

Bob Kauflin

SESSION 4 | When the Darkness Won't Lift

I. INTRODUCTION

"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6)

"That is why we exist - to see, and rejoice in, and reflect the value of the glory of God."
John Piper, quoting Johnathan Edwards in *When I Don't Desire God*, 59.

II. TEN STRUGGLES

- Depression
- Shame
- Distance from God
- Feeling like a hypocrite
- Apathy
- Confusion
- Hopelessness
- Lack of assurance
- Self-hatred
- Suicidal thoughts

III. FIVE REASONS

A. Unrepentant sin

"It is true, the pleasures, the wages of sin, do greatly influence the sensual, carnal affections of men; but it is the holiness and authority of God that sin itself rises up against; it hates the yoke of the Lord." John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol. 6, 179.

"Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear." (Isaiah 59:1–2)

B. A pursuit of everything *but* God

C. Harsh thoughts of God

D. Satan's devices and schemes

"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8)

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12)

E. Physical issues, deficiencies, or burdens

IV. ELEVEN RESPONSES

A. Identify, confess, and fight those areas where you're feasting at the table of other delights.

B. Don't minimize God's response to our feeblest desires for him.

"If you earnestly desire to love God you do love him. If you desire to be purified, if with a strong, continual, agonising desire you pine for it, already the work of purification has begun, for your desire has been purified, your wish, your will, your heart have been purified already. Is there not proof enough that there is a measure of graciousness about true desires after God?" Charles Spurgeon, "Desires Towards God: A Sermon for the Weak"

"A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice." (Isaiah 42:3)

C. Never grow weary of asking the Lord to change your heart and desires.

"Your decision is between calling out to the Lord or not. This is the choice that has confronted those in misery throughout history. Listen to the prophet Hosea, who wrote these words on behalf of the Lord: 'They do not cry out to me from their hearts but wail upon their beds' (Hos. 7:14). You can sit in silence or cry to the Lord. You can cry on your bed or cry to the Lord. These are the two choices." Ed Welch, *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness*, 56.

"And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?" (Luke 18:7)

"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13)

D. Pursue change in the context of Christ-exalting community.

"But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3:13)

"If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." (1 Corinthians 12:26)

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24–25)

E. Recognize and repent of self-absorbed thoughts.

"It is ever the Holy Spirit's work to turn our eyes away from self to Jesus; but Satan's work is just the opposite of this, for he is constantly trying to make us regard ourselves instead of Christ. He insinuates, "Your sins are too great for pardon; you have no faith; you do not repent enough; you will never be able to continue to the end; you have not the joy of His children; you have such a wavering hold of Jesus." All these are thoughts about self, and we shall never find comfort or assurance by looking within. But the Holy Spirit turns our eyes entirely away from self: He tells us that we are nothing, but that "Christ is all in all." Remember, therefore, it is not thy hold of Christ that saves thee--it is Christ; it is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee--it is Christ; it is not even faith in Christ, though that be the instrument--it is Christ's blood and merits; therefore, look not so much to thy hand with which thou art grasping Christ, as to Christ; look not to thy hope, but to Jesus, the source of thy hope; look not to thy faith, but to Jesus, the author and finisher of thy faith." Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, June 28.

"Periodic self-examination is needed and wise and biblical. But for the most part, mental health is the use of the mind to focus on worthy reality outside ourselves." John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 112.

"The fact that all your thoughts turn back on yourself is oppressive. The self cannot carry the load. The way we were intended to function was to be able to look outward, towards God and other people." Ed Welch, *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness*, 59.

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

F. Resist the devil by preaching the gospel to yourself daily.

"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." (1 Peter 5:8-10)

*"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."
(Ephesians 6:10–11)*

"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints," (Ephesians 6:13–18)

G. Distinguish between hypocrisy and faith-filled actions.

"No, you will not be a hypocrite, if you know that joy is your duty, and repent that you don't have it, and ask God earnestly to restore the joy even as you do the deed. That is not the way a hypocrite thinks. That is the way a true Christian thinks in the fight for joy." John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God*, 221.

"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God." (Psalm 42:11)

H. Don't confuse the fight for your final state.

"Your state is not at all to be measured by the opposition that sin makes to you, but by the opposition you make to it." John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol. 6, 605.

"Doubt your despairing thoughts. Whence this great confidence you have in your damnation? A little skepticism is in order here. Who do you think you are making final declarations about your soul that lie hidden in the secrets of the Almighty? No. No. Renounce such confidence. If you have no ability for faith in the love of God for you, make no more such great pretenses to have such certainty of faith in your damnation. This is not yours to know. Rather, yours is to listen to Jesus." John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 119.

I. When appropriate, explore medical options.

- In most cases, medicine and drugs aren't an issue of right or wrong, but of wisdom. They aren't to view them as saviors or demons.
- With some exceptions, it's wisest to see how far biblically informed counsel takes you, keeping an eye out for the potential benefits of changes in exercise, diet, etc. or medical help.

J. Replace thoughts of not desiring God with thoughts of his desiring us.

"But Zion said, 'The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.'" (Isaiah 49:14) The Lord's response:

"'Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.'" (Isaiah 49:15–16)

"For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you." (Isaiah 43:3–5)

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:6–8)

See also Eph. 5:25–30 and Gal. 2:20

"We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

V. THE REWARDS

- In most cases, pursuing some or many of these responses will result in your desire for God returning.
- But not always.

“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

“But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:21–23)

“Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38–39)

The God of peace will “himself sanctify you completely,” and see to it that “your whole spirit and soul and body” is “kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24)

God “is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.” (Jude 24)

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Psalm 16:11)



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