

Drawing Near to God, Part 2

By John Coe

OK. Let's carry on talking about The Dark Night. Biblically in A, this is 3A, biblically this stage is likened to the young men. It's wrestling with the Evil One, it's overcoming, it's you're strong and the Word of God abides in you. See, it's one thing to hear the word and be excited. It's another thing that the word of God abides in you, right. This is when the Scriptures are going into the deep and beginning to deal with stuff in the soul. And B, this is the period of time where God withdraws spiritual pleasure. At some point, Bible reading, hearing sermons, prayer, lose that pleasure dimension and you know what this is, this is God calling from the deep. This is God calling from the deep where whereby we're going to now have to travel, to open up to his presence. Now I'm not talking about somebody who is lukewarm. I'm not talking about somebody who has just kind of walked away from the faith, I'm talking about those of us who just haven't done anything different and all of a sudden we, we just notice "God, I'm, like my mind's wandering when I pray now, I'm bored when I hear sermons, what's, what's going on in my life?" This is God at work. And we're going to be convinced no, it's us. This is going to be a very hard, it's going to be very hard for us to let go of consolation.

But what's going to happen during this time is I'm still characterologically, still quite filled with myself and I still desire pleasure and I see that now and how much I want consolation in the disciplines but God is going to now remove this bottle of spiritual pleasure because here's what's going on.

It's going to be as I said here, this is on page 301. This is going to be an intensified movement of the indwelling Spirit. See, the Spirit doesn't want to just give you consoling love. He wants to fill you. And so, what he's going to begin to do is he's going to begin to work this way. He's going to begin to work what I

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kind of think of as bottom-up spirituality, not top-down. And it's going to be kind of like a hydraulic system where the Spirit now is going to begin to push up the material of your life so you begin to see it.

The point here of the Dark Night, it's to cure us of wanting God on our terms. It's to cure us to want God for the pleasure dimension. That's key. I want consolation. I want the feeling of it, but God has something else in mind. And so now he says, he comes around and puts his arm around me and says, John, now you're ready for the journey. And he begins to take the bottle away. Well you know, I remember when we moved in our family from the "baw" to the sippy cup. You know, Sippy Cups are no fun.

Sippy, I mean my children, when I gave them the sippy cup, they kind of looked at it. You know what they wanted? They wanted the sucking action, they wanted [sucking].

They wanted the nirvana-feeling sucking attachment to that bottle. And when you take the bottle, you know, my children would suck that thing so dry that you know, when I would try to wrestle it out of their mouth, it was a pure vacuum right?

The sippy cup. You know what my children didn't know? Have you ever tried to suck milk out of a bottle? The incredible amount of energy for so little. My children had no idea how much more milk they could get with a sippy cup, but the sippy cup did not give them the pleasure sensation of the sucking, and it's going to be the same with us. But God knows you're ready, because now what God wants to teach you is a whole new lesson and the lesson is John 15:5: apart from me you can do nothing.

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You can't grow yourself. John, the reading, the Bible reading that you've done, the prayer that you've done, all of these things that you've done that I've reinforced because I wanted you to get you attached to those things, I want you to know now John, those things are not going to be sufficient to grow you.

I am the one who grows you. I'm the one, this is going to be a call now to encounter what God is going to want to teach me in the depths of myself about what's really going on in my life. And so God is beginning, is going to begin to show me this stuff, and so the experience and see is this: in the equipoise of our self.

What I mean by equipoise is the, the balance experience, so this ambivalent experience about ourself. During this time, you know what you will you will come to see about yourself? You'll see the truth, and in that you will begin to wonder, how much do I really love you, God? How much do I love me more? How much do I love the world? How much do I really still want to lust? How much do I, God, what's really going on in me? Because you know what's happening, you are getting the gift of a lifetime. As you're reading the word, God takes away the bottle and now you are seeing how little you love the Scriptures.

[Gasp] How shocking.

No, you were born in original sin, driven by much pleasure, and now I begin to see in prayer. Again, have you ever had that where your mind's wandering? Have you ever fallen asleep in a quiet time? It's really quiet. [SnORES]. Ah. You know what you're seeing there? It's a great gift. You're seeing where your treasure is, there your heart will be.

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And right now I'm not excited about God at all.

If my wife came in and said, "Hey John, the Rams are playing." "Whoah ok this is it, get rid of this quiet time real fast." That's my, that's where my heart is.

When your mind wanders in prayer, you know what God is doing? He's giving you a gift. He is showing you where your treasure is.

Your mind is wandering to all of the treasures. Now you know what I used to do? "Dang it, JOHN STOP IT. Back here, study, read, Pray harder."

That's because spiritual pride was motivating me, saying "John, if you were working harder at this." This wasn't arrogance, it was just full of me. It's just the logic of a life full of myself and the spiritual disciplines. "John, if you worked harder, God would be here. God doesn't feel like he's here, ergo, work harder." It's a simple logic, and God is saying "John, I want to show you what really is going on in your heart." And so, you know what I do now when this goes on, or I try to teach my students? when it's dry as bones, I now want to reframe this and say Oh God.

Yummy, eat them up. This is so good because God, you're showing me the truth.

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He's exposing this lie that I may have of my own consciousness of goodness that I've, I've, I've developed spiritual disciplines, I've, I've had God, I know what's going on. And now I'm going, God what's happening? This is the great journey of the soul. During this time, we are going to typically experience dryness, distance from God, frustration, a sense of our moral failures, loneliness, our spiritual impotence, our confusion over what we really love. This is no longer a time where we're going to experience spiritual zest. And I no longer want, if that's not what God wants for me. This is a time of truth. This is a time where we're moving into really, a marriage. The love of God for love's sake, not pleasure's sake. The disciplines will not feel spiritual.

That's what's important. You know how they're going to feel? They're going to feel psychological because while you go to church, you hear sermons, your mind's wandering. That's going to frustrate you because you're not going to feel like God's there, remember this: God is always there. He's just taken away the bottle and you know what he's doing? It's the hydraulic lift.

He's pushing this stuff up.

When I was in high school, I used to bench press all the time. This is a fat little pear frame, but I used to bench press a lot of weight, and that's what God's doing. God's pushing the stuff up, He's giving us an incredible opportunity. If we will just go, God this is cool. God, take me down, teach me that apart from you, I can't do this. I can't make the Christian life work. This is cool. That's what dark nights are for. And it's going to, but it's going to feel psychological, and for most of us, we're then going to try to turn on the pipes to try to crank it up and make it feel spiritual, and we're missing God.

We're missing the work of God entirely. Entirely.

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Now there's much that we can say here. I really do want to get to how to experience a dark night. But let me just give you a little bit more. This is D: the signs of being in a dark night. How do you know if you're in a dark night? Now there's much to say here, I'll just give you a little taste.

How do you know if it's a dark night? Now, this is just one kind of dark night, if, if we had more time we'd talk about a second kind of dark night. It's called The Dark Night of the spirit. And that's a little different. But in general, here's how you know if you're in a dark night. The first thing is this: you find that you cannot stay with the spiritual disciplines. You find that your mind wanders, you are, what another way of putting it is you find that you can't meditate, pray, etc..

I mean, you can do it, you can just keep gutting it out, but you're going to find that while you're listening to Pastor Dale's sermon, your mind's wandering. You know, you start thinking about something else, or when you're in prayer, your mind's wandering. Why? Because God is not reinforcing you with the bottle to keep state on the thing. What he's doing is he's giving you the gift of showing you: your heart's everywhere.

For some that's very frustrating. You must give up on your own goodness. You must give up on your own goodness to enter into the work of God.

You must say "God I don't care. I want Christ, goodness.

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Just take me on whatever you need to take me, to teach me that." A second, second test. First one is you can't meditate because your mind is all over the place. But the second one is you find you don't want to either.

There's a part of you that doesn't want to because it makes you feel guilty.

It makes you feel guilty when you pray because you know something's not there as much. It makes you feel guilty when you reading the Word and it's just dry as dust. This is very hard for pastors and teachers.

I'll talk about that later. When they're in this place.

But here's the third step, and all, and the spiritual writer said all three need to be there.

The third thing is this: this worries you. You see, if you didn't give a rip: "Oh, so what?" No, the third one is crucial. This worries you. This makes you anxious. God, what's wrong with me? God, I used to just, I thought I really loved you. And I don't know what's going on in my spiritual life right now. God, I find that my mind's all over the place, I find I don't even want to do it because it's ugh. God, something's wrong.

See, that anxiety demonstrates something at the core. God, I want you, I want you. Now here's the temptation, here's the temptation. And this is a sure road to spiritual burnout.

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Because we've come to measure the presence of God by feeling, the first thing is I'm going to probably feel guilty. Something's going to kick in. Yeah, something's wrong with me. I should be doing more. You know, at Biola, when my undergrads do this, they usually start becoming like a Sherlock Holmes with their sin life, and take a guess what sin, the guys especially, really go on: lust.

"If I wasn't lusting, you'd really be there. You know, I'm making out too much or whatever they're doing now. Doing that too much, God, I've got to stop it because then you'll, you'll come again. You'll be there." I always say, I mean, isn't it fascinating? You know, you were doing the same thing a couple of years ago and God was coming to you.

Oh yeah, that's right. Hm, hadn't thought about that. You know, of course it is, it is the sin. It's the sin of the deep that blocks the life of the Spirit, that's obvious.

But here's the causal thinking: if I just start getting rid of that sin, then the stuff's going to come back. We, we're missing the point with what God's doing.

No, God doesn't want you to try to become a little good little boy. God wants take you down. He wants to take you into the journey to really begin to open up, the real stuff of your life.

But anyways, you start feeling guilty and the second thing that might begin to happen is an individual might begin to start engaging in the disciplines harder to making Christianity feel good. Yeah, I'll work harder at this. C'mon, let's get there!

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Now this usually leads to number three. They start despairing, right? Hear a sermon. Sermon is about prayer. God, I really need to pray more, God I need to pray. Ok, I'm going to I'm going to revitalize that quiet time, get up on Monday. Then: was OK. Tuesday: mm, not so good. [Yawn] Wednesday: I'm really tired [snores]. Thursday: Not so good. Sunday, I hear a sermon again. Pastor Dale's not trying to create guilt, but you feel it because you hear the truth. And our spiritual vices kick in it. Dang it, what's wrong with you John? If you really love the Lord, you'd give yourself more. Ah geez, what's going on. You know, you can only go through that cycle. You know, this is what people have written books on, calling it toxic faith. You can only go through that cycle so many times and you start to despair. And you begin to settle in for what Soren Kierkegaard called the Gentle Christian life. And the gentle Christian life is, it's a deep resignation that God's Rivers of Living Water aren't for me, and so I'm going to go through the motions.

When, when the pastor says to pray, I'm going to put my head down and pray but inside I'm really thinking "God, what, what's going on?"

Now remember F: this dryness is a new and more profound work of God in our deep. This, this dryness, now again not the lukewarm person that just walked away but just the everyday, you know, we're going on. This dryness is a new profound work in the deep where the Spirit is attempting to reveal the truth of our self.

He's trying to show us how little we love. He's trying to show us how much we're attached to every other thing, he's trying to take us into our neediness.

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He's trying to help us despair of ourselves trying to make this work. The ancient writers called this purgative contemplation.

Now when we think of contemplation, we usually think, you know, I used to, in my Ph.D., you know, I studied Hinduism and Buddhism, and normally when we think of contemplation, we think of a, of a guru, someone who is experiencing great ecstasy. And these writers say "you know what contemplation in the Christian tradition means is just this: it's being open to the Ministry of the Spirit in whatever the Spirit's doing."

And so there's consolation, there's contemplative consolation. We're open to God during those great times, we're experiencing his presence in our brokenness, or his presence in love or excitement or whatever, but this is purgative contemplation.

This is where we're going to begin to help our disciples to get to move through how it feels to know God is always here. God's always here. What is he doing? And so in purgative contemplation, you know what I'm doing? I'm opening my soul to the purging work of God. I'm opening my soul to what He wants to expose, to purge, to cleanse, to show me. This is a real time of spiritual dizziness that God wants to take me on.

He wants to dizzy me from thinking that I've got this Christian life down. I just got to do this, this, this, God's here, everything's going fine.

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God wants to take me on a different journey. You know what this purging reminds me of? It reminds me of a little bit like an enema.

Now, I don't know if I should ask this question but, how many of you have had an enema in your life?

You know, I was raised in a Norwegian farm community and my parents, bless their souls, they weren't into conventional medicine so much.

You know, I didn't take pills, stuff, that came later when they went into that. And so in our home early on, in North Dakota, if you were sick, you know. For those who don't know what an enema is, you know, you know that hot water bottle? You know there's a hot water bottle and a tube. You know, a hot water bottle is not just to warm you at night. You know, there's a, there's a tube attached and you fill up that thing with water and it goes in the rear end. And it's supposed to cleanse out the stuff.

And so my dad and mom had a philosophy: when you're sick, you need a flushing. And so at our home, this is North Dakota now, this is 50 below weather. I mean it could, it was three miles to grammar school, ten feet of snow, 50 below: "Mom and Dad, we're healthy, we're going to school. No problem." I could have pneumonia.

And my dad "John."

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Very loving now. "John I sense a snuffle on you." "No no!" The brothers: "Yeah, I saw him blow his nose!"

Before school, enema time. We had a nice-sized bathroom set up for enemas. Ooh. Very interesting. So here I am laying on this large countertop and here's Dad. Have you ever had two water bottles filled in your body? Woah. Oh. I mean, when I look at those flea things, that's a joke.

No, get a gallon in there. So here's my dad. My dad's so kind.

Here's what he was saying while all that's flooding into me. Hold it Johnny, hold it. He's rubbing my tummy because he thinks rubbing the tummy will get the water in there better and start breaking up the stuff.

Hold it.

I'm going out of my mind and my brothers are looking through the door going haaa. I'm going crazy. And finally, Dad said OK.

And I mean, when I'm, it's like a horse. And while, while I'm going to the bathroom now, in my family, here's the only thing you think about: is that my dad won't look there and go "Johnny, I think we need to do it again." "Aaah Come out. Get this, the crap out, get out." Well.

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This. That's what God's doing. remember, I said "this is not Top-Down spirituality." This is bottom up, where we're moving the stuff, right. We're moving the stuff.

This is an incredible time. It's an incredible time in our life where God wants to purge us of so many things.

And it's going to be painful. It's going to be frustrating unless we let go of our goodness.

If we let go of our virtue and our goodness, then you will actually feel less painful.

Because it's our goodness that will create the friction of resistance.

Gosh, shouldn't be this way. I shouldn't see this about myself.

Oh how cool, cause I want God. I don't want to be filled with John's virtues anymore. I really want to be open to another person. To live his life through me.

In fact, what we'll probably talk a little bit next time about is the Dark night of the spirit just briefly, because that's, that's a dark night for more mature believers. Where God is beginning to wean us from our character. Because as we've gone on in the faith, we've developed a good character and we trust that character and that

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character is our map. It's our roadmap to get around, our virtues are the way that we live. They help us make decisions and others can trust it. And now God wants to say "John, I don't want you to trust your character."

And this will happen to mature believers when they're at a place where everyone else benefits from their maturity except themselves. And they begin to see within their own self "God, oh if only people knew what's really in my heart. God, where are you?" and God begins to dizzy these mature believers so that they begin to say God, ok, I'm not going to trust my own roadmap anymore, I'm going to trust you." That's a whole new, that's a whole new place of growth and development.

That's why I thought it was so cool when Pastor Dale had said this last week, you know, "we're clueless, lacking real understanding." his hand just went right up. That's, that's so often the case. We just don't know. God, what are you doing? Because we're looking at something else. And so, this time of a spiritual enema is such a gift. Abraham experienced one, Job experienced one, even Jesus had one, but he didn't have to have it for the same reason.

But Gethsemane was an incredible time of testing and purging, because the question for Jesus was: would he choose the will of the Father even over letting go of God's love on the cross? That's an incredible, that's a whole different movement of a dark night there.

In my own life, on that retreat, the Lord took me down so deeply. He took me into the places of my own self, my own pride, my own arrogance, how I'd use Gretta, education. And during that time, I experienced the love of the Spirit that I had never known in my life. I, during that time, I experienced places of of the presence of

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another person, right at the, at the least, at the bottom of my crap that I experienced there. God was loving me so deeply. I remember screaming at myself during this three week retreat of what an SOB I've become.

That's the son of beelzebub.

And during that time, I experienced such love right there. And that, that became an object lesson to me, that in weakness, I'm strong. Because God loves the actual you. He doesn't love the good, the goody you.

He doesn't love the facade you, he doesn't love all the effort that you've tried to build your own self. He loves what you really are, if you will only open to that work in these dark nights. I guess one of the concerns I have is that when people hit dark nights, because the spiritual writers said most individuals they had seen in the church don't continue to travel through dark nights. They stop at dark nights and they try to work out their own salvation. They try to make it all work, and they hit the dark nights and they try to work things, and they just do this their whole life, and you know what eventually that happens, what happens in that life? They start to give up on the rivers of living water and they turn to ministry. They think, well, this is what the Christian life is, kind of dry bones. And, and so I guess what a mature Christian does is Minister's, not knowing that oh, the dark night is the call into the deep.

It's the call into the cauldron because that's where the Spirit is going to love them. As they begin to open up these pockets, that's where they're going to begin to experience the presence of another person and that's for a whole other discussion.

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So the point of the Dark night is to open deeper brokenness, deeper neediness into the love of God. Let me give you some final musings, some final thoughts about how to experience the Dark night, how to experience the dark night. So I'm going to give you a list of, I don't know, maybe 10 things. So here's some things that, as I've pondered this in my own life, because while the dark night was so intense for me for ten years, I did not think these thoughts. It was an incredible frustration. Now, as I look back, it's so obvious what God was doing, but when I was in it, it wasn't obvious at all. And so much of my spiritual activity was actually resisting what God was doing.

Because I was trying to make it work, rather than just letting go of that. God, take me on the journey. Open up what you want. But he's faithful. He's so faithful. In general, let me say this about, now, how to experience this. It's not going to be so much of what we do or we don't do. This will be kind of the general principle, but it's how we're going to begin to respond to a person during a dark night. a dark night is a call to a person, and so whatever spiritual disciplines, whatever presenting it will be, it's "I want to open to a person in all of this."

And here's what I'm really going to be doing, two things: I'm going to be asking God "God let me watch your work." I'm not going to worry how it feels. That's, that's not relevant. I want to, regardless of how it feels, I want to watch for you because you're always at work. That's going to be the tough thing. Because we're going to be convinced in desolation feelings, He's not here. No no. He's there powerfully. And I want to watch for him and I want to begin to cooperate with him rather than resist him.

So here's some, here's some things, I'll give you a list now. First thing: when going through this time of desolation or dryness, first thing is simple and this is what you can say to your disciples as well: just open to the fact that this spiritual dryness may be a sign of God working inwardly, so when, when you just notice "God, my mind's wandering" rather than immediately "well, focus". No, a flag should go up. God, maybe

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you're doing a deep work right now. Maybe you're trying to show me something about myself. Open to the truth.

That it's not just the cause of your badness, but it's God wanting to show you. Second principle: in a time of a dark night, the spiritual disciplines have changed in terms of their purpose. In a time of a dark night, the spiritual disciplines like prayer, reading the word, hearing sermons, listening to music, whatever it is has changed in terms of its purpose. It has changed from being encouragement or this felt nourishment to that of being a mirror to the reality of yourself. That's very important.

It's a mirror now. So you're reading the Word and it's dry, "Good, God. Good, this is a mirror now to how little I really love or care about this." You're hearing a sermon and your mind's wandering "God, this is so good." See, I'm going to be open to the work of God. Not move right at "John, make something happen." I want to be open to the work of God.

Third thing: a dark night is all about a person inside of us doing a work of transformation. The dark night is all about not, not a feeling. It's about a person doing a work inside here.

And so I want to enter into what He's doing with that work.

This is really bizarre, but I used to work at a place, where I told you, the Shik center. Well, one of the therapist who was a weight therapy, you know what he actually used to do? This is so bizarre, he was a,

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before that he was a hydro therapist. Now you know something's wrong here. You know what a hydro therapist is? He's a colonic specialist. Now, you know what a colonic is? It's a deep enema.

It's a tube that goes up and they turn on the water hose and the water goes up and comes back. Up and comes back. Up and comes back. Whoah, sit there for an hour doing that. You know what his job was? His job was to inspect the fecal material coming down through the hose.

Whoa, now that's the job to go to school for. Well.

The analogies here. In a dark night, watch what God brings up. Watch what God brings up. Don't get frustrated with your stuff, try to change it, try to fix it. Open up to your need for him in it. Fourth, in a dark night: In a dark night there is a need, this is very important, these next ones. In a dark night there is a need to resist the temptation to spiritually fix yourself. In a dark night you need to resist the temptation to make your spiritual life work.

Because that's exactly what a dark night is trying to cure you of.

Think about that.

You're being cured of you trying to make the spiritual life work. And so, when it feels dry, don't dig in your heels.

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Open up to what God is doing. This is the movement of the fixation on myself in spirituality. To begin to watch now what God is going to do.

And opening up what's going on in myself. It's very important. Number five: believers in a dark night should expect and want nothing from God except what God has to give them. That's heavy. You might have to try to talk yourself into that. Because you and I want the bottle. I want the spiritual joint. For those who don't know, that, it's like a marijuana cigarette.

I want to toké again. And what I want to now talk myself into is no, God, I want what you have to give. Because I want to be on the journey with you. This is very important and this is, you know, this is an issue with some of the books. I've talked to some people at the break. Some of the books being written that generate individuals to, and I know this is not the intent of the writers, but individuals who read books where they want to, they want to kind of get pleasure out of their relation with God.

They want to get high. They want to become a warrior in this. They want to get charged up and uh, this puts them into a great temptation, great temptation to try to make the spiritual life work. And a great temptation to then measure the presence of God by whether it's feeling right.

I want to just "God, what do you have to give? I'll take it because you know best." Now number six, very important: believers in a dark night must resist the temptation to use spiritual disciplines to generate a spiritual feeling. That is crucial.

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Believers in a dark night must resist the temptation to use prayer, reading the word, hearing sermons, fellowship, to generate a spiritual feeling. And you know what especially is the case? Religious music. This is a major issue for our day, it's a major issue because much of the music of today is music that comes from consolation. And if you look at the etiology of it, it's from people who have come to the Lord and are incredibly excited about God.

And it's moving music. I mean it's, it's truckin. I heard a mighty fortress one time put to rap and I thought, well, Luther would be very interested in that. Now there's much to be said here. But I'll say this: when my students at Biola, we have a thing called Sing-spiration in the evening where they go to a time and the whole time is music. And I know, I've been there and I see students. It is fine to hold your hands up and it is fine to close your eyes.

But here's my concern. It is true that if you squeeze your eyes tight enough and you put pressure on the back of your retina you can almost have a kind of weird experience. And I tell them, don't try to generate anything, don't try to work at this when you're hearing music. Don't try to get into some. God, I'm right here. God, I'm right here and God you're right there.

I'm not trying to generate anything. I don't, I don't want to generate anything. I want, I want to watch for God. What are you generating? Because you know, if God wanted to give me a theophany, boom, consolation's cool, I love that.

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You know, when you're in consolation, ride the wave. When, when the times of desolation come, open to the work of God. This is very difficult.

It's very difficult for young students when they begin and they come to Biola and by the time they're, you know, a junior, senior, and they're going through this, they don't know what's going on. They go to chapel, they're getting burnt out. "God, what is wrong?"

Wow. No. Just let it. Open up to what God is doing.

Now here's number seven, this is for leaders in the church. It's for those who counsel, those who preach. Those who teach, those who especially lead corporate worship. This is crucial. Those who do these things need to resist the temptation to generate an experience for their people.

That is not the task of leaders. My task is not to generate consolation and excitement.

Know what my task is? It's to help usher people to what the work of God is doing. Wherever people are at, I want to usher them to those places where God is working. Let me just give you an example: I was asked to come to a large church in Minnesota. It was a church of about four or five thousand, just exploding. And to spend the weekend with the elders talking about formation. And the pastor, just a beloved guy, was up there. They were growing so fast, they didn't know what was going on but they really wanted to bring formation in the church. And as he was preaching, he was teaching about, I think it was out of the text about the ministry

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of the Spirit and he was then, talked about Brother Lawrence of the resurrection. you've heard of a book called Practicing the presence of God.

That was a Carmelite brother. And as he said, you know what we're going to do for the next 10 minutes? He taught about what it is to practice the presence of God, to open to the power of God, open to the love of God, and to sit in His presence. And then he said, after he talked, it was very nice. And then he said "for the next ten minutes, we're going to practice the presence and the love and the power of God. So why don't you bow your head and let's do that." As soon as he did that, I know 50 to 70 percent of the congregation was going to spiritually die a little bit more that day.

Not out of his intention. And so I told Gretta, we were sitting in the back, I said "you know Gretta, I'm just going to watch. Go ahead." And there, as I looked up in front, it's a very funny, it was this long barn that we were in, this huge building, you know. Up in the first third, here's, here's the people. and gosh they are really working at it, and you know who's really working at it? I'm sorry. Women. Women, you're a little more neurotic than the man.

That's the way it is. Now, there's a lot of deep reasons why. But it's usually because you have to make up for everything men don't do.

Mothers work doggone hard. And since most women marry sons, that's the way it's going to have to be.

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But here's the women, they're really working hard. And you know something, for some it really is good, for some it's love. Some it's pleasure. For some it's union with God. As you move back, I'm not kidding, the second, third, here's, the women were working, there they were, good old faithful women, especially because of the louse here. And here's the men. I'm not kidding you. [laughter]

Know what they're doing? They're wondering, I don't get this. I'm not experiencing power, I'm not experiencing love. I don't know what's going on, but I better not lift my head up because that will tell people I'm not getting it.

So I'm going to look around, to make, just what's going on. And then the back third, because it's this really long hall, you know what the men are doing? [laughter]

Those men have already despaired. The ones in the middle were the gentle ones. You know what I wish would have happened? I wish someone would have raised their hands and said, "Pastor, I don't get it. I don't get it. You're getting the power and the love and the presence. I'm just sitting here in dry bones."

Now that would have been cool. Now we would have had an interesting discussion.

You know what that Pastor could have done? I know what happened that day. I'll bet there were 400 men and 300 women at least in that audience of 2,500 and probably more, who walked away saying this: this practicing the presence of God stuff, wow. Open to the ministry of the Spirit. That's really cool. I guess the pastor gets it.

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I don't. OK. That's the lesson. That is the unconscious lesson you got. More frustration, a little guilt. God, what's wrong with me. I guess that's it for me.

See, he could have done something just very slight. And this is what pastors need to do, this what leaders need to do. This is what worship leaders need to do.

Because, let me tell you when you lead worship, there's a great anxiety. When I used to preach more, I used to be with teams of worship. And when we pray before, I felt the anxiety, I felt the anxiety the worship team had. And when you're sitting there leading music and you're doing your thing and then you see someone out there going [yawns].

You know what the temptation of some of our younger worship leaders are? OK, people come on, get up, let's stand, let's get ready for the Lord. All right. [Clapping]

And I'm going, oh God help us. Oh God.

What I want to do is I want to help individuals discover the work of God wherever they're at. There are going to be some people hearing your sermons, hearing you're teaching, hearing your music, hearing whatever it is you're doing and you know what it's going to be? It's going to be, "God, this is so good! Yeah! Woo!"

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And for others, more mature. These are now moving through stages. It's just going to be love. They're going to hear it. They could hear Balaam's ass speak. It wouldn't matter. It would just be love. God I love you. And then for others who are experiencing even union with God, "God, you're so good. You're just, you're just so good." But there are others who are going to be in dark nights, and they're going to hear it and go "God, what's wrong with me?" If I'm leading music, from, you know, teaching what I want people to know is you know, some of you as you hear this, let's say I'm doing worship, and I'm about to do a song of celebration. You know celebration is a spiritual discipline. And so there should be songs that are movin and excited about God.

That's cool! And my task is to present myself to do those. But here's where I want to tell people, I want to say to them, "Now look, we're going to sing this song. This song is going to be so cool. This is going to be the beat of your heart. This is so, this is great." And if that's the truth and if you're in the love of God in this. Just go with the flow.

But some of you out there are going to be singing the song and you're just going to feel dry bones. You're going to feel "that doesn't match what's going on here." And if that's the case I want you to sing anyway. Because right now in the sovereignty of God, you present your body to him.

But while you're singing, and you're aware of the dry bones, just say, "Oh God thank you so much, because you're showing me something about myself." And after that song is over you have ten seconds even. So as you're sitting down, just say "God, for the rest of this time, if you want to take me on a little journey just to show me why I'm so dry, why I'm not excited about that. God, that's great. " So if that pastor had just framed, that's what a pastor needs to do. That's what leaders need to do. That's what teachers need to do. They need to

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frame the experience so that people can know and begin to track what the Spirit of God might be doing so that when that guy out there who is not practicing the presence of God for that 10 minutes he is, he is on an exciting journey, and I want to try to help open his heart in that dryness to what God is doing. That is crucial. Wow I'm really sorry, it's time.

Number eight. Those in a dark night need to be faithful to present themselves. Those in a dark night. We're going to talk about this probably next time. You, in spiritual disciplines you lead with the body, even if you don't feel like it. You always lead with the body, you don't lead with the heart. But you lead with the body. You present yourself. You sing the song. You come to church. You hear the sermon. You read the scripture. You present yourself. But you do it in such a way that you want God to open your heart and take you on a journey with the spirit. Those are the three elements involved in spiritual discipline. The body, you always lead with the body, but it's to open the heart to what the Spirit is doing. Those are the three elements, but in a dark night we need to be faithful. And this is where it's so important during times of dryness to have a spiritual mentor. A spiritual director. Someone who can begin to help interpret in your life what's the spirit of God doing in this point.

Believers in a dark night, when this is going on, they need to open to the fact that God is getting their attention inwardly. God is getting their attention inwardly. And what my task now to do during a dark night is to open to the desolation. Is to open to the feelings of what really is going on in my heart. God, I don't love this. God, what's going on. Take me on a journey.

I am thankful that heaven is not going to be desolation.

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I am thankful that the fullness of the kingdom will not be desolation. It will be total consolation and being filled with the spirit. But this is part of the path. Let me also, since we're not going to have time for questions tonight, I'll just give you two more points then. What if a leader is in a dark night? What if a leader is in a dark night. What if you lead a Bible study or discipleship group and you're going through this. I will say this to you. Do not repress the work of God and try to have a ministry of consolation. Leaders are going to be tempted to have ministries of consolation. They're going to try to get up and they'll try to get others up. This is a great time to open deeply. What it is not a time to do, it's not a time to just cathart. You know there are some pastors who go through these times and they just cathart from the pulpit. They just cathart their stuff in teaching. Catharsis isn't very helpful. What you want to do if you're in that place or if you know leaders who are, you want to assist them into entering into deep places with the god, with the spirit, so that they can begin to teach out of brokenness. The salvaging of dark nights is when we have ministries of brokenness. Ministries of humility. Ministries of, this is what I am and God is meeting me here. God is opening my life.

This is very hard for leaders in churches where elder boards don't have that vision.

Because in some, I've talked to pastors that have come to us from Talbot and they say, "Oh John, if I shared some of these, my dryness with my elder board, they'd say well what on earth are we paying for. You should, you should be more together. What a distortion.

I want an elder board who, when a pastor starts going through this the elder goes, "Oh this is cool. This is so good! Oh, you gonna, you're going to do, after this time that God's going to be taking you through, you're going to have so much to share with us about how to enter that place and how to grow."

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And so I want an elder board who, who wants to even nurture that so that maybe they even they set time aside for a person to have a sabbatical to begin to enter if they're going through this.

The last point I'll just say, again there's a lot to be said on that. That's a powerful time, when a pastor goes through dryness. That's a potential, powerful time that's coming up for the church. If the pastor and the elders and the people will be open to it. It's a powerful time. Lot of learning, a lot of maturing, a lot of potential going into places that that congregation won't go if they try to just have a church of glory. A church of consolation.

The last point I'll just say is that churches sometimes have their own developmental histories. I have had pastors come to me and say, "You know John, we can't get a person to come to our building for anything. It's just dry. It's just, God, we don't know what's going on, there's a little infighting all kinds of stuff." And some churches have so much consolation. So much, there are churches right now in Southern California just exploding with growth. I'm going to be meeting with an elder board next week. It's exploding. 5000 people. They don't even know why. It's just happening. They're wondering what's going on!

You know that's so cool. I was part of a church when I came to the Lord that exploded like that. Christianity Today wrote about it, it was the church of 1000 pastors. It was so cool during those years. And then you know what happened after a year. Everyone was excited. I couldn't hear enough of the teaching. Couldn't hear enough, what was going on was so great. Then all of a sudden it went through a plateau and then even this. And people who are leaders began to say, you know, "Are you bored with the sermon?" Yeah, I am. What's going on. Dark nights for churches or groups are powerful times. And it's going to take a shepherd to lead them through that. Not a rancher. There was a whole philosophy about ranchers and shepherds. You know what a rancher is? {Shouting and yelling like a rancher/cowboy}

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You know that's kinda what's in my head for a rancher, when I was growing up.

When a church goes through a dark night, they're tempted to find a rancher. Because they want to get out of it. They want to have somebody come in, get some life, and let's move em out. Here's where we need real shepherds. Shepherds who, "No, God, God may be taking us to different places."

What I, the, the heart of God yearns for churches where there are people who are old in the Lord who are still on the journey. The deep journey of opening the heart to God and opening to more union and filling with the spirit. That's a cool thing. Let's close in prayer. Our Heavenly Father, God you are so kind to us. You've been so kind to my life, even when I don't know what's going on. Just like Pastor Dale said, God, there are times when I am utterly clueless, lacking real understanding. And even after you give it God I still don't get it. And even after I get it, God I don't do it.

God you are so kind. You are so loving. You are always nurturing my soul. Drawing me, opening things up. Lord, I pray for all of us here, that we would just be open to that ministry, and to begin to watch you, what you're doing, to track you, and to be open to whatever you want to show us. Lord I sense there is so much potential good that you can do here with us. God I want to let go of my goodness and I want to open to yours. Here I am Lord.

God bless all these leaders, these teachers, pastors, bless them God with your continued work. And it's in the name of Jesus we pray, amen. Thank you.

