

The Dark Night of the Soul
6.30.2019

Introduction

Have you ever had a time when you just can't get settled on the inside, when you feel like nothing is like it should be, and the things you are doing no longer satisfy?

Is it a signal to you that things are changing, and it's time for you to change?

What do you do when you get this sense inside that makes you seem uncomfortable most of the time? You can't pray it away. You can't eat it away. You can't play it away. You can't vacation it away. It's just there.

These times that we all have may just be signals that move us into a seeking mode to prepare us for the next phase of life.

Ever so often, we come to a crossroads that prepares us to enter another phase of God's plan for our lives.

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would show us things to come:

John 16:13 (NLT)

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future.

Psalms 139:16 (NLT)

You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

Philippians 1:6 (NLT)

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

Psalms 138:8 (NKJV)

The Lord will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever; Do not forsake the works of Your hands.

Psalms 138:8 - 139:1 (NLT)

The Lord will work out his plans for my life — for your faithful love, O Lord, endures forever. Don't abandon me, for you made me.

Philippians 2:12-13 (NKJV)

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; (13) for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

The Dark Night of the Soul

A Catholic mystic, St. John of the Cross, from the 16th century, wrote about the *dark night* in his books. Later this came to be known as *the dark night of the soul*, a time when God takes you to the end of yourself, and you find a new level of relationship with Him.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_Night_of_the_Soul#In_popular_culture

In recent times this phrase has been found in literature and music, speaking of a time of personal crisis in identifying where you are in life, where you are going, and what the next steps for you will look like.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_Night_of_the_Soul#In_popular_culture

These are some of the toughest times in your life. Change is hard. It is full of unknowns. And there are no guarantees that it will work out well.

And that is the place God will take you to when it's time to move further into His plans for your life.

It sometimes feels like a dark, lonely place. It's the *dark night of the soul*.

Nuclear Fission

In science, it seems similar to the characteristics that occur in nuclear fission, when an atom is about to split and cause a nuclear reaction. The nucleus actually depresses. Scientists observe that the neutron bombardment, which seemed to be changing the nucleus, now shows no sign of reaching critical mass. Nothing seems to be happening.

http://www.wherepeacefulwaters.com/articles/dark_night_of_the_soul.htm

Scientists respond to a depressed nucleus by intensifying the neutron beam, and resolve to do so until fission occurs. They commit to keep moving, not relying on any physical signs.

http://www.wherepeacefulwaters.com/articles/dark_night_of_the_soul.htm

Suddenly, the atom splits, and you have a nuclear reaction!

When God wants to do something new in you, it unsettles you, and you just don't know what to do.

Mario Marillo said in his book *Critical Mass*:

“That is also what happens right before a big change in your life. All of a sudden, you hit a brick wall. The power is gone. God's presence seems to have lifted. Your prayers feel trapped in your mouth. A deep despair settles in. You feel physically drained.”

http://www.wherepeacefulwaters.com/articles/dark_night_of_the_soul.htm

Mario Marillo:

“Everything you have done before you reach this dark night will seem unimportant. It is what you do now that makes or breaks your heart's desire. At no other time does God express love more than when He allows this time of total emptiness. God risks being misunderstood. He faces the potential of one of His children walking away frustrated and confused, but He believes the good it will produce is well worth the risk.”

http://www.wherepeacefulwaters.com/articles/dark_night_of_the_soul.htm

You may ask, why does God allow this *dark night of the soul*?

He may allow it to bring us to a place where we are so desperate that we are willing to do whatever to get out of the place we are in. We are willing to change any attitude or action. We are willing to let go of what we think is important and embrace a new phase of what God has planned for us.

Bible examples

Joseph

You can see this principle in Joseph's life as he was sold as a slave and later imprisoned.

What seemed just terrible moved Joseph into the plan of God for the rest of his life and rescued his family from starvation during a terrible drought in the Middle East.

Moses

Moses spent 40 years tending sheep in the lonely desert place before God appeared to him in the burning bush.

David

David spent years in a cave running from King Saul who was trying to kill him before David became king of Israel.

Jesus

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus faced a battle with His flesh, and with the will of God that loomed large before Him. Was there any way to avoid the darkness that lay ahead of Him.

Could He avoid the physical suffering? Could He avoid the mental and spiritual suffering of separation from His Father and being made our sin?

Are you unsettled inside right now?

Is God trying to get your attention?

Is He wanting something different from your life?

Is He seeking to prepare you for the days ahead?

Are you experiencing the *dark night of the soul*?

Personal experiences:

In the early 1980's I was a janitor in very large church in Oklahoma. I became really frustrated with wearing my janitor uniform and cleaning up after *God's nasty people*.

I was cleaning the toilets in a very large bathroom one day, complaining on the inside to God about where I was and what I was doing.

I had a sudden knowing that what I was doing had something to do with God's plan for me. And that day I surrendered. I finally cried out, *God, if this what you have for the rest of my life for me, I am willing to do it. I'll be the best janitor you've ever seen.*

It wasn't long after that experience that I was promoted into a ministry position on the pastoral staff of that church.

This *dark night of the soul* turned into a change that placed me right in the middle of God's plan for my life.

In 1991, I had a similar experience. I had moved to SC in 1988 with Susan, two small kids, and one on the way (this was September, and Jessica was born in December). I had turned a church I started over to another pastor, and had started a travelling ministry, and then a house painting business.

I worked in the painting business during the week, and ministered mostly on the weekends. One day, I was on a ladder grinding the paint off of the wood siding on an old house being restored. The temps were in the upper 90's. I was high on a ladder wearing a face mask, sweating profusely, and grinding away at the hard, crackled paint, prepping the house for a new coat of paint.

I was so frustrated at where I was in life. My mind kept going back to where I had been before moving to SC. I had great success in my former position at the large church. I ministered to people all day long. I had hundreds of relationships with all kinds of people. I

preached, officiated weddings and funerals, visited hospitals, and counseled for the pastor of the church.

While I was grinding away and thinking that maybe the best part of my life was over, and remembering all the good experiences of the past, a song came on the radio as I was listening with my earbuds as I worked. It was Steve Green singing, *He who began a good work in you...*

I simply broke down sobbing. At that moment, I resigned myself to the will of God for my life, even if it was running my business for the rest of my life and not being used in ministry.

When change is coming, God will put you into a place to bring you to the end of yourself. A *dark night of the soul* may come your way.

That *dark night of the soul* for me was another changing point, but this time it was directed at my inward attitudes about who I was, what I did, and how I relate to Jesus. I no longer *had* to be in ministry. I just wanted to know God intimately.

And after that experience, ministry opened up to me on a full-time basis. I gave my business to a friend. Then I came here, and have never looked back.

Don't despise the *dark night of the soul*. It may be the beginning of a huge turning point in your life!

Pray, Read, Wait, And Seek.

During this unsettled time, it's important to get away every chance you get and pray. Read your Bible, ask God to show you His plan. Make yourself available to do whatever He wants you to do.

Do some heart-searching.

Proverbs 4:23 (NKJV)

Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

I have become desperate for the last 2 months or so. Something is going to change in how we do life sometime in the future.

And in how we do church life together.

Jesus' return is getting much closer.

God is drawing us. Are you willing?

Action Points:

1. Are you unsettled inside right now, and just don't know why?
2. Plan into your day, each day: quiet, get-away-from-distraction time.
3. Turn off your phone and all social media and wait on God.
4. This may take some weeks to get through.