own.

One of the major purposes, then, of the dark night of the soul or a night season is to formulate an unshakable resolve in us, so that even if everything goes wrong in our lives and even if we can't see or understand a thing of what God is doing, we will still choose to cling immovably to God. He wants us to be governed only by our choice of faith – a faith that proclaims whether I live or die, I choose to trust in You, not in my own thoughts and emotions. God wants to produce in us a trust that can never be shaken. He is drawing us away from a life of senses and feelings and forcing us to turn to Him in naked faith, faith without feelings. He wants us to be able to constantly say and mean, "Not my will, but Yours" and "Though You slay me, yet will I trust You."

God is teaching us, by darkening us, that all that matters in this life is knowing and loving Him. He wants us to love Him and rely upon Him regardless of what we desire, regardless of what our intellect is saying and regardless of what we are feeling.

He wants us to be able to echo what Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 4:8-11: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." Our going through the dark night season and coming out even stronger in spirit shows God that He alone is important. It shows Him that we have left "all," even ourselves, to follow Him.

Joy Dawson made an awesome audio tape entitled, "In the Fire." In this tape series she describes God's seven purposes for allowing the night seasons in our lives. Understanding these seven purposes of God help us tremendously in weathering our own night seasons. They are:

- To melt hard substances and produce brokenness.
- To destroy anything in our lives that is useless.
- To reshape us and make us pliable for more use.
- To make us more like Jesus, who is our example.
- To endow us with more power.
- To experience for ourselves the "fellowship of His sufferings."
- To teach us how to mentor and help others, by learning more about ourselves and our own responses to the night seasons.

**Benefits of the Dark Night of the Soul** – The delights, blessings and benefits that God bestows upon us as a result of this dark night are a hundred thousand times better than the terror we experience in the middle of it. Job learned this lesson well: "He discovereth deep things out of the darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death" (Job 12:22). Some of the blessings and benefits that we experience in our relationship with God are:

- We will experience a purging and a cleansing of our soul from sin and unrighteousness.
- Our will will become one with His as we learn to choose "not my will, but Thine."
- We will experience His Life - His Love, His Wisdom and His Power.
- Our faith will become transformed and we will begin to have a radical trust in God.
- We will see the purposes of His Cross more clearly.
- We will no longer be concerned about our own wishes, needs, and mindset.
- We will be delivered from self-pity and self-righteousness.
- We will begin to have an overwhelming desire for God.
- We will learn more about His grace and acquire more understanding of His ways.
- The Scriptures will become alive to us as they never have before.
- We will begin to have deep compassion for others who are suffering and we will be eager to comfort them.
- We will develop more of His character - His patience and His longsuffering - as never before.
- We will begin to experience a serenity and a peace that passeth all understanding.

By going through the dark night of the soul, we should be able to come out with both a clearer understanding of ourselves, and a complete dependence upon God.

# Dark, Dark Night of the Soul

by A. W. Tozer — <http://www.bibleword.com/ddnots.htm>

Remember how they nailed Jesus to a cross. Remember the darkness, the hiding of the Father's face. This was the path Jesus took to immortal triumph. As He is, so are we in this world! I am convinced that in New Testament Christianity the object of the Holy Spirit is twofold. First, He wants to convince Christians that it is actually possible for us to know the beauty and perfection of Jesus Christ in our daily lives. Second, it is His desire to lead us forward into victory and blessing even as Joshua once led Israel into the promised land.

Most Christians will honestly confess that there are still spiritual frontiers before them which they have not been willing to explore. There is still ground to be taken if our object is to know Christ, to win Christ, to know the power of His resurrection, to be conformed to His death. If our object is to experience within our beings all of those things that we have in Christ judicially, we must come to the place of counting all things loss for the excellency of this knowledge.

We know our lack, but we are very slow in allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us into deeper Christian life and experience, that place where the intent of our heart is so cleansed that we may perfectly love God and worthily praise Him. In spite of our hesitation and delay and holding back, God does not give up, because the Holy Spirit is faithful and kind and patient and ever seeks to lead us forward into the life of the special kind of Christian.

I well remember the caution of one of the old saints I have read who pointed out that "a persuaded mind and even a well-intentioned heart may be far from exact and faithful practice." Jesus said, "By your fruit and by your behavior you will be known." This is one rule that is never deceiving and it is by this that we should judge ourselves. God will sift out those who only speculate about the claims of Christ and He will lead forward those who by His grace see Him in His beauty and seek Him in His love.

## Illustration of Gideon

The story of Gideon is an illustration of how God seeks His qualities within us and is not concerned with us just as numbers or statistics. Gideon was about to face the enemy and he had an army of 32,000 soldiers (Judges 7). But the Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many – let all who are afraid go back ' " So Gideon gave the word to the troops, and 22,000 of those men turned back. Then the Lord said to Gideon again, "There are still too many. I can see those among you who are not prepared for what we are going to do. You will never be able to make Israelite soldiers of them."

I presume that there are few preachers among us on the top side of this terrestrial ball who would have turned down those 22,000, but God was putting the emphasis on quality, on those who would cooperate in the performance of the will of God. Then Gideon took the 10,000 men to the river and tested them as God had directed and when this sifting was done, Gideon had an army of 300 men. God seeks out those who are willing that their lives should be fashioned according to His own grace and love. He sifts out those who cannot see God's purpose and design for our blessing.

Some of you know something of that which has been called "the dark night of the soul." Some of you have spiritual desire and deep longing for victory but it seems to you that your efforts to go on with God have only brought you more bumps and more testings and more discouragement. You are tempted to ask, "How long can this go on?" Let me remind you of the journey of Jesus Christ to immortal triumph. Remember the garden where He sweat blood. Remember Pilate's hall where they put on Him the purple robe and smote Him. Remember His experience with His closest disciples as they all forsook Him and fled. Remember the journey up the hill to Calvary. Remember how they nailed Him to a cross, those six awful hours, the hiding of the Father's face. Remember the darkness and remember the surrender of His spirit in death. This was the path that Jesus took to immortal triumph and everlasting glory, and as He is, so are we in this world!

### **Few Enter into the Light**

Yes, there is a dark night of the soul. There are few Christians willing to go into this dark night and that is why there are so few who enter into the fight. It is impossible for them ever to know the morning because they will not endure the night. I think the more we learn of God and His ways and of man and his nature we are bound to reach the conclusion that we are all just about as holy as we want to be. We are all just about as full of the Spirit as we want to be. Thus when we tell ourselves that we want to be more holy but we are really as holy as we care to be, it is small wonder that the dark night of the soul takes so long!

The reason why many are still troubled, still seeking, still making little forward progress is because they have not yet come to "the end of themselves." We are still giving some of the orders, and we are still interfering with God's working within us. We struggle to keep up a good front, forgetting that God says the most important thing is for us to be humble and meek as Christ gave us example. It seems that Christians are obsessed with keeping up that good front. We say we want to go to heaven when we die to see old Jordan roll, but we spend most of our time and energy down here just putting on that good front. It seems that many of us say to God, as did King Saul the apostate before us, "Oh God, honor me now before these people!"

### **Hiding Our Inner State**

We also are guilty of hiding our inner state. The Bible plainly tells us to expose our inner state to God, but we would rather cover it up. God cannot change it if we cover it and hide it. We disguise the poverty of our spirit. If we should suddenly be revealed to those around us on the outside as Almighty God sees us within our souls, we would become the most embarrassed people in the world. If that should happen, we would be revealed as people barely able to stand, people in rags, some too dirty to be decent, some with great open sores. Some would be revealed in such condition that they would be turned out of Skid Row. Do we think that we are actually keeping our spiritual poverty a secret, that God doesn't know us better than we know ourselves? But we will not tell Him, and we disguise our poverty of spirit and hide our inward state in order to preserve our reputation.

We also want to keep some authority for ourselves. We cannot agree that the last, the final key to our lives should be turned over to Jesus Christ. Brethren, we want to have dual controls – let the Lord run it but keep a hand on the controls just in case the Lord should fail! We are willing

to join heartily in singing, "To God Be the Glory," but we are strangely ingenious in figuring out ways and means by which we keep some of the glory for ourselves. In this matter of perpetually seeking our own interests, we can only say that people who want to live for God often arrange to do very subtly what the worldly souls do crudely and openly. A man who doesn't have enough imagination to invent anything will still figure out a way of seeking his own interests, and the amazing thing is that he will do it with the help of some pretext which will serve as a screen to keep him from seeing the ugliness of his own behavior.

Yes, we have it among professing Christians this strange ingenuity to seek our own interest under the guise of seeking the interests of God. I am not afraid to say what I fear that there are thousands of people who are using the deeper life and Bible prophecy, foreign missions and physical healing for no other purpose than to promote their own private interests secretly. They continue to let their apparent interest in these things to serve as a screen so that they don't have to take a look at how ugly they are on the inside.

So we talk a lot about the deeper life and spiritual victory and becoming dead to ourselves – but we stay very busy rescuing ourselves from the cross. That part of ourselves that we rescue from the cross may be a very little part of us, but it is likely to be the seat of our spiritual troubles and our defeats. No one wants to die on a cross – until he comes to the place where he is desperate for the highest will of God in serving Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul said, "I want to die on that cross and I want to know what it is to die there, because if I die with Him I will also know Him in a better resurrection." Paul was not just saying "He will raise me from the dead" – for everyone will be raised from the dead. He said, "I want a superior resurrection, a resurrection like Christ's." Paul was willing to be crucified with Christ, but in our day we want to die a piece at a time, so we can rescue little parts of ourselves from the cross.

There are men and women who beg and plead for God to fill them with Himself for they know it would be for their good, but then they stubbornly resist like our own spoiled children when they are not well and they want us to help them. You try to take the child's temperature or give him medicine or call for a doctor and he will resist and howl and bawl. In the next breath he will beg for help, "Mama, I'm sick!" But he won't take a thing, he won't let you help. He is stubborn and spoiled.

### **Let God have His Way**

People will pray and ask God to be filled – but all the while there is that strange ingenuity, that contradiction within which prevents our wills from stirring to the point of letting God have His way. Those who live in this state of perpetual contradiction cannot be happy Christians. A man who is a ways on the cross, just piece after piece, cannot be happy in that process. But when that man takes his place on the cross with Jesus Christ once and for all, and commends his spirit to God, lets go of everything and ceases to defend himself – sure, he has died, but there is a resurrection that follows!

If we are willing to go this route of victory with Jesus Christ, we cannot continue to be mediocre Christians, stopped halfway to the peak. Until we give up our own interests, there will never be enough stirring within our beings to find His highest will. Why, then, does it take so long?

Whose fault is it that we do not have the intents of our heart so cleansed that we may perpetually love Him and worthily serve Him, and that we may be filled with His Spirit and walk in victory? I hope I have made it plain that it is our fault and not God's! "This work asketh no long time before it be truly done, as some men think, for it is the shortest work of all that men may imagine, according to the stirring that is within thee, even thy will." If you are one of the fellows who is convinced it has to take a long time, you are wrong. It may be one of the quickest, shortest works that a man may know just as short or as long as your own will decrees.

Many of us are hanging on to something, something that we hold dear to ourselves, something that comes between us and the Lord – it may be our spouse or our own children! God just wants to bring us out into a place of surrender so that our earthly possessions, and even our families, do not possess our wills to the point of worship. We must surrender everything in our lives to Christ, holding nothing back. God oftentimes puts us through difficult trials to reveal to us the nature of our undying attachments to earthly things – there must not be a single thing in our earthly lives that we knowingly hold back from God.

### **Treasure Possession**

We who are Christians go through these times of testing and proving as our Lord seeks to deal with us about our treasures possessing us on this earth. With some it may be the commitment of a favorite boyfriend or girlfriend to God for His highest will. Some people have put life's highest value upon their job and their security in this life. With some it may be a secret ambition, and it is driving a wedge between you and the Lord. Others may be possessed by the amount of your nice little nest egg lying there in the bank, and you just cannot bring yourself to quit calling it yours. You just cannot let go and that is in spite of the fact that you know you can perfectly trust the Lord and the leading of His Spirit.

Do you remember a rather comic character by the name of *Sancho Panza* in that well-known book, *Don Quixote*? There is an incident in the book in which Senor Panza clung to a window sill all night, afraid that if he let go he would plunge and die on the ground below. But when the morning light came, red-faced, and near exhaustion, he found that his feet were only two inches above the grass. Fear kept him from letting go, but he could have been safe on the ground throughout the long night. I use that illustration to remind us that there are many professing Christians whose knuckles are white from blindly hanging on to their own window sill. The Lord has been saying, "Look on me and let go!" But they have refused. Paul said we should be "straining toward what is ahead" (Phil 3:13) – but many are afraid. Happy are the men and women who have given God His way? They "press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (v. 14).

## C. S. Lewis's Dark Night of the Soul

<http://gratefultothedeath.wordpress.com/2011/08/24/c-s-lewiss-dark-night-of-the-soul/>

The faith of Christians is built on Presence. Whether in the pillar of fire, the still small voice, or the Incarnate Son, God has been Emmanuel, “with us.” He has promised never to leave nor forsake us. In thousands of hymns, we have sung of an experienced intimacy with God in Christ. We have prayed, wept, and rested in His presence. For a committed Christian, then, nothing is more devastating than Divine Absence, spiritual loneliness, the ceiling of brass meeting our every prayer. Yet when the sixteenth-century mystic *John of the Cross* identified and described a kindred phenomenon — a sort of desolation called “dark night of the soul” — he insisted that it is an important spiritual discipline. We enter the dark night, said John, as a tortuous but fruitful ascetic path to the mystical goal of union with God.

John's work on this subject became a spiritual classic. He was honored and widely cited by Catholics and Protestants alike. Few today subscribe to or even understand John of the Cross; instead, we have taken his phrase “the dark night of the soul” to describe a subjective experience of the complete loss of God's loving presence — without its rootage in John's larger theology, however, we are not always sure what to do with it. It seems a rather unpleasant episode, often associated with doubt, that may plague a Christian for a while but that, we hope, will soon pass.

One reason for giving the “dark night” a second look is a shocking fact about *who* undergoes it. It would be one thing if this experience enveloped only, say, backsliders or immature Christians or those involved in obvious sin; but with great regularity, we find the experience in the life stories of those we think of as having been especially faithful witnesses to the faith — people such as C. S. Lewis, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther. Each of these suffered particularly intense episodes of “dark night of the soul.” And perhaps the best way to begin to understand this experience for ourselves is to listen in on their struggles to find meaning in their darkness. Lewis's dark night came after the death of his wife Joy. Mother Teresa's came at the very founding of her Missionaries of Charity and lasted to the end of her life, with little respite. Luther's plagued him in one form as a young monk, and then in several others as a Reformer. Of course, we could draw our own conclusions about why these saints have suffered thus — and secular historians have frequently done so, but their lack of spiritual credulity only serves to muddy the waters. Let's look at the facts regarding the “dark night” experienced by Lewis.

It wasn't until 1956, that C. S. Lewis (in his late 50s) finally found love. He married the object of his affections, American writer Joy Gresham; but four years later, after an agonizing battle, Joy died of cancer. During the period of intense grieving that followed, Lewis filled four notebooks — first, with words of anguish and rage, then increasingly with an introspective record of the changes that this loss worked in his heart and character. The notebooks were published just one year after Joy's death as *A Grief Observed*, under the pseudonym N. W. Clerk. Lewis was identified as the book's author only after his death, and some have guessed that the great apologist resorted to this subterfuge because his journey through grief also took him to the very the precipice of doubt. Not surprisingly, he asked the same sorts of questions that the grieving often ask: How could a good God allow this woman to die, and in such a painful way? Was He, after all, a Cosmic Sadist? Or did He even exist?

Lewis experienced both the emotional and the intellectual pain of Absence — not just the absence of his wife, but the immense Absence of God — “the dark night of the soul.” In his words, “Meanwhile, where is God? When you are happy, so happy you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be – or so it feels – welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. . . . Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?”

What disturbed Lewis most at first was not the thought that God does not exist. Rather, it was the thought that He does, and that He may inflict pain from motives that we do not recognize as positive or even ethical: “What reason have we, except our own desperate wishes, to believe that God is, by any standard we can conceive, ‘good’? Doesn’t all the *prima facie* evidence suggest exactly the opposite? What have we to set against it?” But even this angry thought, written early in his notebooks, he soon subjects to cooler judgment: “I wrote that last night. It was a yell rather than a thought.”

Yelling at God in times of darkness has a long history, beginning with Jesus himself: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” A vivid cinematic example occurs in Robert Duvall’s movie “The Apostle,” when evangelist Sonny Dewey, who has had his own share of darkness, paces up and down in his room, abusing God in a loud voice. “I love you, Lord,” he bellows, “but I’m mad at you!” Somehow I think Jesus intercedes for those in pain and darkness who yell at the Father.

Upon reflection, Lewis decides that the pain he is experiencing must have some redemptive purpose. We see the first glimmering not far into the book: “It doesn’t really matter whether you grip the arms of the dentist’s chair or let your hands lie in your lap. The drill drills on.” What is a dentist’s drill for except to remove the rottenness from the tooth? It makes us whole, removing (in the long run, at least) a cause of suffering. And of course Lewis would not have published this account of “a grief observed” unless he had concluded that such experiences of Absence—not only absence of a loved one but also Absence of God—in the midst of suffering have at least potentially an educative and perhaps even sanctifying function in the life of the believer.

Ultimately, Lewis decides that his spiritual darkness is a sort of divine shock treatment. “Nothing less will shake a man—or at any rate a man like me—out of his merely verbal thinking and his merely notional beliefs. He has to be knocked silly before he comes to his senses. Only torture will bring out the truth. Only under torture does he discover it himself.” Likening his former faith to a house of cards, Lewis concludes, “the sooner it was knocked down the better. And only suffering could do it.” Torture? In the wake of waterboarding scandals, this seems extreme imagery. But Lewis means it: “Talk to me about the *truth* of religion and I’ll listen gladly. Talk to me about the *duty* of religion and I’ll listen submissively. But don’t come talking to me about the *consolations* of religion or I shall suspect that you don’t understand.” God simply does to us whatever needs doing, and it is often painful.

Lewis also makes another, different move in trying to understand the spiritual desolation that accompanies his grief at the death of his wife. This move is in the direction of the apophatic mysticism of *John of the Cross* (whose thought he now doubt knew, along with the great work of English apophaticism, *The Cloud of Unknowing*). First, he acknowledges how inadequate our senses and reason are in perceiving God: “I, or any mortal at any time, may be utterly mistaken as to the situation he is really in.” Then he admits his own incapacity to know the reality of God: “Five senses; an incurably abstract intellect; a haphazardly selective memory; a set of preconceptions and assumptions so numerous that I can never examine more than a minority of them — never become even conscious of them all. How much of total reality can such an apparatus let through?”

Finally, Lewis acknowledges the flimsy inadequacy of any sort of image—physical or mental—to capture the reality of God. “Images, I suppose, have their use. . . . To me, however, their danger is more obvious. Images of the Holy easily become holy images—sacrosanct. My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. What about our own ideas of God? They must, like our incomplete, prejudiced, and generally inadequate ideas of others, be shattered in order for us to have any hope of contact with the real God: “Not my *idea* of God, but GOD. . . . And all this time I may, once more, be building with cards. And if I am He will once more knock the building flat. He will knock it down as often as proves necessary.” This is as succinct a summary as I’ve seen of the apophatic theology toward which any dark night of the soul pushes us.

# The Dark Night of the Soul

by R. C. Sproul — <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/dark-night-soul/>

The dark night of the soul is a phenomenon that describes a malady which the greatest of Christians have suffered from time to time. It was the malady that provoked **David** to soak his pillow with tears. It was the malady that earned for **Jeremiah** the sobriquet, “The Weeping Prophet.” It was the malady that so afflicted **Martin Luther** that his melancholy threatened to destroy him. This is no ordinary fit of depression, but it is a depression that is linked to a crisis of faith, a crisis that comes when one senses the absence of God or gives rise to a feeling of abandonment by Him.

Spiritual depression is real and can be acute. We ask how a person of faith could experience such spiritual lows, but whatever provokes it does not take away from its reality. Our faith is not a constant action. It is mobile. It vacillates. We move from faith to faith, and in between we may have periods of doubt when we cry, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.”

We may also think that the dark night of the soul is something completely incompatible with the fruit of the Spirit, not only that of faith but also that of joy. Once the Holy Spirit has flooded our hearts with a joy unspeakable, how can there be room in that chamber for such darkness? It is important for us to make a distinction between the spiritual fruit of joy and the cultural concept of happiness. A Christian can have joy in his heart while there is still spiritual depression in his head. The joy that we have sustains us through these dark nights and is not quenched by spiritual depression. The joy of the Christian is one that survives all downturns in life.

In writing to the Corinthians in his second letter, Paul commends to his readers the importance of preaching and of communicating the Gospel to people. But in the midst of that, he reminds the church that the treasure we have from God is a treasure that is contained not in vessels of gold and silver but in what the apostle calls “jars of clay.” For this reason he says, “that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” Immediately after this reminder, the apostle adds, “We are *afflicted* in every way, but not crushed; *perplexed*, but not driven to despair; *persecuted*, but not forsaken; *struck down*, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (2 Cor 4:7–10).

This passage indicates the limits of depression that we experience. The depression may be profound, but it is not permanent, nor is it fatal. Notice that the apostle Paul describes our condition in a variety of ways. He says that we are “afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down.” These are powerful images that describe the conflict that Christians must endure, but in every place that he describes this phenomenon, he describes at the same time its limits. Afflicted, but not crushed... Perplexed, but not in despair... Persecuted, but not forsaken... Struck down, but not destroyed.

So we have this pressure to bear, but the pressure, though it is severe, does not crush us. We may be confused and perplexed, but that low point to which perplexity brings us does not result in complete and total despair. Even in persecution, as serious as it may be, we are still not forsaken, and we may be overwhelmed and struck down as Jeremiah spoke of, yet we have room for joy. We think of the prophet Habakkuk, who in his misery remained confident that despite the

setbacks he endured, God would give him feet like hind's feet, feet that would enable him to walk in high places.

Elsewhere, the apostle Paul in writing to the Philippians gives them the admonition to be "anxious for nothing," telling them that the cure for anxiety is found on one's knees, that it is the peace of God that calms our spirit and dissipates anxiety. Again, we can be anxious and nervous and worried without finally submitting to ultimate despair.

This coexistence of faith and spiritual depression is paralleled in other biblical statements of emotive conditions. We are told that it is perfectly legitimate for believers to suffer grief. Our Lord Himself was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Though grief may reach to the roots of our souls, it must not result in bitterness. Grief is a legitimate emotion, at times even a virtue, but there must be no place in the soul for bitterness. In like manner, we see that it is a good thing to go to the house of mourning, but even in mourning, that low feeling must not give way to hatred. The presence of faith gives no guarantee of the absence of spiritual depression; however, the dark night of the soul always gives way to the brightness of the noonday light of the presence of God.

## **Dark Night of the Soul**

Excerpts from Brian Alger's website — <http://exploring-life.ca/2144/dark-night-of-the-soul-1/>

Darkness means an absence or deficiency of light. From a spiritual perspective, darkness creates an intuitive geography in which the fragility of our beliefs about the meaning and purpose of our lives becomes uncomfortably apparent. To enter into a spiritual darkness is to begin an excruciating and intensely distressing journey into of the essence of our own impermanence. A dark night is a pervasive and unavoidable calling deep into the realm of the soul... it is a spiritual endeavour that places us firmly in the landscape of our own inadequacies and frailties.

Spiritual darkness is a vast interior landscape of loneliness and abandonment. Solitude is our only companion in a dark night. Even in the midst of our loved ones and friends we persist in feeling desperately alone. Darkness invokes extreme contrasts between our immense feelings of solitude and deep desire to belong to something greater than ourselves. The suffering that results overwhelmingly defines our presence in the world. It is this pervasive sense of abandonment and loneliness in the midst of a crowd that is, for me, the essence of the dark night of the soul. A dark night amputates our sense of identity as if removing a mask we forget we were wearing. The soul poignantly whispers to us that we can no longer be who we were and we do not yet know who we will be. A dark night of the soul is not merely an identity crisis, it is the sudden absence of identity and an absolute loss of self. A dark night of the soul is the medium in which we learn about our own suffering, and to learn about suffering is to pursue the essence of our unique presence here in this life.

## Mother Teresa's Darkness — <http://www.stpaulsfay.org/id264.html>

Jesus said to a large crowd who was following Him: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions" (Lk 14:25-33).

A number of letters Mother Teresa's wrote were recently published – they reveal that for nearly fifty years she *felt* almost no presence of God whatsoever. Except for a brief, five-week period of spiritual refreshment in 1959, she lived in an enduring state of deep and abiding spiritual pain. Quoting from her work, "*Mother Teresa: come Be My Light*" – listen to her words:

*Lord, my God, who am I that You should forsake me? The Child of your Love – and now become as the most hated one... 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... where is my Faith – even deep down right in there is nothing, but emptiness & darkness – My God – how painful is this unknown pain – I have no Faith – I dare not utter the words & thoughts that crowd my heart – & make me suffer untold agony.*

*So many unanswered questions live within me afraid to uncover them – because of the blasphemy – If there be God – please forgive me – When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven – there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives & hurt my very soul. – I am told God loves me – and yet the reality of darkness & coldness & emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul. Did I make a mistake in surrendering blindly to the Call of the Sacred Heart?* (These two paragraphs were also printed in a *Time Magazine* article titled, "Her Agony," 9/3/07).

Mother Teresa is not the first Christian to struggle with what sixteenth century's Saint John of the Cross called "The Dark Night of the Soul." The Spanish priest believed that all Christians must come to the point of loving Christ more than anything: His love, forgiveness, blessings, comfort, etc. Loving anything other than Christ Himself was "idolatry." Mother Teresa later writes of embracing that darkness:

*I can't express in words—the gratitude I owe you for your kindness to me—for the first time in ... years—I have come to love the darkness—for I believe now that it is part of a very, very small part of Jesus' darkness & pain on earth. You have taught me to accept it [as] a "spiritual side of your work" as you wrote—Today really I felt a deep joy—that Jesus can't go anymore through the agony—but that He wants to go through it in me (1961).*

Mother Teresa's painfully honest questions should be an encouragement for believers going through times of doubt... and an important antidote for today's unhealthy "health and wealth" emphasis and "prosperity gospel." Hold her words in your mind as you recall her infectious smile, the boundless energy, the ageless compassion that was the light of her being; a light so compelling that it was arresting even through a television screen. Keep her words in mind as you hear these other words of hers:

*I am a little pencil in the hand of a writing God is sending a love letter to the world... Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier... Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing... Good works are links that form a chain of love... Love is a fruit in season at all times, and within reach of every hand... Many people mistake our work for our vocation. Our vocation is the love of Jesus.*

In 1947, Teresa had an ecstatic experience of communion and vocation. Jesus spoke to her heart, calling her to leave her teaching and to live with and serve "the poorest of the poor." The editor of the new book describes her mission "to help them live their lives with dignity [and so] encounter God's infinite love, and having come to know [God], to love and serve [God] in return." Of her vision, Teresa later wrote simply, "Jesus gave Himself to me."

Soon after she entered this work on the streets of Calcutta, Jesus took himself away from her. Her only spiritual respite happened in 1958 when Pope Pius XII died. Teresa prayed to the late Pope for a proof that God is pleased with the "*Society of the Missionaries of Charity*." For five weeks the darkness lifted, then she entered "in the tunnel" [as she calls it] once again, and the absence never abated.

Early in her life, **Agnes Bojaxhiu** chose to give herself completely to Christ, entering a religious vocation and taking the name "Teresa." She was drawn most particularly to Christ's Passion. "I want to... drink ONLY from His chalice of pain," she said. So she embraced the pain of the poorest of the poor as Christ's own, and served them as though each person were Christ himself. We knew all about that during her life.

What we didn't know is that she also embraced Jesus' experience of abandonment on the cross, when he cried out in agony, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Teresa abandoned not only family and possessions, but even spiritual refreshment in her commitment to give herself entirely to God. She lived her public life loving, smiling and healing, bringing light to others' darkness. She lived her interior life abandoned, loving, seeking, doubting in the darkness. If Mother Teresa could live in profound spiritual darkness yet minister with inspiring grace and love, certainly we can live with our own modest spiritual dryness and doubts, and be willing to do what needs to be done for the sake of Christ.

We all experience the storms of our emotions – feeling frustrated or lost or tired or abandoned. Yet we are more than our feelings, and we can live beyond emotion's tyranny. **Mother Teresa** once wrote, "I accept not in my feelings – but with my will, the Will of God – I accept His will."

And we all experience doubts and intellectual uncertainties. Is there really a God? Does any of this matter anyway? When the outspoken agnostic **Malcolm Muggeridge** visited Teresa she addressed his doubts straight on, writing, "Your longing for God is so deep and yet He keeps Himself away from you. He must be forcing Himself to do so – because He loves you so much – the personal love Christ has for you is infinite – the Small difficulty you have regarding His Church is finite – overcome the finite with the infinite." Muggeridge later became one of the world's great outspoken Christian apologists.

All but a few of us have felt abandoned by God. All but a few of us have had doubts about God's existence. It is not unlikely that most Christians today, to some degree or another, feel emotionally abandoned and intellectually doubtful. Mother Teresa is one of the patron saints to those of us who have experienced the darkness of mind and emotion. Though she did not feel Christ's love and presence for extended periods of time, Teresa rose every morning at 4:30 to say, "Your happiness is all I want." If she could do so much with so little spiritual consolation, what might we do with just a little more willingness and humility.