

Going on with God in Dark Nights: Part 2

John Coe

Ok. Here is the experience and signs of being in an ongoing dark night. Now what I want to get at here is how would you know if something like this is going on in you. Because someone came up to me the break and we began talking about this. I think for a young believer, I'm not trying to ask young believers not to trust in their character and try to build character. I think there are certain signs when this begins to happen and it's an act of God. And I think the major thing to look for is if the spirit beginning to turn you inwardly to ask the question, is there something missing in this. And sometimes, perhaps, we need to raise the question for people so that they begin to ask this themselves.

So here are some of the issues, if we're open to it that may be going on. And that's why what is crucial in this process is the issue of honesty. As you're reading the scriptures, as you're open in prayer, as you're hearing the word, is open to, "God, let it show me what is true in me." And so as you're hearing a sermon talking about prayer, remember what I said about feelings. Feelings are very bad leaders. You don't lead with your feelings, you lead with your body. But you know what feelings are, they are excellent windows into seeing what's true.

And so as the pastor is speaking on prayer, what I want to know is, "God I don't want to just bite the bullet and do it. I want to know is this something I really love. Because if it's not something I love, then you know something, something's wrong with me." And I shouldn't be shocked by that, because of course something's wrong with me. And now the Spirit wishes to open that to me. And I just want to be open to the truth. So here are some of the things that may happen during this time.

It's going to be a deepened sense that one's self and one's own character doesn't satisfy like it used to. And so number one, it's this deep sense of one's own inadequacy of character. The other benefit from it is you're beginning to see in your own self deeper vices. You see that there's more there going on. And this is a sign that God's saying, "You know, I bless you for the virtues you've developed. The church is benefiting and others are as well. And now I want to take you into whole new places of dependence on me."

Or number two, if this is at all going on in your life, where there's a lack of zest from your own character and your former accomplishments. And even future endeavors, where you just don't have the same consolation in raising your children or loving your wife. It's starting to get dry. Yes, you're an Ok parent. Yes, you're an Ok spouse. You're an ok teacher. You're an Ok discipler. But you're starting to feel that your own character is like an inadequate compass. There's something more. You're starting to ask yourself, "Is this all it is? Is this really what the Christian life is?" And sometimes, you need to ask these questions of yourself to discover if this truly going on. Because I think after a while, after years and years and years of hearing sermons and trying to do good and trying to do what is right, you start falling asleep to looking at what's really going on. To looking really at the heart and asking the question, "God, is this really what's driving me, or am I just doing it now?" Because the Christian life is about these rivers of living water.

So number three, it's a general distrust even in life's promises that seek to satisfy the heart. A new sense that this life is an inadequate home. This is a sign of these dark nights for older ones. You know, isn't it wonderful to have a good family? But you know what a nice dark night will show you? That you can't take your family and stuff them down here. They cannot provide you the rivers of living water. In fact, there's no finite thing that can. And dark nights

just are little reminders for us of the fact that there's a deeper hunger in me now. Yeah, I love my wife, but you know, Greta can't take away all the pain. She can't fit into this hole and love me perfectly. I'm called to something else. During those times when you are just greatly satisfied in the Lord with these finite things, that's cool. But there's a time to open up. Is there something else going on in my soul?

And number four, there's a renewed sense of loneliness as a result of your good character. You have good character, you're leading a nice life, you're you're kind to others, you're a good person in the church, you're doing spiritual disciplines. But God, I want you. You know, goodness can sometimes just isolate you because you're not willing to see yourself and open up to others. And these are wonderful times when the Lord wants to just open up to us. God, being good is not enough. Having a good character is not enough. I want you.

Number five, ministry may be good and it may be good for others, but it doesn't satisfy the soul. A number of these things have been going on in my life for some time. This is a major one. I used to, you know, ten years ago when I would speak, I'd speak often at churches, retreats, whatever, I would get really off on that. I loved it. I enjoyed it so much. You know, often now, often when I am preparing for teaching and even in the middle of teaching, it's just, "God, I hope this is blessing others. Because God, I want you." I'm coming to a point where even these words, they're good. But I want Him. Having a wonderful time here isn't enough, like it used to be.

Number 6, there's a deep dissatisfaction that my theological knowledge alone and my wisdom, my life map, and my mind map are inadequate. God I want you. I've been studying theology for almost 30 years now. And I want Him. My theology is still too small. It's expanding all the time of what God can and cannot do in our life. I want Him. I want the God who is behind the text.

Number seven. This is a problem with this dark night. There is a fear that we will not be loved in the awareness of the truth of ourself. We're uncertain if journeying inside is really going to have a payoff in the end. Is that really where I want to go? Do I really want to go inside? Is anything going to be there? That's a major issue for us.

And number eight, it's the knowledge that in my will I'm more filled with myself than God. That's just true. That is just the truth. I am generally more filled with John Coe, my hopes, my desires, my urges, than I am with Gods. And I can tell because of the expectations I have in life when they're not met. That's just the truth. And I want to be more filled with Him. I want to be filled with the heights and the depth and the length and breadth of the love of God. To be filled up with all the fullness of God. That's what I want. And that's not the entire truth of my character. I am more filled with myself.

What are the temptations in the dark night? What's the temptation that we will have? Again, I think the major temptation is going to be the deep belief that we're not sure that we're really going to be loved, entering into that deep place of our character. By opening up and seeing what I really am, I'm not really sure God's going to be loving me there. And you know how you can tell if that's true in your life? If you don't like seeing your sin. If your sin frustrates you. Then you can tell that this is something that you're not sure if you really open up and let God take you on a journey into those deep places to show you your neediness, you're not sure you're really going to find God. And I have no doubt that there are some here who just have said, "I don't want to go there. I'm not sure I should. And I'm not sure God will be there."

Here's the temptation in that. Number one. It's to hold on to our goodness and our character. It's to hold on to us, that it's good and it might even be God. "I don't think I need to get introspective at this point in my life. I've lived a pretty long life. I've worked hard. I've done a lot

of stuff. I just don't think I need to go there now." This is what I would say is the temptation to develop a life of a consciousness of goodness. Consciousness of goodness. This is where people develop families of a consciousness of goodness, where they reflect to one another we're good, we're trying, and in those families there's not a way to begin to really open up to what's the truth going on.

You know what often cracks families that have this consciousness of goodness, who aren't really willing to enter in and see what really is going on in my Christian life? All you have to have is one child who explodes. That's all you have to have. One child where it didn't work. And that really sends these families spinning. And there's hardly anything better in life. But that's an external trial to do that. You know dark nights are? Dark nights are internal trials when the external trials aren't there. As a side note, I'll just say this, when the ancient spiritual writers talked about it, they said the early church didn't even need dark nights because they had so much external persecution that the trials of life were constantly opening their hearts to what do you really believe. What's driving you? What's really going on in the heart? But they noticed that during times of peace and prosperity, when everything's going well.

When I get up in the morning, my biggest decision is what I'm going to eat for for breakfast. Am I going to have eggs or cereal? I don't have a lot of external trials. And so I have no external motivation to go on that journey inward. And so the Lord, he does, because he wants to fill me. And so dark nights are especially for the church during times of peace and prosperity, because they want to get our attention to open up to see what's inside.

The second temptation, I think, is to despair of these rivers of living water. To just hit that place of middle age and say, "This is I guess all it is for me. It's just, the pastor's got whatever he's got, but for me it's just this. I have my quiet time, I pray to God. It's not the rivers of living

water. I don't relate to everything Paul the Apostle says when he talks about to know the heights and the depth of the love of God and to be filled with all the fullness of God. I don't know what that is." And so the temptation is this. It's to continue to present yourself. It's to continue to be dutiful in your spiritual life, but not then look at what's going on inside. That is resignation. This is where I'm going to bite the bullet. This is how you create a mature beginner. A mature beginner is the person who continues to be faithful in biting the bullet, doing what the Christian life is about, but not opening up to, "God, what really is going on in me. Do I even want to be here praying? God, I want to love my wife as Christ loved the church, but God what's really going on in here? Are there parts of me that bug you?" Am I willing now to bring this in my relation to God? You know when I think about this, I think the older generation, as I look at especially the church where I came to the Lord and was for years, those people are now often in their 60's, 70's, and even 80's. Elders that I knew are now pastors. Here's what I think of the older generation, older than me at fifty. They lead with the body in their spirituality and rightly so. And they became very diligent and they became a very faithful generation.

But you know what was missing? They often didn't open up to what was going on in the heart? They often didn't open up the heart to God and ask, "God, what really is happening to me?" And you know what that led to? They were disciplined, but it led to a little bit of superficiality. Spiritual superficiality and even a little bit of arrogance. Because they even came to think that their duty, being dutiful and disciplined, was what matured them. But you know, the younger generation is very opposite. My generation and the one behind me, you know what they'd do. They lead with the heart. That it's not what you lead with. Like Pastor Dale said. Feelings are very bad leaders. What it did do, it made them very interested in being authentic, being open, and being real. But they became very undisciplined, very flaky, very unfaithful. My

generation and those behind us were the worst givers the Church has known for decades. The older generation was right to distrust the feelings. But let me just say this to you. Feelings are excellent windows into the soul, and that's where one must begin.

Yes, be faithful, be dutiful, and then ask the real question. "God, what's really going on in here?" And you open that to God and now you're on a journey. Number three, the temptation to defend against opening to the heart's desire for the rivers of living water due to unrequited love. That this is a person who just, you know, says "God, I presented myself, I presented myself, and I haven't gotten those rivers of living water so that's it." And you've despaired of that.

Now number four, to resist entering dark nights because you don't just see the point of it. I don't want to go in there. And now you've made a decision almost unconsciously in your middle age spirituality. "God this is all it is. And I guess now it's my time to turn around and minister others." And that's a sure way to dryness and burnout, because it will be then a life of ministering more in the power of your character than what it could be in opening to the rivers of living water.

And number five, here is a temptation. It's to create ministries of consolation. You know what ministries of consolation are? This will be that if leaders are unwilling to enter into their weaknesses and to open up, they will tend to create ministries that mirror this consciousness of goodness. They tend to create ministries of worship and teaching where it's always up, or it's always, "We're doing Ok." And we never have a place to frame and open, if this isn't true in your life, how good that is to know, and enter that now. And so everything is presented as a goal that I just have to keep going towards. And I can never stop and say, "God, where am I?", and open up to Him in that.

Now, how do we experience these, how do we experience these dark nights? I'm going to skip the first point, regarding the earlier dark night, because I do want to have questions tonight. We talked about that last time. But remember the major things were, in the early dark nights when God's turning off sensual spirituality, give up trying to fix yourself! That's what dark nights are trying to cure you of. "God I can't fix myself anymore." Give up trying to generate spiritual experiences. Open to whatever God has to give you. And those of you who are leaders, I cannot emphasize enough, resist the temptation to try to generate spiritual experiences for others.

Resist the temptation to try to generate something where a person is going to be tempted then to make it work, to focus a little harder so that they they'll get constant with what they're hearing or what they're singing, rather than just what's going on in my life. So we talked about that. But now regarding these ongoing dark nights. The first one is, I say here, learn to sit amongst the weeds, the truth of yourself, with God as the gardener. See the temptation that I'm going to have as I open up to these things is I'm going to want to pull them. I'm going to want to be my own gardener. I'm going to want to a, "God I don't want to do those things anymore. I shouldn't be that way." I want to move away from that Jiminy Cricket conscience we've talked about. To really a relational faith. "God you know what I want. I don't want to be afraid of seeing myself. I just want to be with you in it. I want you to teach me."

Now next week we're going to talk about a whole list of things that you can do on that basis. I'm going to talk about the spiritual disciplines and I'm going to talk about what it has to put on Christ. But this is the bottom ground, because you know something, even my desire for transformation is often self-centered. Even that desire to have my sins out is because I just want to be free of sin! I don't want to just be free of sin anymore. You know what I want to be? I want

to be connected to the vine. I don't want to just get the monkey off my back so I don't have these vices. I want to open it to him.

Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I'll give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." That's what I want to do first. Before I start doing regimens of how to change, because we are going to talk about next time, the first move is, God, I want to learn from you. I don't want to just change my vices. You know what I want to do? I want you to teach me about them. I want your take me on this journey about it. I want you take me on a journey even about my virtues and how I trust in those. "And learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my load is light." You know, my yoke, John Coe's yoke, to change, that's a heavy burden. My yoke of trying to pull my sins. That's a heavy burden. I wanna learn to sit with him in my weaknesses.

Number two. Those of you who are middle aged spiritually. Let go of your goodness. I don't mean go out and be bad. But let go of your goodness as your identity. Stop holding on to your integrity. Stop defending your mind as you hear sermons and you know there's something not right that you defend yourself by thinking you're doing that. Doggone it, you have an opportunity to come out of hiding.

God I don't think I want to do that! God I think I'd like at home an watch videos today than go to church! You know, my wife's buggin me right now. I don't know what it is. When we hold on to our goodness as our identity, you know what happens to a person? You become fragile. You crack. You're not very elastic in life, and you know who really know it? You know who really know it? Your children. Your children will know that you're full of your goodness, and children sometimes get doggone tired of it, because they're wondering is dad real, is mom

real. And then they see your vices leak out and you never open up deeply to them and the kids say they're not real. They're not looking at themselves.

Number three. Let go of your character as the road map you trust. Now that doesn't mean I'm still going to retain my character because you know what, others will be blessed by it! But for me, for John Coe, I'm going to let go of my character, my wisdom, as my roadmap for getting around in the world. I want to be open more and more to being dizzy, to asking the question, "God before I just jump in and fix this problem and make something work and solve this issue, God I want you. God I want you. I want you to be my roadmap. I want you to alter my mind map as you see fit so that I can stand with Job and say God I know that you can do all things. You can do anything with my life you want.

Number four. I want to be diligent to present myself for obedience to the disciplines. I want, I want to still do my duty and lead with the body. We'll talk about that next time. But I want to do it in such a way that it opens my heart. The three elements in obedience are you lead with the body, to open the heart, to the spirit of God is wanting to teach you. I don't want to just lead with my body and think that's enough. That leads to phariseeism that leads to dryness. Doing one's duty without attention to the heart with God is a sure road to spiritual superficiality. It's a sure route to powerlessness, to lovelessness.

Number five. I want to be willing to be open to a new powerful ministry. When I came tonight, my number one prayer was, "God, I know what I want to say. I know what I'm thinking. But God, I want to be open to you though. If you're doing anything with me and through me, I want to be open to that. I want you to teach me here. I want to be open to anything that you want to do as I'm here." I wanna be open to another power source. Rather than my own character and cleverness.

Number six. I want to resist ministries of consolation. That's for sure. I want to resist ministries of consolation where I'm trying to make it so that we're experiencing the ups. We're good, we're growing, everything's fine. No, God,

I want to help open my own soul to this, and I want to help open other souls. In whatever I'm teaching, in whatever worship I'm leading. I want people to experience the truth of themselves in relation to God. And then in number seven, I encourage you to join with others who are on the same journey. I encourage you. This is I know, Doug's heart, with an ongoing ministry here, is that individuals will begin to come together who want to journey this way.

Here's what I want to finish with tonight. I just want to finish with some concerns and qualifications and maybe we'll have some time for questions. These are some things that I have thought in light of the last time that might have come up in your mind about dark nights. The first one is I want to make a distinction between depression and dark nights. Because there are some people here who struggle with depression tonight I'm sure of that in this large an audience. They're different. They do come together. From an objective viewpoint a dark night is a movement of the spirit on the behalf of the believer. Where clinical depression, I've been around a psychologist for 18 years, has a more historical or even biological causal history. But from a subjective viewpoint this is the important one here. Clinical depression may involve no particular object or focus. That is, when you're clinically depressed, you're not focused usually on one particular thing. It's usually a diffuse sense of loss of pleasure, a difficulty in sleep, a generally depressed mood, loss of energy overall. But dark nights have a very fine focus, at least initially. And what a dark night is focused on is your relation to God. And this is particularly brought out when you practice spiritual disciplines.

Let me just summarize that paragraph. In a dark night, you might actually be enjoying everything else! You like watching movies, you like being with your family, you like being with your kids. You're just not so excited about reading the Word right now. You're not so excited about prayer. A dark night is a very focused thing. Depression usually moves to all areas of life. Now let me just say about depression, psychologists say that depression is anger turned inward. I'll let you think about that. If depression is anger turned inward then depression is going to be a very special kind of putting off the old man. And you're probably going to have to do this with a very wise person to assist you because if there's depression then there is probably going to be pain and anger and sadness that you've never dealt with in a very open and meaningful way. And someone's going to probably have to assist you in that. Let me also say about a dark night, as a dark night goes on, it can begin to mingle with depression. Because as a dark night goes on and you're seeing more and more of your stuff and this is going on and on and on, what can begin to happen is you can begin, if you're not kind of willing to enter into this you can begin to get depressed. That is you can get bugged, frustrated and angry and then stuff it about what's going on in your spiritual life. And here's where you really need a mentor to help you begin to deal with what may be happening in your experience.

Second thing. Dark nights and the need to have a mentor. This is crucial. When you're traveling in this place and you really want to open up to these areas in your life in relation to God, it gets really murky and mucky down there. And this is where it's very good to be around a wise man or woman to take you on that journey. In therapy, it's a great time because a good Christian therapist or counsellor can help open up pockets of these vices in relation to God or a spiritual director to help you begin to discern what God's doing in all of this. What's going on in my life? And so I know Doug is interested in beginning to develop a ministry of spiritual

direction where individuals are helping one another kind of navigating their own life. How to discern what is God doing in my life at any one time.

Number three. I just said remember, dark nights are not the absence of God. They're the presence of God. Dark nights are what it is to be filled with the spirit when he wants to do his work. And again, during dark nights, we think the spirit is not there.

Number four. Just another little thought. Beware of thinking as you're being purged, as you're opening up to your sin and you see what you really are, beware of thinking this. That sin separates you from God and His Holiness. I hear a lot of Christians say that. I call that a Christian proverb. Beware of Christian proverbs, because that's true of a non-believer. Sin separates them from God.

But you are in Christ now. Nothing neither death nor life, your sin, whatever, can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That's Romans. You are pardoned. That means this. Even when you become aware of your sin as a believer now, the spirit is there. The spirit is drawing near. Dark nights is when the spirit he already knows your stuff, He's trying to bring it up. And we may be running away from it and that's crazy.

Number five. The demonic in dark nights. There is no doubt in my mind demons will be involved here. Demons will do all kinds of things but their goal is quite different than gods. You know what demons want to do in dark nights? Demons want to get you to work harder on your spirituality. To fix yourself and to cover your shame like we've talked about by being good. You know demons also want to do to you older ones who are mature? They want you to say this. "You know this is all there is. This is all it is." And so either pack up for a vacation for the rest of your life or just hunker down, bite the bullet and give yourself to ministry because the rivers of living water I guess just aren't for you. Those are demonic word whispers. God's goals are

transformation and love. God's goals for those of you are in your 40's and 50's and 60's and 70's is to take you on the journey of a lifetime into a deep love.

I'll say number seven just so we can spend a little time. When dark nights and trials are painful, when they get really painful, especially trials. When there's depression, dark nights, whatever, this is where having other brothers and sisters is so helpful. And at that time the issue is not necessarily to help relieve the pain, but like God, to model being with them in that so they might learn to carry that to God. But you know in some cases the pain, the struggles, there's perhaps individuals even here you can bet on Sunday morning where the pain is so great that it seems like maybe nothing will help. And again, there's so much to think about this. And I know there's a lot of pain. I want you to turn back to the very front of this. I want to read Thomas Merton's No Man is An Island. And then we'll take about 10 minutes of questions. This statement has become very meaningful to me. As I go on, says this. God, who is everywhere, God who is everywhere. Never leaves us. Yet he seems sometimes to be present and sometimes absent. That's just the truth. If we do not know him well, if we do not know him well of what He's doing. We do not realize that he may be more present to us when he seems absent, than when he seems present.

God may be doing such a profound work in your life, if you'd only be willing to open to that truth. Pray with me and then we'll talk for a few minutes. Lord we would come to you and we open ourselves to you Lord. As you're just opening your heart to God. I just want you to ask this question. Have you ever said it about your Christian life? God, is this all there is? Is what I'm experiencing, is this all it is? Are there some of you here perhaps who have just now retired from growth and you're recreating now as a believer. Or are there some of you here who have said this is all it is, but I'll give myself to ministry. Just ask the Lord if you're willing and open. Lord,

open to me what this ongoing life of growth might look like. God do I want to do this? Lord Jesus, God I know in this room right here I can tell there is an incredible potential for releasing the rivers of living water into lives. Of deep love, of deep prayer, of deep brokenness deep ministry. Oh Lord, here am I. Just continue to open my heart in the little things. Watch over us in Jesus name amen.

Ok. We have ten minutes. How about that. What is on your mind? What questions, what thoughts, what comments? Some of you've been in the faith a longtime and I'd love to hear your mind, your thoughts, your agreement, or disagreement.

[Audience question inaudible]

Yeah, and that's what I'm going to talk about quite a bit next time so I won't say too much here. But, when when I'm called upon in the scriptures to do something, I'm not asked to think about it or to consider it or well I don't know if my heart's there. I I am required by you know, by the Lord's through Paul to present myself as a living sacrifice. I'm called to present the members of my body as instruments of righteousness. So when we lead with the body what it means is kind of the Nike commercial. We do it. However, in the doing it, I know that that doesn't transform me. So when I'm called to forgive, when I'm called to love my wife as Christ loved the church, I'm called to do it. Of course as I'm doing it. I will realize if I'm open in my heart. There are times I'm going to bug her. Or as I'm doing it I realize, you know Lord, I love so weakly. I love so so pitifully, but nevertheless I'm called to lead with the body. I'm not called to wait till my heart is ready. If anything that's the problem with my generation and those below me. Yeah.

[Audience question inaudible]

Wow. You know I could but I probably am not going to. I would love to. Parenting is the major issue of my life right now. It's got me going. Well here's what I'm going to do. I'll just try to make this as quick as I can. I am going to parent the body of children and what we mean by parenting the body is I am going to demand that they obey, that they engage and even try with first time obedience with parents. I'm going demand that when I say something, when Greta says something, they're to obey and if not, there are consequences. See that's good shaping. But again Aristotle and the pagan's can talk about that too. But I am interested in shaping character. And because I know there's folly in their heart and if I, if I just let kids do whatever they want, well, they're gonna unravel. And so I am a parent who believes in corporal discipline. I'm a parent who believes in reinforcements, shaping, consequences, the whole bit, because I want to help my daughters contain their stuff so they can begin, although I know that they're doing it in the power themselves, I know they're becoming an all little legalists, but I want them to benefit from this character shaping. However, I also know that no amount of character shaping will ever open them deeply to the cross and to ultimately the life in the spirit into a robust prayer life.

And so what I need to do is I need to take my children on also slow journeys in age appropriate ways into the truth of themselves. As a parent, this has impacted Greta and I so much these last years. If I would have started parenting 20 years ago, 30 years ago when we got married, I know I would have treated my child more as a fellow disciple and that were both facing Jesus. And that I will get him to have quiet times and I would get him to read the word and to memorize the word that would be a primary focus. He's a disciple and we're together. Aged 2, 3, we're going this way. And I came to see that's not how children experience mom and

dad. They experience mom and dad like God and the relationally that I'm building in with them now, that is going to dominate their prayer life 20 years from now. And so here was a major move in my child rearing. My fundamental approach to child rearing is I want to parent my girls like God relates to me. That's, that's fundamental. And so what I am trying to do is I am trying to relationally establish with them how God is relating to me and what do I want to do in this.

They have to present their body. So I'm going to shape their body. But I'm interested in their heart. I am interested in their heart and I want them to know that more than anything else, I love their heart and I'm going in there. We're going to go in together. And some of the things that I'm going to do is I'm going to peel. Remember that heart diagram and all those vices in there and the Lord wants to open those up, that's what I want to do with my children. And I began doing this with them when they were three and two years old.

I remember Anna was about three and one night she was she was going to bed and she didn't want to go to bed. And I knew something was in her heart. And so I decided at night time it was time I put them down. I love that. I'm sitting in the darkness and you know what I want to do, is I know I need to peel back a little of Anna's heart. Because Anna's a little bug with me. I could tell that as she was walking away from her little art project she had to go to bed.

She walked away kinda bugged. I want her to know, I wanna know what's in her heart. And so as we were talking that night I said to her you know I, I know you were kind of bothered with dad tonight. Well Ana right there. Just like I am, you know, as an adult, I don't know if dada will really love me if I share what's true in my heart. She said "Yes daddy, I was a little bugged." Came back, talked a little while and came back about a minute later. "Anna you were really bugged with me tonight."

I went on talking with her and then I finally came back and said "Anna, in fact, you know tonight you were really angry." You know what I'm doing. I'm peeling her heart because if I asked her how she's feeling you know what she'll say? "Oh I'm fine." No, I've got to peel her heart. So I said "Anna, you really angry with dad tonight." You know what Anna did. There was a pregnant pause about a second and a half.

And then there was a sigh, and she said "Yes daddy. You're like God, you get to do anything you want. You tell us when outa go to bed and.....", and Anna for the next four or five minutes just poured out her little heart. And you know, she was praying to me, she was sharing with dada, her heart. I wanted to hear. I wanted to hear it all. It was so wonderful. And then in opening the heart that she could share with me, then I share with her why I do this. This is so crucial that we parent the heart of children. And you know what you're going to have to do? You're going to have to take them on slow journeys. Age appropriate journeys into the truth of their badness because what you want them to come to later on in life like when they're 19 is they'll say this, "Dad, I'm glad you shaped my body because I've got an OK character. And I see my friends at Biola who are just unraveling. But Dad, dad thank you that you took me on a journey inside, where you began to show me what I really am. All the crap in my life. All the fighting so that I know no amount of being good could ever cover my bad. That's why I need Jesus. There are so many kids by the time they come to Biola and they spend so much doggone time being good that Jesus is a bore. Because their parents have just put them into the place of the good good good good good. And we already talked about that. It's already there as an original sin to cover oneself by being good. So here I want to take them on this journey. So that's pretty crucial. But yeah so there is much to say here, but that's a taste.

Another thing. Another question about any of this.

[Audience question inaudible]

Yeah, you know all we mean by that is, you know, Jesus said to the woman at the well I, you know, she says you want some water, and He says I've got some water for you and I have water that will spring up unto eternal life. And when you drink this water you'll never thirst. I know what it's like in the Christian life to experience some of those waters and oh they're good. I know sometimes in the Christian life where it's pretty doggone dry. Where it's so dry feel like I'm licking the bottom of a well. Have you've ever licked the bottom of a well. Ugh, dust. If God wanted, he could give us a theophany every time, but he wants to give us the rivers of living water and what is this? He's talking there about the ministry of the spirit that was to come into the human heart. That eventually would fill us with all the heights and the depth and the breadth of the love of God and all the fullness of God. And so I just want us to talk truth. When you hear that text being taught next time you should say is that true of me right now. That's truth talking because if it's not then you have a journey in prayer with God. And if you're not talking that way, I think we're lying to ourself. We're deceiving ourself. And we're biting the bullet and going on. And again, now that I'm 50, others 50's, 60's and on, we're in the grips of a great temptation to do this, to not be honest, because we just kind of start thinking this is it, this is what it is.

[Audience question inaudible]

You know there is something true about that because I think often when we say "God where are you?" God is saying "I'm right here. I'm right here John. But John this is the truth. But

John you're living in pockets of your virtue and there are vices that hinder this. And John that's where you're living. And so John you know what I'm doing with you right now? I'm giving you a taste of where you are at. That's where you are John. But if you stay there, if you stay there, and you just continue to open to me." See. See you know that's the issue. You know when you when you read the Psalm of laments. That's why they need to be congregational rhythms because you know what the songs of laments are? I cried to you day and night. You weren't there. This went on forever. But I cried to you day and night and you weren't there. You weren't. And I cried to you day and night."

That's the message of the songs of laments. You persist in prayer because why, God is there, and he's got so much to teach you. If you're willing to go in that place, he's going to begin to expose pockets, again, of your self-virtues as well of your vices. But our tendency in dark nights is not to persist in prayer.

Ok enough of this, let's get on.

You know sometimes I think we would rather even choose to bite the bullet and a life of dry bones than to wait. I really, really encourage those of you who are worship leaders to bring back the Psalms of lament. And to help open hearts.

We need to close in prayer.

Father here we are. We need you. Lord I thank you that one day I will and everyone here will be so filled with your presence that we will finally be free of all of this. Until then give us courage to open to you Father, in whatever you give, great consolation, great love, great openness, and then times father where you're opening new places of my soul where your spirit is. God I love you. God I need you. Lord, I want you to, I just ask you that you would really bless

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the people here, especially those who are in the middle of their spiritual life. God be with them.

Do something good here at EV Free Fullerton we bless you in Jesus name, Amen.

Thank you.