

“SOULed OUT”
Session 8: When God Seems Distant
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November 7, 2010

INTRODUCTION

There are times in our lives when we go through an abrupt change from outward focus to inward. It's a period of questioning, exploring, falling apart, sometimes engaging in self centeredness. It almost always results from an unsettling experience and yet results in healing for those who continue through it. The focus is on the issues, battle, and healing in relationship with God.

Psalm 63:1

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

“In my own life, at least, there is this strange duality about pain. It can cause me to wonder where God is, as nothing else can. And it can open me up to my dependence on his presence as nothing else can.” John Ortberg

Q: How can pain and frustration draw us closer to God or move us farther from Him?

I. Circumstances which can trigger this duality in our mind and emotions:

- Exhaustion and disappointments

- Self centeredness or needing approval

- Loss of certainty or a need for re-direction

- A crisis in life or a crisis of faith

- The un-dealt with past interferes with the present

II. “The Dark Night of the Soul”

A term used to describe a specific phase in a person's spiritual life. It is used as a metaphor to describe the experience of loneliness and desolation in one's life. Though typically associated with a crisis of faith in the Roman Catholic tradition, it is commonly referenced by spiritual traditions throughout the world, and is generally accepted to be a universally inherent aspect of spiritual growth.

The term and metaphysicality of the phrase "dark night of the soul" are taken from the writings of the Spanish poet and Roman Catholic mystic Saint John of the Cross, a Carmelite priest in the 16th century. *Dark Night of the Soul* is the name of both a poem, and a commentary on that poem, and are among the Carmelite priest's most famous writings. They tell of his mystic development and the stages he went through on his quest for holiness.

Some examples from the Bible:

Joseph, started out with a great dream for his life, but endured bitter disappointment when his brothers sold him as a slave, and later was falsely accused and went to prison.

Job suffered deeply and endured personal loss, struggling in his faith

Moses went into the desert before he ever led the people out of Egypt. He was on a path to success, was disqualified by his actions of murder, and had to flee.

Every Old Testament prophet of God when through periods of deep struggle and anguish in their souls.

Peter was an up and coming disciple, the rock, yet denied Christ and floundered, until Jesus restored him and he was filled with the Spirit at Pentecost.

Others...

Q: What kind of circumstances have driven you into this time of inward reflection and seeking?

III. Doorways to Transformation

a. The search for integrity

Psalm 139:23-24 (literal)

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Examine me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful or idolatrous way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”

b. Deep questioning:

Psalm 88:13

“I cry to you for help, O Lord; in the morning my prayer comes before you. Why O Lord do you reject me and hide your face from me?”

c. Going through trials:

1 Peter 1:6-7

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

IV. Hitting the Wall – My will meeting God’s will face to face

“We decide anew whether we are willing to surrender and let God direct our lives...Fundamentally it has to do with slowly breaking through barriers we have built between our will and newer awareness of God...At the same time we surrender our wills to be healed spiritually, we simultaneously begin to be healed psychologically” From *The Critical Journey* p 114,115

Colossians 3:9-10

You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

What we typically encounter:

For high achievers and those with strong egos... self sufficiency and control are challenged. A change from self centered to God-centered.

For those with low esteem... a deep and significant sense of God's love and value. A restoration.

For those with guilt or shame from the past... becoming aware of the bottled up pain, and revisiting it with God's perspective. New insights that bring peace.

For those who live in their heads and not their hearts... a loss of intellectual arrogance and an acceptance of ambiguity and humility. Getting in touch with issues of the heart that may have been ignored.

For the very religious... realizing that our will is not necessarily God's will. Facing spiritual pride head on.

Q: What has it meant for you to surrender your will to God?

Questions for Personal Reflection:

A. What has triggered your own search for spiritual meaning?

B. Has your faith ever fallen apart? What were the circumstances?

C. Where have your spiritual walls been? Those things in your life that died (or you are in the process of letting go) so that something better will result?

Coming up...

November 14: The Goodness of God

With more "SOULed OUT" topics to follow in Nov and Dec. A new series begins in January

The audio and notes for this and previous sessions of this series are available at www.sequimcommunitychurch.org in the Sunday Seminar section