

A prayer for those in the Dark Night of the Soul

"Lord, in the midst of my pain, when the enemy of my soul is uniquely adept at shooting his arrows of doubt and discouragement at me, help me to risk believing that even when nothing is happening, something is happening. Help me to be willing to trust the heart of the One who wandered in His own trackless wilderness without receiving a sign of confirmation, yet still chose to stay the course and trust You, despite the silence, the emotional pain, the loneliness, and the offer of instant relief... if He would only take matters into His own hands to fix the situation or shorten the process.

Help me to risk believing that the silence is not what it seems to be, but that You see, You care, You know, and You feel what I am feeling... and that You will show Yourself faithful if I just keep going... one day at a time, one moment at a time. Thank you for being a man of sorrows, acquainted with the most profound sorrow and grief, so that, when I can't trace Your hand, I can trust Your heart. Help me to know Your heart of compassion for me during this time of deep emotional surgery. I give my life once again into Your hands as my Great Physician. Do Your deep work in me, but, please Lord, oversee this process with Your presence, for I cannot do this on my own (Psa.145:17-18).

Lord, help me to pass this difficult test successfully, as I remember that the most important thing I can do during this time is to purpose to act as I should toward others... doing what is right, just, and fair... accurately showing forth the truth of who You are by how I treat those around me... by the words that come out of my mouth, by the attitude people sense from me as they interact with me, and by my ability to "act as if" what I believe in my head is really true... despite the war I feel to the contrary on the inside. As Francis of Assisi prayed, help me to seek to bless, rather than to be blessed during this time when it is such a constant struggle to simply give in to my emotions, to put onto others some of my pain, to give them what they do not deserve. And, let me see through the eyes of those around me, to see the random acts of kindness that people might be trying to do for me as they see me struggling.

Like John the Baptist, help me to continue trusting You, Lord, despite this prison... this very dark and forgotten place. Though everything within me screams out that I have been forgotten, help me to trust that You have not forgotten me, that You know the way I take, that You are aware of what has happened to me, of what others have done, and that You are still active despite the utter silence right now, even though things may be going from bad to worse (Psa.118:49-50). Both my mind, and the enemy of my soul, would want me to conclude that You have abandoned me, that You have walked out on me, that You are not even aware of my situation or my struggles right now, that you are indifferent to my pain, my suffering, and deaf to the depths of pain contained in my sighs. Help uphold me, so that I do not abandon my belief that You do know, that you do see, that you do care, that you are touched with my pain. Help me to see with eyes of faith that You are there, that You are moved by my pain, and You stand with me, to uphold me by Your right hand. (Psa.109:31; 110:5; 142: 1-7)

Lord, the pain is so intense... so excruciating, it is hard to breath sometimes. It threatens to overwhelm me. Despite the intensity of this, help me turn my focus upward and outward, and to resist the pull to turn my focus inward, becoming myopic. Help me to take the time necessary to get alone with You, so that I can purposefully and intensely pour out the pain during those times, as you did, and not let it leak onto others. Thank you for the example of Joseph, the most Christ-like example in the Old Testament, who submitted himself to You, and learned the secret of emotional stability as he developed this most important of all character traits on the road to spiritual maturity. Despite the most profound of intense emotional pain, he was able to be mindful of the emotions of others, and sought to speak encouragement into the lives of those he encountered, despite being in his own seemingly endless prison experience. Thank you that he never gave into the temptation to allow a root of bitterness to fester and grow. And, without his ability to know that so much of Your plan was riding on how he dealt with his pain, help me to remain that consistent, so that I can see what You want to do in and through me on the other side of this long dark valley.

Please help me to be gracious toward others, and to guard against being negative, critical, or complaining (Psa.141:3-4). Impress upon me that a proper attitude will demonstrate that I am passing this test. You never allowed yourself the latitude to being negative toward others because of your pain, so do not allow me to excuse such things away in me (Psa. 19:12-14).

When my emotions do get the best of me, and I am hurtful by my words, reactions, or attitude, help me to apologize quickly, and make whatever changes I need to make in order to prevent a repeat of that kind of behavior (Psa. 73:21-26). Help me to be a positive reflection of your character to those around me, despite what I am feeling. Help me to be mindful of the hurts of others, even while I am in pain, as You so graciously demonstrated even while You were in incomprehensible agony and pain.

And, thank You that You are the One who still calms the raging storms (Psa.107:28-30). Do that within me. Bring a sense of peace that, despite everything I am going through, can help me remain stable and fixed during this time, so that I can remain under Your protective hand (Psa. 91:1), and so that others around me can take note of both my progress and Your faithfulness. Help me to strive hard to enter the rest You have for me... for everything within me wants to work harder to bring this to an end. As a kind and gracious father, You know I am like a child who resists laying down when I need to simply become still and rest. Help me fight against the temptation of trying to "fix things," work harder, or to control situations and people. And, help me to stop resisting Your lead which invites me to lay down beside still waters (Psa.23:1; 131:1-3).

Most of all, Lord, help me to remember that this life is not about me. It is about finishing the course effectively, demonstrating Your love and kindness to others, so that I reflect You accurately.

So, hold me close, for it is dark and the way is long... and, I am tired... so tired (Psa. 50:10). But, I will trust You as You continue Your molding process in my heart. Like Joseph, in the midst of his dark prison experience, help me to hold on to the hope that this is not what it looks like. Bring me out of this prison, Lord, and into the land You have promised. But, regardless, I will choose to trust and remain faithful... no matter how long, for I am Yours, and my life is yielded to you.

Make of me what You will, for You are the Potter, and I am the clay. Help me not to resist the two most important stages of the sculpting process... that of "mastering" and "opening." Help me to allow you to take control of my life, my will, and my emotions, as I am so prone to putting up a fight and resisting this most foundational and necessary step. Then, once my heart is pliable like softened clay and free from debris, move into my inner world with Your skillful, strategic, and wise pressure, to

begin shaping me into a useful vessel, fit for Your selected purpose. Help me to move into the pain, rather than resisting it.

Help me to understand that not all pain is the result of discipline, but can be brought about by a dedicated athletic coach and trainer, who not only hand-selects the next size of weights, but serves as the spotter. Thank you for not giving me more than You know I can handle, despite it feeling like I can't bear any more. Help me to trust Your wisdom, Your knowledge, Your care, Your investment in my progress, and Your overseeing presence as I am trying to find the strength to do one more set... to go the distance. Help me to remain under the pressure, and not to short-circuit the process by simply getting off the bench, by resisting, or by looking for an easier way... a shorter, less painful route to spiritual growth and maturity.

And, thank you for leading by example. Help me to follow Your example, and to learn the deep truth of Your words when You whispered, "...Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done." You have called me to the road less travelled, the narrow road, so I will follow the path, and, with Your help in my intense time of need, I will remain steadfast during this gut-wrenching test, even if it kills me... for, my life is not my own... You bought me with an incalculable price, and freed me from a dark eternity.

Help me to experience your comforting presence in the midst of the blinding pain and the deafening silence, so that I can continue to walk this seemingly endless path. Thank you for helping me take another step, and for being pleased to help strengthen my feeble steps. Lead on Shepherd of my heart. I trust in You.

I ask this in the name of Jesus... the One who had me in mind as He set His face like flint, moving purposefully into the pain, eventually walking that very difficult path alone... which led Him to the cross. Amen"

Psa. 56:8; Psa. 105:18-19; Psa. 42:1; Isaiah 26:8-9, 63:9; Isa 53; Psa. 91:1; Jer. 18:6; Psa. 62:1; Psa. 61: 1-4; Psa. 63:1; Psa. 58: 10-11; Psa. 55:22;