

REVIVALISTS AND MYSTICS
WHEN THE ROAD GETS DARK: CLASS 5
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1. God's Purpose in Seasons of Discipline

- a. Today we are going to take a look at a hero of faith who walked the "Dark Night of the Soul" and provides hope for fellow believers in similar seasons of testing: St. John of the Cross. Before we look at this mystic, we will explore what the Scriptures say about seasons of testing as well as a helpful framework for phases of spiritual maturity.
- b. Our journey of faith is not one straight and expected road straight to heaven. There are winding twists and turns, new phases and seasons. All of the blessings and triumphs, tests and challenges we encounter along the way are gifts from God to teach us to lean and trust in Him alone.

Deuteronomy 8: 2-4 "And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. 3 So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

- c. Challenges and tests are opportunities to become aware of the attachments we cling to that keep us from being wholly dependent on God. God is not content with our agreement, or our lip service. He wants whole hearts, fully surrendered in obedience to His Lordship.
- d. Sometimes the attachments God is calling us to let go of are our own tools we've picked up to survive in the world. (Much of learning to trust the Lord is actually unlearning and releasing the tools and protective strategies that we've formed over years so that He Himself can come fulfill our desires. God uses the seasons of testing to teach us to let go.

To Consider: What have been some of the most significant challenges or pressures in your life? What did you have to surrender in order to make it/overcome?

1 Peter 1:7 "6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which perishes though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;" (NASB)

Psalm 66: 10-12 "For You have put us to the test, God: You have refined us as silver is refined.11 You brought us into the net; You laid an oppressive burden upon us. 12 You made men ride over our heads; We went through fire and through water. Yet You brought us out into a place of abundance.

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- e. God is the one who authors the seasons of testing in our life. He does it for His own glory (Isaiah 48:11) and for our own good (Hebrews 12:6). In it all, He never compromises who He is as Good. In testing, God remains Good.
- f. A.W. Tozer, in Knowledge of the Holy, beautifully reminds us of God's unchanging goodness. "Divine goodness, as one of God's attributes, is self-caused, infinite, perfect, and eternal. Since God is immutable He never varies in the intensity of His loving-kindness. He has never been kinder than He now is, nor will He ever be less kind. He is no respecter of persons but makes His sun to shine on the evil as well as on the good, and sends His rain on the just and on the unjust. The cause of His goodness is in Himself, the recipients of His goodness are all His beneficiaries without merit and without recompense.

Isaiah 48:9-11 "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. 11 For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another.

Hebrews 12: 6 "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."

James 1:2-3 "2 Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (NASB)"

- g. The fruit of testing: the proof of our faith, endurance, perfection and completion, freedom and transcendence, intimacy with God.

To Consider: Think again on your seasons of testing? What fruit was ultimately produced in you? What fruit is God wanting to produce in you now?

Before we take a look at The Dark Night of the Soul, it will be helpful to consider it in the greater context of phases in the life of faith. Many models and frameworks exist to help people make sense of where they are in their pursuit of God. None of these "are it" but they can be helpful tools to help us orient ourselves to God's larger work in our lives and how we can cooperate with it.

2. Stages in the Spiritual Journey

- a. Used with Permission from The Critical Journey: Stages in the life of faith, by Janet O. Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich
- b. Stage 1: The Recognition of God**
 - i. Thesis: Faith is the discovery or recognition of God
 - ii. Characteristics of Stage 1

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1. A Sense of Awe
2. A Sense of Need
3. A Natural Awareness
4. Greater Meaning in Life
5. A Sense of Innocence
- iii. Caged at Stage 1
 1. Worthlessness, Spiritual Bankruptcy, Martyrdom, Ignorance
- iv. Moving from Stage 1 to Stage 2
 1. Become Part of a Strong Group, Let Life Take on More Significance, Find a Charismatic Leader to Follow, Discover the Way
- v. Catalyst for Movement
 1. Accept Self-Worth, Reduce Isolation
- vi. Question: How and when did you first recognize God in your life? (Awe or need?)

Song of Songs 1:4-5 "The king has brought me into his chambers. We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will remember your love more than wine. Rightly do they love you. *I am* dark, but lovely. O daughters of Jerusalem

c. Stage 2: The Life of Discipleship

- i. Thesis: Faith is the learning about God.
- ii. Characteristics of Stage 2
 1. Meaning from Belonging
 2. Answers Found in a Leader, Cause, or Belief System
 3. Sense of Rightness
 4. Security in Our Faith
- iii. Caged at Stage 2
 1. Rigid in Righteousness, We against Them, Switchers, Searchers
- iv. Moving from Stage 2 to Stage 3
 1. Recognize Uniqueness, Identify Gifts, Recognize Contributions, Seek Responsibility
- v. Catalyst for Movement
 1. Risk Taking, Acceptance of Gifts
- vi. Question: When have you felt a part of a faith or spiritual community?

Song of Songs 1:7-8 "Tell me, O you whom I love, Where you feed *your flock*, Where you make *it* rest at noon. For why should I be as one who veils herself By the flocks of your companions? *If you do not know, O fairest among women, Follow in the footsteps of the flock, And feed your little goat beside the shepherds' tents.*

d. Stage 3: The Productive Life

- i. Thesis: Faith is working for God.
- ii. Characteristics of Stage 1
 1. Uniqueness in the Community
 2. Responsibility
 3. Value Placed on Symbols
 4. A Spiritual Goal Reached
- iii. Caged at Stage 3
 1. Overly Zealous, Weary in Well Doing, Self-Centered, Life as Performance

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- iv. Moving from Stage 3 to Stage 4
 - 1. Lose Sense of Certainty, Experience Faith/Personal Crisis, Feel Abandoned, Look for Direction
- v. Catalyst for Movement
 - 1. Letting Go of Success, Accepting Vulnerability
- vi. Question: Which of your talents/gifts do you feel good about and are willing to share?

Song of Solomon 2:10 “My beloved spoke, and said to me: “Rise up, my love, my fair one, And come away. For lo, the winter is past, The rain is over *and* gone.””

e. Stage 4: The Journey Inward

- i. Thesis: Faith is rediscovering God
- ii. Characteristics of Stage 4
 - 1. Life or Faith Crisis
 - 2. Loss of Certainties in Life and Faith
 - 3. A Search for Direction, Not Answers
 - 4. Pursuit of Personal Integrity in Relation to God
 - 5. God Released from Box
 - 6. Apparent Loss of Faith
- iii. Caged at Stage 4
 - 1. Always Questioning, Consumed by Self-Assessment, Immobilized
- iv. Moving from Stage 4 to Stage 5
 - 1. Let Go of Spiritual Ego (Self-Centeredness), Accept God’s Purpose for Our Lives, Seek Wholeness through Personal Healing and Pilgrimage, Be Willing to Commit to Whatever it Takes
- v. Catalyst for Movement
 - 1. Finding Peace through Giving up the Search for Self, Allowing for New Certainty in God, Open to the Cost of Obedience
- vi. Question: How has your faith fallen apart? When? Why?

Song of Songs 5:6-8 “I opened for my beloved, But my beloved had turned away *and* was gone. My heart leaped up when he spoke, I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.”

The watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me; The keepers of the walls Took my veil away from me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, If you find my beloved, That you tell him I *am* lovesick!

f. Stage 4b: The Wall

- i. Thesis: The mystery of our will meeting God’s will face to face.
- ii. Types of Resistance at the Wall
 - 1. Strong Egos
 - 2. Self-Deprecators
 - 3. Guilt/Shame-Ridden
 - 4. Intellectuals
 - 5. High Achievers
 - 6. Doctrinaire
 - 7. Ordained
- iii. Going through the Wall

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1. Comfort, Surrender, Healing, Awareness, Forgiveness, Acceptance, Love, Closeness to God, Discernment, Melting, Molding, Solitude and Reflection

g. Stage 5: The Journey Outward

- i. Thesis: Faith is surrendering to God
- ii. Characteristics of Stage 5
 1. A Renewed Sense of God's Acceptance
 2. A New Sense of the Horizontal Life
 3. Sense of Calling, Vocation, or Ministry
 4. Concern and Focus on Others' Best Interests
 5. A Deep Calm or Stillness
- iii. Caged at Stage 5
 1. Seemingly out of touch with Practical Concerns, Apparently Careless about "Important" Things
- iv. Moving from Stage 5 to Stage 6
 1. No Striving, Just Evolving—Growing Deeper, Seeing God in All of Life, Being God's Person
- v. Catalyst for Movement
 1. "Vocation" is Satisfying, Being Whole Seems Enough
- vi. Question: Do you have a glimpse of God's purpose for your life?

Song of Songs 7:11 "Come, my beloved, Let us go forth to the field; Let us lodge in the villages. 12 Let us get up early to the vineyards;

h. Stage 6: The Life of Love

- i. Thesis: Faith is reflecting God
- ii. Characteristics of Stage 6
 1. Christ-like Living in Total Obedience to God
 2. Wisdom Gained from Life's Struggles
 3. Compassionate Living for Others
 4. Detachment from Things and Stress
 5. Life Underneath or on Top
 6. Life Abandoned
- iii. Caged at Stage 6
 1. Separation from the World, Neglect of Self, Apparent Waste of Life
- iv. Question: How is God everything to you?

Song of Songs 8:5-6 "Who is this coming up from the wilderness, Leaning upon her beloved?...Set me as a seal upon your heart. As a seal upon your arm; For love is as strong as death, Jealousy as cruel as]the grave; Its flames are flames of fire, A most vehement flame.

- i. Some disclaimers: Frameworks are not rules, they are tools. We often go through these phases on a small scale, in a microcosm in specific areas of our life. But we are continually spiraling into greater degrees of surrender, deepening in intimacy with God.
3. Tonight we are going to look at one particular mystic who embraced suffering as a necessary part of the journey of growing intimacy with God, St. John of the Cross. . He, alongside Teresa of Avila, endured much suffering to help bring reform to monastic communities.

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- a. A great resource on St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila is Fire Within, by Thomas Dubay
4. St. John of The Cross
 - a. Biographical Sketch
 - i. St. John of the Cross was born in 1542. He was born in Spain into an impoverished family. His father died when he was 3 years old, and his mother had to move often to try to find work to provide for the family.
 - ii. As a child, John was sent to a boarding school for poor and orphaned children. He was given a religious education from a young age and chose to follow a religious path, even as a child. He served as an acolyte at an Augustinian monastery. As he grew older, he went to work in a hospital while attending a Jesuit school.
 - iii. In 1563, he was able to join the Carmelite Order and took the name, "John of St. Matthias." He made vows the following year, and was sent to the university in Salamanca to study theology and philosophy. He became an expert in the Bible and dared to translate the Song of Songs into Spanish, an act which was controversial since the Church forbade the translation of the Bible from Latin -a measure to protect the original meanings in the scripture.
 - iv. John became a priest in 1567 and considered joining the Carthusian Order where monks lived cloistered in individual cells. He was attracted by the simple and quiet life. However, he encountered Theresa of Avila, a charismatic Carmelite nun. Theresa asked John to follow her. John was attracted by the strict routine followed by Theresa, a routine she hoped to reintroduce to her order, as well as her devotion to prayer and simplicity. Her followers went barefoot, and were therefore known as the discalced Carmelites.
 - v. A lot of Carmelites resisted the reforms that John and St. Teresa were bringing. On December 2, 1577, a group of Carmelites broke into John's residence and kidnapped him. He was taken by force to the order's main house in Toledo. He was brought before a court and placed on trial for disobedience. He was punished by imprisonment. A cell was made for him in the monastery that was so small he could barely lie on the floor. He was fed only bread and water, and occasional scraps of salt fish. Each week he was taken into public and lashed, then returned to his cell. His only luxuries were a prayer book and an oil lamp to read it by. To pass the time he wrote poems on paper that was smuggled to him by the friar

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charged with guarding his cell. After nine months, John managed to pry his cell door from its hinges and escape.

- vi. It was during John's imprisonment, that, by the light of a three-inch hole high in the wall, John wrote his two greatest poems, "Cantico Espiritual" (Spiritual Canticle, 1578) and "Noche Oscura del Alma" (Dark Night of the Soul). These two extraordinary pieces illuminated both his own darkness and the mystery of his path, which many people have since followed.
- vii. John became known as a remarkable and influential poet, especially following his death. He has been cited as an influence to many poets, mystics, and artists, even Salvador Dali. During the last few years of his life, John traveled and established new houses across Spain. In 1591, John became ill with a skin condition that resulted in an infection. He died on December 14, 1591, John of the Cross died.

b. Main Ideas

- i. For John, the mystic path meant living with an all-consuming desire more fully to know and love God, abandoning everything that did not contribute to that communion.
- ii. John of the Cross' stages of maturity
 1. This first step in knowing God is called **purification**: the speaker slips away from the silenced house—the passionate flesh. The soul is then readied for the second stage, **illumination**, a blissful state characterized by a heightened awareness of the presence of God and an enjoyment of his gifts. Nevertheless, as delightful as God's gifts are, they are not God himself, and anything short of the fullness of God is not enough.
 2. **To go further on the way requires another purification, one of the spirit**; this process is what is called the "Dark Night of the Soul," or the "wounded neck" and "suspended senses." The mystic feels an absolute loss of God, a sense that the sun has been completely obliterated. Desolation and despair are the usual emotions. Yet no matter how long the emptiness continues, the soul clings to God, for this "spiritual crucifixion" is necessary: one must learn to seek God for God's sake, not for the sake of the happiness God brings. Only then can one enjoy perfect union with God.

c. Quotes

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“The road is narrow. He who wishes to travel it more easily must cast off all things and use the cross as his cane. In other words, he must be truly resolved to suffer willingly for the love of God in all things.”

“Before the divine fire is introduced into the substance of the soul and united with it through perfect and complete purgation and purity, its flame, which is the Holy Spirit, wounds the soul by destroying and consuming the imperfections of its bad habits. And this is the work of the Holy Spirit, in which he disposes it for divine union and transformation in God through love. The very fire of love that afterward is united with the soul, glorifying it, is what previously assailed it by purging it, just as the fire that penetrates a log of wood is the same that first makes an assault on the wood, wounding it with the flame, drying it out, and stripping it of its unsightly qualities until it is so disposed that it can be penetrated and transformed into the fire. Spiritual writers call this activity the purgative way.”

“O you souls who wish to go on with so much safety and consolation, if you knew how pleasing to God is suffering and how much it helps in acquiring other good things, you would never seek consolation in anything; but you would rather look upon it, as a great happiness to bear the Cross of the Lord.”

“Never give up prayer, and should you find dryness and difficulty, persevere in it for this very reason. God often desires to see what love your soul has, and love is not tried by ease and satisfaction.”

“Have a great love for those who contradict and fail to love you, for in this way love is begotten in a heart that has no love. God so acts with us, for he loves us that we might love by means of the very love he bears toward us.”

“It is regrettable, then, to behold some souls, laden as rich vessels with wealth, deeds, spiritual exercises, virtues, and favors from God, who never advance because they lack the courage to make a complete break with some little satisfaction, attachment, or affection (which are all about the same) and thereby never reach the port of perfection.”

“God is more pleased by one work, however small, done secretly, without desire that it be known, than a thousand done with the desire that people know of them. Those who work for God with purest love not only care nothing about whether others see their works, but do not even seek that God himself know of them. Such persons would not cease to render God the same services, with the same joy and purity of love, even if God were never to know of these.”

For Discussion: Which quote from St. John of the Cross stands out to you? Why? What is your main takeaway from this session today?