

Stages of Life in the Spirit: Finding New Love in the Dark

Night Oct 1999

John Coe

Announcer 1:

Uhh..again, I want to welcome you to the fourth night of our series, Christian spirituality and soul care. I just want to make a couple of announcements. First..umm...again, we have forms out there on the tables, where tapes are available. If uhh..I think someone is going to xerox more forms because they..they.. ran out. But, umm.. if you are interested in getting the whole series.. the people at the media center told me today, that you should, perhaps, just wait till the end and you can order the whole thing. Umm.. unless you wanted those..those..they will send it to you each week, but they will probably rather send it all in one time. But again, you do what you have to do. Um...Also, I just wanted to make a comment for those students here who are taking this for units credit. Umm.. How many are there who are taking this for units ? Yeah...Okay, about ten or so. Umm..Make sure that you see me either tonight or very soon. Because there is more work to be done, so ahh..so make sure you see me. Umm...another thing is that, a number of you now, have left emails or voicemails for me to get back to you on the nature of the programs in spiritual formulation, for perhaps the Fall of 2000\ . That is goal right now, and perhaps start with an M.A. and maybe the goal to move to a Ph.D. I will probably be getting back to you myself and maybe others in the committee, probably somewhere in Novemberish, ahh.. because then we will have a better sense of where we are what is going on for Fall of 2000\ . Also, there is another group that was scheduled at 9:30 tonight. They normally give a little space. So, right at 9:30, umm..we will a few minutes to kind of get in and out. But anyways, I guess at 9:30 there is a

bunch of..uhh... undergraduates who will come storming in here, so get ready. I want to introduce uhh...another faculty member on the institute. One who is a clinical psychologist at uhh... Rosemead school of psychology. And she has been really a kind of a colleague and part of the heart of the institute and that has been done thus far, umm.. not only because of her interest. Like remember Houston said last time, in..in the double knowledge, the knowledge of self, what they can bring from psychology. But just in her own personal life and understanding spiritual formation over the years. So I want to introduce Nancy and she will get us going.

Nancy:

Good evening and following a good tradition that John has started. I think it is really neat to have some time and prayer before the Lord. Uhh...sitting in front of the pew in the first night it was kinda awkward, but it was something nice for those of us..if you are be mobile enough to be on your knees before the Lord. And something nice about that community, so if you know somebody and can pair that, we can welcome that. If it is a trisome or threesome, or something like that, we will understand that also. And then I am going to lead us through some things and to just pray about. So if you will...umm...if you will kinda set yourself up in pairs or triose, and will have some kind of a short time of prayer. And I will just give some topics to pray...to pray about. Okay? Loving Lord, we come before you now. Just uh..our heads know that your presence is here, but we really invite your presence now among us. And first of all, we would like to prayer for our neighbor, our colleague in this uhh..combination, and so we will take some time to lift them up to now. And now pray for each other that they will fed this evening, and be ministered to and our soul will be enriched. And now, pray for our speaker that God will just speak through him. And now, lets have some silences, each one here, praise the God, and ask God what they would like this evening. How they would like to be fed and nurtured. And our

loving God we thank you for this evening. Uhh...We thank you that we are all about to be fed, and we thank you that you created our souls with a real hunger for you. And we pray that we might grow in that, and we might be fed and be nourished. And we long for your spirit's life in us. And just umm...help us be open and to receive from You now, and we just pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Nancy:

Well, John introduced me and now I get to introduce Dr. John Coe. And it is kinda interesting because he has been up here, and if you have been here the last 3 evenings, you know John. But I get to tell you about him. Although as I was talking to a friend just before this session, she said "Oh, you don't need to introduce John, everybody knows John." But maybe not everybody knows about John. So I can talk a little about John. Um..interesting man, really interesting. So I was looking over his vita about what to share and some of it in your folder that you can find out that he got a Ph.D. in philosophy from University of California in Irvine. uhh...But as I thought about it, I thought, you know some people collect post-it stamps, but it looks like John collects M.A.s, he has got one in philosophy, one in humanit...humanities, and one in theological studies. So that is, that is part of John by the way. He is a very eclectic person at here, very much into philosophy and theology. He has come over to Rosemead and has been with us for a while and has kinda been gotten pulled in the psychology direction. And now he is going to integrate them all with spirituality. So uhh...also an interesting, just to give you a feel of the expanse of this man. His Ph.D was on Aristotle..ummm...and ethics of value, but he has got a published book with a joint author that just fascinated me and so I went to John and I asking about it. I had seen briefly with a reference to it. The name of his published book with this co-author is Wildlife in the Kingdom come: an explorer looks at the critters and creatures of the theological Kingdom. It

is a very humorous kind of a expose of different kind of characterization within the theological domain. So John also has got this weird sense of humor. [inaudible] And there are some neat illustrations done not by John but his co-author I think. But just, John is a person who just pulls things together and just knows a lot. But for our purposes, umm..he is here and probably the most significant thing for us is, in the last years he has been drawn together about Spiritual Formation and has been heavily heavily heavily instrumental in working together to get it down in center for institute in umm at spiritual formation at Biola. He's the one I was pulled together to get this lecture series and so you can see where his heart is. And tonight he is going to share with us one of the things that is deep on his heart. Ahhh...I just checked with him to make sure that this is still the title, but I know that this is something that is dear to his heart. Because one semester I sat in on one of his class where he was teaching some of this and this is umm about adventures in the dark night of the soul and about being renewed. And he's going to talk about stages of spiritual life and spiritual growth. So way may we be be blessed. So John share with us.

John Coe:

Okay, thank you. Oh, thank you. Well, the book ahhh...the book did so well and I went out to print right away so you can see what that did. Uhh...yeah, this...tonight I don't even know how far I will get in all of this because this is a subject dear on my heart. I have..I have taught it now in a number of venues...ahh...probably because of something that went on in my life a number of years ago, a real dark night of the soul. So, umm..but again I want to introduce you to that language. While I was in that experience..umm..nobody introduced me to to it. And I had idea what was going on while I was experiencing a very dark night. So tonight we are going to talk about stages of life in the spirit. Finding new love in the dark night of the soul. There are

some things that are so obvious, they are so obvious that we just miss them. In fact later, we look back on our experience and we think, "Gosh, how could I miss what was going on" and yet we did because we were looking at something else.

I uhh I am going to tell you a story about this. It is a humorous story. This is about Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. They were out camping. Now you know this is not true, they did not camp, if you have read Conan Doyle. But, anyways, they were out camping, and uhhh..night time came and climbed into their sleeping bags. And once in their bags, Holmes said, "Watson, look up and tell me what you see." Watson replied, "I see a clear sky and thousands of stars in it." And Holmes said, "What does that tell you Watson?" Watson said, "Well, astronomically, it tells me there are millions of galaxies behind those lights. Anthropologically, it tells me how small and seemingly insignificant we are in comparison to it all. And meteorologically, it tells me that we will have some beautiful weather tomorrow. What does it tell you Holmes?" And Holmes said, someone has stolen our tent." I like that.

There are some things that we just miss in the moment. You know, this happens those of you have maybe gone through divorce. You or you have known someone. You know what that is like..to maybe looking back on the situation. You think, "Gosh, how did I not see what was going on. How didn't I see what that relationship was going to lead to." Or "Gosh, why didn't I see that to spend some more time with my spouse?" "Why didn't I see it?" And in hindsight, it is just crystal clear. But while we are in it, we just couldn't see. Or a parent who says, "God, why didn't I spend more time with my children, because now they don't want to spend time with me. How could I have missed this?" And yet, we missed it. We were oblivious to something and it is

because we were looking for something else. Something else was in our focus. Something else was going on and we just couldn't see the obvious, maybe others did but we didn't.

This is going to be the same with the dark night. In the dark night, a spiritual dark night, there is something so obvious that God is doing in it. But we are looking for something else. Now, we are going to talk about Dark Night. So this...at first, what is a dark night? Well, a dark night just on the surface are going to be those times our spiritual pilgrimage, when we just don't see what is going on. We just don't see spiritually what is happening. When it seems perhaps God is distant. It seems perhaps God is silent. We don't know know what is going on. We just know that a life of prayer and reading the Scripture is not the same as it what was and we are wondering what has happened. We maybe feeling a little spiritually numb. A little spiritually listless. Perhaps you have been there. Perhaps you have been in a dark night like that. Maybe it was short. Or maybe you have a friend who is in one now. Or maybe you are in one now. And you wonder what is going on. I know the dark night well. I was in one and it got darker and darker and darker. And I still experience it, as we will see as once we actually get in to talking about it. But the kinds of things that we begin to ask is "God, where are you?" "Why don't you make yourself more known to me?" "Why do my prayers seem like they are bouncing off the wall?" "Why does it feel like when I am praying, I am talking to myself?" It didn't feel like that a few years ago. Why now has it changed? God you could come down and touch me. You could, couldn't you?. Couldn't you come down and just put your hand on me and say, "I am here." And maybe the wondering begin to turn towards...God, have I done something wrong? Is something not quite right in my life? Am I not praying with the same intensity? Do I not have the same desire when I read the Scripture? God, what is wrong with me? Why do I feel so dry inside? Why am I so critical when I hear

sermons? It wasn't always this way. What is wrong? And then you may actually say, "God, if only I could go back to former times." If only I could go back to those times God you seemed alive. How many of you have had those feelings? Why don't you raise your hands? How many of you have had those feelings? Okay. Quite a few.

Here is the feeling. This is the feeling that we have in these times that the ancient spiritual writers call the dark night. But, the truth, the truth of the matter in a dark night is something different because, in fact, there is something so obvious that is going on. There is something so obvious that God is doing that the..uhh..the reason it is called a dark night is just because that. It feels dark and you don't know what is going on. And you know why you don't? As we are going to talk about it tonight. Because you and I were looking for something. You and I were looking for something else than God was doing in the dark night. And so I want to try to help us to see perhaps what is God doing in those times when it feels. That is the underlined word.. when it feels like He is distant. When it feels like you don't have a desire for God. When it feels like you don't want to pray anymore. When it feels like the Bible is boring. What is God doing?

I want you to recall just for a moment. And this all just an introduction so far. I want you to recall just for a moment uhh Dr. Houston's talk last week on the double knowledge. Right, of the need to know yourself and to know God and those need to be together. Remember, he said and Pascal and others had said that the knowledge of God without of the knowledge of the self, it always leads to kind of spiritual arrogance. That is the person who knows God but doesn't know themselves. What they are doing is that they are probably going to identify themselves with their theological knowledge and doing so they will probably become judgmental over those who don't

hold the same kind of knowledge or the same kind of information. You see, you know what self knowledge does with this knowledge of God? It rounds, it rounds it. It brings empathy, it brings humility, it brings repentance to the individual. On the other hand if you recall what Dr. Houston said, self understanding without the knowledge of God leads to a kind of perhaps psychological gorging, right? Psychological orgy that is bound to leave the individual at the end of it. In depression, despair or anger, because it is going to turn out that the self doesn't have the power to bring about the cure of the self. That is going to have to be because of the love of God. Well here is going to be my thesis, in light of some things that Dr. Houston shared last night. Here is the thesis that we will be talking about. The dark night is going to be God's attempt to make this lesson of the double knowledge concrete in your life. That is what is about. Your dark night's are God's attempt, in fact if you are going to see that it has very little to do with you. They are going to be God's attempt to make the lesson of this double knowledge concrete in your life. Now, that is the thesis. Let me give you a definition now of the dark night. There are four elements to a dark night. This is still the introduction, by the way. Let's see where we go tonight.

A dark night is first God's work. That is the first part. A dark night is, number one, God's work. Number two, to move us into a place of painful self-awareness. A dark night is God's work. Number two, to move us into a place of painful self-awareness regarding the truth of ourselves. Three, which we will not do on our own, which we will not do on our own. And four, and which is intended to cure us or dissuade us from two things. A, from trusting in our self. It is intended to dissuade us or cure us from, one, trusting in ourselves. And B, trusting in the experience of spirituality. Let me read that definition again. A dark night is God's work to move us in to a place of painful self-awareness regarding the truth of ourselves which we will not do on our own. And

which is intended to dissuade us from trusting in ourselves and from trusting in the feel or the experience of spirituality. In other words, the dark night is going to try to teach us self-awareness in the light of what God has done for us. So that we will really come to believe.

Remember the text in John 15:5 about "I am the vine, you are the braches." The goal of it is that apart from Christ, we can do nothing. God in a dark night is going to take us on a journey. And he is going to take us on a journey we would not want to go on our own. We would refuse to go there. Now, certainly a dark night is going to feel bad and it is dark. It's intended to almost not let you know where you are going because it is trying to dissuade you from you pulling off your spiritual life on your own. But I want to say one thing about a dark night. And I say in a little but hindsight. But, also being in it too. A dark night is a very special time. It is a most special time in your life when God thinks that you or I or your friend is ready. It is when God thinks you, I, or your friend is ready for learning something about ourselves that we were not ready before. He is going to take us a little deeper. And this painful self-awareness is going to be liberating in light of the cross. The cross can come alive by cooperating in the dark night.

Another introductory comment here. The dark night is an event that is initiated by God. But here is what I want you to know as well. It is initiated by God which has a history. It is initiated in a life and that life has a certain history that is, there was a before. And you know what the before was? The before was when God said, "You know something? I don't think John is ready for this. I don't think John yet is strong enough for a dark night quite like this. There is a before and there is an after. And the after is..ahh...now he is ready, come on down, John. And that before and after tell us that a dark night occurs within a developmental history of a person. It occurs..see, it is not

as if just kind of come on the scene and we don't have a prior past and a history in our spirituality but every event is accumulating a past and looking into a future.

And so this ministry of the Spirit of the Dark night takes place within a spiritual developmental history. And in that spiritual developmental history, the issue is what is going on in this persons heart? Where they are and what is the holy spirit doing in that person's heart in where they are to lead them more and more into transformation into Christ. Well, it turns out that one of the things that I have given myself to study is the history of spiritual writers and many of them, theologians, pastors, people interested in the spiritual life were fascinated with this idea that there was a spiritual developmental history. That the spirit is taking you on a journey and the spirit is going to do work differently at different times in your personal life because of where you are. And they were interested in this because of what they saw in their own life take place. What they saw in their disciples. Some of these individuals discipled that that I have read...hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of individuals.

Seeing these cycles go on and then they were interested in the Scriptures, because in the Scriptures there is a hint about this. So, I want to begin with the Scriptures, so if you have the text with you, turn to 1 John chapter 2\). This is one of the most explicit text that we find in the New Testament that has to do with something of a developmental history. Because see what I want to do is that I want to trace out a developmental history, just a portion of it so that I can understand what a dark night is doing in that period of our lives. Dark nights aren't forever, but they serve a real place in our lives. This from 1John 2:12 : I am writing to you little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name sake. I am writing to you fathers, because you

know him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to young men because you have overcome the evil one. And now He repeats himself. I have written...some say John is getting a little old here so he is repeating himself but that is not true. I have written to you children because you know the Father. I have written to you fathers because you have know Him who has been from the beginning. I written to you young men because you are strong and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one. This is a clear text to the history of Christian interpreters. Something is going on developmentally. John ahh...this is probably an epistle written to the church at Ephesus. John had been the pastor of that Church for a number of years. Now he had been gone for a while. When he writes, it is almost as if he and they know who they are talking about. Who were the spiritual children? Who were these spiritual young adults? Who are the spiritual Fathers? He doesn't tell us much about it, but here is what we can catch from this.

We we catch that John had in mind at least three developmental stages: spiritual children. And notice what they are characterized by-a sense of forgiveness of sins and a sense of knowing God. This is kind of a sense of personal awakening. I uhh I remember when I came to the Lord in the 70s, right? The thing I went around telling everybody was...Christianity is..isn't a religion...It is a what? A relationship. Yeah, we all know that right? It is a relationship. Well, that is what this sounds like. It sounds like somebody who has come alive to my sins have been forgiven, I know the Father, I have a relationship with God. Now, notice the second stage: spiritual adolescence, early adulthood. John says it is characterized by a sense of struggle. A sense of wrestling with the evil one. A sense of the word integrating into the life, right? And overcoming the word of God abides in you, meaning it has become yours. It is not the faith of your parents now. It is

yours, because it had to become yours in this wrestling period, and you are overcoming. Some kind of a wrestling period. This was a hint to most of spiritual writers later on, of the concept of a dark night. The dark night is a transitioning period. The dark night is going to be a wrestling, it is difficulty. The first period of the child is not. Thank God it is not. We were children, we were spiritual babes. And then spiritual maturity, we were not told much about what this is. In fact, it is very cryptic. John just says, that you know Him who is from the beginning. Most commentators say, this may have something to do with knowing the Sovereign God. The big God. The God over history. He is the one who has been from the beginning, meaning these are spiritual fathers and mothers, who have through time and experience have come to a place where they have let God be God in their lives. They have come to grips with the will of God. They have seen God take their children. They have seen God take their friend's children. They have seen God take their friends...they have seen God do a lot of things and now they are at a place where they say, "God, you are God." Kind of like at the end of the book of Job, where Job finally says, "God, now I know you can do all things" meaning "You can do all things with my life. You are the Sovereign one." Again, we don't get much of this, but there was this sense that John had in mind that there was some kind of spiritual history with this middle transitioning period of a dark night, wrestling. Well, the history of the Church, theologians and commentators picked up on this. Augustine was one of the early one who really tried to take this text and develop out a kind of developmental spirituality. You know just like psychologists have a developmental psychology, looking at the stages of growth, the hurdles. Well, Augustine says there is something going on here in the text about that spiritually. When the spirit comes, we become like little babes again and now we have to grow.

Last week, umm...Houston brought up Bernard of Clairvaux, he had developed a system and I don't want to go into the details of these. I am going to focus on one of them and his name his St. John of the cross. St. John of the cross was writing in the 16th Century and he is writing as kind of ahh...an accumulation of all of these developmental spiritualities that have gone before. And John of the cross really helps to put it together. If you are interested in further reading. Umm..You can read a book called The Dark Night of the Soul. How's that for a title, right? Dark night of the soul. Or the another is the ascent of Mt. Carmel. Now, what I am going to do is, I am going to help parse out what John of the cross has said to try to help us understand what is it that God doing in these dark nights. And I am not going to develop his whole developmental spirituality because, ummm that would, I mean I would spend a whole class just doing that, right? But I want to just introduce it to you, and and talk about a a few of the early stages. Let me tell you how he breaks it down. He breaks this developmental spirituality down into three loves. And the three loves are these stages that we go through.

The first love, is the love of God for pleasure sake. His idea is going to be that when we come to God, we come to God through Christ as a spiritual baby. We come as an infant. We come as an infant and what is that we come in it for? We are in it for pleasure. That's just where we are. And so this is this stage of the love of God for pleasure sake. Now, I am going to take most of my nights and cut and and work on that. The second love, is the love of God for love's sake. God is trying to move us into a place of not just loving Him for pleasure sake but loving Him for love's sake. You can think of the difference between a romance and a marriage. Romance, there is a certain pleasure element that we are in it for. Marriage, now, we are in it for love, or at least some are in for love, right? 50% are not in our country. They are in it for something else. And

the last stage, he says, is the love of God for God's sake, that we actually come to a place in our life where we love God, not even for the love, but we love God for God's sake. This would be probably ahh.. similar to Jesus at Gethsemane. Remember at Gethsemane, the Father tells Jesus, Jesus, I want you to go to the cross and on the cross what I want you to do is, I want you to sacrifice even fellowship with me for my will. Will you do that? Interesting, Jesus gave up the experience of love for obedience to the Father. That's that's great.

I am not going to talk about all these stages, I am going to focus primarily on this first stage: the love of God for pleasure sake and as He transit us to the other ones. So, lets begin talking about this spiritual development. And if you do wish to think about this, this... developmental spirituality, the stages how the spirit is moving you to a greater deeper love. You can think of it linearly and chronologically if you want. That is, maybe umm, maybe these stages actually have something to do with your personal life, Maybe you actually see yourself going through these stages. But, perhaps, these stages that I am going to talk about are merely a metaphorical way to understand periods and times in our lives of how God is going to work to draw us more and more to himself. So, let's begin with the first stage. The first stage is what John of the cross calls, the beginner, the beginner. And in the beginner, this is where he says, we begin the process of loving God for pleasure sake. John of the cross doesn't necessarily think about the beginner as the person at conversion. What he means by the beginner is, some period in your life when all of a sudden, the faith came alive. Now, for me that was rather obvious. I was a uhh unbeliever until 19\ . At 19, I converted into Christianity and [inaudible] boom, it just took...I felt alive. How many of you actually converted later on in life? How many of you were raised in the Church? Okay, more so the other. When he thinks of uhhh the beginner of someone who has been in the

faith, raised in the faith, he is thinking of the individual where... who knows at what time, 6th grade, 8th grade, junior high, high school, college, where all of a sudden, the faith just took. You were just excited about the faith. A period of time earlier on when you said, "Yes! God this is good. Christianity is neat." How many of you have had an experience some where back then, where you just, "Yeah! This is good. Christianity is good."

This is where John of the cross says, " This this corresponds to that first stage in 1 John about the child, sins have forgiven, they have a relationship with the Father." Let me give you a couple of characteristics of this time. The first characteristic is this. In the life of the beginner, the spiritual beginner when faith is finally taken. The first thing is, it is characterized by spiritual pleasure. It is characterized by spiritual pleasure. As a mother gives milk to an infant, so God feeds us as spiritual babies right we are at, and that is, our love for pleasure. And so the idea here is that God gives the believer the bottle of spiritual pleasure without any labor on our part, because why, "We are just babies." We don't have the characterological stuff yet to love God with a more mature love. And so what God does is, God gives spiritual pleasure. No no now, notice this, He gives spiritual pleasure by means of the same psychological structures as in our non-Christian days. The difference is this, there is a new affection at the core. We call that the new creature. However, character logically, our character is still pretty much like the old person. And so what God does is, God meets us right where we are at the place of pleasure.

Let me give you a, let me give you a graph about, this is the..a pre-converted experience. Oops. Didn't mean to have that. For the pre-converted experience, here is the "I". Now the "I" was made for union with God. It was made for relationship with the Holy Spirit. However, the Holy

Spirit is not there. And so, here is like a relational hole. And the individual is going to use things in life to fill that hole. Let's think of these things here, these horizontal or vertical lines as our psychological structures. The capacity for joy, for hope, for desire, for love, for anger. Well the Scriptures say, that prior to our conversion, that we were dead in our trespasses and sins. It says that we kind of filled our life with the lust of the flesh, the desires of the flesh and the mind, meaning that our hearts were pretty habituated by pleasure-in our taking of food, in our taking of sex, in our parenting, even if it was good parenting, in our having friends, it doesn't matter. The heart was somewhat governed by the "I", the ego, who is using pleasure to try to fill that hole.

Well, now, what takes place..here is the experience of the beginner. The experience of the beginner is that, we are a new creature now. The Holy Spirit has come, and so there is in fact, this new expulse of power in our lives. However, the heart is still habi...habituated by pleasure. The heart has not had time to change that much. The heart is a baby. The heart is an infant spiritually. Even though it might be a , you might be a 6 foot adult, spiritually speaking, you are a baby. And so what God does, out of His kindness, as my little girls would say, He gives us the "bahhh". He gives us the bottle. He gives us the bottle of spiritual pleasure.

That is, now isn't this amazing, here at 19, from myself, I do not have the characterological stuff to love God. And yet, at 19 when I am converted, I am now reading the Bible, right? These are my new objects in my life. I am reading the Bible and I love it. I am engaging in fellowship, going to Church, and I love it. I am praying and God seems to be there, He is alive. I am engaging in friends and I am trying to figure out what is to have friends in Christ. I eat food, what is it now to eat food in Christ. And the point here is, that John of the cross says, we were

spiritual infants, and God meets us right where we were and he gives us the bottle of spiritual pleasure to encourage our faith. See I am not ready for Job experience yet. I want to be fed that that milk. I want it to taste good. I want to be encourage on in the faith. I remember with my mom, when I became a believer in 19, her and I had a constant dialogue about ahh..whether I had changed or not. And I used to tell her, "Mom, I have changed, my heart has changed, I am a new creature and you are going to hell." Ahem...my mom, "Yeah, John, the old arrogant you. right?". And we used to fight over this, "I have changed!", "No, I haven't", "I have changed" "No, I haven't". You know, we were both right. I have changed. There was this expulsive power of love that had begun, she couldn't see it. You know what my mom was looking at. She was looking at my character. She saw that my character was pretty much the same.

And those of you who have been in in the faith anytime, know character change is so slow, and that is what the spirit is going to want to do. He's gonna want to change your character. And you know what it is like to struggle with sin for years and years. That is going to be his goal, is the transformation of the character into the mind of Christ. So my mom she was right, but also she was wrong. Something had happened. And so what God does, God responds just like a good mother. [audio clipped] Meets right where the child is at. She doesn't demand the child to be an adult. And God meets us right where we at characterological. We are a new creature, right? 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If any man is in Christ, behold he is a new creature". But a new creature would still, who is characterlogically quite full of himself. A character is still have quite bit of sin working through the members of the heart. And so, what God does is, He gives us the bottle to lead us on, until we are ready for something more substantial. And what is that going to be? It is going to be the truth, it is going to be the truth about yourself. He is going to take you on a

journey sometime, someday and it will change your life. It is going to be the truth of yourself in light of God's grace. But right now, God gives grace to the spiritual baby. And so you know what happens to this time? The spiritual disciplines are usually felt as really good. You just enjoy going to church, you just enjoy reading the Scriptures, you enjoy praying. Everything is kinda working.

And this is a time when I disciplined people at this stage. This is the time when I really encouraged their development, because it is working. God is just giving that grace, of saying "Mmmm" when you pray, "Mmmm" this is good. And I want to move my disciples into that place to take in the word, to take in God as much as possible. Because something is going to come, but know this too in the stage of the beginner. At this point, John of the cross says, that the soul is moved to spiritual things due to the consolation of pleasure that we get from them and that is key. At this point in our spiritual life, we are moved to spiritual things because of the consolation of pleasure. And again I thank God that He condescends to our level. Lest, I wouldn't go on at all. But again, it is going to turn out, that this pursuing God and the disciplines for pleasure is going to be the very reason for the dark night. It was necessary for when you were a baby. And I almost make it a principle like this, the more you need a spiritual pleasure when you were a baby to get you going, is perhaps the darker the night that is going to be.

You know, there are some people, and I look at differences in my parents. My parents were raised in the depression, right? They were born in 1908\ Umm..they ahhh..they were tough. I look at the generation I was in. I'm in..I'm 43\ And and one my students are in...a really different generation. I mean this is a generation really governed by pleasure and it may be that God has to

work even more on our behalf as spiritual infants than my parents, to give us the pleasure to keep us going. To keep us even looking at the Scriptures, even paying attention to prayer, but then it may be that our dark nights are going to be inversely even worse, because we want it so much. Now, during this beginner state, some spiritual strength begins but here is what starts happening, the old vices that we had, the old vices of our character are still at work that we trying to put off. Paul says, "they take on a religious dimension". Now this fascinating. This takes us into the second stage.

This is the second stage of the love of God for pleasure sake. Under the love of God for pleasure sake: the beginner, and now you have the sins of the beginner. The sins of the beginner. This is just going to be a...don't be alarmed. This is just going to be a part of our growth. This is just what is going to have to happen. You see because our spiritual change deludes us to think, here is the issue, it deludes us to think we were making the changes. It deludes us to think, "Hey, when I read the Bible something happens. Hey, when I pray, God responds." This is good. And it deludes us also to believe that the spiritual disciples are always to be accompanied by pleasure. They are always to be accompanied by a spiritual experience. And so the problem here is two-fold. The appetite for pleasure has it's goal to feel good in spirituality. That is going to be a major problem. That our appetite for pleasure now has its goal. And see this is how the old...the old stuff of the heart comes in in to the faith before we were gluttons for pleasure. And now, it turns out we are gluttons for spiritual pleasure , that is what we want. And we thought we were doing it, that is called pride. Well, here is what the ancients did. The ancients took what we call the seven deadly sins. The seven deadly sins of pride, gluttony, sloth...this is a nice litany here...envy, wrath, greed, luxury, and it said those same sins are working into your life

spiritually. And it said those same sins are working their way into your life spiritually. I uhh..there is actually a section St. John of the cross of about ten pages of this and I have my students praying through this. This really does a number to your soul when you begin to look at how these things work out in your life. Let me...I am going to just umm...give you three of them really quickly. The first one is spiritual gluttony. Spiritual gluttony.

Spiritual gluttony is defined as when our drive to do the spiritual disciplines is more for spiritual pleasure than for purity. Let me repeat that. Spiritual gluttony is when our drive to do the spiritual disciplines: prayer, reading the Bible, going to Church, whatever..is more for spiritual pleasure than for purity. Simple test...there is a simple test if you're a spiritual glutton. If there was a time in your life when you know when you were doing the spiritual disciplines, you're just doing what you normally do: quiet time, praying, going to Church. And then you noticed that you weren't quite getting the quite the same zest that you used to be getting. You weren't getting quite the same "mmm" when you did the spiritual disciplines. And then, if you did them less, or if you did them with less intensity, you know you are a spiritual glut. You know it, because, why? You are in it for the pleasure. And so if you are not getting the same "Mmm". I mean how many of you have just kinda ended a prayer time or a quiet time with...uhhh....good work. So...that doesn't exactly encourage me to get up early the next day. You know you are a spiritual glutton. But again, don't be afraid of that, don't be shocked by it. You were a spiritual baby. God had to give you a spiritual pleasure to it all... to get you excited about his word. What else could it be? That of what a baby does. But we are going to have to grow up. Dark night time. Spiritual pride. Here is another one. Now, again, John of the cross gives much more on spiritual gluttony but that just gives is a taste.

Spiritual pride. Spiritual pride is the deep belief that in some way we are making a spiritual life make. Spiritual pride is the deep belief. Most of us have this consciously, most of us say, "Yay, I am making this spiritual life work". No. It is the deep belief held at another level where we really think we are making it work. Simple test. Simple test if you have spiritual pride. If you have done nothing different in your life that is...I mean you haven't turned your back on God now, okay? So I am not talking about someone who just says, "That's it. I don't want Christianity more. I am going this way". No, you haven't done anything really different. You haven't sinned any...anything unusual. No. Sin is just at work in your life. And good is at work in your life. And then you notice at some point. You know, something has changed in my spiritual life. I uhh..ummm..my prayer life just isn't....umm...it's not what it used to be. You know I ahh...I...you just wake up one day and realize, you reading the Bible is just...there is no oomph anymore. It's boring. You notice something has change and then you feel guilty. You know have spiritual pride. You know it. Why? Because you thought you were making it work in the first place. You thought that my efforts were causing it to work and now that it is not working, it must be my fault. So you know what I am going to do? I am going to pray harder. Spiritual pride. I am not talking about arrogance. What I mean by spiritual pride is, that there is subtle belief that I was doing it. You weren't doing it at all. God was infused...this is what we called part of a infused grace. He was infusing Spiritual pleasure to encourage your faith as a response to your activities. Not because those activities somehow generated that because you were a baby. Another um...spiritual sin that happens. It is inevitable. It is inevitable. Do not lament. Rejoice. Knowledge is wonderful.

A third one, this last one that I am going to talk about is spiritual greed, or spiritual avarice. Spiritual greed. I am very greedy. I am very gluttonous. I am very prideful. These things really hounded me and they still do. But, boy, they hounded me for 12 years hard. Spiritual avarice or greed is the deep belief of discontent. It is this deep belief or this deep experience of discontent with the spirituality that God has given you. Spiritual greed is this deep discontent with the spirituality that God has given us. We become bugged and disquieted in our spirit that we no longer find the consolation that we once did. We get bugged at that. "God! Why isn't it the same?" And as a result, we often give ourselves to reading books, listening to sermons, going here speaker, go here this guru, go to this conference, seminars out of spiritual greediness. Ummm...as I think of a...if...if any of you are around during during the 1960's remember the...the group called righteous brothers. They sang a song about that loving feeling. That is what we want back. We go to all these seminars to get that loving feeling. You know I used to do this all the time. You know what I did when I was in a dark night. I just went from spiritual book to spiritual book. I have read a ton of them. I uhh I was so greedy. I wanted the...I wanted the jazz. You know what I didn't want to do? I didn't want to pray. That is what I didn't want to do, because prayer..uhhh..something else goes on in prayer. Prayer is like an encounter and we will see what is gonna go on in that because when you are going into the dark night, prayer is often what we don't want to do. Now, let me just make a comment here about this. This spirituality of the sins. Again, uhh..from my perspective as I have disciplined now a number of peoples. I see my Talbot students go through. I see my Rosemead students go through. 98% of them have gone through something like this into a dark night and I have come to see that this experience that we begin to have these sins sins of the believer stage. Oh what is going on is that our religion, the

religion we have in our head looks a lot like new age religion. It looks a lot like what I might call ancient narcissism.

An ancient narcissism or I think of new age, it has two fundamental tenets. Now, just try to catch these two fundamental tenets. First, narcissism or new age religion is a religion of causality. It is a religion of causality, meaning this, if I do A, B and C. Then God does X, Y, and Z. That's a religion of causality. It...It's a religion as a technology. In this approach, God is not a religion, God is a more of a machine. But you know something, I think that is how, infants a little bit experience their mother- they are giving machines. That is what they are, right? Those of you who are moms, you know what that is like. Sometimes you just like to say, "You know, I just wish this kid would appreciate me once". I have...we have two 5-year-olds. I say that all the time. And you know, I think God allowed Himself to be that to us. He allows Himself, He stoops to be like a mommy, a giving tree, almost like a giving machine, right? The infant cries, mommy comes. The child gets the sense, "I cry. I do X", right? "I do A and something happens." And God says, "Well you are a baby and I am going to let you be that way".

Second element of a narcissist religion or a umm..a new age religion is a religion of causality. And secondly, it is a religion of light. It is a religion of light. It is a religion of sensuality. It is a religion of the senses and it says this, "It is a deep belief that says if I do, A,B, and C, then the feel and the experience of religion is going to get better. Again, that is what the eastern traditions are in terms of some of them.. technologies. If I engage in these meditative techniques, I am...it is going to do better, I am going to experience enlightenment. And you know something, in some ways, that is the way God allowed us to be infants. He allowed it to feel good, He allowed it to

get better and it was like, "Man, this is good. Christianity is good". But there is a time to give up childish things because Christian spirituality is not a technology.

Christian spirituality is a religion of love. And so, first, rather than it being a religion of causality, Christianity is a religion of persons. It is a religion of persons. You see, it is my personal will, vis-à-vis the will of the Father. And you know something, there is no necessary causal relationship between my actions and God's responses. Except, in terms of a relationship. See it may be as a child, it did look causal, but when you get married, you don't run a marriage on the basis of causality. If you want to destroy a marriage, get married and then think, "Okay, if I A, B, and C, for my wife then my wife would respond in X, Y, and Z". I think she is going to get the idea after a while, "Hey, I think this guy is trying to manipulate me". A relationship just doesn't work in that kind of causal way.

A relationship is one will responding to the another will. It is each will being open to the other. Not causally looking for something. But God has got to grow us up into that. And secondly, Christianity, rather than being a religion of light. It is not ascended into a higher consciousness, actually Christianity is a descend down. It is a descend down in two ways. One, it's the God, man had to come down to reach us. And then secondly, Christianity is a religion of descend because the soul has to go down. What does it have to go down into? Repentance, Humility. That is what is missing from new age and narcissist religions. It is not a religion of repentance. It is not a religion of humility. It is rather a religion of ascend. And so I come to God as a sinner. I come to come to God on the basis of my neediness. And as James Houston's notion of the double knowledge of knowing self in the light of knowing God , our increased spiritual awareness of

God is going to take us more deeply into awareness of our sin and our unworthiness. This is what Christian freedom is. Again, I find it interesting that God actually in these first stages, He actually meets the beginner like a baby on the basis of this spirituality of light and this casual spirituality. But nevertheless, God has something else in mind for us. God is going to take us on a new journey. He says, "look I am going to meet you characterologically where you are, but now, I am going you wean you from it. The Spirit knows when that time is going to be. And the Spirit says, "Aha, John in your life now, I am going to wean you from that way". And the first thing he does, is He is going to take the bottle of Spiritual pleasure. And all of a sudden your experience of spirituality is going to change dramatically. And this really becomes the beginning. Tell you what, this is a good time for me to take a break. So, let's take a break and we will start at about 25 after and then umm..I am going to be going right then into dark night and explain that. And I will be taking questions at the end. Yeah.