

The dark night  
of the soul

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng. Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon — from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me — a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?”

My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me,  
saying to me all day long, “Where is your God?”  
Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed  
within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise  
him, my Savior and my God.”

—Psalm 42

## Reasons that people don't feel the presence of God

1. Hurry, busyness, and digital distraction
2. Exhaustion
3. Sin
4. The demonic

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts...”

This is a stage you *must* go through to get to the life Jesus has for you.

1. The desert

2. Night

3. Winter

4. Waiting

5. Hiding

6. Pruning



The dark night of the soul

**Let's start off with what it's *not*...**

1. It's not a time of pain and suffering
2. It's not a time of sickness or chronic fatigue
3. It's not a time of doubt

The dark night a season in our apprenticeship to Jesus where he intentionally takes away, not his presence, but the *felt-sense* of his presence in order to do a work of purgation and preparation in us for a greater level of intimacy with him.

It feels like we're losing God's presence; actually,  
God is deepening our intimacy with him.

“The mystery of God’s presence, therefore, can be touched only by a deep awareness of his absence. It is the center of our longing for the absent God that we discover his footprints, and realize that our desire to love God is born out of the love with which he has touched us. In the patient waiting for the loved one, we discover how much he has filled our lives already.

Just as the love of a mother for her son can grow deeper when he is far away, just as children can learn to appreciate their parents more when they have left the home, just as lovers can rediscover each other during long periods of absence, so our intimate relationship with God can become deeper and more mature by the purifying experience of his absence.”

—Henri Nouwen

It feels like we're losing our faith.

Actually, God is refining our faith.

It feels like we're regressing in our maturity.

Actually, we're progressing.



It feels like sadness and fear.

Actually, God is setting us free from our attachments and anxieties to live in joy and peace.

“An ongoing spiritual process in which we are liberated from attachments and compulsions and empowered to live and love more freely.”

—Gerald May

**There are actually *two* dark nights**

1. The Dark Night of the Senses
2. The Dark Night of the Spirit

“A thick and heavy cloud is upon the soul, keeping it in affliction, and, as it were, far away from God. It is in this kind of ‘darkness’... This is not the time to speak with God, but the time to put one’s mouth in the dust... (We) must suffer through this purgation with patience... (and) learn to be still.”

—St. John of the Cross

“All the great masters of prayer... recognize that the time will come when our intellects, our imaginations, our feelings dry up and cease to be of help. It seems then that we have lost God; but the purpose of the whole experience is rather to reveal to us that God, the Lord we love, is not to be identified with any of these created means — that to learn to distinguish him from every human mode by which we grasp him is not to lose him (as will surely appear to be the case at first) but truly to find him.”

—Thomas Green

“The dark night isn’t something you do;  
it’s something *God does to you.*”

## For those of you who *are* in a dark night

1. Rest
2. Wait patiently
3. Trust in Jesus
4. Slow down and enjoy the simple pleasures of life
5. Don't doubt in the desert what God said in the river
6. Move toward community
7. Release (the illusion of) control

“Do not be worried; indeed, such a trial is the very best sign of God’s grace and love for man...”



..letting God be God, accepting the scandal of his hiddenness and trusting him in spite of reason, experience, and common sense.”

—Martin Luther

## For those of you who *are* in a dark night

1. Rest
2. Wait patiently
3. Trust in Jesus
4. Slow down and enjoy the simple pleasures of life
5. Don't doubt in the desert what God said in the river
6. Move toward community
7. Release (the illusion of) control

“Allow the soul to remain in peace and quietness, although it may seem clear to them that they are doing nothing and are wasting their time... The truth is that they will be doing quite sufficient if they have patience and persevere in prayer without making any effort... contenting themselves with merely a peaceful and loving attentiveness toward God, and in being without anxiety, without the ability and without desire to have experience of Him or to perceive Him. For all these yearnings disquiet and distract the soul from the peaceful quiet and sweet ease of contemplation which is here granted to it.”

—St. John of the Cross

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,  
whenever you face trials of many kinds, because  
you know that the testing of your faith produces  
perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so  
that you may be mature and complete, not  
lacking anything.”

—James 1v2-4

“Sooner or later He (God) withdraws, if not in fact, at least from their conscious experience, all those supports and incentives. He leaves the creature to stand up on its own legs — to carry out from the will alone duties which have lost all relish. It is during such trough periods, much more than during the peak periods, that is it growing into the sort of creature He wants it to be.

The prayers offered in the state of dryness are those which please him best... He cannot 'temp' to virtue as we do to vice. He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles.

Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.”

—C.S. Lewis

*The Screwtape Letters*