

Drawing Near to God When God Seems Far Away: Practicing the Presence of God Despite Feelings

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"God, who is everywhere, never leaves us. Yet He seems sometimes to be present, sometimes absent. If we do not know Him well, we do not realize that He may be more present to us when He is absent than when He is present."
Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island*

Introduction

A. Developmental Spirituality: Biblical Data (I John 2:12-14)

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. 14 I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Spiritual Children:

Spiritual Maturity (Fatherhood/Motherhood):

Middle: Spiritual Adolescence/Early Adulthood:

Corresponds to Three Loves:

1. Beginner: Love of God for Pleasure's Sake

- a. This stage corresponds to Children whose sins are forgiven, having a "relationship with God" (I John 2:12-14)
- b. Characterized by Spiritual Pleasure:
 - (1) As mother gives milk to an infant, God feeds us as spiritual babes where we are at in our love of pleasure.
 - (a) II Cor. 5:17: We are a New Creature with a New Affection for God at the Core of our spirit or heart by the Holy Spirit
 - (b) God gives the believer the "bottle of spiritual pleasure" without any labor on our part.
 - (c) God gives spiritual pleasure by means of the same psychological structures as in one's non-Christian days. The only difference is a new object of pleasure

(d) Thus, the soul is moved to spiritual things due to the consolation of pleasure that we get from them.

(2) Some spiritual strength begins.

(3) Vices take on a religious dimension; vices become mixed with Spiritual disciplines and exercises.

2. Sins of the Beginner:

a. Our spiritual "change" deludes us to think that the self made the changes

b. Our appetite for pleasure has as its goal to feel good in our spirituality.

(1). Spiritual Gluttony

(Def): Our drive to do the spiritual disciplines is more for spiritual pleasure (the bottle) than for purity.

Test:

(2) Spiritual Pride

(Def): The deep belief that in some way we are making our spiritual life work.

Test:

(3) Spiritual Greed/ Avarice:

(Def): The deep belief or discontent with the Spirituality that God has given us

3. Dark Night of the Senses:

- a. Biblically this stage is likened to Young men: wrestles with the evil one, overcomes him, you are strong, the word abides in you. (1 John 2:12-14)
- b. God withdraws spiritual pleasure
- c. The Experience: Equipose in the heart (ambivalence over loves)
- d. Signs of Being in a Dark Night
- e. The Temptation: = certain road to spiritual burn out
 - (1) to feel guilty, that some particular sin is responsible for God feeling distant.
 - (2) to engage in the spiritual disciplines in order to make religion feel good again (fleshy works righteousness).

(3) to despair of doing the spiritual disciplines, or

(4) to despair of experiencing God

f. Remember: This dryness is a new, more profound work of God in our deep in order to have a true, honest relationship. The Spirit is attempting to reveal the truth of ourselves in neediness, to help us despair of ourselves and independence and open us to declare our dependence on the Spirit (= "**purgative contemplation**").

B. The Point of the Dark night:

1. Brokenness
2. Need of the Cross

C. What to do/not to do: